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This paper will deal with two current issues in the study of racial attitudes. Both have come to be summarized in brief phrases, the first by the term "white racism," the second by the term "black separatism." The paper attempts to gain some perspective in interpreting the two phrases, looking more closely at what both phrases mean when attempts are made to operationalize them and gather survey interview data from the urban American public in 1968.

In both cases, time constitutes a crucial dimension. With regard to what is called "white racism," some important trend data are available, and together with current studies the trend results force a reexamination and suggest a conceptual reinterpretation of the phrase. In the case of what is called "black separatism," the emphasis must be not on the past but on projecting present results to the future. Only a little data are available on this, and I will in the present talk give the second issue somewhat less attention.

The phrase "white racism" used in the 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders has had a considerable and controversial impact on public discussion. The Commission wrote:

...the most fundamental cause of the 1967 urban disorders is the racial attitude and behavior of white Americans toward black Americans....White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II. (Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, p. 5)

To many black and some white Americans these words were a welcome focus on something that badly needs saying. To others the phrase "white racism" seemed overdrawn and unnecessarily loaded as a way of characterizing much of white opinion today. Social scientists are increasingly asked to evaluate the merits of the two sides of the argument, and indeed to declare whether most Americans are or are not "racists."

The findings to be reported here, however, indicate that some of the heated discussion over the issue is really irrelevant to the way the general public actually thinks about race. For the debate takes for granted the assumption of determinism common to almost all science, and

revolves around which type of determinism the public holds. But much of the American public, it will be shown, does not accept or even consider this basic assumption at all. Blithely ignoring the logic of causal inquiry, much of the public operates on a premise of "free will," at least when thinking about Negro and white differences in status and achievement.

The phrase "white racism" is nowhere defined in the National Commission Report. But the term "racism" is generally taken to refer to the belief that there are clearly distinguishable human races; that these races differ not only in superficial physical characteristics, but also innately in important psychological traits; and finally that the differences are such that one race (almost always one's own) can be said to be superior to another.¹ More simply, "white racism" is the belief that white people are inherently superior to Negroes in significant ways, but that the reverse is not true.

Questions that can be said to tap "white racism" have been asked from time to time in national surveys over the past twenty-five years. The major finding of these surveys has been a dramatic decrease in beliefs in white racial superiority over Negroes. The most relevant and consistently measured topic has been white beliefs about racial differences in intelligence. In 1942 a National Opinion Research Center survey asked respondents: "In general, do you think Negroes are as intelligent as white people--that is, can they learn just as well if they are given the same education?" Only 42 percent of a national sample of white Americans said they believed Negroes to have the same intelligence as whites. Later surveys, however, showed a continuing rise in the belief in equal intelligence, so that by 1956, 78 percent of an NORC national sample answered the same question in the affirmative. The percentage seemed to stabilize at that point and more recent surveys have continued to show that about four out of five white Americans reject the notion that white people are born with higher mental capacity than Negroes.²

The comparatively rapid decrease in "racist" beliefs in this key area, the relatively small proportion of people who still hold such beliefs, and the fact that the hold-outs tend to come disproportionately from the old South, all suggest that racism--at least in the more open forms that can be measured in surveys--is a minor and disappearing phenomenon in this country. This, of course, implies little about the disappearance of discrimination or hostility toward Negroes or about other aspects of inequality in America. It merely indicates that attempts to buttress anti-Negro feelings with beliefs about biological racial

inferiority no longer carry much weight with the white American public.

It is natural for social scientists viewing these trends to see them as indicative not only of the disappearance of "racist" beliefs, but also as an equally reliable sign of the acceptance by a growing proportion of the white population of one or more of the available contemporary environmental explanations of the Negro's disadvantaged status and achievement in America. It is easy to do this because this is just what has happened in social science itself. The type of deterministic assumptions that played such a large role in American social science in the early part of the century--beliefs in psychogenetic racial differences--has gradually been replaced over the last decades by explanations geared to environmental determinism. Some of these environmental explanations focus on what has been most obvious in the traditional American racial structure: segregation, discrimination, and the domination of Negroes by white power. More and more, social scientists have also looked to cultural and culturally induced psychological phenomena, such as the burden that lower class or rural background places on ability to compete for urban middle class rewards; the assumed disruptive effects of family instability and lack of successful male models; the disabling experience of growing up as a minority in a society where one's ethnic identity is both permanently fixed and negatively evaluated by a large part of the majority. Whatever the particular environmental theory, however, the important point is that an explanatory social science must look for causal variables that are independent of, yet can be said to produce, the "facts" that need explaining.

The problem is that the projection on to the general public of the logic of science leads to paradoxical results. For it is clear that although most of the American public reject "racist" beliefs, they do not emphasize environmental explanations of racial differences with the same fervor as do social scientists. The following question (Table 1) was asked in early 1968 of a probability sample of 2,584 white Americans in 15 major American cities.³ The results show that more than half the sample believe that the inferior economic and educational status of Negroes is due mainly to Negroes themselves. Only 19 percent place the blame mainly on discrimination.⁴ It is interesting to note that 4 percent of the sample denied the initial assertion of the question, claiming that in their city Negroes have jobs, education, and housing equal to or better than that of whites. This serves as another indication of how misleading it is for social scientists to assume knowledge and acceptance by the general public of social science findings--in this case descriptive findings rather than explanatory ones.

The term discrimination was used here as a simple way of representing clear environmental explanations, but it may have failed to provide sufficient opportunity for other environmental views, such as stress on Negro lower class

Table 1

"On the average, Negroes in this city have worse jobs, education, and housing than white people. Do you think this is due mainly to Negroes having been discriminated against, or mainly due to something about Negroes themselves?"

	Percents
Mainly due to discrimination	19
Mainly due to Negroes themselves	54
A mixture of both	19
Denied Negroes have worse jobs, education, and housing--refused question	4
Don't know	4
	100
	(2,584)

background. However, a follow-up question (discussed further below) encouraged respondents to explain their ideas in their own words. Another 18 percent gave some sort of apparent environmental explanation, the major variant of which was mention of lower education on the part of Negroes. Of course, lower education by Negroes was already built into the question as part of the problem to be explained, and it may well be that many of the respondents giving this answer would attribute the educational deficiencies to Negroes themselves rather than to lack of opportunities. Still, making the maximum assumption of environmental emphasis here, and adding the 19 percent who mentioned discrimination explicitly, we find only some 37 percent of the sample attributing Negro disadvantage to causes outside Negroes themselves. More than half the sample place the responsibility for Negro disadvantage mainly or entirely on Negroes.

The results reported in Table 1 appear at first to contradict the trends reviewed earlier which showed a sharp drop in the tendency to attribute Negro lack of achievement to racial inferiority in intelligence. If Negro problems are attributed mainly to "something about Negroes themselves," does not this imply a "racist" explanation? The answer may be "yes" to the scientific determinist, but it is not necessarily yes to the general public.

The situation is considerably clarified by follow-up questions which we asked of the 73 percent of the sample that attributed lower Negro achievement to Negroes themselves or to a mixture of Negroes themselves and discrimination. We inquired first, "What is it about Negroes themselves that makes them have worse jobs, education, and housing?", and recorded the responses verbatim. No matter what the answer, we then asked: "Do you think Negroes are just born that way and can't be changed, or that changes in the Negro are possible?" Skipping over the free answer question for the moment, we found to our surprise that whatever the faults Negroes were seen as

having, only 8 percent of the respondents saw these limitations as inborn and unchangeable, while 88 percent believed "changes in the Negro are possible." (The remaining 4 percent answered don't know.)

We thus arrive at a situation where we find that a considerable portion of the white urban population believes that the source of Negro hardships lies within Negroes themselves, but deny that these sources are inborn and unchangeable. The white public appears simultaneously to accept and to reject "racist" beliefs.

The resolution of the paradox is suggested by the free answers to the question: "What is it about Negroes themselves that makes them have worse jobs, education, and housing?" These answers were coded into the most meaningful categories inherent in the data, and the results are shown in Table 2. Only 8 percent of those asked the question speak in terms that imply or strongly suggest biological or genetic differences between Negroes and whites, and the number mentioning low intelligence as such is even smaller. This certainly does not contradict the NORC trend data presented earlier, but only accentuates it. Answers that lean in an environmental direction are given by a quarter of the sample, as noted earlier. By far the largest category of response, however, does not point in either a genetic or an environmental direction, but is best termed "lack of motivation"; 47 percent of those attributing Negro problems to Negroes themselves give such a response clearly, and another 10 percent offer related responses having much the same implication. Some examples from the interviews are as follows:

"Well, they don't try to better themselves. I've come up through the ranks. I've worked at just about everything. And now I'm at a job where I'm happy and just about making top money. And they can do the same. Get out and look."

"They have the same advantages the whites have but don't use them. They quit school. They quit work."

"They pity themselves too much. We have Negro friends from the service, one is a hard worker and he has made something of himself. Many don't try to better themselves."

The proportion of responses like these to the proportion of responses focusing on intellectual or other types of lack of capacity is on the order of seven to one.

We now have three interlocking clues to what the majority of white Americans who are critical of Negroes see to be the main cause of disadvantaged black status in the United States. First, the cause is perceived to lie mainly within Negroes themselves, rather than coming from external constraints imposed by American social structure or by the prejudice of white Americans.

Second, this interior cause is seen as a matter of motivation or will, not as a matter of capacity or ability. And third, it is not seen as either immutable or ineluctable, but rather as something that can readily be changed.

Changed by whom? For the white general public, the implicit answer is: by individual Negroes themselves! If that seems hard for the reader to fathom, it is only because the reader (like the writer) is a confirmed determinist, at least on race. But a great many Americans apparently are not. What they evidently believe in is a naive form of free will. Negroes can get ahead at any time, so the public thinks, simply by setting their sights higher and putting their shoulders to the wheel. The religious aspects of free will are rarely mentioned, to be sure, but free will is what the general public takes to be an explanation of how individual men and entire ethnic groups can, do, and should achieve success in America. Table 2

Explanations of What It is "About Negroes" that Leads to Their Disadvantaged Status (Asked only of those replying "mainly Negroes themselves" or "mixture" to the question in Table 1)

	<u>Percents</u>
Responses that suggest genetic explanations of Negro disadvantage (e.g., "low mental ability," "low morals")	8
Responses that suggest environmental explanations (other than discrimination) of Negro disadvantage (e.g., "lack of education," "poverty cycle")	25
Responses that suggest lack of motivation as explanation of Negro disadvantage--no indication of genetic or environmental cause. (See text for examples)	57
Don't know, Not ascertained*	11
	100
	(1,886)

* The majority of these "not ascertained" responses were from persons who had answered "mixture" to the first question and who then answered the follow-up by discussing discrimination rather than what it is about Negroes themselves. This was not an answer to the question and is here treated as "not ascertained."

There is really nothing surprising in this public commitment to free will. It must in some form be built into every society, since elders and rulers usually feel it necessary to impress upon children and citizens the responsibility of the latter for their own actions. It may be that a person fails to live up to an important social norm only because of the way he was brought up or only because of the way his endocrine system

functions; yet others in the society will not wish him to attribute his deviant behavior too easily to such causes. They will want him to hold himself responsible for his actions and to believe that he can change if he wishes to and tries hard enough.

Beyond this universal social need to hold individuals responsible for their actions, in America the emphasis on free will has an additional and very powerful cultural source in the belief that each immigrant group has started at the bottom and has proceeded by ambition and effort to work its way toward the top. Few things are more celebrated in our society. The second, third, or n-th generation descendent of immigrants is usually ready to recount vivid tales of ancestral initiative and industry. Moreover, told that Negroes have come from unskilled backgrounds, lack capital and connections, face prejudice and discrimination, many a white American will assure the teller this was all true of his own parents as well, or of his grandparents, or of at least an uncle or two. He will point out that despite tremendous obstacles his forebearers succeeded in America, and that that is exactly why they now have their house in the suburbs, their children in college, and the respect of their neighbors. He will assure the listener that Negroes can do as much at any point if only they exert the effort.

Such a reply will be deeply dissatisfying to the sophisticated social scientist. Even if he accepts motivation as somehow a major problem for Negroes, he will want to investigate why there is this motivational difference between black Americans and white Americans. He may also be so astonished at the apparent naivete of general opinion that he formulates more survey questions for the public. By pushing a good deal he may force some respondents to assert a genetic-like explanation, others to opt for a family structure explanation ("I guess it's the way their mothers and fathers brought them up"), and so forth. Yet these responses to probes will be given mainly to satisfy the pressure of the interviewer, not because the average respondent himself feels an explanation which assumes that human beings have "free will" leaves anything to be desired.

Putting together the results we have reviewed, it becomes clear that much of the public not only does not think in scientific terms about race; it does not even think in pseudo-scientific terms. The general public does not look for deeper causes of Negro disadvantage because it sees these disadvantages as easily ended at any time by the very people suffering from them. Arguments over types of determinism are really irrelevant to this substantial part of public opinion, for it feels quite comfortable in thinking about race in the same simple free will terms that it uses in thinking about individuals: those who really want to get ahead can do so.

Turning to the issue of "black separatism," the results of our survey in 15 cities--in this case the sample consists of 2,814 interviews with

Negroes--also challenge the applicability of the phrase. A clear-cut finding from our study is that the loud and often eloquent talk of some black separatist leaders is not very representative of the general Negro population in these 15 cities. Questions intended to tap total rejection of white society produce rejecting answers by only five to ten percent of the black sample. Nor is this simply a negative finding: questions on residential choice indicate that about 85 percent of the Negro population in these 15 cities have a positive preference for a mixed neighborhood or else claim that the race of their neighbors makes no difference to them one way or the other. When we focus on more restricted and currently very heated issues such as black control of schools and stores in black ghetto neighborhoods, we continue to find that the overwhelming majority of Negro respondents are opposed to the introduction of racial criteria into decision making. Most Negroes consistently apply principles of non-discrimination in these areas just as they do in matters where it is more obviously to their advantage. The proportion favoring black self-rule is, to be sure, a little higher on these questions, but it still constitutes at most 15 percent of the population.

Now all these percentages are very small. In an election poll or in a survey dealing with legislation before Congress, a candidate or an issue with so little support as black separatism has at present, would not expect to get very far. It is certainly useful to indicate this clearly. But at the same time, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that a focus on the 80 percent or 90 percent of the population that holds to the goals of integration is to miss something very important in the current and future dynamics of race in America. Therefore, we have tried to give more emphasis to what must be called the deviant cases in this area.

One simple way to do this is to translate sample percentages into population numbers. We estimate the Negro population in the fifteen cities to have been about 3,330,100 in early 1968. Thus when we speak of nearly ten percent of the black population rejecting white American society, we are speaking of nearly a quarter of a million individuals. This is a large number of disenchanted people, and the fact that it is concentrated in ghetto areas probably accentuates its influence by promoting communication and association among such individuals and by providing them with easy access to just the audience they wish to reach. Thus even 10 percent cannot be discounted if we are interested in predicting the future course of events, rather than in simply describing the present.

We feel fairly certain that this minority within a minority is growing, but at present we have no adequate change data to check this. It is possible, though hazardous, to use age as an indirect measure of change. If we do this we find a clear monotonic age trend in the data, with the youngest cohort showing the most change. Our 16 to 19 age category registers generally about 10 percent higher in separatist beliefs of

almost all kinds than the sample average. Presumably the higher rate of separatism among the young indicates ongoing change and one can attempt to extrapolate the age curve to future cohorts. The assumptions become so shaky that we have not attempted to do this in any systematic fashion. Moreover, we must admit that the age differences are not as great as we had anticipated, and only extreme assumptions of recent acceleration lead to a projection from our data of rapid change toward separatism by even the entire younger generation of Negroes, let alone the Negro population as a whole.

There is one other finding of a purely negative sort that has led us to speculate about the future importance of the separatist subsample. Separatist responses do not show much association with common indicators of socio-economic status. While this makes their antecedents more difficult to disentangle, the fact that both high and low educated persons are well represented among separatist thinkers suggests two consequences. First, it means that this is not a movement only of the lower class, but that it can provide from its own ranks an educated elite for leadership and for the development of ideology. But second, if the adherents came only from the upper SES levels they might well be too detached from the Negro masses to have much effect, becoming simply a new intellectual class or the kind of bourgeoisie that have run most large Negro organizations. The lack of relation to SES indicates that the movement--if one can call it that--has appeal and roots along the entire economic and educational ladder.

We are thus left with a feeling that black separatism has a future, even though its present is not very striking. This seems to be an area where the survey analyst must put together his time-bound data and his sense of what is happening to change the very source of his data. Rather than use the data only to emphasize the extent to which popular views of change are exaggerated, modesty impels one to qualify results to take account of emerging change that is indeed not yet apparent to the eye of the survey analyst.

REFERENCES

- ¹ A typical dictionary definition is found in The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 1967, p. 1184: "a belief that human races have distinctive character that determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others."
- A recent definition offered by a sociologist writing on the topic is even more explicit: "Racism is any set of beliefs that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups are intrinsically associated with the presence or the absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics, hence that such differences are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups socially defined as races." Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967.
- ² These figures are reported in Mildred A. Schwartz, Trends in White Attitudes Toward Negroes, Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 1967.
- ³ This and related questions and data reported below are from a study of "Racial Attitudes in Fifteen American Cities," directed by Angus Campbell and Howard Schuman. A preliminary report of the study appears in Supplemental Studies for the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1968. The samples discussed here are of the white population, ages 16-69, in the combined 15 cities. The cities are: Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Gary, Milwaukee, Newark, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, St. Louis, Washington. Results from two suburban areas (around Cleveland and Detroit) are essentially the same.
- ⁴ Somewhat similar results are reported from a recent Gallup Opinion Survey with a national sample. The Gallup question reads: "Who do you think is more to blame for the present conditions in which Negroes find themselves--white people, or Negroes themselves?" Only 23 percent of the white population blamed "itself"; 58 percent blamed "Negroes themselves"; and 23 percent had no opinion. Gallup Opinion Index, July 1968.