

# PERCEIVED SOURCES OF RACIAL INEQUITIES AND CLASS STANDING: IMPACT ON JUSTICE VALUES OF AMERICAN WHITES

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examined the effects of racial inequalities awareness and class standing on white respondents' views on racial and class justice. Data from two decades (1990-2010) of the General Social Survey were used. Insights from two qualitative interviews supplemented the quantitative findings. Multivariate regression analyses suggested that agency for redressing race and class inequalities were viewed differently depending on the perceived sources of the inequality. Awareness of structural racial inequality led to respondents favoring structural solutions to race and class inequalities. However, a person of higher class standing tended to place agency for class inequalities on the individual and consequently was less open to structural solutions. Theories that distinguish between race and class inequalities were used to explain the findings, with implications for distinct policies to address race and class inequalities.*

## INTRODUCTION

Given the perception of overall racial progress in the United States, many have suggested that America is now a post-racial society. It is a narrative that is tempting to accept. Yet, much debate surrounds the characterization of the United States as a society in which race and/or ethnicity have little bearing on opportunity. Furthermore, research has shown that race remains a salient marker across all aspects of society, impacting education, careers, housing, health, etc. A similar narrative, of the United States as a classless society, also pervades the national discourse. However, class cleavages have only deepened in recent years. Despite the cherished ideal of equality, American society continues to be divided along race and class dimensions. Understanding the disjuncture between perceptions and realities of race and class inequalities has important social and policy implications. If our attempts to redress social inequalities are to succeed, we will have to start by clarifying the empirical connections between perceptions, values, and behavior.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Progression of the United States from a blatantly racist society to one in which the role of race is contested, if not fully understood, has created ample research opportunities for stratification and inequality scholars. Much attention has been paid in the race and class debates to clarifying the intricate connections of racial and class attitudes with the policy prescriptions.

### ***Racial Versus Class Inequalities***

Following the “rediscovery of poverty in the 1960’s and 1970’s and the concomitant challenge to the status quo by the poor, blacks, ethnic minorities, women and the young”, Robinson (1983:345) found that non-whites, or minorities, perceived more racial and class inequality than whites, and were more likely to see inequality as unfair.<sup>2</sup> “Perceptions of inequality refer to people’s impressions of the nature and extent of inequality in the opportunities available to particular social groups, in the treatment accorded them by other social groups and institutions, and in the conditions of life that they experience” (1983:345). In other words, groups that are disadvantaged within society were more aware of inequality in comparison to those that are advantaged. Essentially, individuals that lack opportunities, equal treatment, and positive conditions see the unequal distribution of resources firsthand. Even though more educated individuals were more aware of racial and class inequalities, there was no consensus as to the breadth of the problem. Robinson partially implicated a belief in the American Dream which promotes the notion that success is ensured by hard work, thereby rendering inequality to be a fair outcome. Stated differently, subscription to this ideology justifies inequality because “they may one day benefit from it themselves” (1983:363). Robinson (1983:351) added that individuals are influenced by “group interests, values, and societal myths”, further divorcing perceptions of equality of opportunity from reality.

Focusing more specifically on racial inequalities, Eibach and Ehrlinger (2006a) found white Americans perceived greater progress towards racial equality than Black Americans, reinforcing a historical pattern in which dominant groups perceived more progress towards equality than subordinate groups. Differing perceptions of progress towards racial equality hinged on the reference point used to assess progress. Whites utilized a frame of reference emphasizing growth from “where we were rather than where we should be”, comparing current growth to the past (2006a:67). Minorities, on the other hand, compared current progress to the desired end goal of equality of competition and outcomes. For minorities, equality is seen as a security goal, an urgent basic need, while whites see it as a nurturance goal, or an aspiration.

Eibach and his colleagues (2006a; 2006b) offered theoretical explanations for the radically different perceptions. Using Sidanius and Pratto’s social dominance theory and Kahneman and Tversky’s idea of loss aversion, they posited that because dominant groups reap benefits from their higher standing, their goal is to maintain the status quo.

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<sup>2</sup> Here Robinson refers to American adults, although his sample included both English and American adults.

In doing so, they reject movements towards more egalitarian standards, as increased equality between groups is regarded as a loss of resources and status. This indicates a perceived zero sum game in which gains by minorities are believed to result in direct losses for the dominant group. Conversely, increases in racial equality are seen as gains by minorities.

Even when most individuals, whites included, value equality, Eibach and his colleagues found that they were less comfortable with actual achievement of equality, as those gains jeopardize their status. Pearson, Dovidio, and Gaertner (2009:19) found a similar disconnect between mind and action; even individuals with egalitarian ideals continued to discriminate in “subtle but consequential ways” showing that well intentioned individuals do not always act in well intentioned ways. As Kluegel and Smith (1982) had documented in the early 1980s, supporting racial equality did not necessarily motivate individuals to take action to reduce racial inequalities.

Adding another layer of complexity to the racial equality debates is a growing tendency, in recent years, for whites to perceive substantial progress towards racial equality. Norton and Sommers (2011) have documented a growing, even if pernicious, belief that it is whites, rather than Blacks, who now face the most discrimination. In fact, whites see anti-Black bias as declining and anti-white bias as increasing. Recognition of increased racial equality for Blacks is believed to have created a new inequality, one which disadvantages whites. Even as early as the 1980’s, Kluegel and Smith (1982:518) had documented the reverse discrimination narrative where whites considered Blacks to have “better than average opportunity” because of preferential treatment and affirmative action policies. Whites point to equal legal rights, a decline in overt discrimination and in bigotry as evidence that the race problem has been solved. In this context of presumed progress, continued race based policies are equated with reverse racism. In fact, lack of progress, despite all the pro-race policies, is attributed to Blacks not exercising personal agency; they lack effort and hard work. In short, because of their own abundance of opportunity, whites often subscribe to the dominant ideology that equality of opportunity exists for Blacks as well, while concurrently ignoring structural barriers.

It has been well documented that these perceptions and views on the status of racial equality fail to reflect ground level realities (Pearson et al. 2009). They are merely a reflection of media portrayals, dominant discussions, and societal myths. Moreover, continued segregation in housing and occupations has lead to limited contact between racial groups. Whites are most familiar with the Black middle class, reinforcing the idea that equality of opportunity for Blacks has been achieved (Kluegel and Smith 1982). Consequently, challenging the dominant discourses on race and class based stratification continues to be a difficult task for scholars and policy makers alike.

Complicating the challenges even further, is a lack of consensus on the “depth of the remaining problem” of racial inequalities (Bobo 2001:294). That is, even if we come to a shared understanding of the ideal of racial equality, the perceptions of the “level, effect, and nature of discrimination” vary across different stakeholders (2001:280). Furthermore, Pearson et al. (2009:1) argued that continued progress towards racial

equality is undermined by aversive racism, or a modern form of racial prejudice “manifested in subtle and indirect ways”. Disadvantaged groups continue to encounter discrimination in various aspects of life and describe it as more institutional or structural, while whites deemphasize the role and effect of discrimination in society. Whites tend to go further when they ignore the structural aspects of racial inequality, equating discrimination with the past or an “isolated bigot” (Bobo 2001:281).

In the dominant narrative, then, modern day inequality is predominantly caused by cultural traits and a lack of effort, reinforcing the ideology of personal agency. On the other hand, in the narrative of disadvantaged groups, it is historical and structural forces that have and continue to limit progress. Minorities tend to support affirmative action programs with “explicit racial preferences”, while whites tend to support compensatory policies “that equip minorities to be more effective competitors or that engage in special outreach and recruitment efforts” (Bobo 2001:273).

### ***Race and Class Based Policies***

As scholars, analysts, and policy makers continued to grapple with how to move beyond race, there was a growing outcry for class based, but race neutral policies. For example, Kahlenberg (1996) posited that acknowledging race within aid programs undermines the ultimate goal of a race-blind end society. He argued for race-neutral- class-based programs as an effective method to rid society of racial inequality and its detrimental effects. In order to move beyond racial preferences, solutions must refrain from using racial preferences that contradict the desired race-blind end. Thus, in Kahlenberg’s vision of remedies for racial inequality without favoring race, class based programs for the poor would not favor poor Blacks over poor whites, but help disadvantaged individuals overall. Meanwhile, race-neutral solutions do not legitimize the status quo by also correcting the effects of past discrimination in a more legally and politically sustainable way (1996:728).

However, as early as the 1990s, Gilens (1995) had questioned the effectiveness of race-blind, class based programs. In terms of awareness of class inequality and openness to redistributive programs, white opposition to welfare and other race-neutral programs was still influenced by their racial perceptions or negative stereotypes about Blacks. Opposition centered on the role of the government in contrast to the individual in addressing social problems. Adherence to the dominant idea of personal responsibility and agency in determining success influenced an individual’s views on welfare and presumably, other class based inequalities. Blacks and other economically disadvantaged groups were seen as reaping what they sow. Stated differently, it is their own lack of effort and laziness that created their unequal situation. Thus, to Gilens (1995), although opposition to racial equality has declined, race continues to play an important role in American politics.

More contemporary research on societal inequalities has squarely shifted the focus from race to the intricacies of the interaction between race and class. Kleven (2009:37)

argued that the United States is divided by race and class, and that the two are “interrelated and overlapping phenomena.” Societal institutions produce and perpetuate this class/race hierarchy with unequal distribution of opportunities for advancement along class as well as racial lines. He argued that society’s economic system creates inequalities, which in turn, create classism and racism as a way to maintain the status quo and prevent attempts to “restructure society along more egalitarian lines” (2009:43). The higher one is within the racial hierarchy, the more vested one is in maintaining the status quo; their status is derived from those who are “disproportionately less well off” (2009:39). Because race and class cannot be separated, a non-classist society is required in order to achieve a non-racist society and vice versa. However, for this to occur, Kleven argued for an inter-ethnic working class movement.

It is within this contested space of race and class discourse that the current study was situated. It addressed how whites’ perceptions of structural racial inequalities and class standing impacted their racial and class justice values. Exploring the impact of racial and class awareness on both racial and class justice values supplements the overall tenor of future directions suggested by researchers whose work was reviewed above. The study also highlighted the interplay of class and race as they impact an individual’s structural justice values or their inclinations towards structural solutions for race and class inequalities. Attitudinal differences between personal responsibility and structural or governmental obligation for readdressing inequalities has important implications for policy development and implementation. Lastly, utilizing a nationally representative adult sample offered a national perspective to our understanding of both racial and class justice values.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

The discussion of awareness of racial inequalities, class standing, and justice values were broadly situated within an ecological framework (Fernandez and Nichols 1996). In an ecological world-view, the individual is located within four “nested” ecological systems (the macro-system, exo-system, meso-system, and micro-system). The smallest, the micro-system, is comprised of “the most primary and immediate interpersonal relationships between two or more persons”. Slightly larger, the meso-system includes “direct relationships with secondary and distant systems ‘outside’ of the immediate realm of family, friends, and partners and those which directly affect the individual”, while the exo-system includes “secondary systems that do not directly impact, but still influence, individuals”. Finally, the macro-system consists of “socio-cultural or subcultural systems which are shared by people living in that environment” (1996:123). These systems and individuals mutually interact and influence the latter’s views and behavior.

Applied to justice values, the focus of this paper, an individual’s awareness of and values about race and class can, at one level, be conceptualized as both reflecting and influencing macro level cultural contexts. At other ecological levels, social dominance theory (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle 1994) and Bourdieu’s symbolic struggles

(Appelrouth and Edles 2011) are useful in mapping out the dynamic interactions between individuals and the ecological systems.

### ***Social Dominance Theory and Bourdieu's Symbolic Struggles***

Beginning with the assumption that individuals tend to form and maintain group-based hierarchies, social dominance theorists examine both structural and individual psychological factors that lead to group oppression. This perspective seeks to understand the foundations of group-based hierarchies and oppression as functions of the complex and mutually reinforcing mix of individual orientation, discriminatory behaviors, legitimizing ideologies, and social allocation practices of institutions. For an individual, one's social dominance orientation is "the extent to which one desires that one's in-group dominate and be superior to out-groups" (Pratto et al. 1994:742). Both individuals and societal institutions mutually rely on these dominant ideologies to maintain group oppression. That is, individuals who share these beliefs and ideologies tend to support institutions that reinforce these ideals and practices. As a result, desired resources, including the associated psychological rewards of power, status, and privileges, are funneled toward dominant and powerful groups while less desirable goods are allocated to the powerless. It then stands to reason that dominant groups will have little incentive to challenge the status quo and enact real change. When applied to the dominant white group in the U.S. (the focus in this analyses), restructuring racial hierarchies to be more equal may be perceived as a personal loss, an outcome to be avoided at all costs. In fact, they could be expected to justify and legitimize ideologies that place the onus for unequal racial standing on the individual.

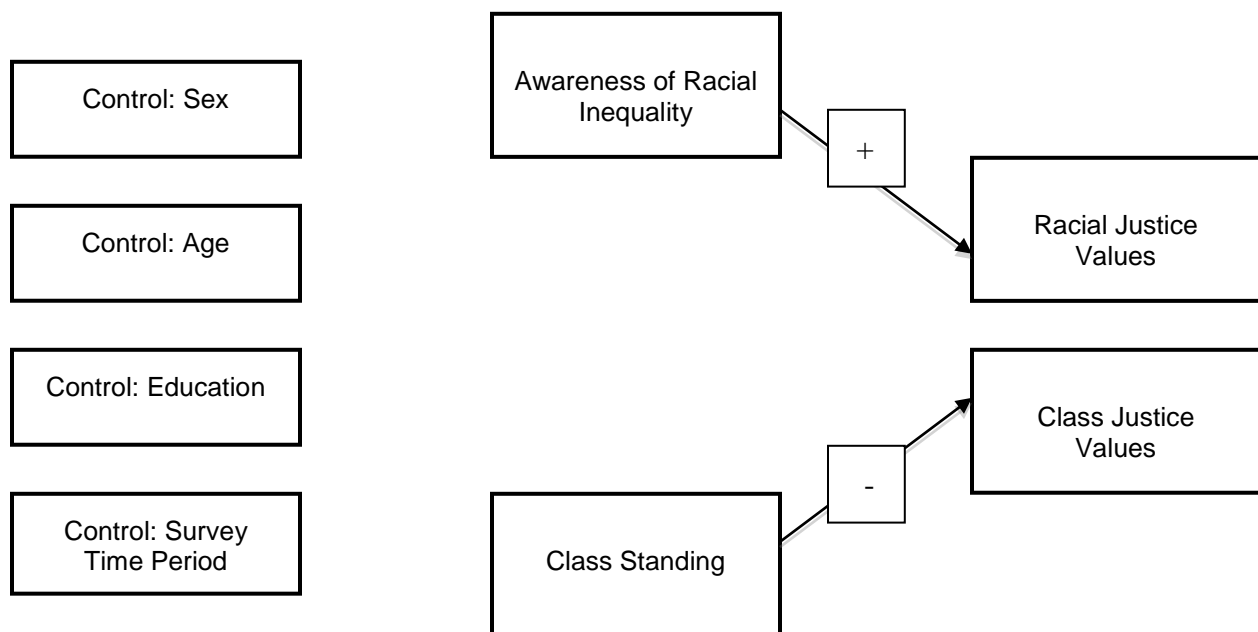
However, could there be conditions under which we could expect the dominant whites to be open to structural racial changes? Bourdieu's symbolic struggles and the limits of symbolic capital in preserving the status quo offer some theoretical possibilities (Appelrouth and Edles 2011). According to Bourdieu, while individuals with symbolic capital (embodied in prestige, honor, reputation, or charisma) have the ability to mold the social world according to their "self-interested" economic and political desires, there are limits to the powers of symbolic capital (2011:454). To successfully utilize symbolic capital to preserve and promote one's interest, Bourdieu argues, it must be seen as legitimate and authoritative; in other words, symbolic capital must be perceived by others as "disinterested" (or at least, unaffected by self-interest) and instead motivated by altruistic intentions of fairness, justice, and equality.

By extension, a scenario can be hypothesized where the dominant group supports realignment of racial hierarchies, if they can legitimize racial inequalities as products of historical legacies and consequently absolve themselves of personal responsibility for the same. Using Bourdieu's language, if dominant whites desire to participate in realigning racial hierarchies, perhaps because they have become more aware of the structural sources of inequalities, they would be the disinterested and therefore legitimate stakeholders in the outcomes. If this reasoning holds true, it is reasonable to predict that: An individual's awareness of structural racial inequalities will have a

positive impact on their racial justice values (after controlling for sex, age, education, and period when they were surveyed).

Insights from the social domination theorists and Bourdieu's limits to power can also be applied, albeit with a different outcome, to the connection between one's current class standing and associated reticence to a realignment of class hierarchies. If one's class standing is perceived to be the product of personal responsibility and agency, albeit buttressed by one's social, cultural, and economic capital, any realignment of class hierarchies can be expected to raise the stakes in preserving the status quo for stakeholders. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that whites with higher class standing and more symbolic capital would want to preserve the ideology of equal opportunity and be reluctant to concede resources and support structural class redistributive policies. This would lead to a prediction of: An individual's class standing will have a negative impact on their class justice values, after controlling for sex, age, education, and time period.

**Figure 1. Hypothesized Effects of Awareness of Racial Inequality and Class Standing on a white individual's Racial and Class Justice Values**



## METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

Secondary data from the 1990-2010 General Social Survey (GSS) were utilized in this study (Smith, Marsden, and Hout 2011). Conducted by Tom W. Smith, Peter V. Marsden, and Michael Hout, the GSS was designed around "a standard 'core' of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions, plus topics of special interest" as a

“data diffusion project” to facilitate time trend studies (The National Data Program for the Sciences; 2011). In addition to demographic characteristics, it includes eleven topical modules: quality of working life; attitude towards firearms; shared capitalism; level of disability; use of foreign languages; mental health attitudes and experiences; number of people known; participation in congregations; and knowledge about and attitude towards science; religious trends; and sexual behavior. Participants were selected using a national probability sample modeled after the 2000 Census frame. Data were collected via computer facilitated personal and telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, and telephone interviews from non-institutionalized, English and Spanish speaking individuals over the age of 18 in the United States, yielding a response rate of approximately 71%.

For this analysis, only respondents who self identified as white were selected because questions regarding racial justice were asked in such a way that either whites or Blacks were shown to be more aware of racial inequality.<sup>3</sup> The final sample yielded 2009 cases with complete information on all the selected indicators.

In addition, qualitative interviews with two professionals familiar with the area of study were conducted to interpret the quantitative findings. The first interviewee was found through an internet search for individuals actively pursuing racial justice and was contacted via email. The second professional interviewee was located through a snowball method. Both teach at a local private university.

## **DATA ANALYSES: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY DATA AND SUPPLEMENTAL QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS**

### ***Descriptive Analysis***

Descriptive information about the sample on the indicators of awareness of racial inequalities, class standing, and justice values are presented in Table 1A-D. Of the 2009 white/Caucasian respondents covered by the GSS during two decades from 1990-2010, about two thirds (63.6%) were surveyed from 2000-2010. Females and males were almost equally represented in the sample (52.1% female). The average respondent was 47.91 years of age (SD=16.94 with a range of 18 to 89) and the majority had at least a high school education (89.8%).

### **Structural Solutions to Racial Inequalities**

A Caucasian person’s values regarding structural justice, the main focus of this analysis, were measured along two dimensions: views on structural solutions to racial inequalities as well as class inequalities. Four indicators were used to assess views on *structural solutions to racial inequalities* (See Table 1.A). When asked about governmental responsibility for addressing Black racial inequality in light of past

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<sup>3</sup> To maintain congruence with the General Social Survey, the term “Black” was used instead of “African American”. Conversely, the terms ‘white’ and ‘Caucasian’ are used interchangeably.



discrimination, about two thirds (61.1%) believed that Blacks should not receive special treatment. It is not surprising then that a majority (63.4%) was strongly opposed to preferential hiring for Blacks and thought they should “work their way up” without special treatment (77.6%). Considering such lukewarm support for structural solutions for racial inequality, it is to be expected that almost half of the respondents (52.6%) also thought current government spending on assistance to Blacks was “about right”. In short, the Caucasian respondents tended to view Blacks as responsible for their own wellbeing without much need for further governmental assistance, even in the face of past discrimination. Such limited support for structural solutions is also reflected in the mean score of 7.63 (SD = 2.75) on the summary index of the four indicators; two thirds of the respondents (67.1%) had scores that fell in between 4 and 8, at the lower end of 4 to 17 continuum of the preference for structural solution index.

**Table 1.A: White GSS Respondents - Racial Justice Values Towards Blacks (n=2009)**

Concepts:	Indicators:	Response Values:	Percentage:
	Government has a special obligation to aid Blacks due to past discrimination?	1 = No special treatment 2 3 = Agree with both 4 5 = Government help	35.3% 25.8 27.6 7.5 3.8
	Current government spending on improving the situation of Blacks?	1= Too much 2= About right 3 = Too little	22.2 52.6 25.2
	Favor or oppose preferential hiring?	1 = Strongly opposes 2 = Opposes 3 = Favors 4 = Strongly favors	63.4 26.7 5.1 4.9
	Blacks should work their way up without any special favors?	1 = Agree strongly 2 = Agree somewhat 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Disagree somewhat 5 = Disagree strongly	48.0 29.6 11 17.7 3.7
	Index of Structural Racial Justice Values <sup>a</sup>	Mean (SD) Range	7.63 (2.75) 4-17

a. Index of Racial Justice Values = Government's obligation to help Blacks (reverse coded) + current government spending on Blacks (reverse coded) + favor or oppose preferential hiring (reverse coded) + Blacks should work their way up without favors. Possible range: 4 – 17. Correlations among these indicators ranged from .279 to .454 and were significant at the .000 level.

## Structural Solutions to Class Inequality

The second dimension of justice, *structural solutions to class inequality*, was also measured with four indicators (Table 1.B). Overall, in contrast to their minimal support for structural solutions for racial inequality, white respondents were in the middle when it

came to structural solutions to class inequality. That is, they were hesitant to call for governmental or structural action to address class inequalities, but were also hesitant to place the onus completely on the individual. For example, when white respondents were asked if the government should work to reduce income differences between the rich and poor, half (50.4%) were in the middle, showing a clear lack of opinion whether the “government should” or the “government should not”, signifying their reluctance to place all the blame on either the individual or the larger social structure.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1.B: Structural Class Justice Values, White GSS Respondents (n=2003-2009)**

Concepts:	Indicators:	Response Values:	Percentage:
CLASS JUSTICE	Government should reduce the income differences between the rich and poor?	1 = Government should not	15.4 %
		2	10.2
		3	13.9
		4	18.8
		5	17.7
		6	9.5
		7 = Government should	14.6
	Government should help improve the standard of living of poor Americans?	1 = People should take care of themselves	14.3
		2	18.7
		3 = Agree with both	45.4
		4	10.5
		5 = Government should improve living standards	11.1
Government should do more or less?	1 = Government doing too much	19.5	
	2	19.8	
	3 = Agree with both	39.3	
	4	11.8	
	5 = Government do more	9.7	
Current government spending on welfare?	1 = Too much	49.4	
	2 = About right	34.6	
	3 = Too little	16.0	
Index of Structural Class Justice Values <sup>a</sup>		Mean (SD)	11.25 (3.72)
		Range	4-20

a. Index of Class Justice Values = government should reduce income differences (reverse coded) + government should improve the standard of living of poor (reverse coded) + government should do more or less (reverse coded) + current government spending on welfare (reverse coded). Possible range: 4 – 20. Correlations among the indicators ranged from .282 to .494 and were significant at the .000 level.

When asked if the government should help improve the living standard of poor Americans, again, most respondents (74.6%) fell in the middle, highlighting their ambivalence towards purely governmental or individual action.<sup>5</sup> They were also split on whether current government spending on welfare was “too much”. About half of the

<sup>4</sup> 50.4% of respondents scored between 3 and 5 (range of 1-7): higher scores indicating support for government involvement.

<sup>5</sup> Responses to the question, “people should take care of themselves” were coded as 1 and a response of “government should improve living standards” coded as 5; 74.6% of respondents fell between a 2 and 4.

respondents (49.4%) thought it was “too much” while 34.6% thought it was “just right” while another 16% thought it was “too little”. Falling in the middle, rather than at either extremes, once more, were the 70.9% of respondents who thought the government was neither doing too much nor too little.<sup>6</sup> This middle ground approach to structural class solutions was summarized in the index (which included the four indicators described above) and ranged from 4 to 20. More than half scored between 9 and 15 (62.5%); the mean score of 11.25 (SD = 3.72) suggested that respondents favored a middle ground approach to class inequalities that valued both structural solutions and personal agency.

## Awareness of Structural Racial Inequalities

**Table 1.C: White GSS Respondents: Awareness of Racial Inequalities**

Concepts:	Indicators:	Response Values:	Percentage:
<i>Awareness of Racial Inequalities</i>	Would you favor living in a neighborhood where half your neighbors were Black? (Number of cases = 1684)	1 = Strongly oppose	8.7%
		2 = Oppose	18.6
		3 = Neither favor nor oppose	50.8
		4 = Favor	14.1
		5 = Strongly favor	7.7
	Blacks' lower status due to lack of will? (Number of cases = 1921)	0 = Yes	52.1
		1 = No	47.9
	Blacks' lower status due to discrimination? (Number of cases = 1952)	0 = No	69.4
		1 = Yes	30.6
	Blacks' lower status due to lack of access to education? (Number of cases = 1969)	0 = No	57
		1 = Yes	43
	Index of Racial Awareness <sup>a</sup> (Number of cases = 1557)	Mean (SD) Range	4.15 (1.59) 1-8

a. Index of Racial Awareness = favor living in a neighborhood where half your neighbors were Black (reverse coded) + Blacks' lower status due to lack of will + Blacks' lower status due to discrimination (reverse coded) + Blacks' lower status due to lack of access to education (reverse coded). Possible range: 1 – 8. Correlations ranged from .114 to .338 and were significant at the .000 level.

The Caucasian sample's justice values were predicted using their *awareness of the structural racial inequalities* faced by Blacks, as well as their own class standing (both subjective and objective). Four indicators were used to measure awareness of racial inequalities faced by Blacks (Table 1.C). All indicators were coded such that higher values indicated more awareness. Half the respondents (50.8%) neither favored nor opposed living in a neighborhood where half their neighbors were Black; the remainder was roughly divided between either favoring or disfavoring the idea.<sup>7</sup> Respondents were also asked for their opinion on the causes of Blacks' lower societal status. For the most

<sup>6</sup> On a range of 1-5, 70.9% fell between a 2 and 4.

<sup>7</sup> 27.3% opposed the idea while 21.8% favored the idea.

part, respondents believed neither discrimination (69.4%) nor lack of educational access (57%) were causes of Black lower status. However, they were more split about the role that a lack of will plays in the low status of Blacks; 52.1% said yes while 47.9% said no.

Overall, the sample was relatively unaware of the structural racial inequalities faced by Blacks. They were ambivalent, at best, about living in racially mixed neighborhoods. A summary index of awareness of structural racial inequalities (range of 1 to 8) pointed to this lack of awareness among the white respondents, of structural racial inequalities faced by Blacks (Mean=4.15; SD=1.59).

## Class Standing

**Table 1.D: Class Standing: White GSS Respondents**

Concepts:	Indicators:	Response Values:	Percentages
<b>CLASS STANDING:</b> Subjective	Living standard compared to parents?	1 = Much worse	3.4%
		2 = Somewhat worse	10.9
		3 = About the same	22.5
		4 = Somewhat better	30.2
		5 = Much better	33
		(Number of cases)	(1982)
	Which class would you belong in?	0 = No class	0.0%
		1 = Lower class	5.9
		2 = Working class	41.0
		3 = Middle class	48.7
		4 = Upper class	4.3
		(Number of cases)	(2003)
Objective	Socioeconomic index (SEI) <sup>b</sup>	Mean (SD)	51.02 (19.14)
		Range	17.10-97.20
		(Number of cases)	(1916)
	Index of Class Awareness <sup>a</sup>	Mean (SD)	328.49 (157.07)
		Range	45 - 830.7
		(Number of cases)	(1889)

a. Index of Class Awareness = Living standard compared to parents' (reverse coded) + subjective class rating (reverse coded) \* socioeconomic index. Possible range: 45.0 – 830.7. Correlations ranged from .079 to .334 and were significant at the .001 level.

b. Combination of Nakao-Treas SEI (post 1989) and Temme SEI (pre-1988).

*Class standing*, the second independent concept, was measured along two dimensions: subjective rating of class standing and objective socioeconomic status (Table 1.D). In a comparison of their standard of living to that of their parents, about half (52.7%) reported that their standard of living was “about the same” or “somewhat better”. The vast majority categorized themselves as working (41%) or middle class (48.7%).

An objective measure of socioeconomic status<sup>8</sup> confirmed their subjective appraisal of class standing. The average respondent had a mean Socioeconomic Index (SEI) score of 51.02 (SD=19.14) within a range of 17.10 to 97.20, which placed these respondents in the middle of the class spectrum. The summary index of class standing (which weighted the subjective standing by the SEI) captured the middle class background of white GSS respondents (Mean=328.49; SD=157.07).

To sum up, the average middle class Caucasian respondents surveyed by the General Social Survey during the last two decades were generally unaware of structural racial inequalities faced by Blacks and were quite unsympathetic to structural solutions to these problems. However, they were more ambivalent about the structural solutions to class inequalities.

### ***Bivariate Analysis***

A preliminary assessment, using correlations, of the empirical relationships of racial awareness and class standing with views about structural solutions to racial and class inequalities provided an early glimpse into the theoretical expectations (Table 2, Appendix A). When structural solutions were separated into racial and class solutions, some interesting patterns became evident about how this sample of white respondents disaggregated the domains of racial inequalities from that of class inequalities. As expected, increased awareness of racial inequality pointed to a desire for more structural or governmental solutions for racial inequalities, ( $r=.513$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ) as well as, even if to a lesser extent, an increased desire for structural solutions to class disparities ( $r=.225$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ). However, not only was the association between higher class standing and structural racial solutions ( $r=.087$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ) much weaker, it was associated with a much less intense desire for structural solutions to class inequalities ( $r=-.157$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ).

The demographic and other variables considered here were also associated, albeit very modestly, with justice values. Females had a somewhat heightened desire for structural solutions for both racial ( $r=.073$ ;  $p\leq.01$ ) and class ( $r=.132$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ) inequalities. Education was positively correlated with racial justice ( $r=.167$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ) while negatively correlated with class justice ( $r=-.094$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ); the more educated were a bit more inclined to favor structural solutions to racial inequalities, but not class inequalities. Older respondents were only slightly less open to structural solutions to racial and class inequalities than younger respondents ( $r=-.054$ ;  $p\leq.05$  and  $r=-.090$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ).

### ***Multivariate Analysis***

Linear regression analyses were used to test the expected hypotheses about the effects of the respondents' understanding of structural racial inequalities and class standing on openness to structural solutions. The results are presented in Table 3.

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<sup>8</sup> The SEI is a combination of Temme and Nakao-Treas SEI scores (Smith, Marsden, Hout, and Kim 2005).

**Table 3**  
**Regression Analysis of the relative effects of Racial Awareness and Class Standing on Whites' Views on Racial and Class Justice<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Racial Justice Values</b>		<b>Class Justice Values</b>	
	<b>Model 1 Beta Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</b>	<b>Model 2 Beta Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</b>	<b>Model 1 Beta Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</b>	<b>Model 2 Beta Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</b>
<b>Racial Awareness</b>	.509***	.497***	.249***	.243***
<b>Class Standing</b>	.048*	.011	-.164***	-.130***
<b>Sex</b>	--	.037	--	.098***
<b>Age</b>	--	-.012	--	-.067**
<b>Education</b>	--	.069*	--	-.046
<b>Time of Survey</b>	--	-.018	--	.041
<b>(Constant)</b>	3.738***	3.849***	10.164***	10.280***
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.267***	.272***	.080***	.096***
<b>DF 1 &amp; 2</b>	2 & 1470	6 & 1466	2 & 1470	6 & 1466

\*\*\*p $\leq$ .001; \*\*p $\leq$ .01; \*p $\leq$ .05

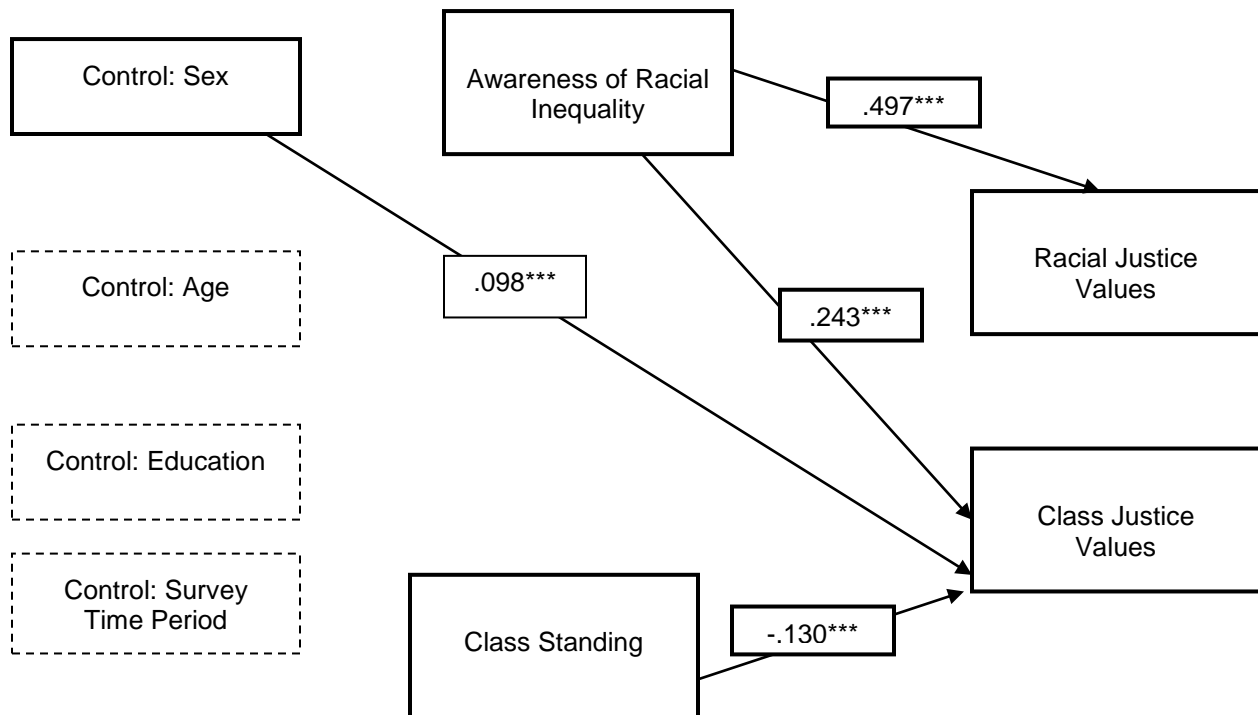
- a. Index of Racial Justice Values = Government's obligation to help Blacks (reverse coded) + current government spending on Blacks (reverse coded) + favor or oppose preferential hiring (reverse coded) + Blacks should work their way up without favors. Possible range: 4 – 17;  
Index of Class Justice Values = government should reduce income differences (reverse coded) + government should improve the standard of living of poor (reverse coded) + government should do more or less (reverse coded) + current government spending on welfare (reverse coded). Possible range: 4 – 20;  
Index of Racial Awareness = favor living in a neighborhood where half your neighbors were Black (reverse coded) + Blacks' lower status due to lack of will + Blacks' lower status due to discrimination (reverse coded) + Blacks' lower status due to lack of access to education (reverse coded). Possible range: 1 – 8;  
Index of Class Awareness = Living standard compared to parents' (reverse coded) + subjective class rating (reverse coded) \* socioeconomic index. Possible range: 45 – 830.7;  
Controls: Sex → 0 = Male 1 = Female; Age (Interval); Education → 0 = Less than high school 1 = High school 2 = Junior college 3 = Bachelor's degree 4 = Graduate degree; Time of survey (control) → 0 = 1990-1999 1 = 2000-2010.

Racial justice values were strongly influenced by awareness of racial inequalities, but not class standing ( $\beta$ =.497; p $\leq$ .000 in Model 2 of Table 3, after controls are introduced). That is, an increased awareness of structural racial inequalities that Blacks face strongly contributed to white individuals' openness to structural solutions to combat these inequalities. The only other factor that ever so slightly impacted racial justice values was the respondent's education; the higher the educational attainment of white respondents, the more likely they were to be (a bit) open to structural solutions to rectify racial inequality ( $\beta$ =.069; p $\leq$ .05).

However, when it came to an individual's class justice values, both awareness of racial and class inequalities had significant but contradictory net effects. An increased

awareness of structural racial inequalities opened an individual to structural solutions for class inequalities ( $\beta=.243$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ). But, class standing ( $\beta=-.130$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ) had a negative net impact, indicating that as class standing increased, individuals were less receptive to structural solutions to class inequalities. Females ( $\beta=.098$ ;  $p\leq.000$ ) and younger respondents ( $\beta=-.067$ ;  $p\leq.01$ ) were slightly more open to structural class solutions than males and older respondents, respectively. These results are also diagrammed in Figure 1.

**Figure 2. Effects of Awareness of Racial Inequality and Class Standing on a white individual's Racial and Class Justice Values<sup>a</sup>**



a. In the interest of clarity, only Beta values of .10 or higher are presented in the Figure. Also, refer to Table 3 for variable measurements.

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In short, the hypothesis, *an individual's awareness of racial inequality will have a positive impact on their racial justice values, after controlling for sex, age, education, and time period*, is supported in this sample of white respondents. Theoretically this can best be explained via an individual's social dominance orientation in conjunction with Bourdieu's 'limits' to the utilization of symbolic capital. White individuals most open to structural solutions to racial inequalities are those with an increased awareness of structural racial inequalities; they most likely attribute structural or historical causes (slavery, segregation, discrimination, racism) to existing racial inequalities. Viewing

racial inequalities as products of structural or historical factors, permits whites to step back and appear disinterested (Bourdieu's 'limits'), an essential component of the definition of reality that frees the dominant group to act to rectify the unequal situation. Identifying racial inequalities as structural in nature rather than assuming personal responsibility for the inequalities, also allows white individuals to utilize their symbolic capital to promote equality. In this narrative, the work of equality is not framed as a zero-sum game (one that will create losses for them and gains for others), but merely a moral wrong that needs to be rectified.

Conversely, whites who are less aware of the structural nature of racial inequalities, are more "anti-egalitarian," resisting an equality driven hierarchal restructuring in favor of "hierarchy legitimating ideologies" and "hierarchy-enhancing social policies" (Pratto et al. 1994:742). That is, they derive benefits from the status quo and are unlikely to favor giving up the power and privileges they continue to receive at the expense of subordinate groups. Realizing that racial equality requires redistributive policies that are inherently harmful to their interests, whites are reluctant to favor such policies. Yet herein lay the paradox between the overall cultural value of equality and the reality of racial inequality in the United States. Formally denoted as the principle implementation gap (Dixon, Durrheim, Tredoux 2007), dominant groups reconcile this contradiction by placing the responsibility for success and attainment on the individual while ignoring structural factors preventing equality of opportunity. In reality, it is simply a new, less overt form of racism.

Both qualitative interviews confirmed the persistence of racial inequality and identified dominant ideologies and justifications that legitimize inequality in society. Assuming that equality of opportunity exists allows whites to attribute their successes as well as the failures of others to individual agency. "There is a belief in this nation in the meritocracy, a belief that we have all earned our positions" (Interviewee 1). However, this meritocratic worldview, fails to take into account the reality of structural barriers stemming from historical factors. Essentially, the dominant groups are unaware of the "truths of our history" including slavery, the genocide of indigenous peoples, and the treatment of immigrants as property to make a profit (Interviewee 1). Ignoring the historical context of present day inequalities allows individuals in the dominant group to "buy into" stereotypes, maintain them, and ultimately pass them on to the next generation.

The second hypothesis, *an individual's class standing will have a negative impact on their class justice values, after controlling for sex, age, education, and time period*, is also supported in this GSS sample of White Americans. From the social dominance perspective, whites have little incentive to equalize class disparities because they occupy a dominant position within society, a position buttressed by the mutually reinforcing action of individuals and structures. Guided by their own self-interest and preservation, movement toward a more egalitarian class structure might be perceived as a direct loss of power, status, and resources. Reluctance to support equality is also justified via dominant ideologies surrounding success. Individuals who have achieved success and a higher-class status attribute such to individual effort as opposed to



structural supports and privileges. Stated differently, one's class position is seen as stemming from personal agency and responsibility; therefore, those at the bottom are responsible for their own position. In this narrative, ignoring benefits bestowed because of dominance, while supporting individual agency, allows whites to justify the class disparities in America. Individuals and institutions work together to subordinate those at the bottom, creating both structural inequalities and personal ideologies that legitimize structural subordination. Furthermore, it is through symbolic capital, or the ability to define social reality and coerce others, that whites have the power to determine the allocation of goods within society. And subscription to the importance of personal agency over structural factors, allows them to continue to control the resources and discourse in society. In the final analyses, promoting the idea of equality of opportunity, while systematically denying it to minorities, serves to discount redistributive structural class solutions in favor of blaming the individual for inequalities. In turn, society reinforces and legitimizes these boundaries, preventing intergroup solidarity and equality. Ideological battles are often fought over the status quo amongst groups that are subverted by the dominant group's interests.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Utilizing secondary data necessitated concessions in the composition of the sample, as well as the nature of questions used. This constrained the creation of indices and required researcher interpretation in measuring the hypothesized relationships. Furthermore, the variables comprising each index contained differing ranges of responses leading to indices weighted towards variables with more categories. However, despite the limitations posed by secondary data, this study has confirmed the interactions between race and class attitudes as they impact values about racial and class justice. Nonetheless, several unanswered questions remain. Why does awareness of racial inequalities influence views on class justice but not vice versa?

Both interviewees stressed that inequality with the United States is a complex and multidimensional issue. As this study has illustrated, the nexus of race and class and the resulting interplay serves as a reminder that inequalities cannot be compartmentalized, but must be understood within their historical and cultural context. Furthermore, inequalities are dynamic and will change only if social and cultural pressures are brought to bear (Interviewee 2). If we are serious about eliminating societal inequality, acknowledging that it exists is not enough; a real understanding of the social conditions that allow it to continue, including historical factors is necessary.

Future research should focus on outlining the intricacies of race and class dynamics so that a more nuanced understanding can be channeled into promoting support for structural race and class based solutions. Also, justice values are far from universal; race and class attitudes among and within sub-groups of populations vary substantially. While this study presented a national perspective on racial and class justice values of White Americans, more focused examination of race and class values of particular populations or regions in the country will be useful.

## Appendix A: Correlation Matrix

Table 2: Bivariate Correlation Matrix: Indices of Racial/Class Justice Values, Racial Awareness, Class Standing, Sex, Age, Education, and Time of Survey in Whites

	Index of Racial/ Class Justice Values	Index of Racial Justice Values	Index of Class Justice Values	Index of Racial Awarene ss	Index of Class Standing	Sex	Age	Education	Time of Survey
<b>Index of Racial/ Class Justice Values</b>	1								
<b>Index of Racial Justice Values</b>	.795*** (n=2009)	1							
<b>Index of Class Justice Values</b>	.894*** (n=2009)	.440*** (n=2009)	1						
<b>Index of Racial Awareness</b>	.406*** (n=1557)	.513*** (n=1557)	.225*** (n=1557)	1					
<b>Index of Class Standing</b>	-.063** (n=1889)	.087*** (n=1889)	-.157*** (n=1889)	.109*** (n=1478)	1				
<b>Sex</b>	.125*** (n=2009)	.073** (n=2009)	.132*** (n=2009)	.060* (n=1557)	-.009 (n=1889)	1			
<b>Age</b>	-.088*** (n=2003)	-.054* (n=2003)	-.090*** (n=2003)	-.050* (n=1552)	.090*** (n=1885)	.079*** (n=2003)	1		
<b>Education</b>	.020 (n=2005)	.167*** (n=2005)	-.094*** (n=2005)	.199*** (n=1555)	.578*** (n=1886)	-.020 (n=2005)	-.052* (n=2000)	1	
<b>Time of Survey</b>	.041 (n=2009)	.023 (n=2009)	.044* (n=2009)	.059* (n=1557)	0.028 (n=1889)	.007 (n=2009)	.055* (n=2003)	.053* (n=2005)	1

\*\*\*p≤.001; \*\*p≤.01; \*p≤.05

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