Education and the Interface between Racial Perceptions and Criminal Justice Attitudes

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Recent work has implicated negative attitudes toward blacks in support for toughened criminal-justice measures. This suggests that the issue of crime may be implicitly “racialized,” despite a lack of overt racial content. The present study examines the hypothesis that education may weaken the relationship between negative racial perceptions and crime-related policy attitudes. In contrast to traditional views about the role of education in the domain of race-related attitudes, the results of analyses using several different general-population samples suggest that the effects of education are somewhat paradoxical: they reduce the intensity of negative racial perceptions, while bolstering the relationship between these perceptions and criminal justice attitudes.

KEY WORDS: Race, Crime, Education

Political psychologists have become increasingly interested in the “racialization” of various public-policy attitudes (Gilens, 1999; Mendelberg, 2001). More precisely, researchers have begun to explore the possibility that certain political issues have become implicitly linked to stereotypical beliefs and biased evaluations associated with various groups, even though they lack the explicitly racial focus that characterizes issues such as affirmative action (Gilens, 1999; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Jamieson, 1992; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Mendelberg, 2001; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). For example, research suggests that perceptions of blacks as lazy, undependable, and overly demanding appear to have a strong influence on whites’ attitudes toward welfare—an influence whose strength often rivals that of other, more obvious antecedents of social-welfare attitudes (such as egalitarianism and individualism;
see Gilens, 1999; see also Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Mendelberg, 2001; Sears & Citrin, 1985; Smith, 1987). While the racialization of the welfare issue has received a great deal of attention from researchers (e.g., Gilens, 1999; Mendelberg, 2001) and journalists (e.g., Edsall & Edsall, 1991) alike, the issue of crime provides perhaps an even more dramatic example of the “race-coding” phenomenon. Recent years have, of course, produced an explosion of “get tough” measures aimed at assuaging public fears about crime (Warr, 1995; see also Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002). These have included increased use of capital punishment, longer prison sentences, and the passage of “three-strikes” laws, as well as a general willingness to devote public resources to crime control. While there are undoubtedly a number of factors which have bolstered public support for measures of this sort, several analyses have suggested that whites’ perceptions of blacks may again be a culprit. In the real world of politics, this was perhaps most evident during the 1988 presidential election, in which the infamous “Willie Horton” ad was used to depict Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis as soft on crime. Although the explicit content of the ad focused on Dukakis’ support for a weekend prison furlough during which Willie Horton—a convicted felon—committed serious crimes, an ominous and prominent photo of the clearly African-American Horton provided the spot with an implicitly racial subtext (Jamieson, 1992; Mendelberg, 2001).

Beyond these general observations, a variety of public-opinion studies have provided a more rigorous pattern of support for the notion that attitudes toward the criminal-justice system have become racialized. For example, in the case of the 1988 presidential campaign, Mendelberg (2001) found that white survey respondents interviewed for that year’s National Election Study during the period of heaviest exposure to the Horton ad were more likely to base their evaluations of the presidential candidates on their attitudes toward blacks (measured in the form of racial resentment; see Kinder & Sanders, 1996). At a more policy-specific level, Kinder and Mendelberg (1995) have found an indirect relationship between negative stereotypes of blacks and support for capital punishment. However, an even clearer pattern of support comes from recent work by Peffley and Hurwitz (2002), who found a direct relationship between the endorsement of negative black stereotypes and support for punitive criminal-justice measures. This result was reinforced by the finding that negative evaluations of black prisoners—but not white prisoners—predict increased opposition to prison furlough programs.

What this suggests is that crime has become associatively linked with a particular social group—i.e., blacks—in the minds of many people. Consequently, individuals respond to the problem of crime in terms of stereotypes and negative evaluations tied to their representation of members of that group (Mendelberg, 2001; Sears, 1988). As with welfare, this association is thought to stem from media coverage in which African Americans are depicted as disproportionately “involved” in the problem. In this vein, studies have indicated that stories on
violent crime represent suspects as black in proportions much larger than those in the real world (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000) and depict blacks in a more threatening and less sympathetic light (Campbell, 1995; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Consistent with this general pattern of bias, other studies have suggested that images of black men in crime-oriented news stories prime negative stereotypes of blacks, resulting in more negative evaluations of black suspects (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1994) and greater support for aggressive criminal-justice measures (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). As the now-notorious Horton episode illustrates, phenomena such as these raise a number of serious issues for political researchers. In addition to suggesting that the policy impact of negative racial perceptions may be quite subtle—and that it may extend well beyond the realm of explicitly racial policy concerns (such as affirmative action)—the extent to which the public’s beliefs about criminal justice have become linked to negative perceptions of African Americans suggests that certain forms of political rhetoric may be quite capable of mobilizing white racial fears and stereotypes without directly invoking race (Jamieson, 1992; Mendelberg, 2001; see also Gilens, 1999; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002).

Education and the Racialization of Crime

Naturally, the ominous character of this problem has prompted researchers to consider whether there are factors which may block the subterranean influence of race on the public’s thinking about criminal-justice issues (see Mendelberg, 2001; see also Gilens, 1999; Monteith & Voils, 2001). While research on this issue is still in its infancy, one finding that does appear to have emerged is that the influence of racial perceptions on ostensibly “nonracial” political attitudes is attenuated among those for whom the norm of equality is salient (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Mendelberg, 2001). For example, Mendelberg (2001) found that the influence of racial resentment on whites’ attitudes toward the 1988 presidential candidates was greatly weakened during the period of the campaign directly prior to the election, once the media’s focus shifted from the crime issue itself to Jesse Jackson’s accusation that the Horton ad was implicitly racist. According to this account, issues like crime can become implicitly racialized only when whites are not fully aware of the influence of racial perceptions on their reactions to certain political issues. However, once whites are made aware of the influence of race, the potential for violations of the norm of racial equality becomes apparent, and processes of conscious prejudice control kick in (see Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Monteith & Voils, 2001).

The positive effects of norm salience suggest another variable which may be capable of weakening the racialization of crime-related policy issues, namely, education. As an extensive body of research suggests, education is associated with increased racial tolerance (see Greeley & Sheatsley, 1974; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Sniderman,
Brody, & Tetlock, 1991), as well as a more generally tolerant outlook across a variety of other domains (Bobo & Licari, 1989; McClosky & Brill, 1983; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Prothro & Grigg, 1960; Sullivan, Piersen, & Marcus, 1982). Importantly, this effect is thought to be mediated by an improved understanding and internalization of the formally egalitarian norms highlighted by Mendelberg (2001), as well as stronger cognitive skills, which make it easier for people to perceive the implications of the norms they internalize and act in ways which satisfy their requirements (e.g., Bobo & Licari, 1989; Nie et al., 1996; Prothro & Grigg, 1960; Sniderman et al., 1991).

This line of reasoning suggests that negative perceptions of blacks may have less of an effect on criminal-justice attitudes among highly educated respondents, since the latter should be more aware of norms prescribing racial equality and more likely to have the skills to actualize them. Put another way, we might expect the norm of equality to be chronically more salient for these individuals, allowing them to correct more effectively for the tendency associatively to connect perceptions of African Americans with the issue of crime (Monteith & Voils, 2001; see also Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). Rather than relying on these relatively crude bases for political judgment, the well-educated may instead derive their opinions about crime control from abstract ideological considerations, whose impact on policy reasoning appears to be stronger among those who have completed more years of formal schooling (see McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Zaller, 1992).

Although there have been examinations of the relationship between racial perceptions and criminal-justice attitudes, researchers have not explored the possibility that this relationship may be moderated by education. However, the hypothesis that education may moderate the perception-policy relationship has received a good amount of attention in the broader race-and-politics literature, where it has played a particularly central role in the “politics-centered” perspective on white racial-policy attitudes (Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). A key argument made by this perspective is that changes in white racial attitudes over the last four decades have substantially reduced the impact of racial hostility on racial-policy reasoning, most particularly among individuals educated enough (1) to see the conflict between intolerance and democratic values and (2) to use abstract political concepts (especially ideology). In this vein, Sniderman and his colleagues (1991) have shown that negative feelings toward blacks—assessed with a feeling thermometer—are less strongly related to a composite measure of racial-policy attitudes among highly educated whites, whose attitudes were more strongly shaped by ideology.

However, other studies suggest that the effects of education may not be as simple as this account implies. More precisely, a variety of recent analyses have implied that education may have two distinct—and somewhat paradoxical—effects on the degree to which negative racial perceptions manifest themselves (see Federico & Sidanius, 2002a,b). On one hand, as a great deal of opinion
research suggests, education does appear to increase tolerance and reduce racial hostility. On the other hand, it also appears to strengthen the relationship between people’s racial perceptions and their racial-policy attitudes. For example, Federico and Sidanius (2002a,b) found that education reduced support for perceptions of black inferiority, but strengthened the relationship between these perceptions and negative attitudes toward affirmative action.

While not intuitive, these results generally accord with the notion that education enhances both the learning of the norm of equality and the development of cognitive skills which allow people to apply these norms. However, they also cast doubt on the notion that these two factors have invariably enlightening effects with regard to the impact of negative racial perceptions (see Federico & Sidanius, 2002a). Like most perspectives on the effect of education, it clearly suggests that the well-educated have indeed learned that negative perceptions of various racial out-groups are generally inconsistent with the norm of equality. However, it also suggests that an improved ability to adopt policy stands consistent with one’s basic predispositions may not always lead to policy positions which are less colored by negative racial perceptions. In this respect, clearly education does not uniformly eliminate intolerance and negative racial perceptions, even if it does reduce the overall prevalence of these ills (Federico & Sidanius, 2002a,b; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996; see also Jackman, 1978). In other words, with the improved cognitive skills provided by higher levels of education, both those with negative racial perceptions and those with positive racial perceptions may find it easier to adopt policy positions broadly consistent with their basic predispositions. In other words, while education may chip away at various stereotypes and biases, the reasoning skills that come with it may in fact strengthen the influence of negative perceptions which manage to survive the process of educational socialization.

Taken together, these considerations suggest a different model of the effects of education in the realm of criminal-justice attitudes. On one hand, if the highly educated have better internalized the norm of equality, we should find a negative relationship between education and negative perceptions of African Americans typically associated with an aggressive approach to the fight against crime. On the other hand, if education also enhances the ability to derive policy positions from general predispositions—including those bound up with whites’ racial perceptions—then we should also find a stronger relationship between negative racial perceptions and crime-related policy attitudes among the highly educated.

While there is some support for these predictions in the context of explicitly racial policy attitudes like affirmative action (as noted earlier; see Federico & Sidanius, 2002a,b), it is not easy to generalize from these results to the case of criminal-justice attitudes. In particular, we must remember that attitudes toward crime—in contrast to opinions about policies explicitly aimed at upholding racial equality—are only implicitly racial in content. As such, the pattern predicted by the politics-centered model may be more apparent with regard to criminal justice issues, since the latter produce disagreements which can be readily understood in
terms of ideological conflicts between liberals and conservatives over retributive justice and the importance of social order, as well as fairly mundane fears about crime victimization (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997; see also Pena, Federico, & Sidanius, 2002). As such, one of the key goals of the present study will be to see whether the perspective advanced here extends to implicitly racialized issues as well, or whether the predictions of the politics-centered model do a better job explaining the interface between racial perceptions, education, and crime.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore these alternative perspectives on the effects of education. In a first step, data from white respondents to the 1992 National Election Study, the 1998 Los Angeles County Social Survey, and the 1991 National Race and Politics Study are used to show that higher levels of educational attainment are associated with a less-pronounced tendency to perceive blacks in generally negative terms, and less likely to see blacks as excessively prone to criminality in particular. In a second step, data from the 1992 NES and the 1998 LACSS are used to demonstrate these negative perceptions are nevertheless more strongly related to support for aggressive crime-control measures among the highly educated, even after the effects of other relevant predispositions are accounted for.

Method

The data for this study were taken from the 1992 American National Election Study (NES; \( N = 2,487 \)), the 1998 Los Angeles County Social Survey (LACSS; \( N = 694 \)), and the 1991 National Race and Politics Study (NRPS; \( N = 2,223 \)). Given our particular interest in the connection between racial perceptions and criminal-justice attitudes among white Americans, only the white respondents from each survey were used (\( n = 1,880 \), in the 1992 NES; \( n = 282 \), in the 1998 LACSS; \( n = 1,841 \), in the 1991 NRPS). With the exception of age and income, all variables described below were recoded to run from 0 to 1 for ease of analysis. Descriptive statistics (for the 0–1 codings) are given in the appendix.

Measures from the 1992 National Election Study

Racial perceptions. As one measure of the tendency to perceive black in negative terms, four NES items measuring what Kinder and Sanders (1996) describe as racial resentment were used. In general, these items assess support for the “belief that blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties that they face and that they take what they have not earned” (Kinder & Sanders, 1996, pp. 105–106). Previous studies have suggested a relationship between this
dimension of racial hostility and support for aggressive anti-crime measures (Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Mendelberg, 2001). In order to get a second measure of negative racial perceptions, the racial-resentment variable was supplemented by an index of evaluative racial superiority (Federico & Sidanius, 2002b), which assessed the degree to which respondents saw blacks more negatively than whites. This index was created using items which asked respondents to rate whites and blacks on three seven-point trait dimensions: (1) violent/not-violent, (2) unintelligent/intelligent, and (3) lazy/hard-working. Each item was coded such that higher scores indicated more positive ratings. A difference score for each trait was then created by subtracting ratings of blacks from ratings of whites. These three difference scores were averaged to form a single index.

Political predispositions. In order to be more confident that any effects of our racial variables were independent of other, nonracial influences on criminal-justice attitudes, four general political predispositions used in other studies of crime policy were also considered. On all scales, higher scores indicated a more “right-wing” response. First of all, given the clear differences between liberal and conservative elites and the political parties in attitudes toward crime control—as well as their influence on criminal-justice attitudes in prior research—measures of ideology and party identification were included as controls (see Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997). These variables also allowed us to control for potential confounds between the content of the racial-resentment measure and race-neutral political attitudes (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). Ideology was assessed using a composite index, based on two measures: (1) respondents’ self-placement as liberal, moderate, or conservative on the NES ideology scale and (2) the difference between their thermometer ratings of conservatives and liberals. Party identification was assessed using a similar composite, based on: (1) respondents’ self-identification as “Democratic,” “Independent,” or “Republican,” measured using the NES party identification item, and (2) the difference between their thermometer ratings of Republicans and Democrats.

Since a general preference for social order has also been implicated in punitiveness and concern about crime in general (Feldman, 2003; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002), measures of conformity and moral traditionalism used in prior studies of criminal-justice attitudes were also included. The conformity variable was based on four items assessing the degree to which respondents preferred orderly social arrangements in which authority, rules, and conventions are respected. Finally, moral traditionalism was assessed using five items measuring intolerance of diverse lifestyles and fears about the breakdown of traditional values. In the case of these variables, the expectation was that individuals more strongly oriented toward conformity and traditionalism would be more concerned about potential threats to the stability of the social order, resulting in a more aggressive stance toward crime (cf. Feldman, 2003).

Concern about crime. A necessary control variable in analyses of criminal-justice attitudes is perceptions of vulnerability to crime (see Peffley & Hurwitz,
Unfortunately, the 1992 NES had no direct measures of these perceptions. However, we were able to construct a simple measure of concern about crime based on open-ended responses to the standard NES questions about the “most important problems” facing the nation. Respondents were given the opportunity to list up to three of what they thought were the most important problems facing the nation and were then asked to indicate what they thought the most important one was. Responses were used to create a three-point crime-concern scale: respondents who did not mention crime or violence were given a score of zero, respondents who listed them as an important problem (but not the most important) were given a score of .5, and respondents who listed them as the most important problem were given a score of 1.

**Education.** This was assessed using the standard NES highest-degree-completed item. Following the approach used by other recent studies of the relationship between education and prejudice (e.g., Federico & Sidanius, 2002a; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993), responses to this item were used to create two educational-attainment categories: those who had not completed a bachelor’s degree (n = 1,404; coded as 0) and those who had (n = 476; coded as 1).

**Aggressive responses to crime.** In order to assess respondents’ support for aggressive responses to the problem of crime, two measures of criminal justice attitudes were used in this dataset. In choosing these particular measures, we tried to get at two key aspects of an “aggressive” stance toward crime control: (1) increased support for harsh punishment of criminals and (2) an increased willingness to devote public resources to the control of crime. These were measured using NES items asking about support for capital punishment and increased spending to deal with crime. **Support for capital punishment** was measured using an item which asked respondents whether they favored or opposed the death penalty for those convicted of murder. Higher scores indicated greater support for capital punishment. **Support for increased crime spending** was measured using an item asking whether outlays to deal with crime should be increased, kept the same, or decreased. Higher scores indicated support for increased spending. Naturally, these two aspects of people’s policy responses to crime are somewhat distinct in content, especially in the sense that the former relates more clearly to a “punitiveness” dimension highlighted by previous studies of racialized crime attitudes (e.g., Peffley & Hurwitz, 1997). Consistent with this distinction, the two measures were relatively independent of one another (r = .097). Nevertheless, research suggests that even these other aspects of an aggressive stance toward crime control may be racialized. For example, studies find that a preference for higher levels of spending on the police and general crime control—as well as stiffer criminal penalties—is reliably associated with prejudiced-related dimensions (e.g., social dominance orientation; see Pena et al., 2002; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). As such, both were considered in the analyses which follow.1

1 Despite this evidence in favor of a link between racial perceptions and an increased willingness to devote public resources to crime-control efforts, we acknowledge that the wording of the NES item...
Demographics and other controls. Four demographic variables commonly linked to race-related attitudes were included in the analyses as additional controls: age (in years), gender (1 = male, 0 = female), income (in thousands of dollars per year), and a dummy-coded region variable indicating whether the respondent lived in a Southern (coded 1) or non-Southern (coded 0) state. Control variables indicating whether the respondent was a homeowner (1 = yes, 0 = no), whether the respondent had children (1 = yes, 0 = no), the number of days per week the respondent watched television news, and the number of days per week the respondent read a newspaper were also included in the analyses. The last two measures were included as controls for media exposure to racially tinged crime coverage (e.g., Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Peffley et al., 1994). Finally, a measure of political knowledge was also included in the analyses, based on respondents’ performance on a series of factual knowledge items (see the appendix; cf. Fiske, Lau, & Smith, 1990; Zaller, 1992).

Measures from the 1998 Los Angeles County Social Survey

Racial resentment. This was measured using four items similar to those used in the 1992 NES. Higher scores indicated greater racial resentment.

Political predispositions. Three nonracial predisposition measures were available in the 1998 LACSS. Political ideology was assessed using respondents’ self-placement as liberal, moderate, or conservative on the LACSS ideology scale. Higher values indicate a more conservative outlook. Party identification was assessed using respondents’ self-identification as “Democratic,” “Independent,” or “Republican” on the LACSS summary measure of party identification. Higher values indicate a stronger identification with the Republican Party. Finally, although there were no measures of conformity or moral traditionalism available in the 1998 LACSS, the survey did contain two conceptually related items assessing the degree to which respondents attributed crime to various forms of moral breakdown in society. Specifically, these moral breakdown attributions items asked whether crime was prevalent: (1) because some groups fail to instill moral values and (2) because of the breakdown of the family unit. Higher scores indicate stronger attributions of crime to moral breakdown.

Fear of crime. The 1998 LACSS had a number of items which allowed us to construct direct measures of respondents’ perceptions of vulnerability to crime. Three items were used: (1) walk alone: an item asking whether the respondent is imperfect. Since the nature of the “spending” is left unspecified by the question, it is possible that some respondents may be thinking of “hierarchy-attenuating” crime remedies not often linked to racial perceptions (poverty reduction, job training, etc.; see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Nevertheless, any tendency for respondents to think of these nonracialized programs when answering the question would bias our results away from the predicted pattern, weakening the overall relationship between racial perceptions and crime spending and the tendency for this relationship to be stronger among the college educated.
was afraid to walk alone at night within a one-mile radius of home; (2) crime victim: an item asking whether the respondent had been a crime victim within the last 12 months; and (3) fear of violence: an item asking how serious the problem of random street violence was.

Criminal justice attitudes. In the 1998 LACSS, a measure of support for aggressive criminal-justice measures was constructed from two items: (1) a question asking about the use of capital punishment and (2) a question asking about the passage of “three strikes” laws. In this case, the correlation between the item was relatively strong \((r = .51, p < .0001)\), so the two items were scaled. Higher scores indicated greater support for an aggressive, punitive approach to criminal justice.

Education. This was assessed using the LACSS highest-degree-completed and high school degree items. Again, responses were used to create two educational-attainment categories: those who had completed a bachelor’s degree \((n = 148; \text{coded as } 0)\) and those who had not \((n = 133; \text{coded as } 1)\).

Demographics and other controls. Four demographic variables were included in the analyses as additional controls: age (in years), gender \((1 = \text{male}, 0 = \text{female})\), income (in thousands of dollars per year), and whether the respondent was a homeowner \((1 = \text{yes}, 0 = \text{no})\). In order to control for the apparent influence of local television news on the racialization of crime (see Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000), a variable indicating how often the respondent watched local news was also included. Items measuring political knowledge and whether or not the respondent had children were not available.

Measures from the 1991 National Race and Politics Study

The data from this study were used to test the specific hypothesis that education would weaken the tendency to perceive blacks as prone to criminality. This perception was measured using a single item, which asked respondents to indicate how “law-abiding” blacks were on a 0–10 scale. Scores on this item were reversed and recoded to run from 0 to 1 \((M = .40; SD = .21)\). Education was assessed using the survey’s summary measure of educational attainment. Two categories were again created: those who had completed a bachelor’s degree \((n = 560; \text{coded as } 0)\) and those who had not \((n = 1,281; \text{coded as } 1)\). Finally, five demographic controls were included: age (in years), gender \((1 = \text{male}, 0 = \text{female})\), income (in thousands of dollars per year), whether the respondent lived in a Southern \((\text{coded } 1)\) or non-Southern \((\text{coded } 0)\) state, and homeownership \((1 = \text{yes}; 0 = \text{no})\).

Results

In order to test the traditional hypothesis that education would reduce support for the negative perceptions of blacks thought to influence whites’ criminal-justice
attitudes, one-way analyses of variance were used to compare the racial perceptions of individuals who had completed a bachelor’s degree and individuals who had not in each of the three datasets. Looking first at the two 1992 NES measures and 1998 LACSS measure, we find a clear pattern of results. Across all three measures, respondents who had completed a bachelor’s degree perceived blacks less negatively ($M = .41$, for resentment in 1992; $M = .37$, for evaluative superiority in 1992; $M = .41$, for resentment in 1998) than those without degrees ($M = .53$, $M = .43$, and $M = .45$, respectively). All of these differences were significant: $F(1, 1,718) = 129.01, p < .0001$, for racial resentment in 1992; $F(1, 1,655) = 67.48, p < .0001$, for evaluative racial superiority in 1992; and $F(1, 278) = 5.34, p < .02$, for racial resentment in 1998. To ensure that this pattern was not due to other characteristics, these comparisons were repeated using an analysis of covariance. In each analysis, the demographics (and in the 1992 NES, knowledge and use of TV news and newspapers) were included as covariates. Again, across all three measures, respondents who had completed bachelors’ perceived blacks less negatively ($M = .44$, for resentment in 1992; $M = .38$, for evaluative superiority in 1992; $M = .38$, for resentment in 1998) than those without degrees ($M = .52$, $M = .42$, and $M = .46$, respectively), even after adjusting for the covariates: $F(1, 1,484) = 37.20, p < .0001$, for racial resentment in 1992; $F(1, 1,435) = 17.64, p < .001$, for evaluative racial superiority in 1992; and $F(1, 239) = 6.60, p < .01$, for racial resentment in 1998.

These findings reinforce the notion that education is associated with a weaker tendency to perceive blacks negatively. Nevertheless, in order to demonstrate this with regard to attitudes which tap directly into stereotypes of blacks as prone to criminality, data from the 1991 NRPS were used. As noted above, this survey explicitly asked respondents to indicate how “law abiding” they thought blacks were. Again, an analysis of variance indicated that respondents who had completed a bachelor’s degree were less likely to believe that blacks were not law-abiding (i.e., $M = .41$ versus $M = .46$), $F(1, 1,769) = 17.95, p < .0001$. Again, an analysis of covariance produced similar results. Respondents with bachelors’ degrees were less likely to see blacks as prone to criminality ($M = .42$) compared to respondents without one ($M = .46$), even after adjusting for the covariates, $F(1, 1,682) = 7.49, p < .01$.2

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2 One objection to this finding is that it may simply be due to the fact that the college educated are more likely to censor “politically incorrect” opinions, even when they privately hold them (cf. Jackman, 1978). While recent studies suggest that social-desirability effects on racial-attitude items are not reliably stronger among the college-educated (especially for measures of racial resentment and the particular stereotypes examined here; see Knudsen, 1995; Krysan, 1998), one of our datasets—the 1991 RAP—did contain a short form of Crowne and Marlowe’s (1960) social desirability scale (10 items; $\alpha = .72$), allowing us to address this issue empirically. An analysis of covariance using this scale indicated that it was unrelated to the tendency to see blacks as prone to criminality ($F < 1$) and that the difference in perceptions between the two educational groups remained significant even after it was controlled for, $F(1, 1,013) = 11.09, p < .0001$. Thus, for our most direct measure of white perceptions of black criminality, this suggests that differences in social desirability are not responsible for the main effect of education.
Education and the Interface between Racial Perceptions and Criminal-Justice Attitudes

1992 NES. The crux of our argument is that education should also strengthen the relationship between negative perceptions of blacks and crime-related attitudes. As a first test of this hypothesis, we began by estimating a series of ordered probit models in the 1992 NES. These were used to examine both the main effects of the two racial-attitude measures and their interactions with education. Separate sets of analyses were done for each of the racial-attitude measures (i.e., racial resentment and evaluative racial superiority) and each of the dependent measures (i.e., crime spending and capital punishment).

As a first step, we wanted to replicate the basic finding that negative racial perceptions have an important influence on criminal-justice attitudes. In order to do this, we simply regressed the two dependent measures on the main-effect terms for the basic demographics and the six attitudinal predictors—ideology, party identification, conformity, moral traditionalism, crime concern, and the indicated racial attitude. Separate models were estimated for each combination of racial attitude and dependent measure. Ordered-probit estimates for these models are shown in Table 1. As the coefficients in the first two columns indicate, both racial resentment ($b = .44, p < .01$) and evaluative racial superiority ($b = .49, p < .05$) were significantly related to support for increased crime spending, although concern

Table 1. Support for Increased Crime Spending and Capital Punishment (1992 NES)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Increased crime spending</th>
<th>Capital punishment</th>
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<td>Moral traditionalism</td>
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<td>(.19)</td>
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<td>Crime concern</td>
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<td>(.19)</td>
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<td>Racial resentment</td>
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<td>(.18)</td>
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<td>76.06 (12)$^{***}$</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients, taken from models also containing age, gender, income, region, homeownership, family status, completion of a college degree (not shown).

$^*$p < .10  $^*p < .05;  **p < .01;  ***p < .001$, two-tailed.
about crime was the strongest predictor of such support in these two models. Moral traditionalism and conformity also proved to be strong predictors of crime-spending attitudes in these models (see Table 2). In order to translate the effect of racial perceptions into more meaningful terms, the change in the predicted probability of favoring increased spending associated with movement from the minimum to the maximum value for each perceptions measure was calculated using the first-differences method (King, 1989). This analysis indicated that the probability of favoring increased spending rose by .21 with a shift from the minimum to the maximum on racial resentment and by .17 with a corresponding shift on the evaluative measure. Similarly, both racial resentment ($b = 1.64, p < .001$) and evaluative racial superiority ($b = 1.66, p < .001$) were significantly related to support for capital punishment, as the entries in the last two columns show. In this case, we calculated minimum-maximum first differences for the change in the predicted probability of being in the category of strongest support for capital punishment. This analysis indicated that the probability of strongly favoring capital punishment rose by .61 with a minimum-maximum shift on racial resentment and by .51 with a corresponding shift on the evaluative measure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Low education</th>
<th></th>
<th>High education</th>
<th></th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>SE $B$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>SE $B$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>SE $B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>(.16)</td>
<td>-.51*</td>
<td>(.31)</td>
<td>-.63*</td>
<td>(.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
<td>(.16)</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>(.33)</td>
<td>.67*</td>
<td>(.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
<td>.76***</td>
<td>(.22)</td>
<td>.56*</td>
<td>(.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral traditionalism</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>(.23)</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>(.34)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>(.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime concern</td>
<td>.95***</td>
<td>(.24)</td>
<td>.58*</td>
<td>(.35)</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>(.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial resentment</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>(.23)</td>
<td>1.00**</td>
<td>(.34)</td>
<td>1.21**</td>
<td>(.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 1</td>
<td>-1.96***</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>-1.96***</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>-1.96***</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 2</td>
<td>-.49**</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>-.49**</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>-.49**</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**All models:**

-2 log likelihood          | 2,213.27
Model $\chi^2$ (df)        | 112.52 (19)**
Pseudo $R^2$               | .07

**Note.** Entries are ordered probit coefficients, taken from models also containing age, gender, income, region, homeownership, family status, completion of a college degree, TV news and newspaper usage, and knowledge (not shown). Entries in the last column are for the interaction between each predictor and education, taken from a full interactive model. Entries in “low education” and “high education” columns are from full interactive models with (1) those without degrees and (2) those with them as the excluded groups on education, respectively. ($N = 1580$ in all models).

*p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001, two-tailed.
Moreover, in these models, the two racial attitudes had stronger effects than any of the other predictors, with party identification being the closest contender. In the NES data, negative racial perceptions thus appear to be related to support for more aggressive crime-control measures, reinforcing the findings of previous studies (e.g., Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002).

To return to our main focus, however, the results of the interactive and subgroup analyses are summarized in Tables 2 through 5. In each set of analyses, the dependent measure was regressed on the demographics, education, the six attitudinal predictors, and the interactions between each attitudinal predictor and education. In order to control for other factors which may strengthen the perception-policy relationship, political knowledge, frequency of TV news viewing, and frequency of newspaper use were also included. In each table, the estimates for the interaction terms are shown in the far-right column. Models for the main effect of the attitudinal predictors within the education groups were also run; these are shown in the left and middle columns of each table. In each subgroup run, the indicated group was coded as the excluded group in the dummy variable for education (see Aiken & West, 1991).3

Looking first at the models for the relationship between racial resentment and support for increased crime spending (shown in Table 2), we find a result consistent with our predictions. The interaction between resentment and education was significant and in the correct direction. Consistent with this result, we also find that the effect of racial resentment was significant and positive in the college-degree group, but nonsignificant in the no-degree group. Put in terms of minimum-maximum first differences, this corresponds to an increased probability spending support of .36 among those with degrees and a nonsignificant decrease of -.11 among those without degrees. The only nonracial predictor whose effect was strengthened by education in this model was conformity (p < .05); none of the other predictors interacted significantly with education. A similar pattern of results was found for the relationship between racial resentment and support for capital punishment (shown in Table 3). Again, the interaction between resentment and education was significant and correctly signed. Although the effect of racial resentment was significant in both groups, the size of this effect is larger in the college-degree group (b = 2.66, p < .001) than in the no-degree group (b = 1.06, p < .001). Again, the first differences for each group were noticeably different.

3 Following Aiken and West’s (1991) procedure, all three of the models estimated for each table (i.e., the interactive model and the two subgroup models) contained the full set of first-order and second-order terms: i.e., the main-effect terms for the demographics, controls, and attitudinal predictors and the product terms for the interaction between each attitudinal predictor and education. The estimates in the last column of each table are for the interaction terms from the model in which those without a college degree were the excluded group on education. The estimates in the first and second columns are for the main-effect terms from these models, taken from runs in which the indicated education category was the excluded group on the education variable.
with an increased probability of strong support for capital punishment of .72 among those with degrees and .46 among those without degrees.

The models for the relationship between evaluative racial superiority and each of the key dependent measures produced roughly similar findings. With regard to the models for evaluative superiority and increased crime spending (summarized in Table 4), we again find a significant interaction between the key racial attitude and education ($b = 1.98$, $p < .01$). As the subgroup estimates indicate, the effect of evaluative superiority on increased crime spending was significant and positive in the college-degree group, but nonsignificant in the no-degree group. Put in terms of minimum-maximum first differences, this corresponds to an increased probability of spending support of .59 among those with degrees and a slight decrease of −.001 among those without degrees. As the estimates in the right-hand column indicate, education also appeared to strengthen the effects of party identification and conformity: both interacted significantly with education. Finally, the results for the relationship between evaluative racial superiority and support for capital punishment were similar, although less pronounced (see Table 5). Consistent with our predictions, the coefficient for evaluative superiority was

---

### Table 3. Support for Capital Punishment Regressed on Racial Resentment at Low and High Levels of Education (1992 NES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Low education</th>
<th>High education</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>−.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>−.45**</td>
<td>(.16)</td>
<td>−.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
<td>−.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral traditionalism</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>(.24)</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime concern</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>(.20)</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial resentment</td>
<td>1.06***</td>
<td>(.23)</td>
<td>2.66***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 1</td>
<td>−1.62***</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>−1.62***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 2</td>
<td>−1.22**</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>−1.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 3</td>
<td>−.59***</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>−.59***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All models:

−2 log likelihood: 2,630.65
Model $\chi^2$ (df): 215.55 (19)***
Pseudo $R^2$: .14

*Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients, taken from models also containing age, gender, income, region, homeownership, family status, completion of a college degree, TV news and newspaper usage, and knowledge (not shown). Entries in the last column are for the interaction between each predictor and education, taken from a full interactive model. Entries in “low education” and “high education” columns are from full interactive models with (1) those without degrees and (2) those with them as the excluded groups on education, respectively. ($N = 1462$ in all models).

$p < .10$  *$p < .05$  **$p < .01$  ***$p < .001$, two-tailed.
larger in the college-degree group than in the no-degree group, although the test on the interaction failed to reach significance in this case ($p > .10$). None of the other attitudinal predictors interacted significantly with education in these models (all $p > .10$), suggesting that the educated were not necessarily relying on more “principled” bases of judgment about criminal-justice issues (cf. Sniderman et al., 1991).

1998 LACSS. While this pattern of results is certainly instructive, one shortcoming of the 1992 NES data is its relative lack of adequate controls for perceptions of vulnerability to crime. Fortunately, the 1998 LACSS featured two measures of perceived vulnerability to crime, as well as a measure of whether or not the respondent had actually been a victim of crime in the previous 12 months. Thus, we attempted to replicate the above findings in this dataset. In order to do this, models similar to those described above were estimated in the LACSS white subsample. Since the dependent measure from this dataset was relatively continuous, we used ordinary least-squares estimates instead of ordered probit.

In these analyses, the criminal-justice measure was regressed on the demographics and controls, education, the seven attitudinal predictors—fear of walking

| Table 4. Support for Increased Crime Spending Regressed on Evaluative Racial Superiority at Low and High Levels of Education (1992 NES) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Variable        | Low education   | High education  | Interaction |
|                 | $B$ SE $B$      | $B$ SE $B$      | $B$ SE $B$  |
| Ideology        | .09 (.16)       | −.39 (.31)      | −.48 (.35)  |
| Party ID        | −.30* (.16)     | .68* (.34)      | .97** (.37) |
| Conformity      | .22* (.12)      | .82*** (.22)    | .59* (.25)  |
| Moral traditionalism | .35 (.23)     | .16 (.35)      | −.19 (.41)  |
| Crime concern   | 1.08*** (.27)   | .49 (.38)       | −.60 (.47)  |
| Evaluative racial superiority | .04 (.27) | 2.02*** (.63) | 1.98** (.68) |
| Threshold 1     | −1.92*** (.19)  | −1.92*** (.19)  | −1.92*** (.19) |
| Threshold 2     | −.45** (.18)    | −.45** (.18)    | −.45** (.18) |
| All models:     |                 |                 |             |
| −2 log likelihood |             | 2,123.11       |             |
| Model $\chi^2$ (df) |             | 113.43 (19)*** |             |
| Pseudo $R^2$    | .07            |                 |             |

Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients, taken from models also containing age, gender, income, region, homeownership, family status, completion of a college degree, TV news and newspaper usage, and knowledge (not shown). Entries in the last column are for the interaction between each predictor and education, taken from a full interactive model. Entries in “low education” and “high education” columns are from full interactive models with (1) those without degrees and (2) those with them as the excluded groups on education, respectively. ($N = 1528$ in all models).

*p < .10  *$p < .05; **$p < .01; ***$p < .001, two-tailed.
alone, crime victimization, fear of random violence, party identification, ideology, moral breakdown attributions, and racial resentment—and the interactions between each attitudinal predictor and education. In an initial step, we simply looked at the main effect of racial resentment in the full sample. In this analysis, only the main-effect terms for the demographics and the attitudinal predictors were included in the model. The results indicated that racial resentment was the strongest predictor of support for harsh criminal-justice measures ($b = .38$, $p < .001$). The next strongest predictor—moral breakdown attributions—had a somewhat smaller effect ($b = .25$, $p < .01$). The only other variables with significant effects were being a recent crime victim (which, interestingly, lowered support for harsh measures); ($b = -.08$, $p < .10$) and fear of random violence ($b = .12$, $p = .05$). Thus, these data appear to replicate the basic finding that racial perceptions have a reasonably strong relationship with criminal justice attitudes.

However, our primary interest was in how the relationship between racial perceptions and criminal-justice attitudes might vary across educational groups. In

### Table 5. Support for Capital Punishment Regressed on Evaluative Racial Superiority at Low and High Levels of Education (1992 NES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Low education</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>SE $B$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>SE $B$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>SE $B$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>.34* (.17)</td>
<td>.36 (.32)</td>
<td>.02 (.36)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-.45** (.16)</td>
<td>.19 (.34)</td>
<td>-.26 (.38)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>.20* (.12)</td>
<td>.33 (.23)</td>
<td>.13 (.26)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral traditionalism</td>
<td>-.03 (.24)</td>
<td>.72 (.36)</td>
<td>.53 (.42)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime concern</td>
<td>.04 (.21)</td>
<td>-.07 (.37)</td>
<td>-.04 (.43)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative racial superiority</td>
<td>1.36*** (.29)</td>
<td>2.20*** (.65)</td>
<td>.84 (.71)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 1</td>
<td>-.160*** (.19)</td>
<td>1.60*** (.19)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 2</td>
<td>-.122*** (.18)</td>
<td>1.22*** (.18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 3</td>
<td>-.61*** (.18)</td>
<td>-.61*** (.18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All models:

- $-2 \log$ likelihood: 2,584.01
- Model $\chi^2$ (df): 170.40 (19)***
- Pseudo $R^2$: .11

Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients, taken from models also containing age, gender, income, region, homeownership, family status, completion of a college degree, TV news and newspaper usage, and knowledge (not shown). Entries in the last column are for the interaction between each predictor and education, taken from a full interactive model. Entries in “low education” and “high education” columns are from full interactive models with (1) those without degrees and (2) those with them as the excluded groups on education, respectively. ($N = 1462$ in all models).

$p < .10$ *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$, two-tailed.
order to address this issue, a model testing the interactions was again run, as were
two models for the main effects of the attitudinal predictors within the low and
high education groups. In each subgroup run, the indicated group was again coded
as the excluded group in the dummy variable for education. These analyses are
summarized in Table 6. The results of these analyses more or less mirrored those
obtained in the 1992 NES. Racial resentment interacted significantly with educa-
tion. Accordingly, we also find that the effect of racial resentment on support for
aggressive crime-control efforts was positive and strongly significant in the
college-educated group, but small and nonsignificant in the no-college group.
Moreover, only one of the other attitudinal predictors—ideology—even came
close to interacting significantly with education (i.e., $b = .13, p < .10$). This sug-

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**Table 6. Support for Punitive Criminal Justice Measures Regressed on Racial Resentment at Low and High Levels of Education (1998 LACSS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Low education</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>High education</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk alone</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime victim</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of violence</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>(.13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral breakdown</td>
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<td>(.16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>(.20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial resentment</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>(.13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.60***</td>
<td>(.13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.44*</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.81*</td>
<td>(2.18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.53*</td>
<td>(2.16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.81*</td>
<td>(2.18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All models:

- $F$ (degrees of freedom) = 5.26 (20, 191)**
- Adjusted $R^2$ = .287
- $N$ = 212

Note. Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, taken from models also containing age, gender, income, homeownership, local TV news viewership, and completion of a college degree (not shown). Entries in the last column are for the interaction between each predictor and education, taken from a full interactive model. Entries in “low education” and “high education” columns are from full interactive models with (1) those without degrees and (2) those with them as the excluded groups on education, respectively.

*p < .10  *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001, two-tailed.

In both datasets, a potential reason for the absence of a relationship between racial perceptions and policy attitudes among those without degrees is that fear of crime may be mediating the effects of the perceptions variables. However, this would require a strong correlation between racial perceptions and fear of crime (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In neither dataset is this the case. In 1992, neither symbolic racism ($r = .02, p > .10$) nor evaluative racial superiority ($r = .01, p > .10$) was correlated with the crime-concern index. In 1998, racial resentment was significantly correlated with only one of the crime-fear variables, albeit weakly (i.e., fear of violence; $r = .18, p < .05$; other ps > .10). Additional analyses indicated that this variable did not significantly mediate the effect of resentment among the poorly educated in 1998 ($p > .10$).
gests that their effects were relatively constant across the education levels. Thus, even in the presence of stronger controls for perceptions of vulnerability to crime, our basic finding holds up. Moreover, the data offered little support for the notion that education would facilitate the use of “principled” criteria in policy judgments.

Discussion

As even the casual observer of the American scene knows, there has been increasingly widespread support for aggressive solutions to the problem of crime (Warr, 1995), for a number of possible reasons. Most obviously, it seems intuitively plausible that real-world fluctuations in the crime rate, along with an increased subjective fear of being the victim of a violent crime, would lead to greater support for aggressive crime-control efforts. Our analysis does provide some evidence for this view. For at least some individuals, fear of victimization does appear to have an impact on one’s support for capital punishment and increased spending on crime fighting measures, although the effects of these variables were somewhat inconsistent. Moreover, it is also clear that attitudes toward crime policy are shaped in part by the general political predispositions—such as ideology, partisanship, and traditionalism—individuals bring to bear on their reasoning about these issues (see Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002; Sniderman & Carmines, 1997).

Despite the importance of these factors, our analysis also suggests that, at least for some individuals, crime has become a racialized policy issue, reinforcing the conclusions of previous work on attitudes toward both crime itself

5 Interestingly, the 1998 LACSS also contained items asking about support for two explicitly “hierarchy-attenuating” (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) nonpunitive responses to crime: (1) job training for inmates and (2) efforts to reduce poverty. Existing work on the racialization of criminal-justice attitudes suggests that the implicit link between race and crime has occurred only in the context of public discourse about “get tough” approaches to crime reduction (e.g., Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002). If this is the case, then we might expect the education to have little or no effect on the strength of the relationship between racial perceptions and nonpunitive policies of this sort, since dimensions related to cognitive skill tend to strengthen the relationship between a given issue-relevant consideration and policy attitudes only when that consideration is frequently invoked in public discourse on that issue (Chong, 1996; Goren, 2002). In order to examine this possibility, the models estimated for the punitive-policies scale were rerun twice, once using each of the nonpunitive items (which did not scale together; i.e., \( \alpha = .23 \)). These analyses first of all indicated that racial resentment was negatively (but only weakly) related to each of these measures (i.e., \( b = -.09, p > .10 \), for job training; \( b = -.18, p < .05 \), for poverty reduction). That is, resentful whites were actually slightly less willing to support these nonpunitive measures. More importantly, however, the relationship between racial resentment and each of these measures was unaffected by education: the interaction between these variables was nonsignificant in both models (\( b = -.23, p > .10 \), in the job-training model; \( b = -.25, p > .10 \), in the poverty-reduction model). Thus, the tendency of education to strengthen the policy impact of racial perceptions appears to be absent with regard to anti-crime measures with an explicitly nonpunitive focus.
(Mendelberg, 2001; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002) and welfare (Gilens, 1999). While ostensibly nonracial in character, a growing body of work suggests these issues have been infused with a racial subtext by media accounts, with welfare recipients and criminals (particularly violent criminals) being portrayed more frequently as African American. In our analysis, racial perceptions, whether measured as racial resentment or negative stereotypes, were in many cases the strongest predictors of support for an aggressive approach to crime control. This is a troubling finding, as it implies that negative racial perceptions may have a considerable covert impact on public policy under the guise of race-neutral concerns about public safety.

However, the impact of racial perceptions on support for aggressive crime policies is not universal. Instead, our results indicate that education is a key moderator of the relationship between racial perceptions and policy preferences. Of course, the hypothesis that education may have a moderating effect of this sort is not new. Nevertheless, our perspective suggests that this moderating effect may take a very different form from that often expected. In this regard, the traditional view is that education not only weakens negative racial perceptions (e.g., McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969; Sniderman et al., 1991) but also suppresses the impact of these perceptions on policy choices (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1993). In contrast, the results of our analysis present a much more complicated view of the impact of education on the connection between racial perceptions and preferences on implicitly racialized policies. Consistent with the traditional hypotheses about the effect of education—from both the racial-attitudes (e.g., Selznick & Steinberg, 1969) and tolerance literatures (e.g., Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982)—education was associated with less negative racial perceptions, whether measured as racial resentment or the endorsement of negative racial stereotypes. This suppression of these perceptions is of particular interest, as both racial resentment (Kinder & Sanders, 1996) and stereotyped views of blacks as violent, lazy, and unintelligent (Gilens, 1999; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002) seem to have a strong impact on attitudes towards implicitly racial issues like crime. In both samples, a college degree reduced the average score on racial-perception measures, even after a variety of relevant covariates were taken into account.

However, education also had a paradoxical effect on the relationship between racial perceptions and attitudes towards implicitly racialized criminal-justice policies. Across two different samples, a college education strengthened the relationship between negative racial perceptions and support for punitive criminal-justice measures and increased spending on the fight against crime. In fact, in many cases, there was no statistically reliable relationship whatsoever between racial perceptions and policy attitudes for those without a college degree. In contrast, among the college-educated, this relationship was consistently strong and significant. Moreover, this pattern persisted even after the inclusion of numerous nonracial controls, including ideology, partisanship, moral traditionalism, and fear of
crime. At the same time, this moderating effect was reversed (albeit nonsignificantly) for fear of crime.

While these results are at odds with some of the past work on the moderating role of education—particularly that associated with the politics-centered model (see Sniderman & Piazza, 1993)—they are consistent with a growing body of work suggesting that education may weaken negative racial perceptions in absolute terms, while simultaneously strengthening their impact on policy attitudes. This pattern of results has been demonstrated with regard to a number of other policy matters, particularly affirmative action (Federico & Sidanius, 2002a,b). This body of findings is problematic for the traditional view of the relationship between racism and education. While education does appear to reduce racial resentment and stereotype endorsement, it does not eliminate them. For individuals whose negative perceptions manage to survive this process, education appears to provide cognitive tools which allow them to better connect their perceptions with policy preferences.

While this finding is interesting in light of traditional expectations about the effects of education, its meaningfulness may be limited by restrictions on the range of key variables. For example, the stronger relationship between racial perceptions and crime attitudes may not amount to much in substantive terms if few college-educated individuals scored above the midpoint on the perception measures, relative to those without degrees. However, a nonnegligible portion of the college educated scored above the midpoint on the perceptions measures. On resentment, 29% of the college educated scored above the midpoint in 1992, while 27% did so in 1998. Moreover, while only 13% of the college educated scored above the midpoint on the evaluative measure, the corresponding number in the noncollege subsample was also low (i.e., 28%). Also, for all perceptions measures, the variance was similar across educational groups: i.e., SD = .16 for those with degrees versus .18 for those without them for resentment in 1992; .15 versus .11 for the evaluative index in 1992; and .21 versus .24 in 1998. Another issue has to with lack of variance in aggressiveness toward crime among those without degrees: if most poorly educated individuals are highly aggressive toward crime, the absence of a racial-perceptions effect may be due to a ceiling effect. However, while the poorly educated were more aggressive on all measures (e.g., in 1992, 87% of those without degrees supported capital punishment, while only 74% of those with degrees did), variances on each measure were similar across groups (i.e., SD = .38 for those with degrees versus .30 for those without them for capital punishment in 1992; .29 versus .26 for crime spending in 1992; and .32 versus .26 for the punitiveness variable in 1998). Finally, it should be remembered that the unstandardized coefficients used in the multivariate models are robust to the effects of between-group variance differences (see Pedhazur, 1997), providing an additional safeguard against these problems.

However, the possibility of differential measurement error across groups may provide an alternative explanation for this pattern of results. If the variables were measured with greater error among the poorly educated (cf. Judd & Milburn, 1980; Converse, 1980), this might attenuate the relationship between racial perceptions and crime-related policy attitudes. In order to deal with this possibility, two multigroup structural-equation models were run in the 1992 NES data (which had a large enough sample size for this analysis) using LISREL. These looked at the relationship between a latent racial-perceptions variable (with seven indicators: the four resentment items and the three white-black difference scores used to create the evaluative superiority measure) and each one of the dependent variables. In accordance with the ordered probit models reviewed in the article, separate analyses were done for each dependent variable. Latent dependent variables were not constructed, since regression estimates are biased by error in the independent variables (e.g., Pedhazur, 1997). Nevertheless, since the dependent variables were categorical in nature, the analyses used the weighted least-squares estimator with polychoric correlations as input (see Muthen, 1984). These error-corrected analyses merely confirmed the results reported in the actual article. The latent perceptions...
Nevertheless, in its focus on the relationship between racial perceptions, education, and policy attitudes, the present study goes beyond the policy domain examined in earlier studies. Previous studies of the relationship between perceptions and policy attitudes among individuals differing in educational attainment have focused almost completely on a single, *explicitly racial* policy: i.e., affirmative action. While there are many nonracial variables which may lead people to dislike affirmative action (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986), it is also easy to see how negative perceptions of a particular group may fuel opposition to a policy designed to benefit that group: the logical connection between feelings toward the group and feelings toward policies designed to assist its members is fairly straightforward.

However, criminal justice issues are only *implicitly* racial. There is no inherent logical connection between these issues and racial matters, and the tendency to make this connection has a largely discursive basis (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). Compared to affirmative action, the issue of crime might be even easier to address in terms of nonracial ideological considerations, mundane concerns about public safety, and so on. In fact, one might expect this to be particularly true among the college educated, who are generally better able to align their policy attitudes with political predispositions like ideology and partisanship. This suggests that crime is a context in which the expectations of the politics-centered perspective on white policy attitudes—which would predict a weaker effect of racial perceptions among the college-educated—may hold (Sniderman et al., 1991). Nevertheless, the results presented here suggest that education strengthens the impact of racial perceptions on a policy that is only implicitly racial, while doing little or nothing to boost the impact of the nonracial factors traditionally thought to guide the policy reasoning of the well-educated and informed (see Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Sniderman et al., 1991; see also McClosky & Zaller, 1984).

While our results are thus conceptually consistent with a variety of previous findings, they still leave us with a nagging question: what accounts for the discrepancy between this body of findings and the results of research guided by the politics-centered model (e.g., Sniderman et al., 1991)? We believe that the answer has to do with differences in the operationalization of racial attitudes across the two lines of research. In this vein, studies that find a stronger relationship between racial hostility and policy attitudes have measured the former in terms of ideologies of racial superiority and dominance (Federico & Sidanius, 2002a,b; Sidanius et al., 1996) or negative perceptions of racial out-groups along specific stereotype variable was more strongly related to support for increased crime spending among those with college degrees ($\gamma = .36, p < .05$) than it was among those without them ($\gamma = .03, p > .10$). Consistent with this result, constraining this effect to equality across groups produced a significant deterioration in model fit, $\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 21.42, p < .01$. Similarly, the latent perceptions variable was more strongly related to support for capital punishment among those with college degrees ($\gamma = .60, p < .05$) than it was among those without them ($\gamma = .37, p < .05$). Again, constraining the relevant path to equality across groups resulted in a significant decline in fit, $\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 12.82, p < .01$. 
dimensions (Federico & Sidanius, 2002b), whereas politics-centered studies which find this relationship to be weaker among the college-educated have measured racial hostility in terms of simple anti-black affect (see Sniderman et al., 1991). While each set of variables represents a meaningful dimension of whites’ racial attitudes, several analyses suggest that anti-black affect may not be reliably associated with the sorts of beliefs that are typically used to justify policy positions that reinforce existing inequalities (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius et al., 1996). For example, while historical studies suggest that beliefs about the inherent inferiority and negative traits of certain racial groups have been a relatively constant element in racist discourse, they also indicate that these beliefs have not always been accompanied by global hostility of the sort tapped by anti-black affect (van den Berghe, 1967).

Consistent with this analysis, contemporary work suggests that overt expressions of dislike for blacks play an increasingly minor role in public discourse on race (Mendelberg, 2001; Sears, 1998), and that generalized anti-black affect is not very strongly associated with policy attitudes once specific dominance-related ideologies and negative racial perceptions are accounted for (Sears, 1988; Sidanius et al., 1996). If education is more likely to make it easier for people to make the perception-policy connection when certain racial perceptions have been made “relevant” by public discourse (Gilens, 1999; Goren, 2002), then it is not surprising that work in the politics-centered tradition has found little evidence for a stronger relationship between racial perceptions and policy attitudes. That is, given its minimal role in racial discourse and the structure of white racial attitudes, there is little reason to believe that education should strengthen the impact of anti-black affect relative to other racial perceptions.

In sum, our results add to the suspicion that education may not be as uniformly enlightening in its effects as is often assumed. Consistent with traditional perspectives on the role of education—and the implications of the politics-centered model of white racial-policy attitudes—the completion of a college degree does appear to be associated with less negativity toward blacks. However, whites’ perceptions of blacks appear to be even more strongly associated with criminal-justice attitudes among the college educated. While this does suggest that education may indeed be associated with a less aggressive approach to crime control among college-educated individuals whose perceptions do become less negative as a result of their experiences, it also suggests that education may be associated with greater aggressiveness among those whose negative perceptions do manage to survive the experience of higher education. As such, findings like ours suggest that researchers may need to pay attention not only to the direct effect of education on people’s racial perceptions, but also to its effects on the relationship between these perceptions and key political issues.

Conclusion

In sum, our results add to the suspicion that education may not be as uniformly enlightening in its effects as is often assumed. Consistent with traditional perspectives on the role of education—and the implications of the politics-centered model of white racial-policy attitudes—the completion of a college degree does appear to be associated with less negativity toward blacks. However, whites’ perceptions of blacks appear to be even more strongly associated with criminal-justice attitudes among the college educated. While this does suggest that education may indeed be associated with a less aggressive approach to crime control among college-educated individuals whose perceptions do become less negative as a result of their experiences, it also suggests that education may be associated with greater aggressiveness among those whose negative perceptions do manage to survive the experience of higher education. As such, findings like ours suggest that researchers may need to pay attention not only to the direct effect of education on people’s racial perceptions, but also to its effects on the relationship between these perceptions and key political issues.
APPENDIX

Information on Survey Items

1992 National Election Study

Racial resentment. (1) “Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.” (2) “Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. blacks should do the same without any special favors.” (3) “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.” (4) “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.” The items were answered on a five-point scale, ranging from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” (v520–v523; $\alpha = .74; M = .50; SD = .19$).

Evaluative racial superiority. whites: v6221, v6225, v6229; blacks: v6222, v6226, v6230 ($\alpha = .74; M = .42; SD = .15$).

Political ideology consisted of (1) the NES ideology scale (v3509), for which responses were used to create a three-point measure: “extremely liberal,” “liberal,” or “slightly liberal” responses were scored as 0, “moderate/middle-of-the-road” responses were scored as .5, and “extremely conservative,” “conservative,” or “slightly conservative” responses were scored as 1; and (2) the difference between respondents’ thermometer ratings of conservatives (v5319) and liberals (v5326). The two items were scaled ($\alpha = .70; M = .45; SD = .43$).

Party identification consisted of (1) the NES summary variable (v3634) responses to which were used to create a three-point measure: “strong” and “weak” Democrats were scored as 0, independents and independent leaners as .5, and “strong” and “weak” Republicans as 1; and (2) the difference between respondents’ thermometer ratings of Republicans (v3318) and Democrats (v3317). The two items were scaled ($\alpha = .79; M = .49; SD = .39$).

Conformity. Introduced with: “Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. I am going to read you pairs of desirable qualities. For each pair please tell me which one you think is more important for a child to have.” Items: “Independence or respect for elders” (v6019), “Obedience or self-reliance” (v6020), “Curiosity or good manners” (v6021), and “Being considerate or well-behaved” (v6022). “Conformity” responses were scored as 1, and “independence” responses were scored as 0 ($\alpha = .75; M = .41; SD = .36$).

Moral traditionalism. (1) “The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes” (v6115), (2) “We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards even if they are very different from our own” (v6116), (3) “This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on family ties” (v6117), (4) “The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our
society” (v6118), and (5) “It is always wrong for a married person to have sexual relations with someone other than their marriage partner” (v6119). Responses to these items were originally given on a five-point scale, ranging from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” ($\alpha = .69; M = .65; SD = .20$).

**Education.** v3908 (highest degree completed).

**Political knowledge.** Recognition of political figures: Introduced with “Now we have a set of questions concerning various public figures. We want to see how much information about them gets out to the public from television, newspapers, and the like.” Items: “Dan Quayle,” “William Rehnquist,” “Boris Yeltsin,” and “Tom Foley” (v5916–v5919). General information about the political system: “Which party is more conservative” (v5915), “Who has the final responsibility to decide if a law is constitutional or not . . . is it the President, the Congress, the Supreme Court, or don’t you know” (v5920), and “Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to the Federal Courts . . . is it the President, the Congress, the Supreme Court, or don’t you know” (v5921). Relative placements of the political parties: Democrats (v3705) versus Republicans (v3704) on fewer-versus-more services and spending scale; Democrats (v3711) versus Republicans (v3710) on increase/decrease defense spending scale; Democrats (v3718) versus Republicans (v3717) on liberalism-conservatism scale. In order to be given a correct score on each issue, respondents had to place the parties in the correct left-right order and at least two scale units apart. For all indicators, correct responses were scored as ‘1,’ and incorrect responses were given a score of ‘0’. These indicators scaled reliably, so an overall knowledge score was calculated by averaging scores on all indicators ($\alpha = .75; M = .48; SD = .28$).

**Concern about crime.** Based on responses to the three “most important problem” items (v2334, v2335, and v2336) and the “single most important problem” item (v2337). Codes 320 (worries about drug-related crime) and 340 (worries about crime/violence) were classified as crime-concerned responses ($M = .06; SD = .19$).

**Criminal justice attitudes.** (1) “Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?” (v5934 and v5933; these items formed a four point scale, ranging from “favor strongly” to “oppose strongly”; $M = .81; SD = .33$); and (2) “Should federal spending be increased, decreased, or kept about the same on dealing with crime?” (v3814; $M = .82; SD = .27$).

**Demographics and controls.** Age: v3903. Gender: v4201. Income: v4104. South versus non-South residence: dummy based on v3104. Homeownership: v685 Children: v4136. Television news use: v3146 (coded to 0 to 1; $M = .66; SD = .37$). Newspaper use: v3148 (coded to 0 to 1; $M = .56; SD = .42$).

1998 Los Angeles County Social Survey

**Racial resentment.** TRYHARDB (if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites), DEMANDB (blacks demand too much from
society), DENYDISB (discrimination against blacks not a serious problem), and
SLAVERY (slavery, discrimination created difficulties for blacks). The items
formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .67; M = .42; SD = .23$).

Political ideology. Based on IDEOFLTR (liberal-moderate-conservative
filter), IDEOSTRL (strength of liberalism), IDEOSTRC (strength of conser-
vatism), and IDEOLEAN (moderate, lean liberal or conservative) ($M = .46;
SD = .32$).

Moral breakdown attributions. NOMORALS and NOFAMILY ($\alpha = .63;
M = .83; SD = .20$).

Party identification. Based on PIDFILTER (Democrat-Independent-
Republican filter), PIDSTRD (strength of Democratic identification), PIDSTRR
(strength of Republican identification), and PIDLEAN (independent, lean
Democratic or Republican). ($M = .48; SD = .36$).

Education. Based on EDUCDEGR (highest degree completed) and
EDUCGED (completed GED or high school degree).

Perceptions of vulnerability to crime. Based on WALKMILE (is respondent
afraid to walk alone within a one-mile radius of home; 1 = yes, 0 = no),
CRIMEVIC (has respondent been a crime victim in the last 12 months; 1 = yes,
0 = no), and RANDVIO (how serious is the problem of random street violence;
not very serious = 0, somewhat serious = .5, very serious = 1).

Criminal justice attitudes. Based on DEATHPEN (agree/disagree with the use
of capital punishment as a crime remedy) and THRSTRKS (agree/disagree with
“three strikes” laws as a crime remedy). The items were scaled ($\alpha = .68; M = .65;
SD = .30$).

Demographics and controls. Age: Constructed from YEARBORN. Gender:
SEX. Income: INCOME. Homeownership: OWNRENT. Local television news
use: LOCLNEWS (again recoded to run from 0 to 1; $M = .71; SD = .38$).

1991 National Race and Politics Study

Blacks not law-abiding. Introduced with “Now I’ll read a few words that
people sometimes use to describe blacks. Of course, no word fits absolutely every-
body, but, as I read each one, please tell me using a number from 0 to 10 how
well you think it describes blacks as a group. If you think it’s a VERY GOOD
description of most blacks, give it a 10. If you feel a word is a VERY INACCU-
RATE description of most blacks, give it a 0.” Item: “How about LAW-
ABIDING?” (item S1).

Education. Based on EDUC.

Social desirability. Items M5A to M5J.

Demographics and controls. Age: AGE. Gender: SEX. Income: ISUM. South
versus non-South residence: REGION. Homeownership: DWEL.
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