

Chapter 8

In Their Own Words: Citizens' Explanations of Inequality between the Races

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Racial inequality is generally acknowledged to be a central issue in modern American political life. While progress in removing barriers to equality between the races cannot be denied, there are still great areas of inequality. Policy proposals, as prospective solutions to problems about which the government should concern itself, carry implicit assumptions about how the problem came about. Assumptions about the cause of a problem define the range of response options considered (Snyder and Paige 1958, Tversky and Kahneman 1974), and, indeed, the suitability of any government intervention (Schattschneider 1960). Thus, as Sniderman and Piazza argue in Chapter 2, asking respondents why “the average black American is worse off than the average white” provides an opportunity to explore public perceptions of causality in a way which can shed further light on opinion about a whole range of racial issues.

The National Race and Politics Study provided respondents with the opportunity to explain the reasons for racial inequality in their own words. In the following pages these unstructured open-ended responses are explored in depth. The goal here is twofold: first, to provide a sense of the variety and flavor of citizens' explanations for racial inequality, and, second, to examine the role of causal attributions for racial inequality in predicting policy and other racial attitudes.¹

Attributions and Inequality

Causal attribution is widely regarded as the building block of cognitive organization—the means by which individuals “make sense” out of the stimuli that are continually bombarding them from gross reality. To ask respondents to make an attribution is to ask them to summarize their understanding of how this particular part of reality functions (Heider 1958, Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky 1982, Nisbett and Ross 1980). A considerable tradition in the study of racial attitudes is also based upon the central notion of causal attribution (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1979, Sniderman with Hagen 1984, Sigelman and Welch 1991, Gilens 1995).

The “fundamental attribution error” is the underestimation of the contextual, or situational, factors in explaining one's own behavior, and the overestimation of individual dispositional factors in explaining the behavior of others (Heider 1944). In the American culture, this general human tendency is reinforced by the high value placed on individualism and self-reliance (Sniderman and Brody 1977, Hochschild 1981, Kluegel and Smith 1986, Feldman 1982). According to Allport, the tendency “. . . to regard causation as something people are responsible for . . . predisposes us to prejudice. While in reality our frustrations and ills are due

to impersonal causes . . .” (Allport 1954, 170).

In applying this perspective to racial inequality in an earlier study, Sniderman and Hagen (1985) pointed to an ethic of self-reliance coupled with a moralistic style of thought. It is this intersection, characterized most particularly by the moralistic “propensity to convert wrongs into wrongdoing” (Sniderman 1985, 21), which most closely approximates Allport’s (1954) definition of prejudice. If inequality is the outcome of failures in effort or will, then it is hardly up to “the taxpayer” to redress the imbalance. The internal, or dispositional, attribution relieves society of responsibility, while reaffirming the basic justice of the system (Schlozman and Verba 1979, Kluegel 1990). Further, in Allport’s (1954) theory, rather than denying the value of equality, people project a norm violation onto the outgroup. Thus, punitive moralism is warranted. Subsequently, Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991) illustrated that the “desert heuristic” played a central and reciprocal role in attitude toward policies intended to promote racial equality. “Attributions for racial inequality provide people with a simple easy-to-execute heuristic for evaluating appeals for assistance.” (Sniderman, et al. 1991, 87). A “test” is applied and, if the answer is unambiguous, the inference is compelling. Adopting the terms of Reasoning and Choice, the desert heuristic is a “quasi-ideology” a “scripted,” or “pre-packaged” attribution “drawing on stereotypes about the group in question and expressing widely shared beliefs about the causes of success or failure.” (Sniderman et al. 1991, 87).

This theme has also been pursued at length by Sigelman and Welch (1991) in their examination of blacks’ attitudes about inequality. They found, for example, black/white differences about the impact of discrimination (an external, or situational, attribution) to be most pronounced and consistent over time. Black/white attitudes about the impact of internal, or dispositional, factors like “willpower” were more similar to each other. Majorities of both races were found willing to agree that while “discrimination has unfairly held down blacks, [but] many of the problems which blacks in this country have today are brought on by blacks themselves” (Sigelman and Welch 1991, 91). Kluegel and Smith (1986) pointed to a similar mix of “structuralist” and “individualist” explanations.

Recently Gilens (1995b) identified blaming blacks for racial inequality as a major component in white racial attitudes. His more detailed analysis suggested that whites’ racial attitudes play an over riding role in determining attitudes about welfare policy generally. Further, “even with a wide range of demographic and attitudinal controls, support for these [direct assistance] programs is strongly related to respondents’ attribution of blame for racial inequality.” (Gilens 1995, 108-109) Gilens stressed, as did Wright (1976), that the significance of this relationship lies in the fact that attitudes about blacks’ deservingness drive preferences for a policy that is not targeted toward blacks explicitly, and which, as a matter of fact, benefits more white native-born Americans than it does blacks.²

The most sophisticated research on causal explanations of racial inequality has been content controlled either by using multi-item scales (Sniderman and Hagen 1985, Sniderman et al. 1991, Sigelman and Welch 1991) or by experimental manipulation (Sniderman et al. 1991, 1996, Sniderman and Piazza 1993). These various efforts have yielded a good deal of insight about inequality, but they have also left some issues unresolved. Sigelman and Welch (1991) point out that Heider's theoretical assumption of unidimensionality has not been born out by the empirical evidence. They found that dispositional and situational explanations form separate dimensions that are not highly negatively correlated. Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991) were satisfied that principal components analysis of six items yielded a single strong dimension, although Sniderman (with Hagen 1984) has expressed objections to unidimensionality at a theoretical level.

The American National Election Studies (see Kinder and Sanders 1996) the General Social Survey (see Schuman, Steeh and Bobo 1985), opinion polls sponsored by the media, and the Bay Area Study employed by Sniderman and Hagen (1984), carry sets of agree/disagree items designed to capture separate components of these explanations for inequality. Citizens can, and do, agree with several of the explanations in ways which may appear confused or inconsistent. On the other hand, recognizing that a problem can have multiple causes can be seen as a sign of realistic sophistication, or cognitive complexity (Tetlock 1984). Sigelman and Welch's (1991) finding that a majority of both blacks and whites agreed with an ABC News/Washington Post item which mentions both discrimination and lack of effort points to a different kind of complexity.

The difficulty is that all of the explanations for racial inequality provided to survey respondents in public opinion polls are plausible, or they would not have been included in the survey to begin with. Most of the resultant patterns of responses are, likewise, plausible. Ultimately, we know a good deal about "what goes with what" in the minds of the survey analysts, but we do not know what kinds of reasons respondents might put together on their own. The modern theory of the survey opinion (Zaller and Feldman 1992) suggests that citizens will construct their explanations from a distribution of considerations (Feldman 1995). The range of the distribution of considerations will be constrained both by factors affecting the individual and factors affecting the circumstances under which the explanations are produced (Sniderman et al. 1993, Lodge 1995).

Providing respondents with sets of agree/disagree items exerts maximum control over the circumstantial factors affecting the response. As Ginsberg (1986) points out, respondents may "strongly agree" with plausibly phrased statements that they might not think of by themselves. Objections to the question wording, reservations, and amendments offered by respondents are generally noted by interviewers,

but ignored by researchers. An unstructured format provides respondents greater opportunity to express more individualized (idiosyncratic) views. The strategy employed in this exercise is deliberately “in-between.” It takes advantage of word processing technology to store and review citizens verbal responses to an open-ended question. In so doing it seeks to improve upon traditional depth interviews of small nonprobability samples (e.g., Lane 1963; Hochschild 1981, 1995) by yielding data that are generalizable and compatible with quantitative analysis, but still preserve the richness of natural language with all its attendant ambiguities.³

Posing the Question

The stimulus question read as follows:

Statistics show that the average black person in America is worse off than the average white person. What do you suppose caused this difference? ((Just tell me in your own words.))⁴

The question occurred about a third of the way through a long telephone interview about race relations, which should insure that respondents were well “warmed up” by the time the open-ended question was posed, and that any racial schema they possessed should have been fully accessed (see Fiske and Taylor 1982, Lau and Sears 1986, Lodge and McGraw 1995).⁵

The range of explanations for racial inequality generally mirrors the complexity of issues concerning race in America. The complex reality of racial issues today necessarily leads to confusion and ambivalence, even exasperation, on the part of the public (Hochschild 1981, 1995). Value conflict is also evident, since sympathy toward African Americans may coexist with conflicting preferences about the appropriate means of distributing economic value in society (Sniderman and Piazza 1993, Hochschild 1981).

The responses also provide examples of what Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991) refer to as “scripted attributions.” These “pre-packaged” explanations frequently mimic political rhetoric at the elite level. Citizens may absorb these scripts⁶ and reproduce them faithfully, or reorder them, or mix and match to arrive at their own unique construction, or misunderstand them entirely. However, when asked to explain apparent racial inequality in American society, respondents clearly do not “start from scratch.” Nor do they uniformly parrot the last consideration they were asked about in the survey. Some respondents clearly borrowed from the framing of earlier questions, but they do not seem to do so systematically. And they go well beyond this in their efforts to explain the causes of racial inequality to some stranger on the phone.

Coding Attributions

When citizens are asked to explain the reasons for inequality between white and African Americans, most of them are quite willing to construct an answer. For the most part, they accept that “the average black

person in America is worse off than the average white person” is a realistic depiction of racial inequality. Seventy-four white respondents (4% of all whites) did reject the premise of the question, along with three black respondents. Another five percent of whites and nearly ten percent of African Americans quit the effort with a “don’t know.” But by and large the survey respondents made a real effort to come to grips with this complex and enduring problem. More than ninety percent of white respondents provided some verbal explanation. This is a high level of opinionation even compared to standard fixed format questions (see for example Sniderman and Hagen 1984), and substantially higher than open-ended evaluations of the candidates and parties in the American National Election Studies.

Verbatim responses were separated from the other NRPS data and coded in isolation to prevent knowledge of demographic or other attitudinal characteristics of the respondent from contaminating the judgment. All open-ended responses were classified into one of four categories. Two of these were for attributions which could be unambiguously assigned. Unqualified EXTERNAL responses are those which made reference to situational, structural, circumstantial or environmental reasons for inequality. Unqualified INTERNAL responses are those which place the blame for inequality on volitional or dispositional factors internal to individuals, or to the culture of black Americans.

Two mixed categories were provided for responses which expressed some degree of ambivalence. Ambivalent responses are by their nature ambiguous, but in order to avoid a catchall middle category the coder was required to judge whether the internal or external attribution predominated. In EXTERNAL/internal (E/i) responses, references to situational factors predominated, but some kind of internal attribution was also mentioned. INTERNAL /external (I/e) responses are those in which the dispositional elements predominated, but reference was also made to systemic elements like prejudice or discrimination. If no other means was available to decide which attribution predominated, the response was coded according to first mention.⁷

Table 8.1 provides a breakdown of the content of the attribution coding of explanations for racial inequality for both white and black respondents. While the rest of the analysis is restricted to whites only, taking a look at the way African Americans explain inequality between the races provides one kind of baseline from which we can interpret the explanations offered by whites.⁸ The lack of a black over-sample means that the range of error around estimates for blacks is much larger than that for whites (roughly $\pm 8\%$ for blacks versus $\pm 3\%$ for whites).

** Table 8.1 goes about here. **

While just a little less than a majority of whites offered unqualified external attributions, a solid majority of blacks located the reasons for racial inequality in societal prejudice and historic discrimination.

African American respondents were by no means unwilling to identify dispositional elements that contributed to racial inequality. Roughly twenty-five percent of black respondents made some mention of individual failings in effort or character which contributed to the disadvantaged position of African Americans in modern society, including twelve percent who offered internal attributions only.

By comparison, however, white respondents were much more likely to attribute inequality between the races to the individual failings of black people. Thirty-two percent of whites made at least some internal attribution, and nearly twenty percent offered exclusively dispositional explanations for the continuing inequality between the races. Differences between blacks' and whites' propensities to make unqualified external attributions for the causes of racial inequality are large enough to be considered statistically significant by any reasonable criteria. Racial differences in propensity toward unqualified internal attributions are not statistically significant according to normal conservative criteria (i.e., the confidence intervals around the estimates for blacks and whites overlap).

The Content of Attributions for Racial Inequality

The purpose of this exercise was not to find a more complicated, and admittedly less reliable, way of producing a measure of citizens' attributions for the causes of racial inequality. Causal attributions for racial inequality are theoretically important predictors of prejudice,⁹ and have been found to exert a good deal of explanatory influence on other racial attitudes. The primary purpose of this part of the NRPS enterprise was to explore citizens' explanations for racial inequality in their own words. The causal attribution coding scheme used here can be thought of as a device for organizing the verbatim data which follows logically from the question wordings. It also reflects an important dimension of content, but not the only one that might be considered relevant by other researchers.

The remainder of this chapter illustrates the open-ended comments in depth and then looks briefly at the consequences of causal attributions for attitudes about other policy issues. An important philosophical issue about the nature of open-ended data in survey research underlies the decision to follow a broad general coding strategy and to quote verbatim responses at length. It is simply that the richness of what randomly interviewed members of the public tell us in their own words has, for the most part, been lost in the abstraction process involved in rendering the data in numeric form. A decent respect for our respondents' efforts to explain their views requires that researchers be willing to read what the respondents actually tell us. The process of reading what the respondents say may also provide some insights about what their fixed-format responses mean, and may serve as a useful corrective to the reification of concepts in question wording.

Another “Dog that Didn’t Bark”

One particular element among the explanations for racial inequality commonly offered in fixed format items simply doesn’t occur when respondents are asked to explain the reasons for racial inequality in their own words. This is the “biological inferiority” thesis. As a number of researchers who have examined trends in racial attitudes have pointed out (e.g., Schuman, Steeh and Bobo 1985, Sniderman and Piazza 1993, Kinder and Sanders 1996), explanations for blacks’ inequality that are based on notions of the inherent inferiority of the black race seem to have died out. Some respondents may still be cued by question wording to agree with statements ascribing racial inequality to innate or biological origins, but they don’t seem to provide such explanations on their own.

The overall lack of biological explanations for racial inequality is important to note for two reasons. First, it is indicative of progress in white Americans’ attitudes about African Americans. Second, it is an important indication that when ideas are not “scripted” by intellectual and political elites they do not emerge from the mass public. It is, of course, possible that the biological inferiority explanation was avoided by respondents in the NPRS because it is deemed socially undesirable, but even this is progress. Some responses did indicate that blacks were judged inferior to whites, but the reasons were not rooted in biology.¹⁰

Unqualified Internal Attributions

Internal attributions are those which locate the causes of racial inequality in the individual dispositions of black people. While unqualified internal attributions were offered by only a fifth of white respondents in the NRPS, they deserve more than a cursory examination. This is because internal attributions constitute rationales for opposing public policy initiatives aimed at redressing inequality because the potential recipients are undeserving. Undeservingness is a logical “stopper.” In this sense it is more powerful than other arguments because once it is made, or agreed with, the implication—opposition to a policy designed to “help”—is unavoidable. To argue someone out of opposition to policies designed to help blacks, when such opposition is based on the perception of undeservingness, it is not enough to offer other reasons for supporting the policy. Instead, it is necessary to go back and change the perception of undeservingness (see Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

In addition to the logical strength of the desert heuristic, it is useful to examine unqualified internal attributions in depth because of Allport’s (1954) thesis that the fundamental attribution error “predisposes us to prejudice.” Racism may not be as much of a problem now as it has been in the past, but it is still an important problem. Not everyone who makes an internal attribution for the causes of racial inequality can be

considered a racist. But the hypothesis that racial hostility and animosity is more likely to be found among individuals who blame blacks for racial inequality is straightforward, and worthy of examination.

The following response, from an older white man living in the mid-Atlantic region who actually called himself a liberal Democrat, is a classic example of the tendency to attribute responsibility for economic disadvantage to lack of individual effort, or lack of disposition toward self-reliance and initiative.

Ah, too lazy to get out and get a job.

((Anything else?)) Well, they're just lazy and they think more of dope and drinking than earning a living. They are all on welfare all the way, in other words.

((Anything else?)) Well in my neighborhood, in my state, all of the state that is, the only issues I can find are that they are too lazy, and welfare takes care of them.

Economic inequality among blacks as a group is attributed to failings of individual character and values. The respondent's hostility is further magnified by the injustice of state support for indolence and criminality.

Blacks are seen as a group to be violating the rules of the game, and taking unfair advantage of the system.

In the following explanation, offered by a seventy-one year old white man who identified as a conservative Republican, the dispositional emphasis is also clear. The negative behavior is willful, a matter of preference, rather than misfortune or disability.

Lack of wanting to do something. They prefer to get by without working. I think anybody can get a job if they try hard enough.

((Anything else?)) Well, I myself work and I feel like anybody can get a job if they want to.

A sixty-two year old white male college graduate responded in a similar fashion:

Lack of ambition to go out and work.

((Anything else?)) No, I think that's what I think. I just feel that a lot of 'em could get a job if they wanted to go do it, rather than requesting a handout.

In each of the preceding cases, the respondents' complete answers have been presented, and these examples are quite typical of the bulk of internal attribution responses. The explanation is unicausal. The stereotype of laziness, a personal attribute, is used to explain the economic disadvantage of blacks in general. Blacks prefer not to work. "Anybody" can get a job.

The tendency to attribute the disadvantage of a group to the personal failings of its members can also be seen in the following response, but the tone is not as punitive:

I think, uh, bad managing, managing your business wrong.

((Can you tell me a little more about that?)) When a black and white man are working on the same job, the white man will manage his money better than the black man.

((Anything else?)) Well, uh, I don't know, its hard, yes hard, your ideas from a long way back. They never really had it.

((Repeat question.)) Now they can't afford it but can get it, can afford a Volkswagen, but will go buy a Cadillac.

((Anything else?)) That's about the size of it, spending money.

Here, the personal failing is not one of ambition, but a lack of understanding, or rejection, of the value of thrift. The moralism is muted, but still apparent. Blacks as individuals do not measure up; they have failed to grasp the fundamentals of the work ethic and the dynamic of capitalism. The respondent, in this case a middle-aged black man from the south who expressed no partisan or ideological identification, offered a vignette of behavior, or a “moral tale,” which includes the presumption that the world is racially unbiased “when a black and white man are working on the same job.”

The following more contextualized explanation features the same themes (poverty, too many children, lack of education) but the implications are much more negative:

Ah, they are worse off than the average one, is that what you're saying? ((Yes.)) I think they have a lack of incentive due to their environment. I think where they are coming from and where they are heading to looks the same to average black.

((Anything else?)) I don't feel that any of it is discrimination any more, not in this area.

((Anything else?)) Well I think it's the old saying the sins of the parents fall on the children.

((Sins?)) I would say it would involve probably use of the welfare system.

((Anything else?)) I don't know, I don't think so. I know some very affluent blacks who send their children to better schools than I send mine to.

A superficial reading of this response from a younger white male high school graduate might suggest an external, or environmental, attribution. There is a sense of historical dysfunction somehow linked to the “welfare system” which deprives blacks of incentives for economic advancement. They have no initiative—“where they are coming from and where they are heading to looks the same.” But, still, it is the individual's failure to take advantage of opportunities that causes the aggregate inequality. Discrimination against African Americans is explicitly dismissed as a cause of the current imbalance of economic outcome. Indeed, there is a mild challenge of the premise of the question—that blacks are “worse off” than whites—obtained by differentiating within the categories of black and white. The fact that there are some “very affluent blacks,” certainly better off than the respondent, argues that economic rewards are not biased by race. The exception is used to further confirm the fairness of the system.

The preceding response, and the one cited directly below, highlight a sense of historic and

intergenerational disjunction. The “sins of the parents” are visited on the children. Not only are children not taken care of, they are produced to take advantage of the welfare system. The “scripts” reproduced by the respondents contain the themes favored by right-wing television commentators and talk show hosts. Differentiation within the category of blacks—“I don’t think all of them are like that”—not only reaffirms the ultimate justice of the distribution, it also serves as a kind of disclaimer of personal prejudice.

Gosh, I don’t know, um, I really don’t. I don’t know just to put it in a few words.

((Just give me some ideas about how you think about it now.)) I think too many want something for nothing, and don’t get out and try to get work.

((Anything else?)) Gosh, not getting enough education. I guess, I honestly think some of the parents some of the lower blacks don’t take care of their children at home and don’t care about where they are half the time, and it just gets out of control. I think a lot of them get babies just to get on welfare.

That’s how it was at one time. I don’t think all of them are like that, I think a lot of them are.

Here laziness is reinforced with the perception of irresponsibility in caring for the young. The myth that women have children to obtain or increase welfare payment is a prominent part of the explanation for blacks being worse off.

Even if a punitive attitude toward the violation of economic norms is not regarded as racist since it can be applied to whites as well as African Americans, it is not comforting to realize that such attitudes are held by a minimum of one out of every five white Americans. And, this twenty percent only counts respondents whose dispositional attributions were unqualified. An additional twenty two percent of white respondents made some internal attribution as part of an ambivalent response. Even the estimate of forty two percent may be low, however, if a social desirability bias depresses respondents’ willingness to blame blacks for the economic disadvantages they suffer.

Unqualified External Attributions

Respondents who make unqualified external attributions explain racial inequality in a fashion which absolves African Americans of responsibility for their disadvantaged status.

Blacks as a group are seen as victims of discrimination and prejudice. These are circumstances over which blacks have no control. The reasons for blacks’ disadvantage may also be attributed to inequity in the economic system, and a lack of opportunity to obtain education and jobs. Just a little under half of all white respondents in the National Race and Politics Survey provided unqualified external attributions.

It is possible that blaming inequality between the races on prejudice, an unjust social economic system, or other factors beyond the control of individual black people might require extra cognitive effort.

First, it is necessary to overcome the fundamental attribution error by seeing inequality as a result of a situation in which blacks find themselves, and which they would change, if they could.¹¹ Making a situational attribution also requires overcoming the prevailing cultural bias in favor of individual initiative and responsibility. It might additionally be said to require a more sophisticated understanding of the quirks of chance, or an ability to put oneself in the other's place. In essence, external attributions might be said to require a "second thought" that considers the situational factors, or the broader course of history.

The following response, offered by a middle aged southern white male with some experience in graduate school who identified as a moderate Democrat, provides a classic example of external attribution.

Why minorities are worse off? How it came about? ((Yes.))

Oh, me, it came about, it's an odd thing in the sense that mm, it is because of the superior feeling of the Caucasian groups from taking over the country from minority groups and slavery. PBS has been carrying a four or five night historical series, Shelby Foote on that. [I'm] reading up on the books themselves, it's very interesting.

((Can you tell me more?)) Feeling of superiority of race and blacks were imported from other nations and felt to be inferior, and felt to be limited. How to say this, limited I don't know in capacities of life. I don't know how to say that, just in general they're an inferior race to be produced for the Caucasian people who were taking over the country. That's not my personal feeling, but you asked why that happened.

((Anything else?)) That summed it up pretty well, from the feeling of superiority, the socioeconomical barriers, no recognition of the individual or the individual mind, the capability or equality of humans.

In this response, blame for racial inequality is clearly attributed to the attitudes and behavior of white people. The respondent specifically disavows such attitudes on his own part. Further, he is able to cite public educational television programming, and the name of a specific historian as his source. Although generally not evident in such detail, this response offers another example of what Sniderman et al. (1991) call a "scripted attribution."

Attribution to the environment, or to a situation beyond the control of individual African Americans, need not sound sophisticated or go into great detail, as the following complete response illustrates.

I have no idea, discrimination.

((Can you tell me more about that?)) The civil war, slavery, the sinful heart of man.

((Anything else?)) No.

This explanation by a white male college graduate clearly locates the cause of disadvantages faced by African

Americans beyond their control. It is longstanding, and seems to have a certain air of inevitability.

The following respondent offers a more contextualized version of the attribution to historical, and apparently inevitable, discrimination.

hmm, slavery. I think it's just history at this point.

((Could you go into that please?)) Well, I just think we're paying for slavery now. All of us, whites and blacks. I don't know what else to say, I just know that, especially in Chicago, its a very bigoted town, but I just think it's what we're paying for.

((Anything else?)) I really think that's the basis of it, if you want to go into present day things, it's so hard to start. It's the families, not that they're not important, I don't know how to tell you. I can only speak for this area, but blacks are thrown into these high rise ghettos, with an invisible wall around them. The family isn't available for the children, it isn't supportive, and the sad part is that a lot of it isn't intentional. The mothers are doing the best that they can do, but they have to work, it's hard.

((Anything else?)) I think that's enough.

This respondent, a thirty-six year old white woman who refused to identify ideologically, and who called herself an independent when asked about party identification, makes her sympathy clear. She not only provides an attribution which relieves the "average black American" of responsibility for racial inequality, but specifically argues against the stereotype of laziness.

In the following response, it also seems quite clear that systemic discrimination is to blame for the economic disadvantage of blacks.

I think prejudice, prejudism.

((Anything else?)) No I just feel that, um, I don't know how to explain that the blacks are put down a lot, they're not given the same opportunity as the whites. The inner city schools don't give them the opportunity that the white kids have. I believe that if you're born in poverty you don't have the same chance, and a lot of the black kids are.

((Can you say anything more about that?)) I just feel that, I think that birth control had a lot to do with it. I think that they just keep having kids, and more kids, and the blacks don't have a chance to break out of their environment.

((Repeated question.)) I just believe it's their poverty. I don't know of any other reason.

((Can you say anything more about poverty specifically?)) I told you they just keep having children, and the younger children keep having children, and I think there should be some kind of birth control.

((Anything else?)) No.

This explanation from a middle-aged white Republican woman who also refused ideological identification is clearly sympathetic, even seemingly anguished over the frustrating inevitability of discrimination and poverty. The respondent does not condemn blacks for their own poverty, but sees a connection between having children and poverty. The repeated reference to “birth control” might carry the implication that African Americans do not exercise proper self-discipline with respect to sexual matters. In this sense, even if sympathetic, the explanation feeds into racial stereotypes. Nonetheless, to be true to the logic of the coding scheme, this must be regarded as an external, or environmental explanation because there is no explicit statement or insinuation that the lack of “birth control” is intentional.

The fact that forty-eight percent of white Americans attribute the lack of material equality between the races exclusively to causes over which neither the black community nor individual African Americans have control may be cause for some optimism that the social value of racial equality has penetrated fairly deeply into the public at large. Fully seventy percent of white respondents in the National Race and Politics Study attributed at least part of the reason for racial inequality to circumstances which could not be held to be the fault of blacks. This figure is very likely a maximum, and may well be inflated by social desirability bias.

Attributions and Ambivalence

Of course, not all respondents in the National Race and Politics Survey offered clear cut dispositional or environmental attributions. In some cases, respondents were willing to talk out contending considerations. The following response is typical of the ambivalence expressed in attempting to explain the reasons for the disparate circumstances of black and white Americans.

Well, I think, ah, they could be just about the same as the other people if they buckle down and try to get a job.

((Anything else?)) Well, it's, ah, let's see, their environment, and, you know, the education.

((How did this come about in the first place?)) I don't think they were, it's not that they didn't want to go. It's just that they were so dog gone discriminated against. They didn't go to school just so that they wouldn't get in conflict, a fight, you know.

((Anything Else?)) No.

Several strands of explanation are apparent even in this relatively compact response. Initially the respondent, a middle-aged Hispanic man who identified as a Republican, attributes the inequality to individual differences in efforts, implying a certain degree of trust in the fairness of the economic outcome. On probing, lack of education is identified as an additional cause of racial inequality. But this is followed with an acknowledgment of systemic prejudice, perhaps evoking images of school integration confrontations of the

1950s, where blacks who attempted to get an equal education faced the organized hostility of whites.

The implications of these alternative attributions for public policy solutions are quite different. According to the dominant ideology of individualism, if the disparity results from lack of individual effort, it is to be expected and tolerated (Kluegel and Smith 1986). It can be regarded as a just outcome—consistent with the work ethic. Even more, it is possible to regard the disadvantaged group, “itself,” as responsible for the outcome through willful violations of the accepted norms.

If, on the other hand, the inequality results from forces that are outside the control of individual black people, or because of injustice visited on African Americans as a group, then some degree of government intervention to redress the imbalance might be acceptable. In fact, many respondents acknowledged historic discrimination and inequality, but some also took pains to indicate that the situation has been subsequently rectified.¹² This kind of response makes up the bulk of the mixed attributions category.

The following respondent, a twenty-eight year old white female college graduate from the south with no partisan or ideological identification, also compared the situation today to that of the past. But she is less forgiving in her ambivalence:

I think if they had more education they could get better jobs and that would help.

((Why can't they get more education?)) Um, well, the parental support, they don't get it because the parents don't have the educational background to help the children. So if they could upgrade themselves, the parents that is, then the parents could help the children further themselves.

((Anything else?)) Some are not as ambitious as others, some find it easier to go through the system and have it handed to them.

((How do you mean they aren't ambitious?)) Um, they are satisfied with the government giving them a check and they could spend it on drugs, alcohol and the children then have to do without.

((Anything else?)) Maybe substance abuse.

((Can you tell me more about that?)) Well, it's just that they feel put down so their self-esteem is low and that will make them feel better, and that just doesn't work.

((Anything else?)) I think that's about it nowadays.

((Were things different in the past?)) In the past it would have been discrimination, but now it's not much of an issue, and it's been blown up to more than what it should be.

Several familiar themes reappear in this response. There is the linking of dependence on government “handouts” with dependence on drugs and alcohol abuse. There is the notion of intergenerational dysfunction; parents may have been deprived of education due to past discrimination, but they exacerbate the problem for their children by irresponsible behavior. Even this weakness is, to some extent, understandable

because of past damage to self-esteem, but it is nonetheless a failing. Thus, while this respondent is not without sympathy, ultimately greater self-worth on the part of individual blacks will solve the inequality problem. Systemic discrimination is acknowledged, but again explicitly dismissed as a problem in the current era.

A thirty-seven year old white woman from the south explained in a similar vein:

Educational difference. ((Anything else?)) poverty, well, birth control, welfare all of that adds to it.

They haven't the education [or] knowledge to exercise birth control. Too many children some in poverty, and then on welfare, and we've paid for this. I don't believe their living styles are as structured. Their morals aren't as strong. ((Anything else?)) That's probably it.

In this case, there is some evidence that the dysfunctional behavior of blacks is not regarded as necessarily willful: "They haven't the education . . . to practice birth control" and it is "too many children" that ultimately keep them in poverty. Still, "their morals aren't as strong," and the cost of the unconstrained behavior of blacks is borne by society as a whole.

The following two responses exhibit the "helplessness, anger, [and] inconsistency" Hoschild (1981: 240-241) regards as emblematic of ambivalence. The first, by a thirty year old white male Republican high school graduate, considered several explanations for continuing racial inequality. Discrimination is acknowledged but ultimately dismissed. African Americans are compared to other minorities and found wanting in ambition and effort. The second example by a white woman of about the same age, but much greater educational attainments, expresses an even greater sense of intractability.

Ah, without profanity? Boy what caused that? I suppose the beginning of it started with discrimination, but a lot of it today is laziness. Well, ah, I'm trying to figure [it] out, I feel that they have same opportunities I have, went to same schools I did, but it's a matter of going out and getting it. I think they are too used to having system work for them, all the social programs, the Mexican people are as hard hit, but they are trying to work themselves out of it, also lack of education.

((How did this come about in the first place?)) Well, as to what caused it in the first place I can't speak for that. Back in 50's or 60's I went to school where I was mostly minority. I had the same teachers they had. My parents weren't rich. I really can't say why.

Ah, I think it's environmental. Ah, how do I say this, a lot of it is opportunity a lot is environmental. Not having desire, or ambition, or hope that they can make it on their own.

((Repeated Question)) Ah, no it all had to do with that. Probably there is income, but which came first chicken or egg? If you don't have income to go to school, one breeds the other, and they have

oppressed group behavior, horizontal violence.

This response can be read as a direct contradiction, and signaled enough confusion that the interviewer repeated the question. The respondent, however, confirmed her ambivalence and employed something that sounds like social science concepts to attribute at least part of the reason for the disadvantages faced by blacks to their own doing.

The explanations for racial inequality in the mixed categories provide particularly nice illustrations of the process hypothesized by Zaller and Feldman (1992) to underlie the survey response. Asking citizens open-ended questions gives them an opportunity to review and share the considerations that play a role in their opinions. Only twenty-two percent of white people in the NRPS expressed ambivalence. This is less than might be expected on the basis of Hochschild's (1981) or Feldman and Zaller's (1992) studies of open-ended answers about welfare not explicitly targeted toward blacks. It is also substantially less than the majority Sigelman and Welch (1991) found to agree with a fixed format item containing both situational and dispositional attributions for the disadvantaged position of blacks. But, it is a typical theme in the open-ended responses.

Explaining Inequality

The question posed to the NRPS interviewees is generally not considered an easy one to answer. It is in some respects surprising to find that ninety percent of the public offered an explanation. It must, however, be granted that respondents had been thoroughly stimulated to think about racial issues by the time they were offered a chance to reply in their own words. Only about a fifth of white Americans responded to the question with ambivalence, and reading these responses in detail makes clear that apparently contradictory considerations are not signs of confusion or inattention. Another fifth of the sample attributed the inequality between the races to lack of effort, or will, on the part of black people.

Nearly half of the NRPS sample attributed the inequality between blacks and whites to factors which African Americans could not be expected to overcome as individuals. Given the fundamental attribution error, the individualistic biases in the culture, and even the weight of ideological rhetoric in the recent past (see Feldman and Zaller 1992), this figure is both surprising and encouraging. Even more, seventy percent of white respondents attributed racial inequality at least partially to factor outside the control of African Americans. Even if a good deal of social desirability bias affects these responses, one can be consoled by the knowledge that the vast majority of white Americans have at least learned that it is "politically correct" to explain inequality between the races with some reference to factors beyond the control of individual black Americans.

Demographic Correlates of Causal Attributions

With the sample restricted to white respondents only, those who blamed racial inequality exclusively on the individual failings of black people were significantly older (average 46 years v. 42) than those who attributed inequality entirely to external, environmental, or systemic causes. White respondents living in the south were also significantly more likely than those living elsewhere to blame continuing racial inequality on blacks. In fact, with a control for region, the relationship between age and internal attribution is non-significant in the south, but remains so elsewhere. In other words, young white southerners are just as likely to blame blacks' disadvantaged status on the individual dispositions of black people as older white southerners.

White respondents who made exclusively internal attributions were also significantly less educated than those who made exclusively external attributions. Sixteen percent of white respondents who made internal attributions had no more than a high school diploma, compared to only six percent of whites who attributed racial inequality exclusively to the environment. Only twenty percent of whites who attributed economic inequality between the races exclusively to the failings of individual blacks had graduated from college. Nearly twice as many whites (37%) who made external attributions held a college degree.¹³ As might be expected, liberal identifiers were significantly more likely than conservatives to make external attributions, but Democrats were no more likely to make external attributions than Republicans.

Consequences of Causal Attributions

There is a wealth of items available in the survey which allow the relationship between causal attributions and other racial and political attitudes to be examined. As Gilens (1995) proposed, attribution of the causes of racial inequality should affect respondents' positions on policy issues such as welfare spending. This might be particularly likely since "welfare dependency" is an available scripted attribution for racial inequality.

Table 8.2 provides a breakdown of attitudes towards welfare spending by attributional category. Seventy percent of white respondents who made exclusively internal attributions for racial inequality preferred to see less spent on welfare, as opposed to forty percent of white respondents who made exclusively external attributions. Blacks were not an explicit target in the welfare spending question, so it appears that thinking of blacks as the authors of their own disadvantaged position spills over into welfare attitudes more generally, as Gilens (1995b) suggests.

** Table 8.2 goes about here. **

One of the many experiments in the survey asked respondents whether they agreed with the statement “these days [group] would rather take assistance from the government than make it on their own through hard work,” where the group was randomly varied as “poor people,” “blacks,” and “poor blacks.” Table 8.3 reveals an interesting pattern of differences between external and internal attributers. The percentage agreeing and strongly agreeing with the statement in each condition have been combined to simplify the presentation.

** Table 8.3 goes about here. **

When the target group was described simply as “poor,” forty-seven percent of respondents who made exclusively external attributions agreed with the statement, as did sixty-nine percent of respondents who made exclusively internal attributions. Only thirty percent of white respondents who made external attributions agreed that the group would rather take assistance than work when it was identified as “blacks.” By contrast, eighty-one percent of internal attributers agreed with the statement when the group was described as “blacks.”

When both descriptors were used simultaneously, e.g., “poor blacks,” internal and external attributers appear to respond differently to the combined description. Forty-four percent of respondents who made exclusively external attributions for the causes of racial inequality agreed that poor blacks would rather take assistance than work. Among internal attributers, however, eighty-two percent agreed that poor blacks would rather take assistance than work. In essence, white respondents who made exclusively situational attributions for racial inequality seem to think that taking government assistance is more likely to be explained by poverty than by race. The same cannot be said for the internal identifiers.¹⁴

Overt Expressions of Anger

The survey also asked respondents to rate how angry various conditions made them feel. Among the conditions, situations and behaviors described were several particularly relevant to perceptions of blacks. These are detailed in Table 8.4. Everyone reported feeling quite angry “when people are treated unfairly because of their race,” as indicated by the grand mean of nearly nine on a scale that ranged from zero to ten, and a fairly narrow variance. Nonetheless, whites making unqualified external or unqualified internal attributions differed significantly¹⁵ in the level of anger they expressed in reaction to the statements.

** Table 8.4 goes about here. **

Those who made unqualified internal attributions for the causes of racial inequality were significantly¹⁶ more angry about “giving blacks and other minorities special advantages” than individuals who considered situational explanations (i.e., made external attributions) at all. The greater anger toward

“special advantages” for blacks and other minorities would seem appropriate among respondents who believe that blacks are to blame for their own disadvantage. Individuals who made unqualified external attributions were significantly less angry about “minority spokesmen complaining about discrimination” than those whose responses included any reference to dispositional factors. Likewise, those who made unqualified internal attributions were significantly more angry at the minority spokesmen than individuals who were classified as making predominantly or entirely external attributions.

Open Housing

The two experiments described above were both aimed at trying to disentangle the effect of attitudes toward welfare and individual effort from the effect of attitudes toward blacks. The results are suggestive at the bivariate level, but not conclusive. As a final effort in this direction, the following analysis considers an attitude which should be theoretically unrelated to welfare. Respondents were asked “How do you feel about blacks buying houses in white suburbs?” Responses were collected using a four point “strongly favor” to “strongly oppose” format.

Among white respondents, the Pearson’s correlation coefficient between the four-value Internal/External attribution coding and feelings about blacks buying houses in white suburbs is .20. In the south, the correlation is .24, and in the north it is .16. As illustrated in Table 8.5, less than three percent of whites reported themselves strongly opposed to blacks buying houses in white suburbs in the nation as a whole. Individuals who made exclusively internal attributions for the causes of inequality between blacks and whites were, however, more than twice as likely to oppose the idea of blacks buying houses in white suburbs.

** Table 8.5 goes about here. **

The idea of blacks buying houses in white suburbs has no explicit welfare component, so the “desert heuristic” should not be triggered by this question. What is at issue here is willingness to see African Americans moving into neighborhoods where whites live. Individuals who are willing to say they strongly oppose this notion are few enough that their attributions for racial inequality can be considered in more detail.

Of the forty-four respondents in the entire survey who said they strongly opposed blacks buying houses in white suburbs, thirty-two made some kind of internal attribution and twenty-three made exclusively internal attributions. The bulk of these responses manifested a particularly punitive quality. The reasons for inequality between blacks and whites are given as “it’s their own fault. Anyone who wants to work can.” Another respondent said “because they’re too damn lazy to work.” Still another said “they don’t work as much as white people.” Among all of the respondents who strongly opposed housing integration, a dozen

explicitly mentioned something to do with an unwillingness to work. Eight respondents mentioned something about welfare and “government handouts.”

The following full responses provide some sense of the flavor of these explanations, and particularly the tendency to project norm violations onto the “out group.”

Well the only thing that I would say is that they don't work hard enough. They just take it off other people. That's the way people are here, they think it should be given to them.

((Anything else?)) Not that I know of.

Well I think a lot of them are really lazy and I've been raised about them you know.

((What do you know?)) Having babies one right after the other, there's such a thing as birth control you know, I had that done when I was 24, I was ahead of this, I had three boys, I had my tubes [tied]. I've never had any problems since.

Well the way everything is handled.

((What do you mean?)) I'm not against the colored people but the colored people are getting advantage of everything. If you are colored you can go to the grocery store and get everything if you are white you don't see that kind of thing.

While these respondents were generally among the less educated, about a third of them reported at least some college experience. They were also older and more likely to come from the south. Several college graduates provided answers too long to quote in their entirety. The following is atypical in its length, but not in its sentiment:

One word: education. ((Can you tell me more?)) . . . The Negro as a race are their own worse enemy, and even their own exalted leaders are coming around to the fact . . . It's not the whites fault but the Nigger race themself. It's their own fault every time you turn the TV on you get these pictures of murder, rapes, drugs, um disrupted families . . . and they are black, and 98 percent of it is black . . . ((Can you tell me how it came about in the first place?)) Well, ok, segregation, and that was a big issue, but when Eisenhower called the troops in Arkansas that was the beginning of forced integration of the schooling. That was the beginning of the downfall of education for the Negro, yeah and that alone is one of the reasons the Negroes keep killing the Negroes, and the Negroes keep selling the dope to the Negroes. . . . But if the Negro race would wake up and quit blaming everyone else for their own fortunes and plight and make a real honest to God effort to improve on their own lot then there is no question that they would be better off but . . . they've done really nothing but

murder and steal from each other. . . . They are a very violent people.

Clearly, a person who provides this kind of explanation of why “the average black person in America is worse off than the average white” would hardly want African Americans to buy houses in white suburbs. Citing the TV media as the source of this information provides another example of where stereotypes come from (see Gilens 1995a and note 2). Whether they say it in brief or at length, individuals who make internal attributions and who strongly oppose integration of suburban housing are accusatory in their attribution of blame for inequality to the willful failings of black people.¹⁷

Again, it is important to stress that unqualified dispositional attributions for the causes of racial inequality were provided by only a fifth of white respondents in the survey. Negative stereotypes, hostility, and punitive moralism seem to be heavily concentrated in one segment of the public. While blaming blacks for racial inequality is not by itself an indicator of racism, it may be enough reason for a closer look.

Conclusion

The intent of this exercise was to try and get some sense of the flavor of explanations for racial inequality based on what respondents are willing to say in their own words. Until quite recently, open-ended responses have received relatively little attention in mass survey research. Part of the reason for their absence can be traced to the difficulty of rendering them into the numerical form required for most analytic purposes. Current word processing capabilities do not fully solve these difficulties, but they do make it possible to preserve the data in a form accessible to other researchers. Refinements in theory and/or methodology require replication. Another advance in the NRPS is that responses to the open-ended questions were typed into the CATI record by the interviewer. These responses (edited only to expand abbreviated and truncated words, and to correct spelling) are available in electronic form to interested researchers for replication and further analysis.¹⁸

In many respects, it is more disturbing to quote the kinds of unenlightened and prejudiced things respondents tell us in their own words than it is to report that a certain percentage of citizens agree with some negative stereotype or prejudiced statement. Fixed format survey items have a certain sanitized quality that encourages detachment and “value free” analysis. At the very least, it can be argued that responses which cast the public in a negative light are the contrivances of the researcher and would not occur in “real life” without prompting (Ginsberg 1986).

Because negative information generally has a greater impact than positive, it is important to stress, once again, that this analysis suggests only a fifth of the public blames blacks in an unqualified fashion for their disadvantaged position in society. Another fifth of the public expresses some degree of ambivalence

about the causes of racial inequality. On the positive side, roughly half of the American public looks to the situation in which African Americans find themselves today to explain continued inequality.

That even half of the public in the early 1990s can construct verbal explanations for racial inequality that locate responsibility for the current state of affairs beyond the control of individual black people is a finding worthy of some celebration. As Feldman and Zaller (1992, 297) point out, “supporters of the welfare state still lack a clear ideological justification for their positions.” Nor can it be claimed that sympathizing with African Americans to the extent of seeing them as victims of circumstance (whether or not the circumstances were brought about by the agency of others) insures support for social welfare programs, or programs targeted toward repairing the injuries of the past (Sniderman, Carmines, Carter and Layman 1996).

With respect to the general question of welfare, even among those who make entirely external attributions, forty percent favor spending less. White external attributers express significantly more anger “when people are treated unfairly because of their race.” At the same time, among those who made exclusively external attributions for the causes of racial inequality only eighty-seven percent favored “laws protecting [black] people from discrimination in hiring and promotion.”¹⁹ Nonetheless, those who make external attributions have overcome the fundamental attribution error, the dominant ideology of individualism, the dearth of coherent philosophical justification for egalitarianism, and a noticeable lack of forthright political leadership from the American mainstream.

Chapter 8 Appendix: Using Natural Language Responses

The impetus to make more use of the kinds of things people tell us in their own words developed as a result of my opportunity to read and code the open-ended responses to the so-called “likes/dislikes series” in the American National Election Studies. Due to state human subjects research regulations, obtaining access to the interviewers’ verbatim record requires special permission, and a promise not to retain or reproduce the raw responses in other than statistical form. Yet, reading the verbal responses fifteen hundred people provide to a set of general questions about the candidates and parties during the campaign season makes it clear that no coding scheme can truly capture the richness of the raw text. The “SRC Master Codes” try, but that effort has been likened to “instant coffee” by Robert Luskin (1987), and rightly so. Even with several hundred discrete coding categories it is impossible to reconstruct the sense of what a respondent says. Context, qualification and nuance are irretrievably lost.

The ANES open-ended response data have traditionally existed as a paper record in the interviewers’ handwriting. Some of the recent years’ responses have been transcribed to electronic files. However, it is still the case that no quoting or extended characterization of what the respondent actually said is permitted.

The National Race and Politics Study was designed to include a brief opportunity for open-ended comment. After several options had been examined it was determined that a single broad causal question would fit best with the rest of the endeavor. Prior to the “why are black people worse off than white people?” question, respondent had been asked a large number of fixed response format questions and randomly assigned to some experimental versions of question wording. In this context the open-ended responses to the general question can be seen as an opportunity for the respondents to summarize their views and to qualify or otherwise elaborate on their perceptions of race relations.

The opportunity to speak in one’s own words provides the respondent a brief respite from a long list of fixed format items, and some sense of control in the interview situation. No argument is being made here that interviewees are not influenced by the content of the interview to this point, or that they would respond in the same manner in the absence of the cognitive context of the previous questions. Since the idea is to allow respondents to elaborate on the general issue of race relations in their own words, the question was deliberately phrased in a way that allowed individuals some latitude in interpretation.

The best way to experience the richness of the verbal responses is to read them directly. At present they can be obtained as a single electronic file (text only) from ICPSR as part of NRPS [study number], from the Survey Research Center at UC Berkeley, or directly from the author. Such a random walk may suggest any number of alternate themes suitable for systematic analysis that may not be captured by the coding scheme employed in this chapter. In such circumstances establishing a new coding scheme for the verbal data

is easy and relatively quick. It takes about 20 person hours to read and code the responses by hand. The electronic text can also be processed by common content analysis software, but users should consider the implications of natural language responses, as opposed to documentary style text data, for the software they wish to employ.

While random walks may be enlightening, a means must be found to efficiently communicate the resulting observations. As detailed in the text, the attribution coding scheme employed here seemed (to this researcher) to arise naturally from the nature of the question. It can be viewed as an obvious starting point for examining peoples' perceptions of racial relations in the United States, and has also served as the source of much theorizing about the nature of prejudice.

One can view the degree of blame for racial inequality as a continuum running from purely internal, or dispositional, attributions to purely external, or situational attributions. It would be presumptuous to claim to be able to accurately order all the verbal responses along such a continuum, although this might be the ultimate goal of a detailed content analysis. It might also be noted that in a question asking directly whether blacks or whites were to blame for racial inequality posed after the open-ended question, 67% of whites said both races were equally to blame.

Partly in order to compensate for the somewhat over-populated neutral category in the fixed format item, a four value attribution coding scheme was employed. Two of these categories are referred to as unqualified internal and external attributions. This means that the response includes no direct indication of ambivalence or ambiguity in the attribution. Where the respondent's explanation for racial inequality included both dispositional and structural features, the coder was instructed to decide which response predominated. In cases where the decision was at all in doubt, the essential distinction between internal and external attribution was posed in terms of volition. In other words, in cases where both attributions were made in the same response, coders asked themselves whether the internal attribution implied that black people would not want change if they could control the outcome. [Is the behavior causing the inequality under the control of the actor? If it is not, is there indication that the behavior is willful or preferred?]

The most common examples of a purely external attribution provided by the interviewees were discrimination, prejudice, or racism. These are circumstances entirely beyond the control of black people, either individually or as a group, that they would wish to change, if they could. At the opposite extreme, the most common purely internal attribution was laziness. This is a behavior assumed to be entirely under the control of the individual. When it is viewed as a matter of choice, and particularly a choice more likely to be made by black Americans as a group, it engenders punitive moralism. In this view, blacks deserve to be worse off than whites because they violate norms of individual responsibility and industry.

Chapter 8 Notes

1. Mass survey research has always displayed a healthy respect for the potential existence of a “social desirability bias” brought about by respondents’ need to portray themselves, and the opinions they hold, in a socially acceptable fashion (Edwards, 1990).
2. In a related paper Gilens (1995a) demonstrates rather neatly that this fairly widespread misperception is packaged for the public in media stories and photographs which distort the demographic characteristics of welfare beneficiaries.
3. See appendix for a complete discussion of coding procedures and rationale.
4. Throughout this presentation the double parenthesis will be used to indicate and interviewer probe, or comment.
5. Interviewers were instructed to try to type the response verbatim without worrying about spelling or grammar and to use neutral probes until the respondent indicated he or she had nothing further to add. If the first response to the question was a simple tautology (e.g., “They don’t got as much money.”) or made reference to nothing more than differences in education or income, interviewers were instructed to ask: “And how do you think these differences came about in the first place?”
6. The idea of “scripts” in the way it is used here seems to have originated with Tomkins (1965).
7. This kind of global coding of an entire response is similar to that undertaken in coding level of conceptualization (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960) or cognitive complexity (Tetlock and Hannum 1984). It differs from the conventional content coding of open-ended responses. It is based on the premise that any interested researcher can examine the exact content of the response to replicate the coding or modify it. Those who wish to peruse the content of the response by attributes of respondents can now do so, for example, to see how conservative southern Democrats articulated the reasons for racial inequality. However, during the coding process used here, attributes of the respondents were not available. Again, see appendix for further description of coding and information on the text data set.
8. Again, race of the respondent could not be ascertained during the coding process.
9. Note Allport (1954) says that internal, or disposition, attributions “predispose” us to prejudice. Not that internal attributions equal prejudice.
10. Of course, arguments by the likes of Wilson or Murray and Herstein may have relegitimized the biological inferiority explanation, but this was not evident in 1991.
11. Note here that viewing black inequality as the result of the conscious and deliberate acts of individual white people would technically constitute another form of the fundamental attribution error. Thus, for example, explaining racial inequality on a conscious conspiracy by a small group of white people would be an

internal attribution. However, recall that to avoid confusion the basic coding question was whether or not blacks could exercise control. Thus, discrimination, prejudice, racism, etc. are considered external attributions.

12. Further, societal discrimination, when it is acknowledged, appears to be the product of individual prejudice on the part of others. Something injurious to equal opportunity, but not something to which the respondent is a party.

13. No significant differences in attribution were found by gender, or by gender within region among white respondents.

14. Because of the smaller number of respondents who make internal attributions one cannot really say that the percentages across the group descriptors are significantly different. The Pearson's correlation between causal attribution and agreement with the statement is .19 when the group is described as poor, .41 when the group is described as blacks, and .33 when the group is described as poor blacks.

15. Means for the two categories of unqualified attributions are significantly different at the .05 level using the Scheffe test. Means for the two mixed categories are not significantly different from each other.

Differences between the means for the exclusive categories and the ones for which the same attribution predominates are also not significant.

16. Means for all three other attribution categories were significantly different from the mean for internal attributers using the conservative Scheffe test. The same is true for all other comparisons where the term "significantly" is employed.

17. The twelve respondents who made unqualified external attributions for the most part cited simple issues like discrimination and lack educational opportunity. These responses were general short, and the respondents tended to be less education and older. One should have been coded into the E/i category. The others make attributions to forces clearly beyond the control of African Americans, including "...the Lord made whites before blacks." The following responses provide a general flavor:

Lack of education. ((How did this difference come about in the first place?)) Done by people, I guess, the media.

((Could you tell me more about that?)) TV & political reasons & television, old laws. ((Anything else?)) That's it. That's actually allowing them to make mandatory rules on black minority employment that pisses off white folks. That gets them mad.

Because they're black I guess. I don't know. ((Anything else?)) I don't know. ((Else?)) Because ((mumble, missed))

They hire in more whites than ((missed)). I don't know. I can't prove that to be a fact, there's supposed to equal rights.

18. Responses quoted in this chapter have been edited further for grammar and presentation.

19. This datum comes from another experiment in question wording which randomly varied the description of the targeted for anti-discrimination protection: blacks, Asians, women. Full analysis is a story in itself (see Stoker this volume).

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