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**Cognitive Ability, Anti-Black Prejudice, and the Principle-Policy Paradox**

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is commonly hypothesized that higher cognitive abilities promote racial tolerance and a sincere commitment to racial equality. An alternative theoretical framework contends that higher cognitive abilities enable members of a dominant racial group to articulate a more refined legitimizing ideology for racial inequality. According to this perspective, ideological refinement occurs in response to shifting patterns of racial conflict and is characterized by rejection of overt prejudice, superficial support for racial equality in principle, and opposition to policies that challenge dominant group privilege. This study estimates the impact of cognitive ability on a comprehensive set of racial attitudes, including anti-black prejudice, views about black-white equality in principle, and racial policy support. It also investigates cohort differences in the effects of cognitive ability on these attitudes. Results suggest that high-ability whites are less likely than low-ability whites to report prejudicial attitudes and more likely to support racial integration in principle. Yet despite these liberalizing effects, high-ability whites are no more likely to support a wide variety of remedial policies for racial inequality. Results also suggest that the liberalizing effects of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice and views about racial equality in principle emerged slowly over time, consistent with ideological refinement theory.

## INTRODUCTION

Higher cognitive ability is widely held to have a profoundly liberalizing influence on racial attitudes (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford 1950; Allport 1958; Deary, Batty, and Gale 2008; Hodson and Busseri 2012; Schoon, Cheng, Gale, Batty, and Deary 2010). Individuals with more advanced cognitive capacities are thought to possess an enlightened world outlook that is less sensitive to the narrow appeals of intergroup negativism. According to this theoretical perspective, cognitive ability promotes heightened tolerance of racial out-groups and a sincere commitment to racial equality and egalitarian social change.

Until recently, this version of the enlightenment hypothesis had escaped rigorous empirical assessment, but several recent psychological studies now provide evidence that, among whites, higher cognitive ability is indeed associated with lower prejudice against blacks (Deary, Batty, and Gale 2008; Hodson and Busseri 2012), net of confounding factors like education and parental socioeconomic status. Furthermore, results from these studies indicate that the enlightening effects of cognitive ability on racial prejudice are mediated by ideological liberalism—in other words, cognitive sophistication is thought to promote a more liberal, less authoritarian social ideology, which in turn leads to greater racial tolerance and a sincere commitment to equality (Hodson and Busseri 2012).

An alternative theoretical perspective, the ideological refinement approach, does not view more advanced cognitive capacities as truly enlightening with respect to racial attitudes (Jackman 1978; Jackman 1981; Jackman 1994; Jackman and Muha 1984). Premised on group conflict theory, the ideological refinement perspective contends that cognitively sophisticated members of a dominant racial group are no more committed to racial equality than their less intelligent peers. They are, however, better equipped to understand, analyze, and act on their group interests; to develop effective legitimizing ideologies for extant social inequalities; and to articulate an astute defense of their privileged social position. According to this perspective, intelligent members of dominant groups reject overtly racist views about subordinate groups because these attitudes have the potential to inflame intergroup relations and provoke subordinate group challenge to the status quo. Instead, they placate disadvantaged subordinates by denouncing these inflammatory attitudes and by offering superficial support for racial equality in principle. However, given their keen awareness of conflicting group interests, dominant group members with higher cognitive ability are expected to react decisively against

concrete efforts to overcome the group-based inequalities from which they benefit, often relying on ostensibly race-neutral values to subvert remedial policies that challenge their privileged social position. For this theoretical framework, absent a corresponding level of support for policies designed to realize racial equality, the negative associations between cognitive ability and anti-black prejudice documented in prior studies represent little more than “slopes of hypocrisy” (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan 1997:304).

Within the ideological refinement framework, attitudinal differences by cognitive ability are also closely related to the evolving nature of intergroup conflict. When subordinate group members are generally compliant parties to unequal social relations, overtly prejudicial attitudes that highlight supposedly categorical distinctions between races are frequently used by dominant group members to justify their privileged social position. On the other hand, if subordinate group members are actively challenging their unequal social position, prejudicial attitudes are perceived to be derogatory and their expression risks further inflaming dominant-subordinate relations. For this theoretical perspective, then, the attitudinal effects of cognitive ability described previously—rejection of overtly racist attitudes and support for racial equality in principle—are thought to have emerged slowly over time, and particularly after the Civil Rights Movement, as blacks increasingly challenged their subordinate status. In contrast, the enlightenment perspective does not view the liberalizing effects of cognitive ability as sensitive to group conflict. Prejudice is conceived of as a set of uninformed beliefs, not a constituent element of a legitimizing ideology for racial inequality, and higher cognitive abilities are thought to simply liberate individuals from this type of ignorance, regardless of whether or not these attitudes are widely contested by subordinate group members.

While previous research provides important evidence on the association between cognitive ability and racial attitudes, these studies are limited by their focus on a single racial attitude domain, overt racial prejudice, and by their inattention to differences across time in the effects of cognitive ability on these attitudes. Reliance on measures of racial attitudes that do not examine a constellation of views on prejudice, principles of equality, and policy remediation of inequality, and that are used with a narrow range of birth cohorts or in time-invariant analyses, precludes testing of more complex hypotheses about the link between cognitive ability and dynamic, multidimensional racial ideologies. Therefore, research on the attitudinal effects of

cognitive ability to date has not been able to properly adjudicate between the enlightenment and ideological refinement framework.

This study provides new evidence on these competing theories by investigating the effects of cognitive ability on a more comprehensive set of racial attitudes and by investigating cohort differences in these effects. Specifically, it analyses the effects of cognitive ability on not only anti-black prejudice but also on views about racial segregation in principle, perceptions of discrimination, and support for variety of remedial policies for racial inequality. With a more extensive set of attitude measures from birth cohorts spanning most of twentieth century, this study is uniquely equipped to investigate whether cognitive ability is truly enlightening with respect to racial attitudes, or whether it instead promotes a more refined legitimizing ideology for racial inequality. In this way, the study integrates psychological and sociological perspectives on intergroup attitudes to address the link between cognitive abilities and “the processes by which ideology and prejudice develop” (Hodson and Busseri 2012:193).

I begin by discussing the theoretical and empirical foundations of the enlightenment and ideological refinement perspectives. In these sections, I outline the core premises and propositions of each theory; review prior studies that have attempted to assess these different frameworks; and develop a competing set of hypotheses about the relationship between cognitive ability and racial attitudes. Then, with data on whites’ attitudes from the 1972-2010 waves of the General Social Survey, I estimate total and cohort-specific effects of cognitive ability on anti-black stereotypes, attitudes toward racial segregation, perceptions of workplace discrimination, and support for both redistributive and opportunity-enhancing racial policies.

Results from these analyses indicate that whites with higher cognitive ability, compared to those with lower ability, are less likely to report negative prejudicial attitudes toward blacks, are more likely to support racial integration in principle, and are more likely to acknowledge the problem of discrimination in the labor and housing markets. But, despite these liberalizing effects, whites with higher cognitive ability are no more likely to support open housing laws, special government aid for blacks, tax breaks for businesses to locate in largely black areas, and targeted spending on predominantly black schools, and they are significantly less likely to support school busing programs and preferential hiring policies, compared to their counterparts with lower cognitive ability. These seemingly paradoxical findings challenge the enlightenment hypothesis that higher cognitive ability promotes a sincere commitment to racial equality.

Furthermore, results suggest significant cohort differences in these effects. The liberalizing impact of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice and on views about racial equality in principle are much less pronounced, and in some instances completely absent, among cohorts born before the Civil Rights Movement. Nontrivial effects of cognitive ability on these attitudes emerge only among more recent birth cohorts. These findings are also difficult to reconcile with enlightenment theory and are more consistent with the ideological refinement perspective.

## **COGNITIVE ABILITY AND RACIAL ENLIGHTENMENT**

The enlightenment perspective is premised on the view that racial prejudice and negative stereotypical attitudes are the direct efflux of a narrow-minded, uninformed, and inegalitarian world outlook. Prejudice is defined as antipathy toward an out-group “based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization” (Allport 1958:9). In other words, for the enlightenment perspective, prejudice and negative intergroup attitudes result directly from individual ignorance and mental rigidity.

Based on this conception of intergroup negativism, the hypothesis that higher cognitive ability breaks down prejudice and promotes more egalitarian racial attitudes naturally follows: if prejudice and inegalitarian attitudes emerge from ignorance and mental rigidity, then individuals with higher cognitive ability, who are assumed to be less vulnerable to ignorance and to possess more dynamic reasoning capacities than their counterparts with lower ability, are anticipated to be less prejudiced and more egalitarian. Advanced cognitive abilities are thought to facilitate a more complete understanding of the complex historical, social, and economic forces responsible for inequality; to allow individuals to adopt alternative perspectives and simultaneously process information from multiple points of view; and to promote greater awareness of the dangers of inequality and prejudicial attitudes.

Furthermore, the enlightenment perspective posits that individuals with more limited cognitive abilities gravitate toward authoritarian ideology, which offers a psychological sense of stability and order. Authoritarian ideology is assumed to provide a cognitive lens for distilling large amounts of complex social information into simplistic, categorical, and hierarchical absolutes without the expenditure of significant mental energy. By emphasizing resistance to change, simple answers, and strict boundaries between groups, authoritarian ideology promotes prejudicial attitudes and support for group-based inequality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford 1950; Altemeyer 1996; Hodson and Busseri 2012).

An emerging body of empirical evidence is consistent with the general claims of enlightenment theory. Several studies document strong negative associations between “general intelligence” (i.e., a weighted average of scores from several batteries of cognitive tests) and a composite measure of racial prejudice based on scaled responses to statements about personal comfort with other races (e.g., “I wouldn’t mind working with people from other races,” “I wouldn’t mind if a family of a different race moved next door,” and so on). These effects persist even after controlling for the potentially confounding influence of education and parental socioeconomic status (Deary, Batty, and Gale 2008; Hodson and Busseri 2012). Evidence also suggests that the negative association of cognitive ability with prejudicial attitudes is mediated by authoritarian ideology, where those with low cognitive ability are more likely to endorse authoritarian views, which in turn predicts higher levels of prejudice (Hodson and Busseri 2012).

While these studies provide important evidence on the relationship between cognitive ability and racial attitudes, they are not without limitations. First, previous studies have thus far focused on but one of many different dimensions of intergroup attitudes: overt prejudice. This narrow focus provides an incomplete assessment of the link between cognitive ability and complex racial ideologies and ignores theories about the determinants of racial attitudes that predict “liberalizing” effects of cognitive ability for some attitude domains but not for others. Second, previous studies are based on data from cohorts born during or after the 1950s, which precludes an investigation of potential heterogeneity in the effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes among individuals socialized well before (versus during or after) the Civil Rights Movement. This heterogeneity is predicted by ideological refinement theory, which contends that “liberalizing” effects of cognitive ability on overt racial prejudice emerge only after subordinate group members challenge their disadvantaged social position.

In a related literature dealing with the effects of education on racial attitudes, evidence indicates that focusing exclusively on racial prejudice and ignoring views about racial equality in principle and attitudes toward racial policies may generate misleading conclusions. For example, a large body of evidence indicates that, compared to Whites with lower levels of education, highly educated Whites are more likely to reject prejudicial stereotypes, endorse norms of racial equality, and accept racial integration in principle, but are no more supportive of affirmative action policies, such as government efforts to integrate schools and racial preferences in both college admissions and the workplace (Glaser 2001; Jackman 1978; Jackman 1994; Jackman 1996; Jackman and Muha 1984; Schaefer 1996; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan 1997; Wodtke 2012).

## **GROUP CONFLICT AND IDEOLOGICAL REFINEMENT**

The ideological refinement perspective is premised on group conflict theory (Bobo 1988; Jackman and Muha 1984; Tilly 1978). Group conflict involves a competition over status, power, and economic resources in which distinct social groups attempt not only to gain these desired values but also to “affect, change, or injure rivals” (Bobo 1988:91). Competing groups are stratified in a hierarchy based on inequalities in status, power, and resources. The dominant group controls a disproportionately large share of the desired values, while subordinate groups lack commensurate status, power, and resources. Dominant and subordinate group members have objective interests that emerge from shared advantages or disadvantages linked to their position in the social hierarchy. At a simple level, members of the dominant group have an objective interest in maintaining their privileged social position, and subordinate group members have an interest in challenging their disadvantaged social position.

Within this framework, negative intergroup attitudes are not viewed as unfortunate consequences of narrow-minded, uninformed, and inflexible world outlooks. Rather, prejudicial attitudes and negative stereotypes are viewed as constituent elements of complex racial ideologies developed to legitimize the dominant group’s privileged social position and to quell subordinate group challenge to the status quo. Dominant groups routinely develop norms, values, and beliefs that serve their interests. This ideology is developed without contrivance. It flows naturally from the desire of dominant group members to impose a sense of order on patterns of social interaction and to view the unequal social relations from which they benefit as appropriate and equitable (Jackman and Muha 1984:759). Thus, according to this perspective, whites may report discomfort about living close to blacks and believe that blacks are of inferior intelligence or moral fiber not because they are simply uninformed or weary of a seemingly alien social group but because these views legitimize and maintain extant relations of racial inequality. That is, racial prejudice and negative stereotypes are not “uncontrolled outbursts of negativism; nor are they anachronistic expressions of deficiencies in socialization or personality” (Jackman and Muha 1984:759). Rather, they are assumed to be an integral part of dominant group efforts to reproduce their privileged social position.

Based on this conception of racial attitudes, the ideological refinement perspective contends that advanced cognitive abilities are unlikely to promote “enlightened” views because these abilities do not liberate dominant group members from the concerns and interests imposed by intergroup conflict. On the contrary, advanced cognitive abilities are anticipated to promote a heightened awareness of group interests and provide the intellectual means for articulating a more sophisticated ideological defense of these interests. Ultimately, intelligence equips dominant group members “to promote their interests more astutely—indeed, to become state-of-the-art apologists for their group’s social position” (Jackman and Muha 1984:752).

An important component of ideological refinement theory is that the means by which dominant groups attempt to maintain unequal social relations vary according to the nature of intergroup conflict. When subordinate group members are compliant parties to the unequal social relationship, the dominant group may justify group-based inequality and blatantly discriminatory behavior in terms of the supposedly distinct qualities of the groups involved (e.g., “blacks are lazy,” “women are emotionally fragile,” and so on). However, if subordinate group members are resistant parties to the unequal social relationship and actively challenge their subordinate social position, legitimizing ideologies based on assertions of categorical group differences are imbued with derogatory implications and “inject dangerous venom” into a potentially explosive dominant-subordinate relationship (Jackman and Muha 1984:759).

When group-based inequalities provoke resistance from subordinate groups, the dominant group seeks to mollify subordinate discontent while making as few concrete concessions as possible. To this end, they downplay inflammatory assertions of categorical group differences but attempt to undercut subordinate group efforts to restructure relations of inequality by drawing on seemingly race-neutral values, such as respect for individual rights and meritocracy, to deny the validity of group rights and group-based remediation efforts (Jackman 1994; Jackman and Muha 1984).

Individualism and meritocratic values provide dominant group members with an ostensibly principled means to deny the validity of group-based redistributive policies and transform them into weaker policies aimed at equal treatment and opportunity enhancement, which are more consistent with individualistic and meritocratic ideals. Within a highly imbalanced intergroup competition over resources, however, the provision of equal individual

rights and meritocratic standards conveys a major competitive advantage to the dominant group and works to perpetuate their privileged status (Parkin 1971). Moreover, advanced cognitive abilities are not thought to promote a truly race-neutral commitment to individualism and meritocracy; rather, dominant group members with advanced cognitive abilities are anticipated to selectively draw on race-neutral values to delegitimize only those policies that are threatening to their group's privileged social position.

In terms of black-white relations in the U.S., this perspective suggests that the ideational means by which whites attempted to maintain unequal social relations changed over the twentieth century. Overt prejudice and negative stereotypes, once an integral part of white efforts to legitimize and maintain relations of racial inequality, became more inflammatory and thereby less effective during the Civil Rights Movement, when blacks began to aggressively challenge their subordinate position.

In the context of escalating conflict over unequal race relations, whites with advanced cognitive abilities adopted a more refined legitimizing ideology for racial inequality that attempted to placate subordinate group members by denouncing prejudicial views and offering symbolic support for racial equality in principle, while nevertheless opposing substantive concessions to subordinate groups that would bring about a more equal distribution of desired resources.

In short, ideological refinement theory posits that advanced cognitive abilities do not engender a sincere commitment to racial equality, as hypothesized by enlightenment theory, but rather promote a more refined defense of extant group inequalities and sophisticated ideational resistance to measures that challenge these inequalities, particularly when subordinate group members aggressively contest their disadvantaged social position. Examining black-white relations in the U.S. from this perspective suggests that the pattern of racial attitudes described above emerged over time, through a combination of period and cohort change, as whites adapted to growing resistance from blacks throughout the twentieth century. Because the data needed to examine period differences in the attitudinal effects of cognitive ability before and after the Civil Rights Movement are not available (such an analysis would require time-series data spanning most of the twentieth century), the present study focuses on cohort differences in these effects.<sup>1</sup>

## HYPOTHESES

Based on the foregoing theoretical discussion, several competing hypotheses can be derived about the effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes that together provide a more rigorous evaluation of the enlightenment and ideological refinement perspectives. First, the *enlightenment hypothesis* contends that higher cognitive ability among whites is associated with rejection of anti-black prejudice, support for racial equality in principle, acknowledgement of the problem of discrimination, and support for policies designed to overcome discrimination and realize racial equality in practice. The *ideological refinement hypothesis*, on the other hand, contends that whites with higher levels of cognitive ability, compared to their less intelligent peers, are more likely to reject prejudicial attitudes, support racial equality in principle, and acknowledge the problem of discrimination; however, unlike the enlightenment hypothesis, cognitive ability is expected to have no effect, or perhaps even a negative effect, on support for concrete remedial policies for racial inequality. Because opportunity-enhancing policies, such as race-targeted investment in education, are more consistent with individualistic values and are less threatening to extant group-based inequality than are redistributive policies, such as workplace racial preferences, support for the latter is expected to be particularly low among whites with higher cognitive ability.

Second, the *enlightenment hypothesis* holds that the liberalizing impact of advanced cognitive abilities is not sensitive to shifting norms or patterns of intergroup conflict and therefore should not vary across cohorts in the U.S. If greater intelligence is inherently inconsistent with rigid, inaccurate, and uninformed views about racial out-groups, it should promote an enlightened outlook even if such views were normative and unchallenged during early socialization. The *ideological refinement hypothesis* holds that the link between cognitive ability and racial attitudes is contingent upon the state of dominant-subordinate relations, which implies a combination of period and cohort differences in the attitudinal effects of cognitive ability in the U.S. as a result of growing resistance among blacks to their disadvantaged social position during the twentieth century. More specifically, older cohorts of whites born well before the Civil Rights Movement are expected to exhibit few differences in anti-black attitudes by cognitive ability, while more recent birth cohorts are expected to exhibit the pattern of racial attitudes posited under ideological refinement theory.

## **METHODS**

### **Data**

I use data from white respondents to the 1972-2010 waves of the General Social Survey (GSS) (Smith, Marsden, Hout, and Kim 2011). The GSS is a repeated cross-sectional survey of the American public based on a series of independent nationally representative samples of English-speaking adults in the contiguous U.S.. It was conducted annually from 1972 to 1994, except in 1979, 1981, and 1992, and biannually thereafter by the National Opinion Research Center. In earlier waves of the survey, about 1,500 adults were interviewed each year. More recently, between 3,000 and 4,500 adults have been interviewed in each wave. As an omnibus national opinion survey, the GSS collects information on a broad range of topics, including respondent demographics, racial attitudes, policy support, and cognitive abilities. Some of the core questions in the GSS are asked of all respondents in every wave of the survey, while others are asked of only a random subset of respondents and/or are only included in the survey periodically. The 1972-2010 independent cross-sections of the GSS contain information on a total of 44,873 white respondents, but because the survey uses a rotational split-ballot design, sample sizes vary by outcome and are considerably smaller in most analyses (see Table 2 for details).

### **Variables**

The response variables used in this analysis fall into several interrelated attitude domains: anti-black prejudice, views about black-white equality in principle, perceptions of discrimination, and opinions toward both group-based redistributive and opportunity-enhancing racial policies. Appendix A provides the GSS text used to measure each response variable in this study.

The first set of response variables measure several dimensions of anti-black prejudice. Two of these items ask respondents to rate the work ethic and intelligence of blacks on seven-point scales spanning “lazy” (“unintelligent”) to “hard-working” (“intelligent”). Values on these scales are collapsed into binary variables coded 1 for an anti-black response, and 0 otherwise. In addition, I use two items that probe attitudes about living in a neighborhood where half the residents are black and about a family member marrying a black person. Responses on the five-point favorability scales are coded as binary variables equal to 1 if a respondent reports being “somewhat” or “very much” opposed to living in a racially integrated neighborhood (or to racial intermarriage), and 0 otherwise.

To measure views about black-white equality in principle, I focus on two survey items. The first item asks respondents to evaluate the statement that “white people have a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods.” This item is recoded into a binary variable indicating that the respondent feels “white people have no right to segregate their neighborhoods,” with the value 1 denoting a response of “disagree strongly” or “disagree slightly” on the original four-point response scale, and 0 representing a response of “agree strongly” or “agree slightly.” The second item asks whether respondents think black and white students should attend the same schools or separate schools. This item is coded as a binary variable, with 1 indicating a response of “same schools” and 0 indicating a response of “separate schools.”

In addition to measuring respondents views about racial equality in principle, I also measure perceptions of racial discrimination using two questions that ask whether blacks are discriminated against “a lot,” “some,” “only a little,” or “not at all” in the labor and housing markets. These variables are recoded dichotomously such that 1 represents a response of “a lot” or “some,” and 0 represents “only a little” or “not at all.”

The last set of response variables measures support for different policies designed to redress racial segregation, discrimination, and group-based material inequalities. In the GSS, respondents are asked about their support for several different group-based redistributive policies, including special government aid for blacks, school busing programs, and racial preferences in hiring and promotion. These policies are designed to directly equalize control of valued resources (e.g., money, jobs, and quality schools). The GSS also asks respondents about several policies that are best described as opportunity-enhancing rather than redistributive, including open housing laws, tax incentives for employers to locate near largely black neighborhoods, and targeted spending on education in largely black schools. The different response scales used to measure opinions about these policies are each recoded into binary variables, with 1 denoting a favorable attitude toward the policy in question and 0 representing a neutral or unfavorable attitude.<sup>2</sup>

The explanatory variable in the present study is cognitive ability. The GSS measures this construct with an abbreviated version of the Gallup-Thorndike Verbal Intelligence Test (GTVT), a short vocabulary test developed specifically for use in survey research (Thorndike 1942; Thorndike and Gallup 1944). This test consists of ten vocabulary items selected from the Institute for Educational Research Intelligence Scale (Thorndike 1942). For each item,

respondents are asked to choose the one word out of five possible matches that comes closest in meaning to a reference word. Correct responses are summed to yield a final score that ranges from 0 to 10. This test has desirable psychometric properties, including high internal consistency, reliability, and criterion validity (Miner 1957; Thorndike 1942; Wolfle 1980). Vocabulary tests tend to be highly correlated with more comprehensive tests of “general intelligence” (Miner 1957), and more specifically, the GTVT has an estimated correlation of 0.71 with the Army General Classification Test (Wolfle 1980:110). Before 1988, the GTVT was administered every other year to the full GSS sample. Since then, the test has been administered every year to a random subset of the full sample using a split-ballot design. In multivariate analyses below, test scores are standardized to have zero mean and unit variance.

The control variables included in multivariate analyses are survey year, cohort, gender, region, respondent education, father’s education, and father’s occupational prestige. Cohort is equivalent to a respondents’ year of birth, which ranges from 1883 to 1992 in the GSS cumulative time-series data. In certain analyses, cohort is treated not only as a control variable but also as a moderating variable for the effect of cognitive ability on racial attitudes. Gender is dummy coded, 1 for female and 0 for male. Region is expressed as a series of dummy variables for residence in the “East” (excluded category), “South,” “Midwest,” and “West.” Both respondent’s and father’s education are measured as years of completed schooling. Father’s occupational prestige scores come from the Hodge-Siegel-Rossi rating system developed at the National Opinion Research Center, which assigns scores based on respondent estimates of the relative social standing of different occupations (Hauser and Featherman 1977; Siegel 1971). For all variables, missing values due to item-specific nonresponse are simulated using multiple imputation with 10 replications (Royston 2005; Rubin 1987).

## **Analyses**

I estimate logistic regression models for the effects of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice, views about racial equality in principle, perceptions of discrimination, and support for different racial policies, controlling for the factors described above. To investigate potential nonlinearities in the relationship between cognitive ability and racial attitudes, I fit models with linear, quadratic, and cubic specifications for cognitive ability scores. Because these different specifications provide a comparable fit to the data in nearly all instances, I report only those

results based on the linear specification.<sup>3</sup> These analyses permit an investigation of the net effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes and allow for an examination of differences in these effects across different attitude domains.

To investigate cohort differences in the effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes, I estimate more complex logistic regression models that include interaction terms between respondent's year of birth and cognitive ability scores, controlling for period effects as well as the other putative confounders discussed previously.<sup>4</sup> To facilitate interpretation of these interaction models, I also plot the estimated proportion of respondents that hold a particular racial attitude by cognitive ability level and birth cohort for selected response variables. Together, these analyses evaluate whether differences in racial attitudes between those with higher versus lower cognitive abilities change across time through a process of cohort replacement.

The GSS provides weights that adjust for subsampling of initial non-respondents, a cost-saving procedure introduced in 2006. Because multivariate analyses conducted with the weighted and unweighted samples do not differ substantially, results from the unweighted analysis are reported here. All estimates and standard errors are based on combined results from the 10 imputed datasets.

## **RESULTS**

### **Sample Characteristics**

The first column in Table 1 summarizes demographic and socioeconomic characteristics for the total sample. Overall, the sample is 56 percent female. The average respondent was born in 1945, was 46.5 years old at the time of the interview, and completed 12.9 years of schooling. On average, respondents correctly answered about 6 out of 10 cognitive ability test questions.

Table 1 also presents sample characteristics separately by tertiles of the cognitive ability distribution, revealing stark differences between these groups. High-ability respondents in the third tertile are more likely to be female and to reside in the eastern and western regions of the country than respondents with lower ability in the first and second tertiles. Respondents in the third tertile are also typically older, have higher levels of education, and come from more advantaged families with educated fathers in higher status occupations.

## **Anti-black Prejudice and the Principle-Policy Paradox**

The first column of Table 2 presents descriptive statistics about anti-black prejudice, views on segregation and discrimination, and racial policy attitudes for the total sample. Several patterns are evident in these data. First, prejudicial attitudes about blacks' work ethic are more prevalent than prejudicial attitudes about blacks' intelligence. Specifically, 38.1 percent of white respondents report that "blacks are lazy," while 18.2 percent report that "blacks are unintelligent."

Second, white respondents are more likely to support opportunity-enhancing policies, such as open housing laws and targeted spending on education, than they are to support redistributive policies, such as government aid for blacks and racial preference policies. For example, in the total sample, 52.2 percent of whites support open housing laws, while only 11.8 percent support racial preferences. This pattern of differential policy support likely reflects the greater consistency of opportunity-enhancing policies with individual rights and meritocracy as well as the lower perceived threat posed by opportunity-enhancing policies for whites' privileged access to critical resources. Special government aid for blacks, school busing programs, and racial preference policies, by contrast, are premised on group-based distributive rights and are designed to directly equalize access to valued resources.

Third, these data reveal a clear disconnect between views on racial segregation and discrimination, and attitudes toward policies designed to remedy these problems. For example, although 73.6 percent of white respondents say that "whites have no right to segregate their neighborhoods," only a slight majority support open housing laws. Furthermore, while 88.8 percent of white respondents say that blacks and whites should attend the same schools, only 23.1 percent support school busing programs designed to integrate racially segregated districts. Similarly, 71.5 percent of white respondents acknowledge that blacks face "some" or "a lot" of discrimination in the labor market, but only 11.8 percent support racial preferences in hiring and promotion.

The right-hand columns of Table 2 present descriptive statistics on racial attitudes separately for tertiles of the cognitive ability distribution. With respect to anti-black prejudice, unadjusted differences by cognitive ability level indicate that whites with higher cognitive ability are less likely than those with lower ability to report prejudicial attitudes toward blacks. For example, 45.8 percent of whites in the first tertile of the cognitive ability distribution report that

“blacks are lazy,” while 38.8 percent and 28.7 percent of whites in the second and third tertiles, respectively, report the same negative attitude. A similar pattern of lower prejudice among whites with higher cognitive ability holds for attitudes about blacks’ intelligence, opposition to black neighbors, and opposition to black-white intermarriage.

Attitudinal differences across cognitive ability levels are also evident with respect to views on racial segregation and discrimination. Results indicate that high-ability whites are more likely than low-ability whites to reject residential segregation in principle, support school integration in principle, and acknowledge racial discrimination in the labor and housing markets. For example, 63.1 percent of whites in the first tertile of the cognitive ability distribution report that “whites have no right to segregate neighborhoods,” while 75.6 percent of whites in the second tertile and 84.9 percent of whites in the third tertile report the same view. And although a large majority of white respondents at every cognitive ability level report that “blacks and whites should attend the same schools,” nearly all white respondents in the third tertile of the cognitive ability distribution (95.9 percent) endorse school integration in principle, while a smaller proportion of respondents in the first tertile (81.2 percent) endorse the same view. In addition, cognitive ability is positively associated with perception of anti-black discrimination in the labor and housing markets. For example, 65.1 percent, 71.1 percent, and 79.6 percent of respondents in the first, second, and third tertiles of the cognitive ability distribution respectively report that blacks face “some” or “a lot” of discrimination that hurts their chances of getting a good job.

Although high-ability whites are less likely to report prejudicial attitudes against blacks and more likely to support racial equality in principle compared with low-ability whites, Table 2 shows only trivial differences across cognitive ability levels in support for redistributive policies designed to realize racial equality in practice. In several cases, whites with higher cognitive ability are less likely than low-ability whites to support group-based redistributive policies. For example, 26.9 percent of whites in the first tertile of the cognitive ability distribution support school busing programs, while only 22.5 percent of whites in the third tertile support this policy. Similarly, 15.1 percent of whites in the first tertile, 8.3 percent of whites in the second tertile, and 13.1 percent of whites in the third tertile support racial preferences in hiring and promotion.

By contrast, the pattern of support for opportunity-enhancing policies across cognitive ability levels is somewhat different. The unadjusted estimates in Table 2 indicate that whites with higher ability tend to be more supportive of open housing laws, special tax breaks for

businesses to locate near black areas, and targeted spending on largely black schools than whites with lower ability. These results suggest that the effects of cognitive ability on racial policy support may hinge on whether the policy adopts an opportunity-enhancing versus redistributive approach to remediating racial inequality. In several cases, however, the unadjusted positive associations between cognitive ability and support for opportunity-enhancing policies appears modest, and only a slight majority of whites with higher cognitive ability support open housing laws and tax incentives designed to promote economic development in black neighborhoods.

In sum, whites with advanced cognitive abilities are less likely to report prejudicial attitudes toward blacks, more likely to endorse racial equality in principle, and more likely to acknowledge labor market discrimination against blacks, but they are no more likely than whites with lower cognitive abilities to support group-based redistributive policies and only somewhat more likely to support rather benign opportunity-enhancing policies. As a result, the principle-policy paradox—that is, the disconnect between attitudes toward racial equality in principle and attitudes toward policies designed to realize racial equality in practice—is more pronounced among high-ability whites than among low-ability whites. This pattern of racial attitudes between whites with different cognitive ability levels is consistent with ideological refinement theory.

### **Net Effects of Cognitive Ability on Racial Attitudes**

Table 3 contains results from multivariate logistic regression models that provide estimates of the attitudinal effects of cognitive ability net of the confounding influence of gender, education, family background, and so on. These estimates are log odds ratios that give the additive effect of a one standard deviation increase in cognitive ability on the log odds of a particular attitudinal response, holding other variables in the model constant. To simplify interpretation of these models, estimated probabilities are also reported for respondents with mean cognitive ability, with cognitive ability one standard deviation above the mean, and with cognitive ability one standard deviation below the mean. Note that one standard deviation is roughly equal to 2 correct answers on the cognitive ability test. Estimated probabilities are computed with control variables set to their sample means.

The upper panel in Table 3 contains estimates for the net effects of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice. In general, these estimates indicate that whites with higher ability are

significantly less likely than comparable whites with lower ability to report prejudicial attitudes against blacks. For all four prejudicial attitudes considered in this analysis, a one standard deviation increase in cognitive ability is estimated to reduce the odds of reporting a negative attitude toward blacks by about 20 percent (e.g.,  $\exp(-0.215) = 0.807$ ). Among white respondents with comparable demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, this equates, for example, to an estimated 43 percent of those with one standard deviation below mean ability versus an estimated 33 percent of those with one standard deviation above mean ability saying that “blacks are lazy.”

The middle panel in Table 3 contains estimates for the net effects of cognitive ability on attitudes about racial segregation and discrimination. These estimates indicate that cognitive ability has a highly significant positive impact on support for residential and school integration in principle and on acknowledgment of discrimination in the labor and housing markets. For example, a one standard deviation increase in cognitive ability is estimated to increase the odds of reporting that “whites have no right to segregate neighborhoods” by about 40 percent (i.e.,  $\exp(0.336) = 1.400$ ). Similarly, net of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, higher cognitive ability is linked to significantly greater odds of reporting that “blacks and whites should attend the same schools” and that blacks suffer “some” or “a lot” of discrimination in the labor and housing markets.

The lower panels in Table 3 contain estimates for the net effects of cognitive ability on attitudes toward redistributive and opportunity-enhancing racial policies. Despite the strong liberalizing impact of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice, views about racial equality in principle, and perceptions of discrimination, estimates for the net effects of cognitive ability on racial policy attitudes indicate that whites with higher cognitive ability are not significantly more likely than comparable whites with lower cognitive ability to support any of the remedial policies considered in this analysis. More specifically, the estimated effect of cognitive ability on support for special government aid for blacks is close to zero and not statistically significant at conventional thresholds. Furthermore, high-ability whites are significantly less likely than similar low-ability whites to support school busing programs and workplace racial preferences. For example, a one standard deviation increase in cognitive ability is estimated to reduce the odds of supporting school busing programs by about 20 percent (e.g.,  $\exp(-0.185) = 0.831$ ). Even with respect to comparatively benign opportunity-enhancing policies like open housing

laws and tax breaks to incentivize businesses to locate in black areas, point estimates for the net effects of cognitive ability indicate that high ability whites are no more supportive of these policies than comparable whites with lower abilities. The only policy for which point estimates suggest a nontrivial liberalizing effect of cognitive ability is race-targeted spending on education, but the size of this effect estimate is still rather modest and it does not approach conventional significance thresholds. The paradoxical effects of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice, support for racial equality in principle, and racial policy attitudes are consistent with ideological refinement theory.

### **Moderated Effects of Cognitive Ability on Racial Attitudes by Birth Cohort**

Table 4 presents estimates of cohort differences in the effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes, controlling for demographic characteristics, education, and socioeconomic background. These estimates come from more complex logistic regression models that include interaction terms between a respondent's year of birth and cognitive ability. The interaction coefficients and standard errors in the left-hand columns of the table test whether the effects of cognitive ability change across cohorts. In the right-hand columns of the table, log odds ratios and Wald tests for the net effects of cognitive ability are reported for selected birth cohorts. These estimates identify the cohorts for which cognitive ability has significant effects on racial attitudes.

Although results from the cohort interaction models are somewhat inconsistent, they nevertheless provide considerable evidence that the liberalizing effects of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice, attitudes toward segregation, and perceptions of discrimination emerged primarily among more recent birth cohorts socialized during or after the Civil Rights Movement. For cohorts socialized before the 1950s and 1960s, results generally indicate a far more modest impact for cognitive ability on these attitudes, consistent with ideological refinement theory.

For example, cohort differences in the impact of cognitive ability on prejudicial attitudes toward blacks' work ethic are highly significant, with more recent cohorts showing much larger attitudinal differences by cognitive ability level than older cohorts. Among the 1910 birth cohort, cognitive ability is estimated to have no effect on prejudicial attitudes toward blacks' work ethic, but among cohorts born in 1950 or later, cognitive ability is estimated to have a strong and highly significant negative effect.

There is also evidence of significant cohort differences in the impact of cognitive ability on attitudes toward residential segregation and perceptions of racial discrimination in the labor market. The estimated effects of cognitive ability on perceptions of job discrimination among cohorts born before 1950 are close to zero and not statistically significant. By contrast, among cohorts born in 1950 or later, estimates indicate that cognitive ability has large and statistically significant positive effects on the likelihood of acknowledging job discrimination against blacks. The liberalizing effects of cognitive ability on attitudes toward residential segregation are also significantly larger for more recent cohorts than for cohorts born before 1950. Although results indicate no cohort differences in the effects of cognitive ability on attitudes toward school segregation, the data used to estimate this cohort interaction model are somewhat limited because the response variable was included only in early waves of the GSS, precluding an analysis that incorporates more recent birth cohorts.

In contrast to prejudicial attitudes and views about segregation and discrimination, the effects of cognitive ability on racial policy attitudes are not significantly different across birth cohorts: none of the interaction coefficients even approach conventional thresholds for statistical significance, and among all cohorts considered in the analysis, point estimates indicate that cognitive ability has a substantively similar impact. For example, among whites born anytime between 1910 and 1970, estimates indicate that a one standard deviation increase in cognitive ability reduces the odds of supporting school busing programs by about 15 to 20 percent (i.e.,  $\exp(-0.197) = 0.821$  and  $\exp(-0.174) = 0.840$ ).

This pattern of cohort differences is depicted graphically in Figures 1 to 3, which illustrate the emergence of paradoxical effects of cognitive ability for selected racial attitudes. The estimated probabilities in these figures are computed from the cohort interaction models with control variables set to their sample means. Figure 1 indicates that among cohorts born before 1950, there are few differences between cognitive ability levels in prejudicial attitudes about blacks' work ethic. Moreover, among cohorts born before 1950, the estimates in Figure 1 indicate that fairly large proportions of whites at all cognitive ability levels report prejudicial views. Among cohorts born after 1950, considerable differences by cognitive ability emerge, with high-ability whites much less likely to report that "blacks are lazy" than comparable low-ability whites.

Figure 2 shows a similar pattern of cohort differences in the effects of cognitive ability on perceptions of job discrimination against blacks. Cohorts born before 1950 exhibit no significant differences by ability level, and point estimates indicate that between 65 and 75 percent of these whites at all ability levels acknowledge that blacks face labor market discrimination. Significant attitudinal differences emerge among cohorts born in 1950 or later, with point estimates indicating that more than 80 percent of high-ability whites, but only about 65 percent of low-ability whites, acknowledge that blacks face discrimination in the labor market.

Figure 3 displays estimated probabilities of supporting workplace racial preferences by cohort and cognitive ability level. These estimates indicate no cohort differences in the effects of cognitive ability, and minimal support for this policy across all cohorts and at every cognitive ability level.

In sum, among older cohorts, differences in racial attitudes by cognitive ability are much more muted: at all ability levels, many respondents report prejudicial attitudes, some support racial equality in principle, and few support remedial policies for racial inequality. Among more recent cohorts, high-ability whites are more likely than comparable low-ability whites to reject negative racial stereotypes and support racial equality in principle, but cognitive ability still has no impact on the minimal levels of support for remedial policies, and for group-based redistributive policies in particular. This pattern of cohort differences in the attitudinal effects of cognitive ability resonates with ideological refinement theory and is difficult to reconcile with enlightenment theory.

### **Cognitive Ability and Race-neutral Policy Attitudes**

An alternative explanation for the pattern of attitudinal effects discussed previously is that high-ability whites are indeed committed to racial equality both in principle and in practice, but compared to their low-ability counterparts, they are also better attuned to the dangers of policies that violate individual rights. For example, because workplace racial preferences privilege group rights over individual rights, whites with advanced cognitive abilities may oppose this policy not out of concern for protecting their own privileged social position but rather out of a truly race-neutral concern for protecting individual rights over group rights. Another variant of this explanation contends that whites with higher cognitive abilities are better attuned to the dangers of government expansion, and would oppose policies like school busing

programs because they involve an expansion of government powers. These alternative explanations suggest that it is high-ability whites' greater commitment to race-neutral individualism, rather than their more nuanced ability to avoid the appearance of racism while defending their group interests, that is behind the principle-policy paradox—an interpretation that is not consistent with ideological refinement theory.

To assess these alternative explanations, I analyze the net effects of cognitive ability on environmental policy attitudes. If advanced cognitive abilities promote a race-neutral commitment to individualism and a general aversion to government policies that limit individual rights, whites with higher cognitive ability would be expected to oppose not only racial policies that infringe upon individual rights but also environmental policies that involve government limitation of individual rights.

Table 5 contains estimates from multivariate logistic regression models of three environment policy items included in select waves of the GSS. These items measure support for “much higher taxes” to fund environmental protection; support for “government laws” to protect the environment, even if these laws “interfere with people’s right to make their own decisions;” and support for “government laws” to protect the environment, even if they “interfere with business’s right to make their own decisions.” The exact text used by the GSS to measure these policy attitudes is provided in Appendix A. Response categories are collapsed into binary variables coded 1 to indicate a favorable attitude toward the policy, and 0 to indicate a neutral or unfavorable attitude.

In sharp contrast to the effects of cognitive ability on racial policy attitudes, the estimates in Table 5 indicate that cognitive ability has a highly significant positive impact on support for environmental policies described as requiring “much higher taxes” and “government laws” that intrude on the rights of either individuals or businesses. These results suggest that high-ability whites are more likely than low-ability whites to favor government interventions that violate individual rights in an effort to redress misdirection on important social issues. This finding casts doubt on the alternative explanation for the lack of support for racial policies observed among high-ability whites in the same survey—that is, their greater race-neutral commitment to individual rights and limited government. Rather, these results suggest that whites with advanced cognitive abilities selectively draw on seemingly race-neutral values to delegitimize policies that threaten their group’s privileged social position.

## **DISCUSSION**

The impact of cognitive ability on racial attitudes is a contested topic in social psychology. Enlightenment theory contends that cognitive sophistication promotes a liberalized world outlook that is inherently less vulnerable to the narrow appeals of inegalitarian attitudes and the faulty, uninformed, and inflexible generalizations that underlie intergroup negativism. An alternative theoretical framework, the ideological refinement perspective, does not view advanced cognitive abilities as “enlightening” with respect to racial attitudes. Rather, this perspective argues that whites with higher cognitive ability are best equipped to recognize and act in accordance with their group interests and to articulate a sophisticated ideational defense of their group’s privileged status.

This study provides the first empirical test of these competing theories as they relate to effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes. Although several recent studies investigate the link between intelligence and racial attitudes, none examine the effects of cognitive ability across multiple racial attitude domains or across birth cohorts socialized under different normative conditions. By analyzing a more comprehensive set of racial attitudes and by investigating cohort differences in the attitudinal impact of cognitive ability, this study extends previous research and provides a more rigorous empirical assessment of competing theoretical perspectives.

Findings indicate that whites with higher cognitive ability are significantly less likely than comparable whites with lower cognitive ability to report anti-black prejudicial attitudes. High-ability whites, compared with low-ability whites, are also significantly more likely to support racial integration in principle and to acknowledge discrimination against blacks in the labor and housing markets. Despite their more favorable views about blacks, greater support for racial equality in principle, and greater awareness of the problems that blacks encounter when searching for jobs and housing, results indicate that whites with higher cognitive ability are no more likely than their counterparts with lower cognitive ability to support specific policies designed to realize racial equality. In fact, high-ability whites are significantly less likely than low-ability whites to support school busing programs and workplace racial preferences.

Results also suggest that the strong “liberalizing” effects of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice and views about racial equality in principle emerged slowly over time through a process of cohort replacement. Attitudinal differences by cognitive ability level are much less pronounced and in some cases completely muted among cohorts socialized well before the 1950s

and 1960s, while higher cognitive ability is closely linked to rejection of overtly prejudicial attitudes, support for residential integration in principle, and acknowledgement of discrimination among cohorts socialized during or after the 1950s and 1960s.

Taken together, these results are not consistent with enlightenment theory. Although high-ability whites give more “enlightened” responses than low-ability whites with respect to anti-black prejudice and support for racial equality in principle, they do not report more “enlightened” attitudes about policies intended to redress racial inequality in practice. Even fairly benign opportunity-enhancing policies, such as open housing laws designed to protect blacks from discrimination on the part of prejudicial homeowners, receive no more support from high-ability whites than from low-ability whites, net of confounding factors. While nearly all whites with advanced cognitive abilities say that “whites have no right to segregate their neighborhoods,” nearly half of this group would not vote for a law intended to prevent prejudicial real estate practices on the basis of race. These paradoxical findings seem to belie enlightenment theory claims that cognitive ability promotes a sincere commitment to racial egalitarianism.

It is also difficult to reconcile the pattern of cohort differences observed in this study with the enlightenment theoretical framework. According to this perspective, the liberalizing impact of cognitive ability on racial attitudes is due to an inherent inconsistency between advanced cognitive abilities and the narrow-minded, faulty, and inflexible mental constructions that are thought to underlie intergroup negativism. If this inconsistency is truly inherent, whites with higher cognitive ability should be more likely to reject anti-black attitudes regardless of the normative environment in which they were socialized. In this analysis, however, nontrivial effects of cognitive ability on anti-black prejudice emerge primarily among cohorts socialized during or after the Civil Rights Movement.

The results of this study are more consistent with ideological refinement theory. Differences in the effects of cognitive ability across racial attitude domains and across birth cohorts indicate that intelligent white Americans have distanced themselves over historical time from racial attitudes that came to be viewed as inflammatory and offensive, but over the same period, they have not become any more supportive of policies that could threaten the systemic advantages from which they benefit. This pattern of results resonates with the ideological

refinement argument that intelligent whites are simply more adept than their less intelligent peers at defending their privileged social position when it is challenged by subordinate minorities.

Although the effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes observed in this study are consistent with ideological refinement theory, there remain several alternative explanations for these patterns. First, it is possible that high-ability whites oppose remedial policies for racial inequality not because they are concerned about protecting their group interests or because they secretly harbor anti-black sentiments. Rather, intelligent whites may oppose these policies because they are perceived to be ineffective at achieving their intended goal of ameliorating racial inequality. According to this argument, if extant racial policies were more effective at reducing segregation, eliminating discrimination, and realizing a more equal distribution of resources between racial groups, intelligent whites would actively support these programs.

Although this alternative explanation cannot be completely dismissed without gathering new data on the reasons why intelligent whites oppose various affirmative action policies, in the volumes of previous research on determinants of whites' racial policy attitudes, concerns about efficacy have not been identified as an important explanatory factor. Instead, previous research consistently highlights the considerable explanatory power of prejudice and racism in various guises (e.g., "old-fashioned" racism, anti-black stereotyping, symbolic racism), different types of political ideology (e.g., egalitarianism, conservatism, individualism), and concern about group- or self-interests (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, and Lev-Arey 2006; Kluegel and Smith 1983; Krysan 2000; Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000; Sears, Hensler, and Speer 1979; Tuch and Martin 1997).

Another alternative explanation for the cohort differences observed in this analysis contends that whites with higher cognitive ability did not adapt their attitudes in an attempt to avoid further escalating intergroup conflict and preserve their privileged social position. Rather, this perspective argues that the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was a consciousness-raising event that presented whites with new information—of which they were previously unaware—about the impoverished living conditions and unfair treatment of blacks in America. According to this perspective, cognitive ability is associated with greater responsiveness to new information in general, and thus high-ability whites were better equipped than low-ability whites to revise their racial attitudes in light of the new information on racial inequality with which they were presented as a result of the Civil Rights Movement.

It is difficult to empirically adjudicate between this explanation and ideological refinement theory with extant data, but the core premises of this alternative account seem highly implausible on their surface. For example, it seems unlikely that prior to the Civil Rights Movement intelligent whites were simply unaware of the deep inequalities that separated black and whites in America as well as the highly unequal treatment that whites and blacks regularly received in nearly all domains of life. Furthermore, if the Civil Rights Movement was indeed a “consciousness-raising” event for intelligent whites, it is unclear why this group would revise their prejudicial attitudes toward blacks and their principled views about racial equality yet would not support in any meaningful way specific policies designed to eliminate racial inequality. Thus, while the present empirical analysis cannot definitively rule out every alternative explanation, because of the highly questionable face validity of these alternatives, ideological refinement theory remains the most compelling explanation for the attitudinal patterns observed in this study.

Although this study makes several important contributions to research on racial attitudes, it is not without limitations. First, it relies on a comparatively limited measure of cognitive ability. The GTVT has acceptable psychometric properties and is highly correlated with comprehensive measures of cognitive ability, but this test is still likely to be less reliable and consistent than assessments used in previous studies (e.g., Hodson and Busseri 2012) because it consists of only ten vocabulary questions administered in an uncontrolled setting.

Second, ideological refinement theory suggests a combination of period and cohort differences in the impact of cognitive ability on racial attitudes, but GSS data permit only an investigation of cohort differences in these effects. Because the GSS was not fielded until after the period of most intense racial conflict during the Civil Rights Movement, it lacks the appropriate comparison group—individuals interviewed before the 1950s and 1960s—needed to estimate the hypothesized period differences. The analysis of cohort differences in this study is also premised on the assumption that ageing effects on cognitive abilities and racial attitudes are negligible, that is, that cognitive capacities and racial attitudes are highly stable from early adulthood onward. This assumption is consistent with research about ageing effects on a variety of sociopolitical attitudes (Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb 1991; Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Sears and Funk 1999) and with research on the stability of psychometric intelligence from childhood through old age (Deary, Whalley, Lemmon, Crawford, and Starr 2000).

Future research on cognitive ability and racial attitudes should seek to overcome this study's limitations by collecting data on a wide variety of racial attitudes and by using a more comprehensive assessment of cognitive ability. In addition, future research should analyze open-ended survey questions that ask about the logic and motivation underlying intelligent whites' opposition to different racial policies. Ideological refinement theory contends that intelligent whites justify their opposition to these policies in terms of race-neutral commitments to individualism and meritocracy, but this specific claim cannot be evaluated without more detailed data on the reasons that whites give to explain their policy attitudes. It will also be important to use innovative methods that can measure differences in "covert racism" (e.g., Sigall and Page 1971) and "implicit prejudice" (e.g., Wittenbrink, Judd, and Park 1997) among whites with different levels of intelligence and to firmly ground analyses of cognitive influences on racial attitudes within the broader social and historical contexts that structure these influences.

So, are smart people less racist? The findings from this study suggest that the answer to this question is complex. Less intelligent whites, together with more intelligent whites from cohorts that were born earlier in the twentieth century, show a pattern of racial attitudes that is more consistent with elements of "old-fashioned racism," characterized by overtly prejudicial views and anti-black affect, than is the pattern of attitudes prevalent among high-ability whites from more recent birth cohorts. This latter group, by contrast, holds a set of racial attitudes that is more consistent, at least in part, with elements of so-called "symbolic racism" (Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears 1988), "laissez-faire racism" (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997), and "color-blind racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2003). These racial ideologies differ from each other in subtle ways, but they all involve persistent resistance to meaningful policy efforts aimed at ameliorating racial inequality based on seemingly race-neutral values instead of overtly prejudicial attitudes. If racism is ultimately about "a dominant group striving to maintain its systemic advantages" against "minorities fighting to subvert the status quo" (Bonilla-Silva 2006:131), then the results of this study suggest that highly intelligent whites have simply become more sophisticated racists than less intelligent whites.

Blacks and other dark-skinned minorities continue to lag far behind whites on nearly every measure of human well-being (Kerbo 2009). Audit studies demonstrate that anti-black discrimination is still widespread in the labor, housing, and credit markets (Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009; Yinger 1995). Racial residential segregation remains extreme in many

metropolitan areas (Charles 2003). These severe inequalities have persisted, and in some cases worsened, despite evidence of widespread racial tolerance and a strong commitment to racial equality among whites, especially among whites with advanced cognitive abilities who disproportionately occupy positions of power, authority, and leadership in American society. This study suggests that the apparent disconnect between whites' racial attitudes and patterns of racial inequality may have an explanation in a refined racial ideology that functions to preserve systemic inequalities.

## ENDNOTES

1. A cohort analysis of effect heterogeneity spanning most of the twentieth century is well-supported in the GSS. For example, in the sample of white respondents who were administered the cognitive ability test and asked about their attitudes toward blacks' intelligence, the distribution of respondents across cohorts is as follows (*cohort-frequency-proportion*): 1900s-50-0.01; 1910s-189-0.03; 1930s-564-0.10; 1940s-909-0.16; 1950s-1216-0.21; 1960s-1146-0.20; 1970s-776-0.14; 1980s-388-0.07; 1990s-31-0.01.
2. Where appropriate, response variables were also coded and analyzed as ordinal outcomes (results not shown). Ordinal logistic regression models of these outcomes yield results very similar to those from the binary logistic regression models presented in this study.
3. There is some evidence of a non-monotonic, U-shaped effect of cognitive ability on attitudes toward school busing programs and racial preferences, where whites with average or slightly above-average ability have the least supportive attitudes, followed by high-ability whites and then low-ability whites, who have the most supportive attitudes. The practical significance of these deviations from linearity is mostly trivial, however, so I opt to report results from more parsimonious linear specifications.
4. Experimentation with a variety of specifications for the cohort by ability interaction indicated that a single cross-product term provided the best balance between goodness-of-fit and model parsimony.

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Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Variable	Total Sample	Verbal Ability Tertiles		
		1st	2nd	3rd
<i>N</i>	21,695	7,381	8,335	5,979
Region, percent				
East	19.8	17.1	18.9	24.5
South	32.9	38.4	32.1	27.2
Midwest	27.3	27.6	28.7	25.1
West	20.0	17.0	20.3	23.1
Sex, percent				
Male	44.1	52.7	42.2	42.6
Female	56.0	47.3	57.8	57.4
Cohort, mean	1945	1944	1947	1943
Age, mean	46.5	46.7	45.0	48.3
Education, mean	12.9	11.2	13.1	14.9
Father's education, mean	10.4	9.0	10.7	11.8
Father's occ. status, mean	42.2	39.0	42.5	45.7
Cognitive ability score, mean	6.3	4.0	6.4	8.8

Notes: Data come from white respondents to the 1972-2010 waves of the General Social Survey that included the verbal ability test. Results are combined estimates from 10 multiple imputation datasets.

Table 2. Anti-black prejudice, views on segregation and discrimination, and racial policy attitudes

Variable	Total Sample		Cognitive Ability Tertiles		
	N	Percent	1st	2nd	3rd
Anti-black prejudice					
Blacks are unintelligent	5,705	18.2	22.8	18.4	13.0
Blacks are lazy	6,493	38.1	45.8	38.8	28.7
Oppose having black neighbors	5,705	29.2	35.0	28.8	23.5
Oppose black-white intermarriage	5,705	37.5	46.7	36.9	28.0
Attitudes toward segregation and discrimination					
Whites have no right to segregate neighborhoods	8,465	73.6	63.1	75.6	84.9
Blacks and whites should attend same schools	3,935	88.8	81.2	91.4	95.9
Blacks face labor market discrimination	779	71.5	65.1	71.1	79.6
Blacks face housing market discrimination	779	72.3	68.3	71.5	77.9
Racial policy attitudes (redistributive policies)					
Support government aid for blacks	9,882	13.2	12.6	10.8	17.2
Support school busing programs	12,026	23.1	26.9	20.1	22.5
Support racial preferences in hiring and promotion	6,938	11.8	15.1	8.3	13.1
Racial policy attitudes (opportunity-enhancing policies)					
Support open housing laws	10,637	52.2	48.3	53.4	55.3
Support tax breaks for business to locate in black areas	400	43.8	38.9	40.9	53.6
Support spending more on black schools	400	65.5	59.8	61.5	77.4

Notes: Data come from white respondents to the 1972-2010 waves/ballots of the General Social Survey that included racial attitude items and the cognitive ability test. Results are combined estimates from 10 multiple imputation datasets.

Table 3. Net effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes

Variable	Coef	SE		P(Y=1) by cognitive ability		
				-1 SD	Mean	+1 SD
<b>Anti-black prejudice</b>						
Blacks are unintelligent	- 0.267	(0.043)	***	0.21	0.17	0.14
Blacks are lazy	- 0.215	(0.033)	***	0.43	0.38	0.33
Oppose having black neighbors	- 0.223	(0.037)	***	0.33	0.28	0.24
Oppose black-white intermarriage	- 0.281	(0.038)	***	0.42	0.35	0.29
<b>Attitudes toward segregation and discrimination</b>						
Whites have no right to segregate neighborhoods	0.336	(0.032)	***	0.71	0.77	0.82
Blacks and whites should attend same schools	0.440	(0.067)	***	0.90	0.94	0.96
Blacks face labor market discrimination	0.301	(0.100)	**	0.66	0.73	0.78
Blacks face housing market discrimination	0.221	(0.100)	*	0.69	0.73	0.77
<b>Racial policy attitudes (redistributive policies)</b>						
Support government aid for blacks	0.048	(0.038)		0.12	0.13	0.13
Support school busing programs	- 0.185	(0.027)	***	0.25	0.22	0.19
Support racial preferences in hiring and promotion	- 0.150	(0.048)	**	0.13	0.12	0.10
<b>Racial policy attitudes (opportunity-enhancing policies)</b>						
Support open housing laws	0.031	(0.025)		0.52	0.53	0.53
Support tax breaks for business to locate in black areas	- 0.038	(0.129)		0.44	0.43	0.42
Support spending more on black schools	0.170	(0.131)		0.63	0.67	0.70

Notes: Data come from white respondents to the 1972-2010 waves/ballots of the General Social Survey that included racial attitude items and the cognitive ability test. Coefficients are estimated log odds ratios from logistic regression models that control for survey year, geographic region, birth cohort, education, father's education, and father's occupational status. Results are combined estimates from 10 multiple imputation datasets.

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, and \*\*\* p < .001 for two-sided tests of no effect.

Table 4. Moderated effects of cognitive ability on racial attitudes by birth cohort

Variable	Cohort x ability interaction		Cognitive ability effects for selected cohorts			
	Coef	SE	1910	1930	1950	1970
<b>Anti-black prejudice</b>						
Blacks are unintelligent	- 0.002	(0.002)	- 0.194 *	- 0.232 ***	- 0.269 ***	- 0.307 ***
Blacks are lazy	- 0.005	(0.002) ***	0.004	- 0.104 *	- 0.212 ***	- 0.321 ***
Oppose having black neighbors	- 0.007	(0.002) ***	0.035	- 0.096	- 0.226 ***	- 0.356 ***
Oppose black-white intermarriage	- 0.006	(0.002) **	- 0.057	- 0.168 **	- 0.279 ***	- 0.390 ***
<b>Attitudes toward segregation and discrimination</b>						
Whites have no right to segregate neighborhoods	0.004	(0.001) **	0.233 ***	0.313 ***	0.393 ***	0.473 ***
Blacks and whites should attend same schools	- 0.000	(0.003)	0.447 ***	0.439 ***	0.431 ***	0.424 **
Blacks face labor market discrimination	0.012	(0.005) *	- 0.092	0.138	0.369 ***	0.599 ***
Blacks face housing market discrimination	0.006	(0.005)	0.002	0.128	0.254 *	0.381 *
<b>Racial policy attitudes (redistributive policies)</b>						
Support government aid for blacks	0.002	(0.002)	- 0.035	0.012	0.058	0.104
Support school busing programs	0.000	(0.001)	- 0.197 ***	- 0.190 ***	- 0.182 ***	- 0.174 ***
Support racial preferences in hiring and promotion	0.001	(0.002)	- 0.208 *	- 0.181 *	- 0.153 **	- 0.125 *
<b>Racial policy attitudes (opportunity-enhancing policies)</b>						
Support open housing laws	0.000	(0.001)	0.021	0.028	0.034	0.041
Support tax breaks for business to locate in black areas	0.004	(0.006)	- 0.170	- 0.095	- 0.020	0.055
Support spending more on black schools	0.003	(0.006)	0.054	0.121	0.188	0.255

Notes: Data come from white respondents to the 1972-2010 waves/ballots of the General Social Survey that included racial attitude items and the cognitive ability test. Coefficients are estimated log odds ratios from logistic regression models that control for survey year, geographic region, birth cohort, education, father's education, and father's occupational status. Results are combined estimates from 10 multiple imputation datasets.

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, and \*\*\* p < .001 for two-sided tests of no effect.

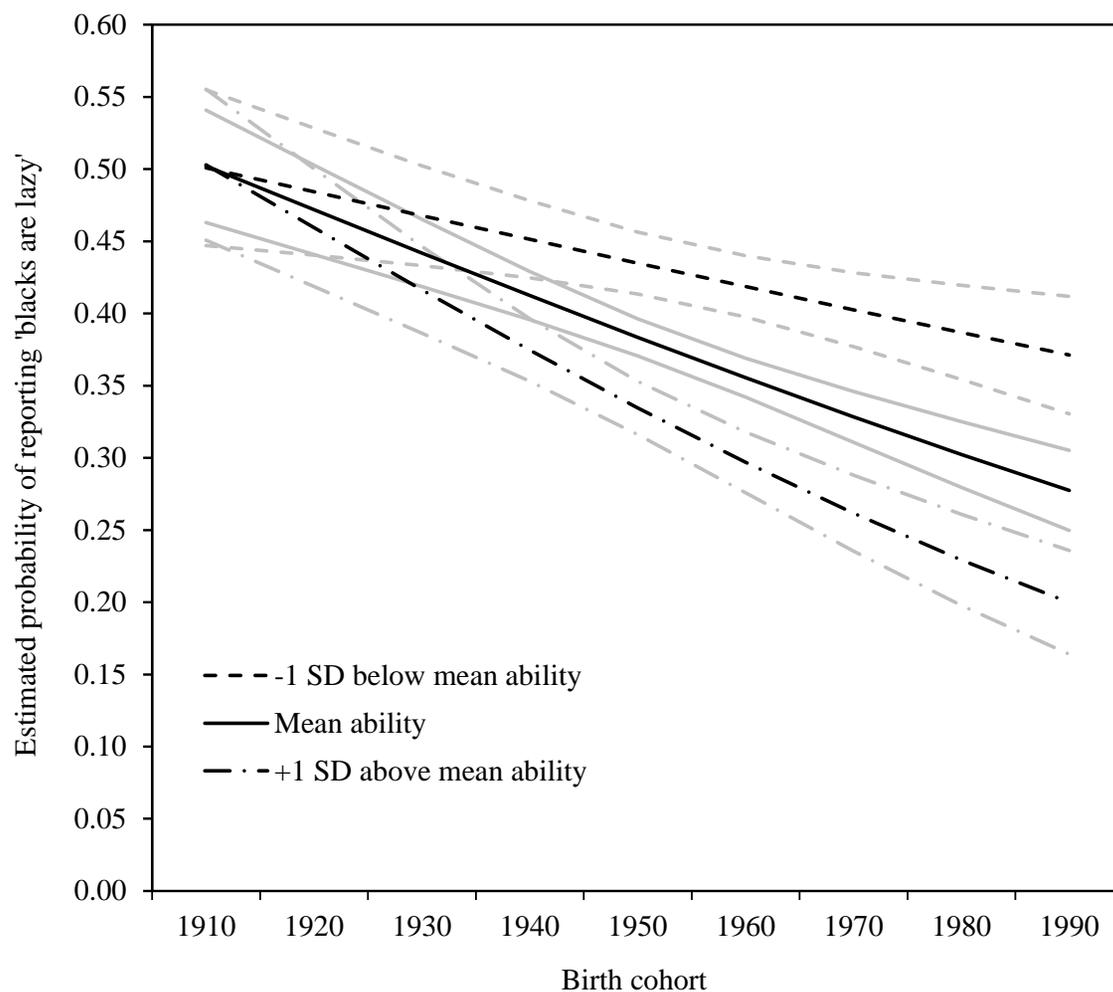
Table 5. Net effects of cognitive ability on environmental policy attitudes

Variable	N	Coef	SE	P(Y=1) by cognitive ability			
				-1 SD	Mean	+1 SD	
To protect environment, respondent would...							
Support much higher taxes	3,693	0.127	(0.043)	**	0.31	0.34	0.37
Support govt laws over individual initiative	3,693	0.124	(0.048)	**	0.67	0.70	0.73
Support govt laws over business initiative	3,693	0.201	(0.070)	**	0.88	0.90	0.92

Notes: Data come from white respondents to the 1972-2010 waves/ballots of the General Social Survey that included the environmental attitude items and the cognitive ability test. Coefficients are estimated log odds ratios from logistic regression models that control for survey year, geographic region, birth cohort, education, father's education, and father's occupational status. Results are combined estimates from 10 multiple imputation datasets.

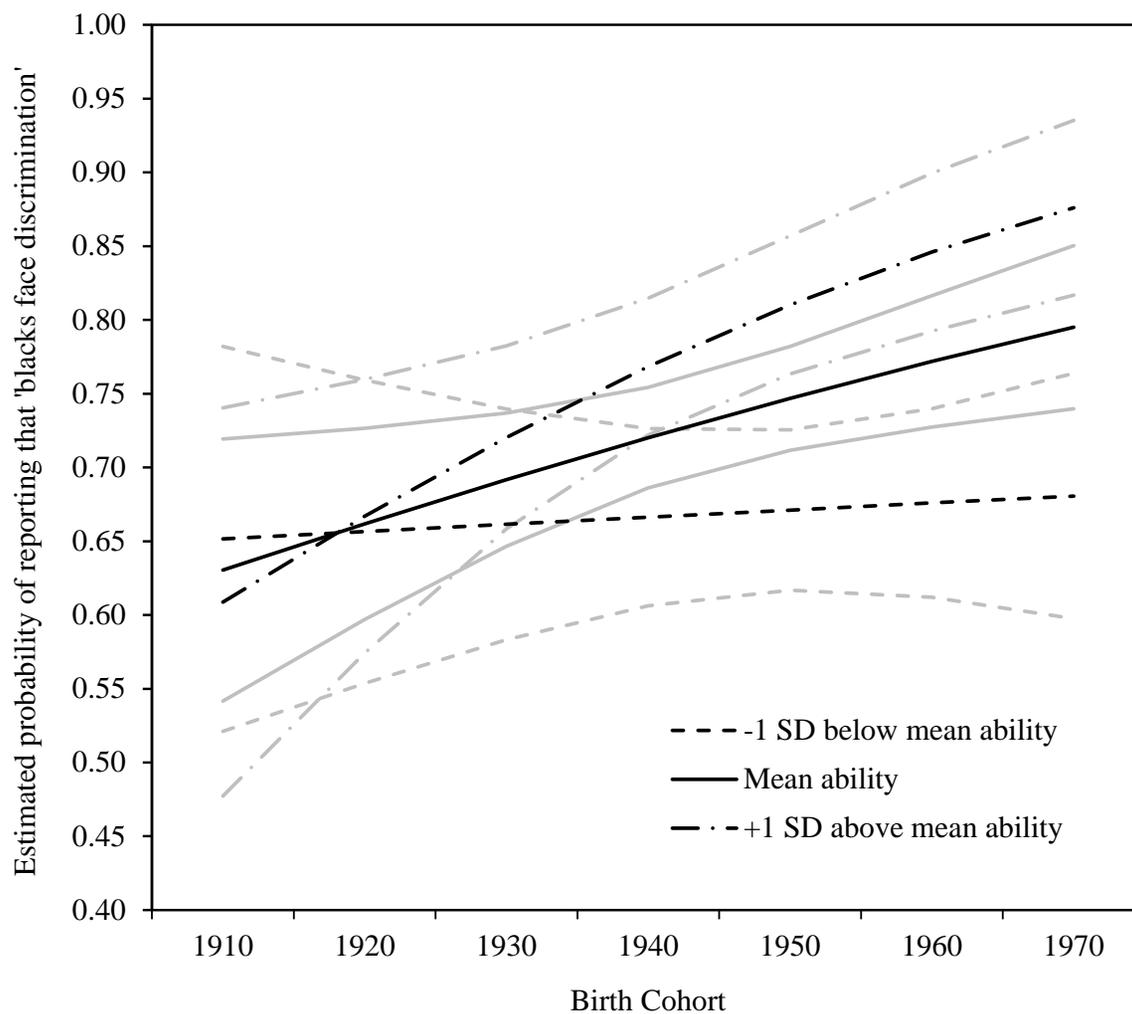
\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, and \*\*\* p < .001 for two-sided tests of no effect.

Figure 1. Estimated probability of reporting 'blacks are lazy' by cognitive ability level and birth cohort



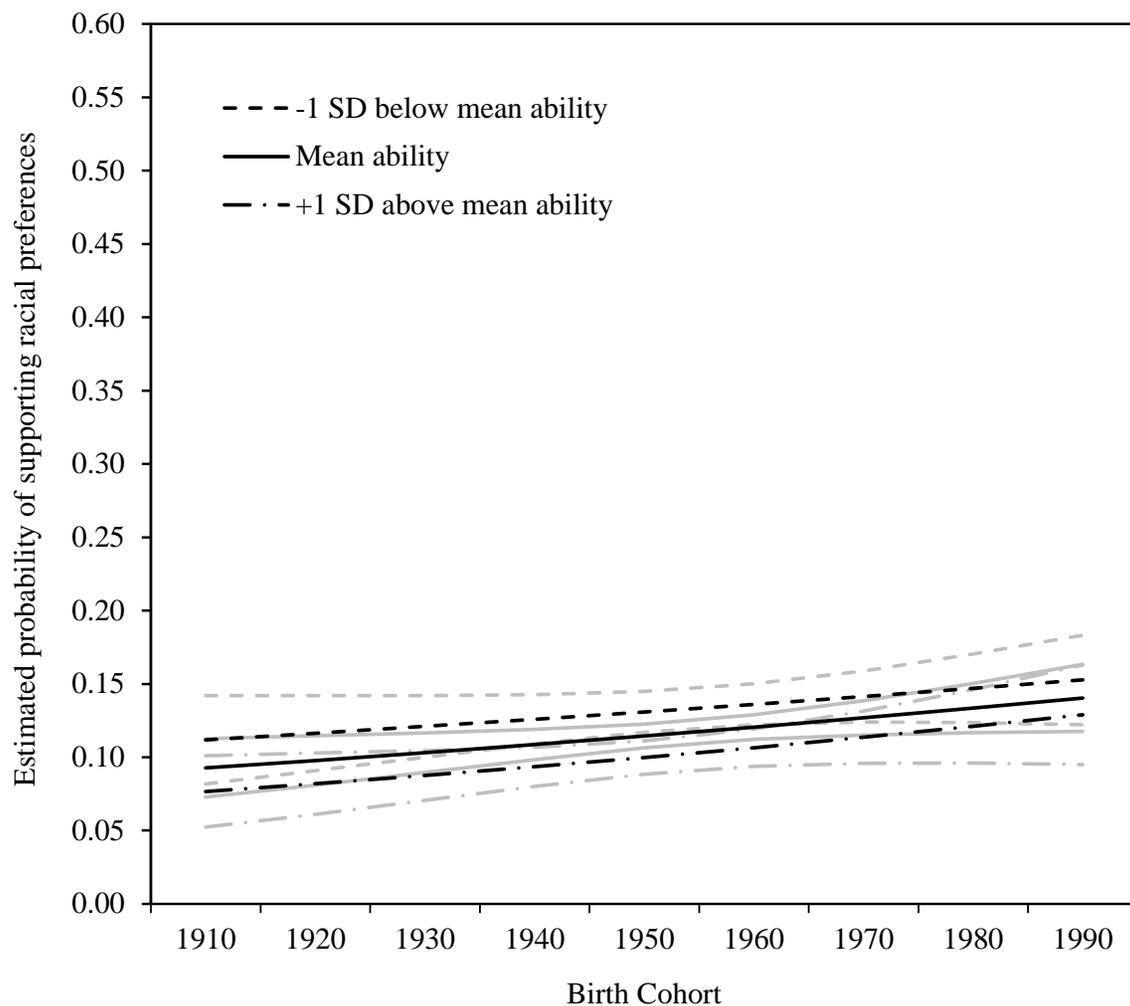
Notes: Probabilities are estimated from a logistic regression model with control variables set to their sample means. Point estimates are given by the black lines, and 95% confidence intervals are shown in grey.

Figure 2. Estimated probability of reporting that 'blacks face discrimination' by cognitive ability level and birth cohort



Notes: Probabilities are estimated from a logistic regression model with control variables set to their sample means. Point estimates are given by the black lines, and 95% confidence intervals are shown in grey.

Figure 3. Estimated probability of supporting racial preferences by cognitive ability level and birth cohort



Notes: Probabilities are estimated from a logistic regression model with control variables set to their sample means. Point estimates are given by the black lines, and 95% confidence intervals are shown in grey.

## **APPENDIX A: GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY ATTITUDE ITEMS**

### **Anti-black Prejudice**

INTLBLKS. “Now I have some questions about different groups in our society. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the characteristics of people in a group can be rated. In the first statement...The second set of characteristics asks if people in the group tend to be hard-working or if they tend to be lazy [respondent shown 7-point scale with 1 labeled ‘hard-working’ and 7 labeled ‘lazy’]. Where would you rate blacks in general on this scale?”

WORKBLKS. “Next, do people in these groups tend to be unintelligent or tend to be intelligent? [respondent shown 7-point scale with 1 labeled ‘unintelligent’ and 7 labeled ‘intelligent’] Where would you rate blacks in general on this scale?”

LIVEBLKS. “Now I'm going to ask you about different types of contact with various groups of people. In each situation would you please tell me whether you would be very much in favor of it happening, somewhat in favor, neither in favor nor opposed to it happening, somewhat opposed, or very much opposed to it happening? Living in a neighborhood where half of your neighbors were blacks?”

MARBLK.. “What about having a close relative marry a black person? Would you be very in favor of it happening, somewhat in favor, neither in favor nor opposed to it happening, somewhat opposed, or very opposed to it happening?”

### **Attitudes toward Segregation and Discrimination**

RACSEG. “Do you agree strongly, agree slightly, disagree slightly, or disagree strongly with the following statement? White people have a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods if they want to, and blacks should respect that right.”

RACSCHOL. “Do you think white students and black students should go to the same schools or to separate schools? [respondent can answer ‘same schools’ or ‘separate schools.’]”

BLKJOBS. “How much discrimination is there that hurts the chances of blacks to get good paying jobs? Would you say there is a lot, some, only a little, or none at all?”

BLKHOUSE. “How much discrimination is there that makes it hard for blacks to buy or rent housing wherever they want? Would you say there is a lot, some, only a little, or none at all?”

## **Racial Policy Attitudes**

HELPBLK. “Now look at CARD [respondent shown 5-point scale with one end labeled ‘I strongly agree the government is obligated to help blacks’ and the other end labeled ‘I strongly agree that government shouldn’t give special treatment’]. Some people think that blacks have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standards. Others believe that the government should not be giving special treatment to blacks. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?”

BUSING. “In general, do you favor or oppose the busing of black and white school children from one school district to another?”

AFFRMACT. “Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion of Blacks is wrong because it discriminates against whites. What about your opinion—are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of Blacks? [if favors] Do you favor preference in hiring and promotion strongly or not strongly? [if opposes] Do you oppose preference in hiring and promotion strongly or not strongly?”

RACOPEN. “Suppose there is a community-wide vote on the general housing issue. There are two possible laws to vote on. One law says that a homeowner can decide for himself whom to sell his house to, even if he prefers not to sell to blacks. The second law says that a homeowner cannot refuse to sell to someone because of their race or color. Which law would you vote for?”

BLKZONE. “Here are several things that the government in Washington might do to deal with the problems of poverty and unemployment among Black Americans. I would like you to tell me if you strongly favor it, favor it, neither favor it nor oppose it, oppose it, or strongly oppose it. Giving business and industry special tax breaks for locating in largely black areas?”

BLKSCHS. “Here are several things that the government in Washington might do to deal with the problems of poverty and unemployment among Black Americans. I would like you to tell me if you strongly favor it, favor it, neither favor it nor oppose it, oppose it, or strongly oppose it. Spending more money on the schools in black neighborhoods, especially for pre-school and early education programs?”

## **Environmental Policy Attitudes**

GRNTAXES. “How willing would you be to pay much higher taxes in order to protect the environment?” Are you very willing, fairly willing, neither willing nor unwilling, not very willing, not at all willing?”

PUBDECID. “If you had to choose, which one of the following would be closest to your views? Government should let ordinary people decide for themselves how to protect the environment, even if it means they don’t always do the right thing, or government should pass laws to make ordinary people protect the environment, even if it interferes with people’s right to make their own decisions.”

BUSDECID. “If you had to choose, which one of the following would be closest to your views? Government should let businesses decide for themselves how to protect the environment, even if it means they don’t always do the right thing, or government should pass laws to make businesses protect the environment, even if it interferes with business’ right to make their own decisions.”



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