A growing body of research indicates that welfare attitudes may be strongly shaped by negative perceptions of Blacks. This raises questions about what might inhibit the racialization of welfare attitudes. In this vein, a long line of work indicating that education leads to increased tolerance suggests that the relationship between negative racial perceptions and welfare attitudes may be weaker among the highly educated. However, recent studies suggest that the role of education may be more complex: While negative racial perceptions may be less prevalent among the highly educated, the relationship between these perceptions and policy attitudes appears to be stronger among highly educated individuals. The present study attempts to extend this finding by examining the hypothesis that the presence of a racial cue would be more (rather than less) likely to strengthen the relationship between negative racial perceptions and evaluative responses to welfare among college-educated Whites. Data from a survey-based experiment included in the 1991 National Race and Politics Study provided a clear pattern of support for this hypothesis.

KEY WORDS: welfare, stereotypes, education, race-coding, African Americans
In this regard, a number of explanations have been offered, both in the attitudes literature and in mainstream public-policy debates. Some researchers have focused on the role of economic self-interest, suggesting that members of the middle class resent being taxed to support programs only the poor are eligible for (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Skocpol, 1991). Others have emphasized the individualistic tint of American political culture (Hartz, 1955; see also Lipset, 1961; McClosky & Zaller, 1984), arguing that opposition to means-tested welfare programs stems ultimately from the endorsement of values related to the Protestant work ethic (see Feldman & Zaller, 1992; see also Appelbaum, 2001; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Skitka & Tetlock, 1993).

However, in recent years, a more controversial explanation has emerged. Namely, political psychologists have suggested that public opposition to welfare may be strongly linked to Whites’ perceptions of African Americans. In this vein, several studies have shown that perceptions of Blacks as lazy, undependable, and excessively demanding strongly predict Whites’ welfare attitudes, with its effects often being stronger than that of self-interest, egalitarianism, and individualism (see Gilens, 1996, 1999; see also Federico, 2004; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sears & Citrin, 1985; Smith, 1987). Moreover, work in this area also suggests that this relationship between racial perceptions and social-policy attitudes is strongest with regard to the means-tested programs commonly referred to as “welfare,” i.e., Aid to Families with Dependent Children (now Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), Food Stamps, and General Assistance. In contrast, more widely supported social-welfare measures, such as unemployment insurance, are relatively unrelated to racial attitudes (Gilens, 1999). Finally, experimental studies have also shown that Whites’ perceptions of Blacks on welfare—while similar to their perceptions of White recipients—are associated with greater opposition to welfare than the latter (see Gilens, 1996, 1999).

Taken together, these findings reinforce the long-running suspicion that welfare taps into Whites’ racial resentments without overtly playing the “race card” (see Gilens, 1996, 1999; Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). In turn, the prevalence of associative links between welfare and racial stereotypes has typically been attributed to biases in media coverage of poverty. As content analyses (e.g., Gilens, 1999) have suggested, news coverage of poverty-related issues tends to overuse images of Blacks when depicting the unsympathetic forms of poverty typically associated with welfare dependency, while rarely showing them in the context of sympathetic forms of poverty (e.g., poverty among the elderly). The result is that welfare has become discursively linked to stereotypes of Blacks, while other antipoverty efforts have not (Gilens, 1999). Confirming the generality of the racialization phenomenon, other studies have suggested that a similar evolution has taken place with regard to Whites’ criminal justice attitudes. In this case, studies have repeatedly found that support for punitive anticrime measures has become increasingly linked to perceptions of
Blacks as violent and lawless (Mendelberg, 2001; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002). Again, the association appears to have its origins in media coverage that depicts Blacks as being disproportionately involved in the problem (e.g., by overrepresenting Black suspects in crime stories; Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000).

In general, findings of this sort suggest that politicians may find it easy to galvanize White racial resentment without directly touching on race. By focusing on ostensibly race-neutral issues, they can tap into negative racial perceptions without running afoul of the norm of racial tolerance (see Mendelberg, 2001; see Gilens, 1999; Huckfeldt & Kohfeld, 1989). Moreover, in the case of welfare, they suggest that proposals to get around the lack of enthusiasm for efforts to assist Blacks by relying on “universalistic” policies designed to help disadvantaged members of all races (e.g., Sniderman & Carmines, 1997; Wilson, 1996) may simply establish programs that are bound to become race-linked in the future.

Does Education Inhibit Racialization?

So, how might we inhibit the racialization of public policies like welfare? In this regard, a variety of research suggests that education may play a particularly useful role. This body of work suggests higher levels of educational attainment—particularly in the form of a college degree—are associated with increased racial tolerance and more positive attitudes toward Blacks (see Greeley & Sheatsley, 1971; Lipset, 1960; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). This association is thought to be mediated by greater internalization of democratic norms (e.g., McClosky & Zaller, 1984) and improved cognitive skills, which enhance people’s ability to recognize the logical implications of these norms (e.g., Bobo & Licari, 1989; Sniderman et al., 1991; McClosky & Zaller, 1984).

This line of work suggests a relatively straightforward hypothesis about the impact of racial perception on welfare. Among the college-educated, opposition to welfare may be less connected to negative perceptions of Blacks, since these individuals should be more likely to have internalized the norm of tolerance and more likely to have the skills to apply it. That is, given the norms they have internalized, they may be more motivated—and able—to avoid the tendency to cognitively link perceptions of African Americans with welfare (Mendelberg, 2001). Instead, we might expect them to rely more heavily on nonracial political concepts—such as ideology and beliefs about government—which have been identified as antecedents of welfare attitudes, since education also appears to facilitate the use of abstract ideas in policy reasoning (see Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Sniderman et al., 1991; see also Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; McClosky & Zaller, 1984). In the race and politics literature, this hypothesis has been most forcefully articulated by proponents of the politics-centered approach to racial-policy attitudes (Sniderman &
Federico Carmines, 1997; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). Among other things, this approach suggests that the relationship between negative racial perceptions and policy attitudes should be weakest among those educated enough to see the contradiction between prejudice and democratic values and bring abstract political concepts like ideology to bear on their policy reasoning.

However, other research suggests that the story may not be this simple. More precisely, education actually appears to strengthen the impact of racial hostility on explicitly race-related policy attitudes, such as affirmative action (Federico & Sidanius, 2002a,b; see also Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). Moreover, recent studies suggest that this effect may extend to implicitly race-related policies like welfare and crime as well—and that the relationship between education and racial hostility may be more complex than previous studies have assumed (Federico, 2004; Federico & Holmes, 2005). For example, Federico (2004) finds that negative perceptions of Blacks typically associated with welfare opposition—particularly the belief that Blacks are lazy—are less prevalent among college-educated Whites. However, somewhat paradoxically, the relationship between these perceptions and opposition to welfare appears to be stronger among these individuals as well.

What these findings suggest is that the two mediators of the relationship between education and racial hostility—an improved learning of democratic norms and the development of cognitive skills that allow people to apply these norms—may not have uniformly liberalizing effects with regard to the impact of negative racial perceptions. On one hand, as the politics-centered model of racial-policy attitudes and most other work on the effects of education suggest, individuals who have completed a college degree may have indeed learned that racial stereotyping is inconsistent with the tolerant, democratic ethos of American political culture. However, an improved ability to connect policies with general predispositions may not always lead to policy positions which are less informed by negative racial perceptions. Instead, this may not happen unless one has actually internalized this broadly democratic ethos. Thus, if education also makes it easier for people to come to conclusions about specific policies which are more consistent with their general predispositions, then this may happen among those with negative racial perceptions and those with positive racial perceptions.

Education, Welfare, and Racial Cues

Research thus suggests that the relationship between education and the racialization of welfare may be somewhat complex. The purpose of the study reported here is to examine the relationship between education and the racialization of welfare in a somewhat different way, namely, by looking at whether welfare-related negative perceptions are less likely to be brought to bear on responses to welfare in the presence of a racial cue among the college-educated. As noted earlier, previous research suggests that the contemporary surfeit of opposition to
welfare may be anchored in the perception that welfare recipients are predominantly Black (see Gilens, 1999). If this is correct, then the effects of education on the relationship between racial perceptions and responses to welfare should depend critically on who survey respondents have in mind when they think about welfare. At the most basic level, negative racial perceptions may be more strongly associated with evaluative responses to welfare when recipients are depicted as Black. In this condition, the presence of a racial cue should prime respondents’ perceptions of African Americans, thereby strengthening the relationship between these perceptions and evaluative responses to welfare.

However, a more important issue—which this study attempts to address—is how this priming effect may vary as a function of education. While both of the approaches described earlier suggest that negative racial perceptions should be less prevalent among the college-educated, they differ with regard to the predictions they would make about the influence of racial cues on the relationship between these perceptions and evaluative responses to welfare among individuals with different levels of educational attainment. On one hand, if the politics-centered model of racial-policy attitudes—as well as most other research on the effects of education—is correct, then the presence of racial cues should have no influence on the relationship between negative perceptions of Blacks and evaluative responses to welfare among the college-educated. Regardless of whether racial cues are present, a relationship between negative racial perceptions and evaluations of welfare should not be found among these individuals. In fact, if the presence of racial cues has an effect at all, it should be most prevalent among the poorly educated. On the other hand, if the model sketched here is correct, then the presence of racial cues should have its strongest influence on the relationship between negative perceptions of Blacks and evaluative responses to welfare among the college-educated. More precisely, since the relatively advanced cognitive skills of the college-educated may allow them to more easily link their perceptions of Blacks with a discursively related policy (i.e., welfare), the presence of a racial cue may strengthen the relationship between negative racial perceptions and evaluations of welfare to a greater extent among these individuals.

Method

In order to test this basic hypothesis, data from a survey-based experiment included in the 1991 National Race and Politics Study (RAP; see Sniderman & Carmines, 1997) were used. This survey was conducted in two stages: a computer-assisted telephone survey, which reached a full sample of $N = 2,223$ respondents, and a second-wave mailback questionnaire completed by $n = 1,198$ of the original respondents. Unfortunately, the items needed to operationalize certain control measures (i.e., individualism, egalitarianism, and beliefs about government) were included only on the mail-back questionnaire. Moreover, given our particular interest in the attitudes of White Americans, only the White respondents
from this survey were used. Together, these two restrictions resulted in a final sample size of \( n = 1,061 \).\(^1\) Items from this dataset were used to operationalize the variables described below. With the exception of age and income, all variables were recoded to run from 0 to 1. All scales were created by averaging their constituent items; when the original items were on different scales, the recoding was carried out prior to the generation of composite scores. All descriptive statistics are for the 0–1 variable codings.

**Variables**

**Work ethic perceptions.** Six items measuring African-American stereotypes were used to create a measure of work-ethic perceptions index in the 1991 RAP. Four of the items asked respondents to indicate how well a series of words described Blacks on a 0–10 scale, with a response of 10 indicating that the word was a “very good” description. The words corresponding to these four items were “lazy,” “irresponsible,” “dependable” (reverse-coded), and “hardworking” (reverse-coded). The other two scale items asked respondents whether they agreed with the statements, “One of the biggest problems for many Black people is their lack of self-respect” (reverse-coded) and “When they have the chance to improve their economic position, most Blacks make good use of such opportunities.” The last two items used a four-point response scale, ranging from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” Higher scores indicate a stronger perception that Blacks lack a good work ethic (\( \alpha = .68; \bar{M} = .43; SD = .15 \)).

**Political predispositions.** Five nonracial political variables were also considered as controls in the analyses: (1) political ideology, based on respondents’ self-placement as liberal, moderate, or conservative on a standard NES-style ideology item (\( M = .59; SD = .48 \)); (2) party identification, based on respondents’ self-placement as Democratic, Independent, or Republican on a standard partisanship item (\( M = .53; SD = .41 \)); (3) beliefs about government, based on responses to a single item asking whether “the government in Washington tries to do too many things that should be left up to individuals and private businesses” (reverse-coded; \( M = .69; SD = .28 \)); (4) antiegalitarianism, which was measured using a single item asking whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement, “when people can’t support themselves, the government should help by giving them enough money to meet their basic needs” (\( M = .34; SD = .27 \)); and (5) individualism, based on responses to items asking whether respondents believed that “anyone who is willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding” and “if people work hard they can make a good life for themselves” (both reverse-coded; \( \alpha = .83; \bar{M} = .78; SD = .21 \)). The items used to create the beliefs about govern-

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\(^1\) The presence of missing cases resulted in further reductions in sample size in all of the analyses which follow. Final sample sizes are given in the tables for each analysis.
ment, antiegalitarianism, and individualism measures all used a four-point response scale, ranging from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” All responses were coded such that a higher score indicated a more right-wing response.

**Education.** This was assessed using the survey’s summary measure of educational attainment. Two categories were created: those who had completed a bachelor’s degree \( (n = 366; \text{coded as 1}) \) and those who had not \( (n = 695; \text{coded as 0}) \).

**Demographics.** Four demographics were included: age (in years), gender \( (1 = \text{male}, 0 = \text{female}) \), income (in thousands of dollars per year), and Southern (coded 1) or non-Southern (coded 0) residence.

**Split-Ballot Experiment: Welfare Recipients versus Black Welfare Recipients**

The hypothesis that education should strengthen the relationship between negative racial perceptions and attitudes toward welfare recipients only when the recipients are Black was examined using a split-ballot survey-wording experiment included in the 1991 RAP. In this experiment, respondents were asked to indicate on a 0–10 scale how angry an individual “who collects welfare because he is too lazy to get a job” would make them under one of two randomly assigned question-wording conditions. For half of the sample, the individual was simply described as a “man,” while for the other half, the individual was described as a “Black man.” In the subsample used here, 538 respondents received the “man” version of the question, while 523 received the “Black man” version. In both conditions, higher scores indicate greater anger \( (M = .92, SD = .20, \text{in the “man” condition}; M = .89, SD = .23, \text{in the “Black man” condition}; M = .91, SD = .22, \text{across both conditions}) \). A centered variable indicating which each respondent’s split-ballot group was also created: Respondents in the “man” group were given a code of \(-1\), and respondents in the “Black man” group were given a code of 1.

**Results**

**Does Education Weaken Negative “Welfare-Related” Racial Perceptions?**

As a first step, the main effect of education on support for the kinds of negative racial perceptions thought to predict hostility to welfare was examined. Consistent with other results (e.g., Federico, 2004), an analysis of variance indicated that respondents who had completed a bachelor’s degree were less likely to see Blacks as lazy \( (M = .40) \) compared to those without degrees \( (M = .45) \), \( F(1, 1059) = 23.95, p < .0001 \). Reinforcing this conclusion, an analysis of covariance—which included the demographics as covariates—produced similar findings. Respondents with bachelors’ degrees were less likely to see Blacks as lazy (estimated marginal \( M = .40 \)) compared to those without degrees (estimated
marginal $M = .44$), $F(1, 1027) = 15.18$, $p < .0001$. Thus, as both of the models described earlier suggest, the sorts of negative racial perceptions most commonly associated with hostility to welfare are less prevalent among the college-educated.

**Negative Racial Perceptions, Racial Cues, and the Role of Education**

Nevertheless, the primary aim of this study was to examine the hypothesis that the presence of a racial cue would strengthen the impact of negative racial perceptions only among those with a college education. In order to test this hypothesis, a series of hierarchical OLS regression models were estimated. Scores on the welfare-anger variable were regressed on the first-order terms for work ethic perceptions, education, and split-ballot group, the three two-way interactions between these variables, and the critical three-way interaction between work ethic perceptions, education, and split-ballot group. The demographics, ideology, party identification, antiegalitarianism, individualism, and beliefs about government were also included as controls. All variables were centered prior to this analysis (see Aiken & West, 1991).

The estimates for this analysis are shown in Table 1. Three models were estimated: Model 1, which included only the controls and the three key first-order terms (i.e., work ethic perceptions, education, and the split-ballot indicator); Model 2, which added the three two-way interactions; and Model 3, which added the three-way interaction. Model 1 first of all revealed a significant effect of the split-ballot variable ($b = -.01$, $p < .05$), indicating that respondents in the “Black man” condition were actually less likely to respond angrily to the hypothetical welfare recipient. This reinforces earlier findings suggesting that White respondents do not apply an outright double standard against Blacks when making social-welfare judgments (Gilens, 1999; see also Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). Moreover, collapsing across the two levels of the split-ballot manipulation (which is accomplished by the centering of the split-ballot dummy; Aiken & West, 1991), Model 1 also indicates a significant effect of work ethic perceptions ($b = .11$, $p < .05$), with those who have more negative perceptions of Blacks also showing more anger toward the welfare recipient; and a negative effect of education ($b = -.01$, $p < .05$), such that respondents with a college degree were less likely to express anger toward the recipient. Moreover, older respondents ($b = -.001$, $p < .05$) and women ($b = -.04$, $p < .01$) were less likely to express hostility toward the welfare recipient, while respondents who were high in opposition to big government, individualism, and antiegalitarianism were more likely to do so (all $p$s at least $< .05$), reinforcing earlier findings on the antecedents of social-welfare attitudes (see Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989).

However, these results were qualified by two significant two-way interactions, which were tested in Model 2. The estimates in this model revealed a marginally significant interaction between split-ballot group and work ethic perceptions ($b = .08$, $p < .10$), indicating that the positive relationship between work-ethic perceptions and anger toward the welfare recipient was stronger in the
"Black" man condition; and a significant interaction between work ethic perceptions and education \((b = .15, p < .01)\), indicating the relationship between work-ethic perceptions and anger was stronger among the highly educated. Therefore, in the case of the latter interaction, when we collapse across the two conditions of the split-ballot variable, we find evidence for the same pattern uncovered by Federico (2004): i.e., a stronger rather than a weaker relationship between work-ethic perceptions and hostility toward welfare among the college-educated.

Finally, qualifying these interactions, the estimates in Model 3 indicated that the key three-way interaction was indeed significant, \(b = .09, p < .05\).\(^2\) This three-

\(^2\) Importantly, this finding was robust to alternative specifications. In a full model also containing (1) the five three-way interactions between each of the control attitudes (ideology, party identification, antiegalitarianism, individualism, and beliefs about government), split-ballot group, and education and (2) all of the constituent two-way interactions involving these variables, the three-way interaction between work ethic perceptions, the split-ballot variable, and education remained significant \((b = .10, p < .05)\). This suggests that the predicted interactive effect was robust to the inclusion of other interactive effects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
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<td>(b)</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>.05*</td>
<td>.05*</td>
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<tr>
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Note. Entries are OLS regression coefficients.

\(\ast p < .10. \ast \ast p < .05. \ast \ast \ast p < .01. \ast \ast \ast \ast p < .001.\)
way interaction was broken down by examining the simple two-way interactions between work ethic perceptions and split-ballot group within each of the educational levels, as well as the simple slopes for the relationship between work ethic perceptions and attitudes toward the hypothetical welfare recipient for respondents in the “man” and “Black man” conditions within each of the educational levels. A graphical depiction of the simple slopes can be found in Figure 1. As predicted, this analysis indicated that the two-way interaction between work ethic perceptions and split-ballot group was significant in the portion of the sample that had received bachelor’s degrees (\(b = .21, p < .01\)), but nonsignificant among those without bachelor’s degrees (\(b = .02, p > .10\)). The simple slopes for the relationship between work ethic perceptions and anger toward the welfare recipient reinforced this pattern of findings. Among those with bachelor’s degrees, the relationship between work ethic perceptions and public-assistance attitudes was much stronger among those in the “Black man” condition (\(b = .55, p < .01\)) than it was among respondents in the “man” condition (where the relationship did not reach significance, \(b = .13, p > .10\)). In contrast, among respondents without bachelor’s degrees, this relationship was small and nonsignificant regardless of how the recipient was described (\(b = -.01\) in the “man” condition; \(b = .04\) in the “Black man” condition; both \(ps > .10\)).

**Discussion**

A variety of perspectives suggest that the policy impact of prejudice should be less pronounced among the college-educated (e.g., Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). However, a growing body of research suggests that the role of education in the domain of racial attitudes may be somewhat more complex. More precisely, while agreeing that negative racial perceptions are less prevalent among the college-educated, these studies also suggest that the connection between these perceptions and racial policy attitudes may be stronger among those with college degrees (e.g., Federico & Sidanius, 2002a,b; see also Sidanius et al., 1996). More recently, research has indicated that this pattern extends to policy attitudes which are only implicitly racial, such as welfare and crime (Federico, 2004; Federico & Holmes, 2005). The purpose of this study was to extend these findings by looking

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3 This was done using Aiken and West’s (1991) method. In order to test the simple two-way interaction between Black work ethic scores and education within each split-ballot group, individuals in the group of interest were coded as 0 on the split-ballot variable, and individuals in the other group were coded as 1. The term for the interaction between these two variables was then examined in the full interactive model. In order to test the four simple slopes for the relationship between Black work ethic scores and public assistance attitudes, a similar procedure was used for both the split-ballot and education variables. For example, in order to test the simple slope for bachelor’s degree respondents in the “Black man” condition, respondents with a bachelor’s degree were given a code of 0 on the education variable and respondents in the “Black man” were given a code of 0 on the split-ballot variable. For each simple slope, the coefficient for the work ethic term was examined in the full interactive model.
Figure 1. The interaction between Black work ethic perceptions, education, and experimental condition.

at whether the tendency for racial cues to strengthen the relationship between negative racial perceptions and evaluations of welfare differed as a function of education.

Consistent with both of the aforementioned approaches to the role of education, the results presented here suggest that the racial perceptions most closely associated with welfare opposition among Whites—namely, perceptions of Blacks as lazy, irresponsible, and lacking in self-reliance—were indeed less prevalent among the college educated. On the other hand, analysis of data from a survey experiment which manipulated the perceived racial identity of a hypothetical welfare recipient indicated that the presence of a racial cue was more likely to strengthen the relationship between negative racial perceptions and responses to welfare. More precisely, respondents who perceived Blacks negatively were more
likely to express anger toward a hypothetical “lazy” welfare recipient when that recipient was described as a “Black man” rather than a “man,” but only if they had completed a college degree. This, of course, is not the pattern of results we would expect to find if highly educated respondents were uniformly evaluating the undeserving poor in terms of strictly political, value-based concerns. If this were the case, then we would expect to find a relatively weak relationship between racial perceptions and evaluative responses to welfare, regardless of the race of the target respondents had in mind. Instead, this approach would expect racial cues to strengthen this relationship primarily among the poorly educated, who are less likely to have internalized racially tolerant values and acquired the cognitive skills needed to apply them.

As such, these findings provide a stronger pattern of support for the alternative hypothesis that the connection between negative racial perceptions and evaluative responses to welfare may be stronger among the college-educated. While education may very well reduce the prevalence of negative racial perceptions (by virtue of its effects on the learning of racially tolerant values), it also provides people with the cognitive skills needed to connect whatever negative perceptions they do have with policy evaluations. Thus, when provided with a racial-category cue, college-educated individuals’ responses to welfare may be more colored by their perceptions of the racial group stereotypically linked to welfare dependency, i.e., Blacks.

Taken together with previous findings (e.g., Federico, 2004; Federico & Holmes, 2005; Federico & Sidanius, 2002a,b; Sidanius et al., 1996), the results of the present study provide a somewhat sobering perspective on the role of education in the domain of racial attitudes. While the approach taken here does not dispute the well-established thesis that education may erode support for negative racial perceptions (e.g., Greeley & Sheatsley, 1971; Lipset, 1960; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991), it does suggest that the tendency for even relatively universalistic social policies to be viewed through the prism of race is not any less prevalent among the college-educated. In fact, like earlier findings reported by Federico (2004), the results reviewed here suggest that the tendency for welfare programs to be evaluated in terms of perceptions of Blacks may actually be stronger among the college-educated. Going beyond these earlier findings, however, the present study also suggests that the tendency for racial cues to engage these negative racial perceptions may be stronger among the college-educated as well. In other words, while earlier work merely suggested that college-educated Whites were chronically more likely to connect negative perceptions of Blacks with welfare, the results presented here indicate that they may also be more susceptible to the influence of situational cues that serve to reinforce the associative link between stereotypical perceptions of Blacks and welfare.

More broadly, a key implication of this line of work is that education may do little in and of itself to attenuate the process of policy racialization as long as public discourse continues to subtly link issues like welfare dependency and crime
to negative perceptions of various social groups, particularly African Americans (cf. Gilens, 1999; Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino et al., 2002). Insofar as biased media depictions of these issues and certain forms of political rhetoric are capable of generating this link, the relatively advanced cognitive skills provided by higher education will allow it to be more easily detected and integrated into people’s belief systems. Among other things, this means that race may continue to be a reference point for political attitudes and behavior even among the most well-educated and informed segments of the population. Since these strata are precisely the ones that are most likely to actually be politically engaged (e.g., Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996), researchers may want to be more circumspect about the effects of education in the domain of racial attitudes, even if it remains true that a variety of negative racial perceptions are less prevalent among the highly educated.

Finally, the analyses presented here do leave a number of questions open. For example, while the 1991 National Race and Politics dataset used in this study has proven to be an invaluable resource for the analysis of contemporary racial-policy attitudes and their antecedents (see Sniderman & Carmines, 1997), it does not include crucial psychological measures that would allow us to examine the mediators of the two divergent educational effects highlighted here. Moreover, the National Race and Politics data do not allow us to clearly isolate the mediators of the priming effect of the racial cue found among the college-educated in the present study. More precisely, they do not allow us to determine whether the cue does this by increasing the cognitive accessibility of negative racial perceptions (e.g., Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino et al., 2002), or by increasing the perceived importance of these perceptions, as others have argued (e.g., Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). Further research will be needed to address these issues.

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