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Executive Summary

Surveys on various socioeconomic and political issues continue to show a racial divide in American public opinion. This is nothing new, but continues to be manifested in how blacks¹ and whites view specific policies and racial equality in general.

In a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) survey conducted in March 2005—the *NAACP Public Interest Survey of African Americans*—these divisions were evident, with few instances of congruence in black and white opinions.² This report highlights some of the findings from the survey data focusing on black and white opinions:

- ▶ Nearly three-fourths of blacks believed that African Americans would either never achieve racial equality or at least not in their lifetime, whereas less than a third of whites shared this same sentiment;
- ▶ On the question of whether the federal government should offer an apology for slavery, African Americans were much more likely than whites to say that the federal government should apologize (82% versus 25%, respectively);
- ▶ Blacks tended to disagree with racial profiling as a law enforcement tool to a much greater extent than did whites. Black opposition toward racial profiling was most apparent when used for domestic crime (i.e., crimes taking place in the U.S.) and as a business tactic for addressing shoplifting and vandalism. Black opposition toward its use in addressing immigration and homeland security issues was still apparent, although it did not register as strongly as in other categories;
- ▶ When respondents were asked whether they would support a candidate who favors the death penalty, only 37% of African Americans said that they would “likely” or “definitely” support a candidate who defends the death penalty; however, more than two-thirds of whites held this view (67%);
- ▶ Whites tend to express less support for affirmative action, with some believing that it constitutes reverse discrimination. Thus, whereas a clear majority of African Americans (80%) said that they would “likely” or “definitely” support a candidate who defends affirmative action, less than half of whites held this view (47%).

As the following report shows, differences of public opinion, especially those that tend to follow distinct racial lines, are generally attributed to varying reasons. Some argue that these divergences, especially along black and white racial lines, stem from acute trend variations in education, economics, health, and other historical and current life factors that have been formed and embedded into our societal fabric throughout history. However, while possible reasons for these differences are not discussed in-depth in this paper, the data cited clearly suggest that a noticeable difference between black and white public opinion continues to exist and is indicative of a larger, on-going divide between the two races.

Full Report

Blacks and whites have achieved racial equality. The state of our nation is solid and just. People of all races in America receive the same opportunities and chances in life.

To some, statements such as these suggest absurdity and a clear denial of reality. To others, they simply echo the truth. Differences of opinion commonly exist between individuals. After all, people of all backgrounds carry their own subjective truths based on unique experiences, beliefs and assumptions. Nonetheless, instances occur when these differences, irrespective of social class, follow distinct patterns and suggest not only individual divergences, but rather, larger and systemic divergences between racial groups as a whole.

Given this context, the data and conclusions presented in this report provide a statistical glimpse into the public opinions of blacks and whites, and the inherent differences therein, as they pertain to a host of issues ranging from racial equality to affirmative action to the death penalty, among others. While some areas of congruence exist, most opinions of black and white respondents in this study provide a discernible indication that, regardless of any perception of increased symmetry between the two groups over the course of recent years, differences are deeply entrenched and take more than rhetoric and perceived progress to abate.

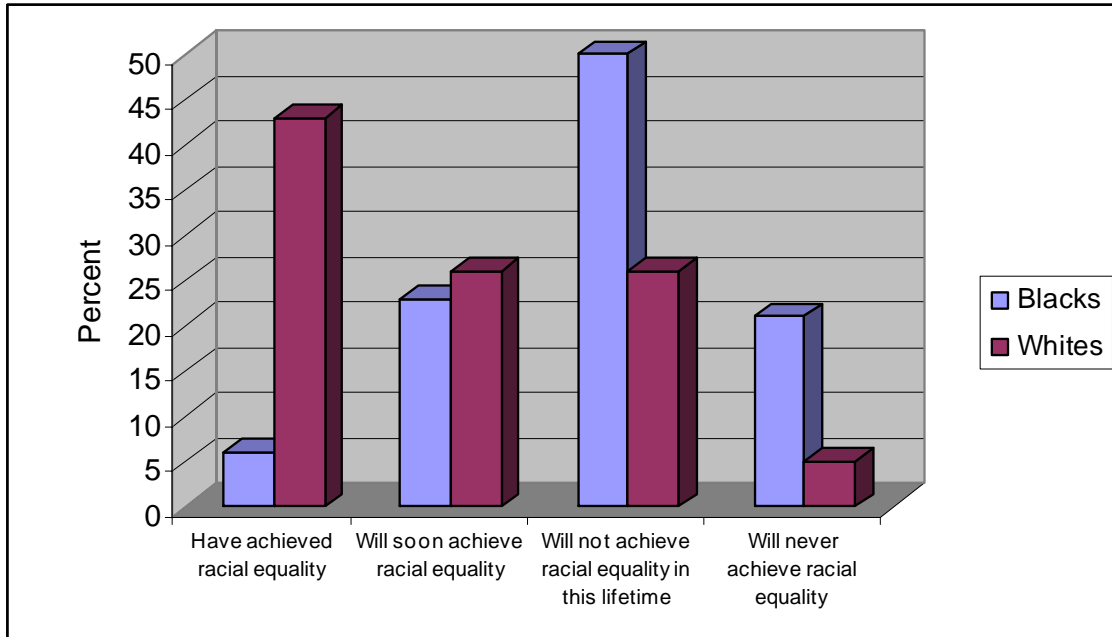
Racial Equality

When asked about the achievement of racial equality for African Americans, respondents seemed to be nearly split in their assessment of black equality. While a little more than half (51%) said that they believed African Americans had, or would someday soon, achieve racial equality, 49% indicated that they did not believe African Americans would achieve racial equality during their lifetime, if ever.

A breakdown by race, however, shows that blacks were much more likely to believe the latter than were whites (see Figure 1). In fact, 71% of blacks believed that African Americans would either never achieve racial equality or at least not in their lifetime, where less than a third of whites indicated this same sentiment. Conversely, 69% of whites believed that racial equality has already been achieved or will soon be achieved for African Americans, with only 29% of blacks believing the same. Perhaps most striking is the divergence in black and white opinion on whether African Americans have already achieved equality, with 43% of whites believing that equality has been achieved compared to a mere 6% of blacks.

A breakdown by gender suggests that while white men and women are aligned in support of the belief that blacks have or will soon achieve equality, blacks firmly believe the opposite, with black men being slightly more likely than black women to support the idea that African Americans will never achieve racial equality, or at least not in their lifetime.

Figure 1 Do You Think African Americans...?



N=1,003 * Chi-square tests of racial differences were significant at the .0001 level.

A recent study examining white and black opinions on racism, as well as one exploring the attitudes and opinions of black men, suggest similar findings. By most accounts, blacks and whites continue to see very different realities when it comes to racial equality and the presence and impact of racism in America. The somewhat greater likelihood of black men indicating that African Americans have not and probably will not ever achieve racial equality may stem partly from an assessment of their present-day life opportunities, particularly as it relates to patterns of joblessness and incarceration.

In 2000, for example, 65% of black male high school dropouts in their twenties were jobless (unable to find work, not seeking it, or incarcerated). By 2004, that number had increased to 72%, compared with 34% of whites. Of any group in our society, black males maintain the position of poorest life chances into young adulthood (even when controlling for lower levels of education). Moreover, according to a recent survey of African American men, black men were more likely than black women and whites to say they worried about being a victim of racial discrimination and being mistreated by the police. Exposure to such lived experiences could very well shape black men's outlook on, or the prospect of, achieving racial equality in America.

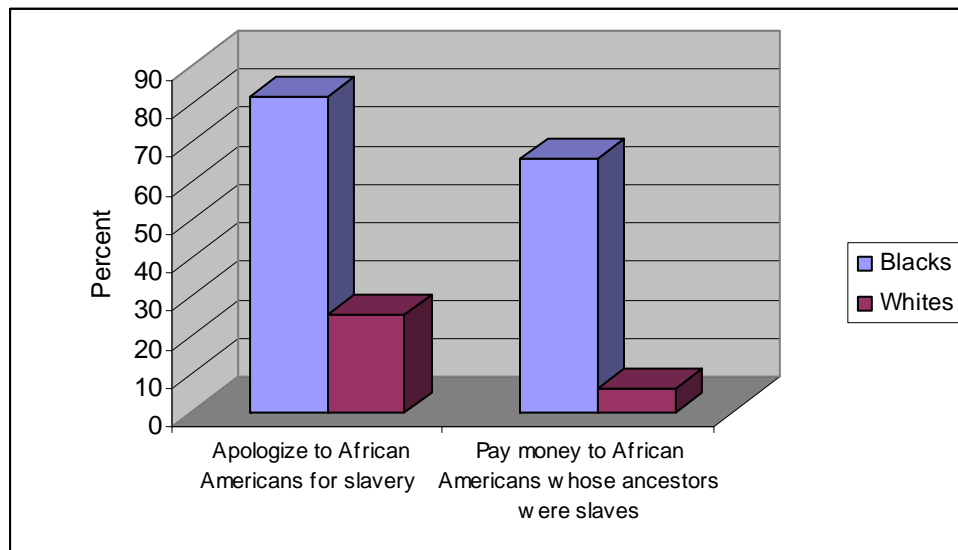
Reparations

Reparations are sometimes used as a measure for how willing American society is to right the wrongs of centuries of black socioeconomic subjugation. However, when asked whether the federal government should apologize or pay money to African Americans for slavery and for anti-black violence and segregation, a significant divide in opinion surfaced. While a slim majority of respondents (54%) agreed that the federal government should apologize for slavery and for upholding Jim Crow segregation, over two-thirds (65%) did not believe that any payment to the descendants of slaves should be rendered. Examining these opinions by race, however, highlights an even greater divide.

On the question of whether the federal government should offer an apology, Figure 2 shows that African Americans were much more likely than whites to say that the federal government should apologize (82% versus 25%, respectively).

On the question of whether the federal government should pay descendants of slaves, the same pattern emerges. Whites and other groups are fervently against this idea with more than 90% saying that the federal government “should not pay;” blacks, however, while more supportive of this idea than other groups, seemed to give a tempered measure of support with 68% saying that the government “should pay.” (See Figure 2)

Figure 2 Do You Think the Federal Government Should...?

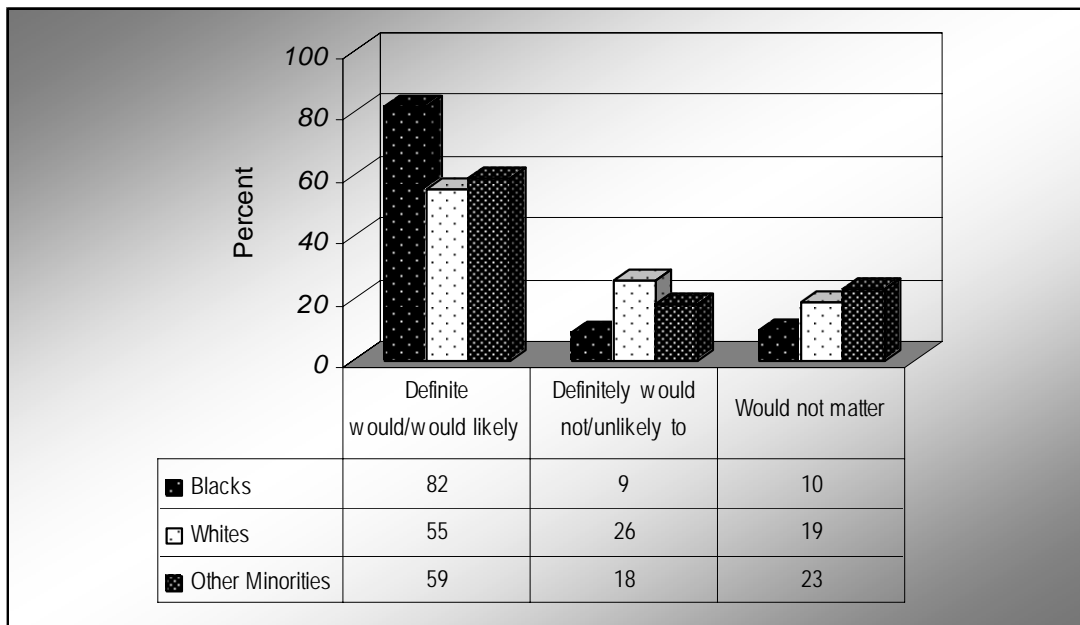


N=990 * Chi-square tests of racial differences were significant at the .0001 level.

Enforcing Civil Rights

When respondents were asked whether they would support a candidate who favored increasing funding for the enforcement of civil rights, 67% of those in the sample said that they would. Blacks, however, were once again the major supporters of this idea with more than 80% saying that they would “likely” or “definitely” support a candidate who espoused this notion. Whites were much less likely to indicate this and much more likely to say that “it would not matter” whether a candidate favored this idea (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Would You Support a Candidate Who Supports Increased Funding For the Enforcement of Civil Rights Laws?



N=1,255 * Chi-square tests of racial differences were significant at the .0001 level.

Evidently, this departure in opinion about the need for civil rights enforcement shows that while blacks most likely believe that the civil rights of many are not currently being upheld and/or that increased funding is needed in order to keep rights upheld, many whites probably feel as though the work of the civil rights advocacy is no longer relevant or needed, as was seen in whites' favorable opinion about the achievement of racial equality presently or in the near future.

Racial Profiling

Respondents were asked four questions about the issue of racial profiling, which is essentially the practice of assuming certain characteristics or behaviors of individuals based on race and then using those assumptions to determine possible guilt of a crime. Overall, respondents appeared to be split in their assessment of whether racial profiling serves as a valid tool for dealing with immigration and homeland security, domestic crime, and for use by businesses to combat shoplifting and related issues. When asked whether they would support a candidate who supported ending racial profiling, a clear majority of respondents (70%) said that they would "definitely" or "likely" support this candidate.

Table 1 shows the responses to the questions about racial profiling as a useful law enforcement tool. While more than a quarter of all respondents were neutral or unsure about the use racial profiling in the three areas listed below, differences in agreement and disagreement by race were apparent.

Table 1 Please Indicate Whether You Agree or Disagree With The Following...

	% Strongly Agree / Somewhat Agree		% Strongly Disagree/ Somewhat Disagree	
	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites
Focused racial profiling is a valid law enforcement tool for dealing with immigration and homeland security issues	24%	49%	35%	24%
Focused racial profiling is a valid law enforcement tool for dealing with domestic criminal matters	17%	33%	57%	37%
Focused racial profiling is a valid tool for use by retailers and other businesses for dealing with shoplifting, vandalism, and related issues	15%	20%	60%	51%

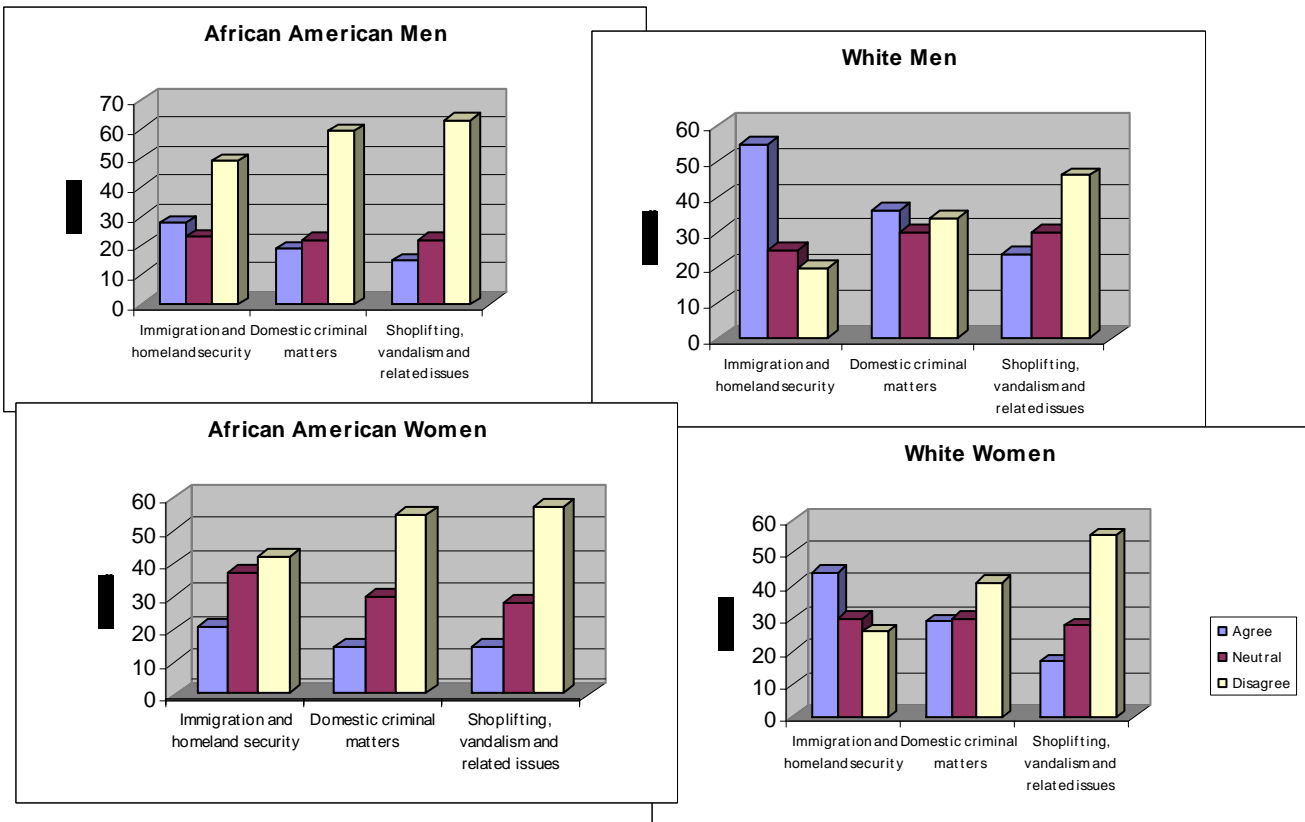
N=1,004 * Chi-square tests of racial differences were significant at the .0001 level.

As suggested by the table above, blacks tended to disagree with racial profiling as a law enforcement tool to a much greater extent than did whites. Black opposition toward racial profiling was most apparent when used for domestic crime (i.e., crimes taking place in the U.S.) and as a business tactic for addressing shoplifting and vandalism. Black opposition toward its use in addressing immigration and homeland security issues was still apparent, although it did not register as strong as it did for the other categories.

Likewise, white respondents tended to disagree with racial profiling when used as a tool for addressing domestic crime, and especially by businesses; however, nearly half (49%) agreed with its use for immigration and homeland security issues. Overall, white opposition to racial profiling was not as strong as that of African American respondents.

For both groups, then, there seems to be an agreement that racial profiling is probably not a good tool for addressing domestic crime or for use by businesses in targeting crime. There appeared to be somewhat greater acceptance, however, for using racial profiling for purposes related to immigration and homeland security.

Figure 4 Focused Racial Profiling Is A Valid Law Enforcement Tool for Dealing With...



N=520 * Chi-square tests of racial and gender differences were significant at the .0001 level.

When we examine these questions by race and gender, we find that while a slight majority of white men (55%) and a plurality of white women (44%) tended to support the use of racial profiling for dealing with homeland security and immigration, the level of support lessens for the other two categories. However, as Figure 4 suggests, African American respondents (particularly black men) were consistent in their opposition to racial profiling, especially as it relates to its use for domestic crime and as a businesses technique in curbing shoplifting and vandalism. African American opposition in general, and African American male opposition in particular, could stem from the observation that black males often tend to be (or perceive themselves to be) targets of racial profiling in the latter two categories to a much greater extent than other groups. The somewhat tempered opposition to racial profiling for the purposes of immigration and homeland security could be a function of the conflict between knowing that such a policy tends to target people of color, but is often framed as being necessary for protecting the country from those who may wish to harm Americans.

Other Policy Issues

Respondents were asked whether they would support a candidate who favored a variety of policy issues. What follows in Table 2 is a breakdown of the responses by those who said that they would “definitely” or “likely” support a candidate who favored a given policy. A discussion of opinion differences by race, and where significant, by gender, appears below.

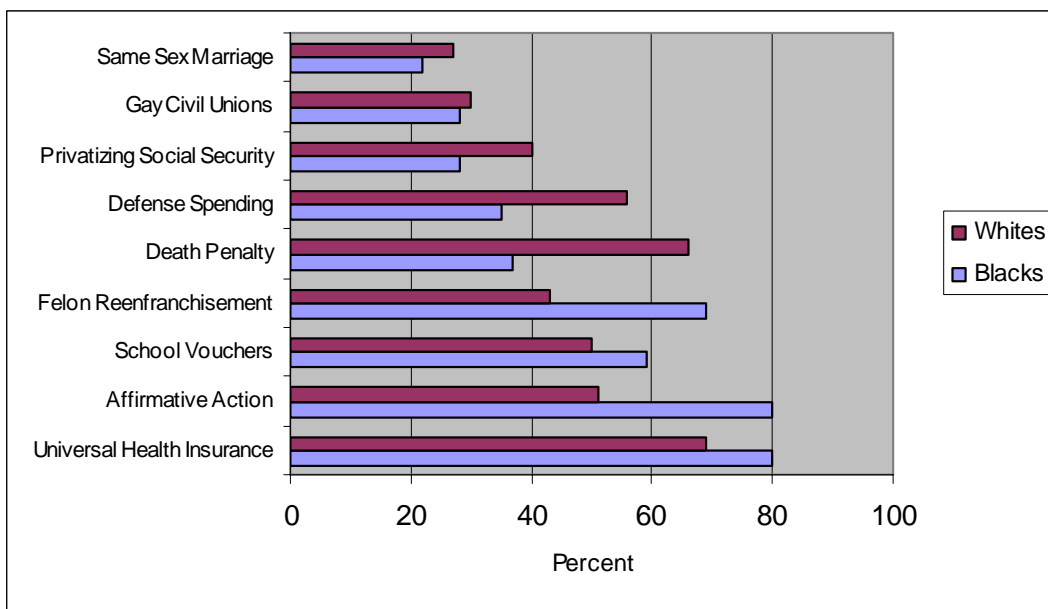
Table 2 Would You Support a Candidate Who Supports...?

Policy	% saying “definitely would support” or “would likely support”
Universal Health Insurance	73%
Affirmative Action	65%
School Vouchers	55%
Felon Re-enfranchisement	53%
Death Penalty	52%
Defense Spending	45%
Privatizing Social Security	35%
Gay Civil Unions	30%
Same Sex Marriage	25%

N=1,251

When the data is further examined, it becomes evident that white and black Americans support different types of policies. The only areas in which the two groups exhibit somewhat similar views in terms of showing limited support for a candidate who favors these issues are gay civil unions and same sex marriage. With very little exception, the gender gap in support for most issues tended to be between white men and women. Those with a percentage point gap of twenty points or more are discussed further in subsequent sections.

Figure 5 Would You Support A Candidate Who Supports...? (by race)



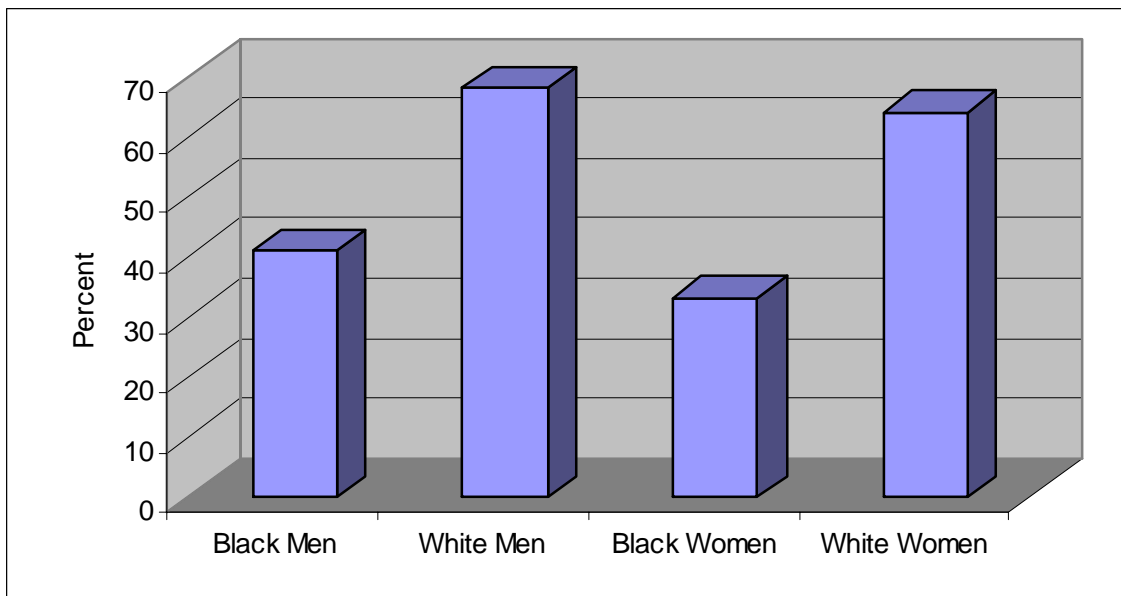
N=519 * All Chi-square tests of racial differences were significant at the .0001 level except for school vouchers, which was significant at the .01 level.

Death Penalty

When respondents were asked whether they would support a candidate who favors the death penalty, blacks were much more likely than whites to say they would be “unlikely to support” or “definitely would not support” a candidate who supports the death penalty. Whereas only 37% of African Americans said that they would “likely” or “definitely” support a candidate who defends the death penalty, more than two-thirds of whites held this view (67%). The thirty percentage point racial gap may be unsurprising given the disparities in the application of the death penalty, one that is unevenly levied upon people of color.

Interestingly, a gender dynamic with respect to support and non-support for the death penalty did emerge between white men and women and black men and women, though the gap was larger for the latter group. That is, while whites in general were much more likely to say that they would support a candidate who favors the death penalty, a four percentage point gap still surfaced with white women being somewhat less likely than white men to support a candidate who favored the death penalty. The gender gap between black men and women was eight percentage points, with black men saying to a greater degree that they would “definitely” or “likely” back a candidate who supports the death penalty (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Would You Support A Candidate Who Supports the Death Penalty?



N= 519 * Chi-square tests of racial and gender differences were significant at the .0001 level.

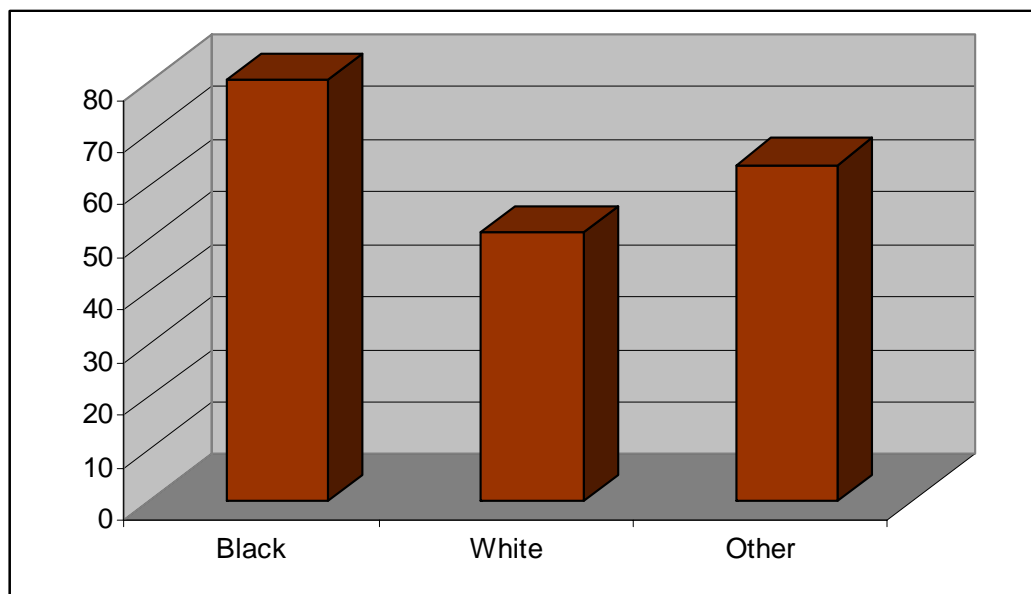
Affirmative Action

Affirmative action continues to be a topic for debate among all races, but particularly among blacks and whites. When respondents were asked whether they would support a candidate who supports affirmative action in higher education, as we might expect, blacks were much more likely than whites to say they would “likely” support or “definitely” support a candidate who supports affirmative action in higher education. This is perhaps of little surprise, as large numbers of blacks view affirmative action as necessary to “make up” for past injustices that continue to have present-day effects on equal opportunity.

Conversely, whites tend to express less support for affirmative action, with some believing that it constitutes nothing more than reverse discrimination. Thus, whereas 80% of African Americans said that they would “likely” or “definitely” support a candidate who defends affirmative action, less than half of whites held this view (47%). The twenty-nine percentage point racial gap may be unsurprising given current-day framing of the policy as one that unfairly advantages undeserving minorities.

As Figure 7 shows, respondents of all minority racial categories held a more supportive view of affirmative action than whites. Research tends to suggest that being a minority is associated with stronger support for affirmative action. However, research also indicates that with respect to “racialized” policies such as affirmative action, non-black minorities’ support of such policies tends to be of a lesser magnitude than that of African Americans. Given that these groups are not immune to the framing of affirmative action as a policy that mostly benefits (undeserving) blacks at the expense of others, a level of support that falls in between that of whites and blacks makes sense.

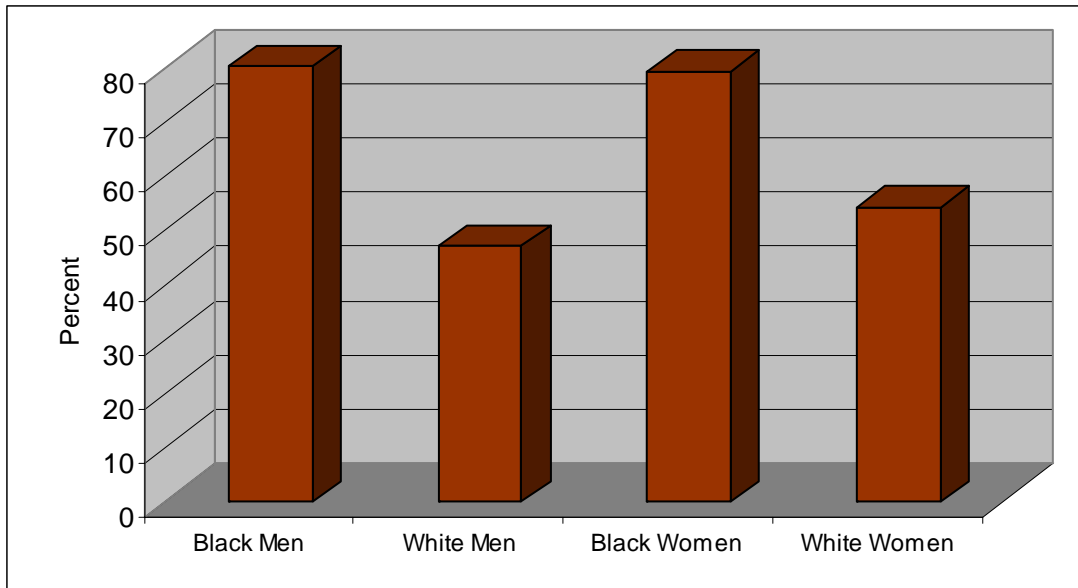
Figure 7 Would You Support A Candidate Who Supports Affirmative Action? (by race)



N=1256 * Chi-square tests of racial differences were significant at the .0001 level.

Interestingly, the only gender dynamic to emerge in support of affirmative action was between white men and white women. That is, while whites in general were much less likely to say that they would support a candidate who favors affirmative action, there was a seven percentage point gap, with white women being somewhat more likely than white men to support a candidate who favored affirmative action (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Would You Support A Candidate Who Supports Affirmative Action? (by race and gender)



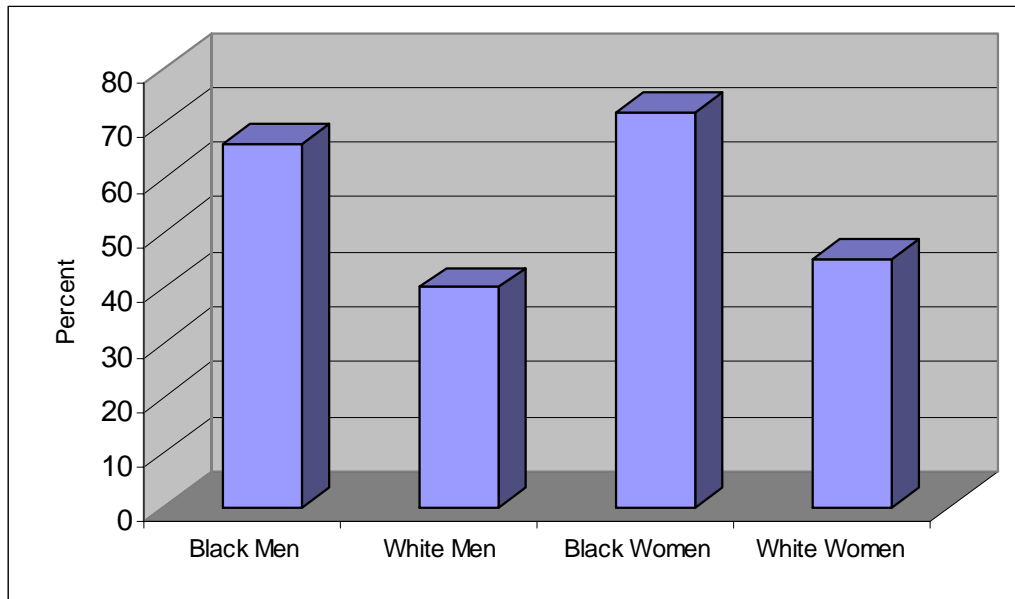
N= 523 * Chi-square tests of racial and gender differences were significant at the .0001 level.

Felon Re-enfranchisement

Most states restrict the voting rights of citizens who have been convicted of felonies. Some states even go so far as to disenfranchise ex-felons for life, even if they have served their terms and paid any necessary fines with the hopes of reentering their communities as productive citizens. Re-enfranchisement, however, seeks to restore federal voting rights to people with felony convictions upon completing periods of incarceration, parole, and probation.

When asked whether respondents would support a candidate who supports felon re-enfranchisement, blacks were much more likely than whites to say they would likely support or definitely support a candidate who supports re-enfranchisement. Where over two-thirds of African Americans (69%) said that they would “likely” or “definitely” support a candidate who defends the reinstatement of voting rights for ex-felons, less than half of whites held this view (43%). The twenty-six percentage point racial gap may be unsurprising given the high incarceration rate of minorities who, upon release, cannot vote depending on where they live. The gender gap with respect to felon re-enfranchisement is somewhat smaller with white and black women being more willing to support a candidate who backs re-enfranchisement than white and black men by five and six percentage points, respectively (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 Would You Support A Candidate Who Supports Felon Re-enfranchisement?



N= 522 * Chi-square tests of racial and gender differences were significant at the .0001 level.

Conclusion

This report illustrates a bold divide between black and white public opinion across several policies and on racial equality in general. With few exceptions in the policy areas examined here, incongruence in attitudes on everything from affirmative action to the death penalty remains consistent.

Previous research on American public opinion has also noted this great divide, with some pointing to variations of class, ideology, and/or lived experience as the probable cause of the distinctive attitudes of whites and blacks. Still, it remains critically important that we continue efforts to tease apart these differences for the sake of the cultural melting-pot we live in today. This report examines only the opinions of blacks and whites; however, in light of an ever-increasingly heterogeneous society, exploration of the opinions of non-white and non-black groups would be fruitful for our general understanding of the dynamic nature of American public opinion.

¹ The racial designations African American and black are used interchangeably in this report.

² The survey, which asked respondents about their familiarity and involvement with civic and advocacy organizations, as well as opinions about political leaders, racial equality and related issues, was conducted by National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and included 1,268 respondents. For details on the specifics of the survey, please see the Appendix.

³ See CNN.com, "Most Americans See Lingering Racism – In Others" <http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/12/12/racism.poll/index.html>; Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University, "African American Men Survey" (2006).

⁴ R. B. Mincey, Ed., *Black Males Left Behind* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2006).

⁵ Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University, "African American Men Survey" (2006).

⁶ R. B. Mincey, Ed., *Black Males Left Behind* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2006).

⁷ See Glenn L. Pierce & Michael L. Radelet, "The Impact of Legally Inappropriate Factors on Death Sentencing for California Homicides, 1990-1999", no. 46 Santa Clara Law Review 1 (2005); Amnesty International, "Death by Discrimination: The Continuing Role of Race in Capital Cases" (2003); Death Penalty Information Center, "The Death Penalty in Black and White" (1998).

⁸ See for example Pie-te Lien and M. Margaret Conway, "Comparing Support for Affirmative Action among Four Racial Groups" in *Black and Multiracial Politics in America*, ed. Yvette Alex-Assensoh and Lawrence Hanks (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Mingying Fu, "Symbolic Racism of Color: How Asians and Latinos View Affirmative Action" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, April 7-10, 2005).

Appendix

The NAACP Public Interest Survey of African Americans

The survey was conducted through The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and included a nationally representative online panel of respondents to assess the following broad issues:

- ▶ Familiarity and involvement with, as well as opinions of, civic and advocacy organizations
- ▶ Attitudes about racial equality and related issues
- ▶ Familiarity with national political leaders
- ▶ Experiences with voting in the 2004 election
- ▶ Key demographic and political characteristics

This snapshot of public opinion is based on 1,268 completed surveys. The main survey was fielded from March 16, 2005 to March 31, 2005 and had a median completion time of 26 minutes. Respondents were selected from the Knowledge Networks adult panel with a sample requirement of 1000 interviews from three strata, over-sampling for non-whites: 520 African-American, 488 Caucasian, 190 Mexican-American, and 70 other, non-Hispanic respondents. The margin of error was $\pm 3\%$.



About the NAACP

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, is the oldest civil rights organization in the United States of America. The NAACP works to end racial discrimination while also ensuring the political, social, and economic equality of all people. As a leader in social justice, the NAACP is dedicated to closing the gap of disparities faced by people of color across the globe by promoting fair and equitable human rights and economic justice.

NAACP Chairman of the Board: Julian Bond
NAACP Interim President & CEO: Dennis C. Hayes
NAACP Director of Research: Shelly Anderson
NAACP Research Manager: Cynthia Sharpe

Public Opinion in Black and White: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same was written by Shelly Anderson and Cynthia Sharpe.

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