

Chapter 11 – The Rational Basis of “Symbolic” Racism

The evidence offered in previous chapters uniformly drew on aggregate data. Election returns allow a compromise between the direct study of racial views and the indirect study of racial politics. By selecting particular campaigns that brought racial issues to the fore, I have been able to study racial polarization without ignoring entirely the mediating institutions and non-racial motivations that also filter political behavior. This is a niche that opens irregularly: racial politics extended to the boundaries of what the contemporary electoral system permits.

Yet aggregate data are not the only way to measure how people decide to vote. Surveys regularly ask respondents for their vote choice. Paraphrasing Gordon Allport, if I want to connect the context in which people live to their voting behavior, why not just ask their intent? The answer lies in the nature of my subject. Whatever virtues survey data normally possess for studying individual political orientations (c.f., Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen 1989, 17-19), race provides a troublesome exception to the rule. Leaving aside the many sources of sampling and measurement error that typically hinder survey research, racial issues run up against the more formidable barrier of respondent dishonesty. Tolerance has risen to such preeminence among virtues, and racial liberalism has been imbued with such moral authority, that many whites fear the opprobrium (and even economic retribution) that stating unpopular opinions can attract. Racial opinion has entered a “spiral of silence” (c.f., Noelle-Neumann 1993).

Historical experience with election surveys, for example, indicates that whites consistently exaggerate their intention to support black candidates (Brady and Orren 1992, 82-85). Such deception has skewed polls conducted, for example, in the 1982 California governor's race, the 1989

Dinkins mayoral election in New York City and the 1989 Virginia governor's election narrowly won by Douglas Wilder. Many white survey respondents are unwilling to admit racial attitudes contrary to mainstream views, such as support for a “racist” candidate or opposition to a black candidate based upon race (Kane 1991).¹ Thus, the dangers of ecological analysis—which at least builds on systemic outputs—are better understood by the discipline than the vagaries of studying racial attitudes.

If this “social desirability” bias were random, or at least evenly distributed, it might not pose such a problem. But respondents misrepresent themselves at uneven rates (Kuklinski, Cobb and Gilens 1997, 340-47). Racial hostilities face varying degrees of social opprobrium in various settings. Also, some whites have a degree of political sophistication that enables them to evaluate poll questions better (Jackman 1981), and some are better able to afford being branded a racist. Survey respondents may even conceal socially discouraged attitudes from themselves (Devine 1989, 11; Gilovich 1993), such that protecting respondent anonymity is no guarantee of accuracy.² In a nutshell, the reason a student of racial politics should not “just ask” is: Because people lie.

Nevertheless, the theoretical framework introduced in this dissertation is perfectly compatible with survey analysis, presuming the data are reported with geographical information intact. Indeed, the findings reported in Part II ought to face validation within alternate forms of data, including surveys. If they fail to hold up in individual-level data, that is no guarantee of their inaccuracy, but

¹ I am not persuaded by the argument that, because some whites are willing to admit openly to hostile racial feelings, whites therefore generally do not deceive pollsters. In the one case when we can test this fallacious reasoning directly—by comparing the election returns for black candidates with survey estimates of that support—a consistent pattern of inaccuracy emerges.

² Some writers treat prejudice as America's version of original sin, the stain on each individual's soul that must be purged. Even Devine (1989, 5-6), who explicitly challenges the “inevitability” of prejudice, nevertheless argues that tolerant whites carry around socially transmitted negative stereotypes of blacks that are more fundamental than their rationalized attitudes (i.e., that kick in when a situation demands automatic responses). Giving so much credit to social determinism does not take us very far from collective guilt. However, one need not embrace this pessimism to realize that, as Devine's work shows, some whites must fight to achieve mastery over or deny internalized racial prejudices.

it at least would provide a healthy warning.

Looking Behind the Symbols

The literature contains a long and vibrant research tradition claiming that racial resentment follows a psychological logic—building on ignorance, stereotype and rumor; dressed up with socialized values; thick with trite symbolic rhetoric; alleviated by egalitarian contact with minorities. Perhaps the most influential psychological approach to race, the “symbolic racism” narrative, has built up extensive evidence that attitudes do not respond directly to community racial density (see Chapter 5). Instead, this line of research shows that one’s position on progressive social policies responds to the assessment of why minorities have fallen behind in the first place. Those who blame society tend to desire institutional solutions to make up for discrimination; those who “blame the victim” see no such need. Presumably these psychological orientations are handed down across generations, because they do not seem to have any basis in the respondent’s actual environment.

Why are my findings using aggregate data so much at odds with these survey-based studies? Explaining attitudes with attitudes is always a risky business. It is very hard to know why whites might embrace a particular assessment of minorities. Travelers in the Old South were often struck by the negative stereotypes that planters had of their slaves and, later, their black wage workers (Howard 1917, 588). Yet few outsiders doubted that these negative impressions thrived precisely because such myths operated in service of rational incentives (Howard 1917, 582-84). Indeed, anti-black stereotypes only developed after slavery required an ideological defense (Wilson 1973, 79).

Today’s symbols and stereotypes might be working in service of an equally “rational” goal.³

The symbols may not *cause* anything; they may be just another product of a racially stratified

³ By “rational” I do not mean that prejudices are correct, informed or socially desirable. I mean only that they promote material goals, and represent one potentially successful means of achieving those goals. That is, the term only signifies *economic* rationality.

society. By accepting purely psychological explanations for racial resentment, simply because policy preferences coincide with acceptance of these symbols, researchers risk missing the competitive underpinnings of the social phenomenon they wish to study.

As a thought experiment, we can consider what the same methodology would have indicated about the slave system, since that institution was a rather clear case of group-based exploitation. Judging from the anecdotal evidence, surveys would have indicated that whites considered slaves lazy, unprepared for democracy, and content with their condition—a myth shared between slave owners and other whites nationwide. The likely result? An argument that antebellum racism was psychological, built on inherited symbols, rather than driven by self interest. One doubts that this explanation could have had much predictive leverage over the instrumental power relationships clearly driving the “peculiar institution.”

The work introduced in previous chapters, which observed genuine political behavior rather than answers provided to pollsters, repeatedly discounted psychological explanations. The tests sometimes had to be rather blunt, of course, but they consistently upheld the observable implications of the Cultural Backlash approach: suburban exceptionalism, a political alliance between minorities and the whites who share their residential milieu, a high degree of racial conservatism among white who reside near a large black population with whom they cannot assimilate. The elections research in previous chapters therefore provides strong evidence that social exchange over race may trade in symbols, but the ultimate currency is the preeminence and privilege that comes from dominating cultural values in a community, or in the society as a whole.

Developing this critique now requires leaving aside aggregate data. The amorphous phenomenon called “symbolic racism” is entirely a construct of opinion surveys, a composite of answers to questions about the role of race in American society. No one has measured it any other way. This chapter’s purpose therefore is to apply the framework introduced in chapters 4-5 to an

extraordinarily valuable race survey, the 1995 Kaiser Foundation Race Poll. The Kaiser poll offers an extensive battery of race-based questions along several filters discussed in Chapter 4, with alternate wording to that featured in many academic survey questions, including informational questions that allow tracing the genealogy of political preferences.

My purpose is not to explain racial conservatism, as in the previous chapters. Rather, my purpose is to turn an eye directly on the symbols and myths that supposedly fuel politics in place of self-interested preferences: beliefs about why people are poor, about who gets which social resources, about whom social welfare policy benefits. Consistent with previous literature in the symbolic politics vein, I find using simple contextual models that “material incentives” fail to predict adherence to symbolic racism’s articles of faith. However, I then explore the possibility that self interest follows somewhat more complicated patterns, in the form of interactive backlash hypotheses introduced in Chapter 5. The analysis shows that survey responses usually interpreted to reflect a psychological orientation actually follow a clear and systematic geographical pattern, entirely consistent with the Cultural Backlash approach that has been so successful predicting aggregate racial conservatism measures. There is no disjunction between aggregate- and survey-based findings, when both incorporate adequate theoretical complexity.

The Kaiser Foundation Race Poll

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation funded a particularly valuable survey in 1995, in collaboration with the *Washington Post* and researchers at Harvard University (Morin 1995).⁴ The survey was part of a larger study on the role that information and misinformation play in the development of policy preferences, but this particular portion focused almost exclusively on race. Chilton Research Services, which actually implemented the Kaiser Foundation Race Poll, recorded

⁴ I thank Bob Blendon and Derek Bok for making the survey data, codebook, and initial Kaiser report (Brodie 1995) available to me.

the county of residence for most respondents.⁵ Having this geographical information allows linking the individual-level data to aggregate contextual variables likely to influence racial views, in particular the estimated black density in each respondent's county. The main drawback, for these purposes, is only the small sample size among whites. The Kaiser poll included an oversample of minorities among its 1,970 respondents—roughly 474 African, 353 Asian and 252 Latino Americans.⁶ However, the white sample is almost uniformly large enough to explore the survey instruments used in Symbolic Racism research.

For the analysis that follows, I use data from two sources: the Kaiser poll itself (Brodie 1995), and 1990 census data linked to each respondent by county of residence (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993a). All of the hypotheses introduced in Table 5-1 will require the black population percentage, since this is the basic “backlash” variable; I use the census demographic computed for a county’s voting-age population. Most also require an interaction term of some sort to identify the unique approaches. I introduce the hypotheses in the next section.

Race Through a Contextual Lens

One may hold various stereotypes or prejudices about an ethnic group, but those inclinations do not spring full flower into political behavior, let alone policy. Various incentives, competing interests, and mediating laws shape the attitudinal raw material into systemic outputs. This procedural heuristic for comprehending racial orientation is what I call the Filter Model (see Chapter 4). Previous chapters used electoral data, and therefore constituted studies of politically relevant racial conservatism. They invalidated the traditional white-backlash logic, by falsifying the geographical patterns it predicts, but could only probe the process connecting racial context to

⁵ The survey did not report county of residence for members of the Latino oversample.

⁶ The exact figures vary depending upon how one treats black Latinos.

political behavior from a distance. This chapter addresses that weakness by looking directly at the connection between context and attitude.

The most influential social psychology research seems to indicate that self-interest plays little direct role in racial attitudes, at least as represented by the density of racial outgroups. The Symbolic Racism school emphasizes this disparity between self-interest and professed beliefs directly (Kinder and Sanders 1996, chap. 4; Sears, Hensler and Speer 1979, 374), in a few cases purportedly rebutting the rational “racial threat” approach (Kinder and Sears 1981, 421-22).⁷ Glaser (1994) also finds little connection between prejudice and racial context.⁸ These results concur with older research on urban attitudes, which determined that exposure to blacks shattered prejudicial stereotypes even if it also increased conflict (Lipset and Raab 1978, 341; Pettigrew 1980, 9).⁹

In every case, however, analysis operationalized “self interest” in an extremely limited manner: either residence in racially diverse communities or, in the case of research on school desegregation, having children who attend schools that might become racially diverse. My intent is therefore to revisit the search for proximity effects, armed now with the interactive hypotheses developed in Chapter 5. Researchers probing “symbolic” racial attitudes may have missed meaningful geographical patterns for the same reason my non-interactive Louisiana model did not find such patterns with David Duke’s white support: because “threat” is not a direct function of proximity, but nonetheless related systematically.

Tracing particular narratives about racial politics to observable (and therefore testable)

⁷ Even the rival “Group Threat” approach, while emphasizing *perceived* group incentives, nonetheless makes no specific claim to an individual’s real interests (Bobo 1983, 1,206). In other words, the competing claim is not that racial polarization comes from self-interest, only that it stems from rational motives (c.f., Hardin 1995, 46-49).

⁸ The Black Belt logic does seem to succeed with what Glaser (1994) calls more “political” survey questions. These tend to gauge racial orientations after they have passed through several filters.

⁹ Kinder and Mendelberg (1995, 420-21) seem to contradict this dominant interpretation, despite the lead author’s prominence in the Symbolic Racism literature. They dismiss the backlash logic for political *expressions* of prejudice, but apparently wish to retain the theory for prejudice itself.

implications risks numerous pitfalls. The first mistake would be to presume that *any* geographical pattern in racial attitudes proves that polarization is rational, let alone self-interested. Even purely psychological phenomena can take on a systematic geographical expression over time. For example, as I indicate in Chapter 5, migration patterns might result in racially sensitive whites cloistering themselves in homogeneous communities. Similarly, if the antidote to an irrational impulse is exposure to countervailing evidence, then life experiences in an integrated community might mitigate racial conservatism eventually. Both of these less-naive psychological approaches would result in whites who reside near blacks being systematically *more* tolerant, however. Reverse the pattern, such that proximity (or some other conflictual incentive) corresponds to hostility, and the underlying social process surely must implicate some form of rational social exclusiveness.

Another pitfall would be to assume that intergroup conflict must follow a strict territorial logic. Certainly ethnic groups sometimes fight for control of a particular territory, as they did during the segregation struggles of the 1960s or as they sometimes do in urban neighborhoods today (Green, Strolovitch and Wong 1998). But conflict can revolve around different stakes, some territorial and some not. Rather than assume that proximity spawns antipathy, that “familiarity breeds contempt,” it is better to differentiate among different forms of conflict and the specific geographical patterns of racial conservatism they might imply. Most forms of social exchange have tangible stakes attached, after all; any might invoke intense feeling from those with vested interest in preserving the status advantages they convey.

If “middle-class values” are not shared by all whites equally, any attempt at cultural exclusion will reverberate primarily where whites have something to defend. This rational form of symbolism might follow a backlash pattern outside urban areas, but within the modern metropolis it is in the all-white suburbs where we find America’s “keepers of the culture.” Thus I would expect the conventional backlash pattern to decline or even reverse in metropolitan counties. The data also

permit me to test other contextual interactions:

- Hypotheses 2, 5 and 6: All require black density multiplied by a measure of status inequality. For the latter I use the difference between white and black per capita income, where a positive number means whites are wealthier.
- Hypotheses 2 and 3: Both require black density multiplied by a measure of population stability. For the latter I use the percentage of the population that did not live in the county five years previously.
- Hypothesis 6: This requires black density multiplied by a measure of white socioeconomic status, to permit lower-income white communities to exhibit a backlash stronger than found in wealthier locales. For the latter I use white per capita income.
- Hypothesis 7: The Cultural Backlash approach is most complicated. Surveys allow multiple ways to get at “white middle-class values,” but none that clearly sums up the concept, or that can be pulled apart from the social interests reflected in my dependent variables. The analysis requires more concrete proxies for interest or affiliation. Therefore I tested the idea from several angles, all of which required black density multiplied by some contextual measure of the likely prominence of “middle-class values,” the social investment in white cultural socialization advantages (Merelman 1994, 2-5).

First, consistent with previous chapters, I use the level of urbanization, since suburban isolation allows the control of cultural capital (Merelman 1994, 5). This test for suburban exceptionalism is a rather blunt measure, however, since counties can be large and diverse. Rather than simply use the county's overall level of urbanization, therefore, I also tried a second approach based upon whether the respondent reported personally living in a metropolitan area. Finally, I tried a measure that would get me past pure suburbanization, and look specifically at one component of white middle-class privilege: the percent of the labor force in professional

occupations, since these draw heavily on “cultural capital.”

Tacit Theories of Blame

The socioeconomic status of African Americans is clearly lower than that of whites in the United States, a fact no scholar disputes. Where people disagree is their assessment of *why* the races differ. Racial liberals attribute the gap to racism, discrimination, and inadequate government attempts at equalization. Racial conservatives emphasize faults within the black community. It is this desire to downplay systemic causes of inequality that some scholars dub symbolic “racism.”¹⁰ The Kaiser poll included a handful of questions asking why different ethnic groups lag in achievement, and therefore allows a formal exploration of whether these “symbols” are in fact unrelated to systematic interests. The wording on these questions tends to differ from that found in other surveys, and therefore offer a refreshing look at the issue.

I begin with two questions centered on black opportunity (MONEYBL and STDLIV; see Appendix 11A for exact question wording). The first asks whether blacks have as much opportunity to be successful and wealthy as whites. The second focuses on the African-American standard of living. Tracing “blame” for economic results is an extremely tricky business; some polemics blame inner-city black culture while others point the finger at mainstream society. Where one falls out seems more a matter of faith than a matter of hard evidence, so I am not worried that this is actually a factual question. Whatever the justice of the labeling, this is exactly the sort of judgment call that scholars use to determine whether one is a “symbolic racist.”

I begin with the standard of living variable, since it was applied to the entire sample. It asked whether black Americans have “the same standard of living and opportunities as whites.” This is

¹⁰ While this attempt to demonize rhetorically those who disagree may seem excessive, those who use the label are certainly correct that racial conservatism “blames the victim,” and therefore implies a rather negative judgment of African Americans as a group.

unfortunate wording, since it combines two judgments—a question of fact (“standard of living”) and one of potential (“opportunities”). However, I find no connection between actual black poverty in a county and the response that whites provide to the question, so presumably it evokes a broad social judgment rather than an empirical observation. It taps a judgment of what African Americans could accomplish on their own merits.

The variable takes on two values: 1 if the respondent considered black opportunities worse, 0 otherwise. The binary measurement calls for a probability model such as the probit, which I use here.¹¹ The initial run was bivariate, using only white respondents, to see how their responses varied with black density.¹² The results seem to overrule a geographic model, since black density does not predict responses simply (see Table 11-1, Model A)

Obviously people are not assigned to communities randomly. Those who live in mixed-race counties may differ substantially from those in all-white locales, in a way that would influence their orientation toward racial issues. I therefore switch to a multivariate probit analysis, adding the following controls: a five-point education scale, a nine-point family income scale, the respondent's year of birth, and a dummy variable for whether the respondent is male. All four are typically thought to shape racial attitudes. This more complex version does not overturn the initial results, however (Model B). Symbolic racism does not seem to follow a geographic pattern. This is precisely the sort of finding that often fuels claims that rational self interest does not explain racial views.

My final step, however, is to cycle through the more complex observable implications introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The absence of geographical patterns may not indicate a purely psychological phenomenon; it may simply indicate that interactive effects wash out when

¹¹ I will stick to probit models throughout the chapter, because it fits my prior that most people have ambivalent racial attitudes, whereas the numbers get smaller with more extreme positive or negative assessments.

¹² Throughout this chapter, my measure of county black density is the black percentage of voting-age residents, drawn from a CD-Rom from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1993a).

Table 11-1: Predicting White Theories of Blame

Dependent variable: Whether blacks have the same economic opportunities

Explanatory Variable	Model A (Simple)	Model B (Controls)	Model C (x Metro)	Model D (Professional)	Model E (MONEYBL)
<i>Racial density: % black among voting-age pop</i>	-0.005 (.004)	-0.006 (.005)	-0.027 (.008)	-0.044 (.02)	0.020 (.019)
5-point education scale		0.17 (.045)	0.16 (.045)	0.17 (.045)	0.18 (.06)
9-point family income scale		0.02 (.023)	0.01 (.024)	0.02 (.023)	0.01 (.03)
Year of Birth		-0.01 (.003)	-0.01 (.003)	-0.01 (.003)	-0.01 (.004)
Dummy variable for males		0.21 (.096)	0.23 (.097)	0.21 (.096)	0.19 (.123)
Black per capita income in \$1,000s					0.03 (.002)
<i>Interaction: Black PCI * racial density</i>					-0.01 (.002)
Dummy variable for Metro area			0.00 (.128)		0.11 (.172)
<i>Interaction: metro dummy * racial density</i>			0.03 (.008)		0.03 (.014)
<i>Interaction: % labor force professional * racial density</i>				0.002 (.001)	
Intercept	0.14 (.059)	14.46 (5.87)	14.77 (5.93)	14.09 (5.87)	
observations	772	725	721	725	352
X^2	1.07	33.69	51.23	37.59	34.30
$p(>= X^2)$	0.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cutpoint 1					-17.80
Cutpoint 2					-16.32

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models A-D use probit regression on a binary response, whether blacks enjoy the same standard of living. Model E uses ordered probit on an ordinal variable representing the change in black financial opportunities, with higher responses being more optimistic.

averaged over the population. Most interactive hypotheses did not bear fruit, with one glaring exception: the Cultural Backlash hypothesis. When I include an intercept and slope shift for metropolitan areas, allowing the effect of black density to change around cities, the results are strongly in favor of the Cultural Backlash approach (see Model C).¹³ Whites exhibit a classic backlash pattern outside of the metropolis; they are more willing to admit racial inequalities in American society as the African-American population gets smaller. Metropolitan whites, by contrast, do not respond to black density this way. If anything, they become more sensitive to African-American difficulties as their counties become more diverse, whereas racially isolated whites follow their cultural incentive to deny unequal opportunities. The same happens, to a lesser extent, with my interaction using professional status (see Model D). Whites in a heavily professionalized community do not exhibit the classic backlash pattern; if anything those in predominantly white areas are most likely to embrace “symbolic racism.” In either case, “symbolic” racism is not merely symbolic; it follows a predictable pattern.

Model E presents a similar analysis for the wealth opportunities variable (MONEYBL), this time using an ordered probit model to take into account three options (opportunities are better, the same, or worse). This time responses did seem to respond to actual black per capita income in the county, so I added a control for that information, as well as an interaction between black income and racial density. An information-based pattern does appear, even after testing the Cultural Backlash hypothesis. It shows that the propensity of rural and small-town whites to follow a “backlash” pattern increases significantly as black income rises, which may simply reflect the judgment that local black opportunities *have* improved. Metropolitan whites, however, never follow this pattern. Rather, the model indicates that racially isolated whites are the most likely to claim equality, even after controlling for the actual level of local black incomes

¹³ Adding a metro dummy did not alter the results at all; this is clearly a slope shift.

Table 11-2: CLARIFYing the Probabilities for Standard of Living

Percentage Reporting that Blacks Enjoy Fewer Opportunities than White:

<i>County Racial Density:</i>	<i>No blacks</i>	<i>Sprinkling of Blacks</i>	<i>Black Presence</i>	<i>Half Black</i>
	<i>0%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>19%</i>	<i>50%</i>
Rural or Small-Town Respondents	56.3 (3.4)	48.3 (3.1)	38.6 (6.0)	17.6 (11.2)
Metro Respondents	56.0 (3.8)	58.3 (2.7)	61.0 (3.3)	68.2 (9.1)

Note: These predicted probabilities illustrate the meaning of the black density coefficient and its interaction with whether a respondent reported living in a metropolitan area, as drawn from Table 11-1 Model C. The standard errors, which appear in parentheses, come from the CLARIFY software developed by Tomz, Wittenberg and King (2000).

The coefficients reported here are not immediately meaningful, but Table 11-2 translates the predictions into probabilities using monte carlo simulation (King, Tomz and Wittenberg 2000), as implemented in the CLARIFY code for Stata 5.0 (Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2000). All values are set to their means, except those for black density and each variable interacted with it. The table shows a backlash pattern among rural and small-town whites. On average, 56.3% of those in all-white counties report that blacks enjoy fewer opportunities (standard error of 3.4). This sentiment drops among whites as the African-American density increases, to 48.3% (3.1) with a minor presence, 38.6% (6.0) with a more substantial one, and 17.6% (11.2) in a mixed-race county. The pattern reverses among metropolitan respondents. They start at 56% (3.8) with no blacks present, but rise to 58.3% (2.7), 61% (3.3) and finally 68.2% (9.1) acknowledging racial inequalities as the racial balance evens out. The backlash pattern appears outside of metropolitan areas, but dissipates within cities, as predicted by the Cultural Backlash approach.

Comparison with Other Immigrant Groups

One useful question asks whether blacks should work their way up “without any special help from the government” the way other immigrant groups have (OTHRGRPS). This is exactly the sort of question often used to represent “symbolic racism,” since it implies that African Americans are more whiny than the Irish or Italians.¹⁴ Where do such sentiments thrive? The variable is binary, with the high value more conservative racially, so I again opted to use probit regression. The initial, bivariate results seemed to affirm claims of irrationality, to discount a geographical pattern. On average, the respondent’s racial environment does not help predict assignment of blame (see Table 11-3, Model A), as the symbolic racism school would expect.¹⁵

These results hide that white responses follow a perfectly predictable and systematic pattern, in keeping with the suburban orientation of the Cultural Backlash Hypothesis. Model B repeats the regression, this time with metropolitan areas excluded. Outside of metropolitan areas, a statistically significant backlash pattern emerges: whites increasingly embrace bootstraps rhetoric as black density increases.¹⁶ Since this is one leg of the Cultural Backlash hypothesis, a natural next step is to see if the pattern disappears or reverses in metropolitan areas. Model C shows that, indeed, black density no longer predicts opinion once we move to metropolitan respondents. In fact, outside the South, symbolic racism decreases with black density, exactly as cultural backlash would produce (Model D). Thus only Southern cities resist the Cultural Backlash pattern. My best guess why, in keeping with the logic of the hypothesis, was that blacks in some Southern states (i.e., South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana) are numerous enough that even whites far from the minority

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, one could answer the question in a way unfavorable to government action and still not blame blacks for their situation, as long as the respondent opposed government intervention *despite* the existence of prejudice.

¹⁵ Interaction terms capturing the Contact and Migration hypotheses provide no assistance (analysis not shown).

¹⁶ Black per capita income does not increase with black density, so there is no fear that white assessments of opportunity correspond to observed achievement.

Table 11-3: Predicting Unfavorable Ethnic Comparisons

Dependent variable: Whether blacks should help themselves as other ethnics did

Explanatory Variable	Model A (Simple)	Model B (Non-Metro)	Model C (Metro South)	Model D (Metro Non-South)	Model E (Total Metro)
<i>Racial density: % black among voting-age pop</i>	-0.002 (.005)	0.016 (.008)	-0.004 (.011)	-0.018 (.009)	-0.020 (.008)
State Racial Density					0.03 (.012)
Intercept	0.55 (.061)	0.61 (.083)	0.65 (.238)	0.44 (.106)	0.25 (.114)
observations	783	406	89	282	371
X^2	0.25	4.27	0.01	4.31	8.03
$p(>= X^2)$	0.62	0.04	0.71	0.04	0.02

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. All models use probit regression on a binary response, whether blacks should lift themselves up as other ethnic groups have. Models B-E restrict the sample according to the respondent's region and according to the sort of community in which the respondent reported living.

population will be cognizant of any perceived cultural challenges (for example conflict at the state university or board of education). Model E thus repeats the analysis for all metropolitan respondents, but this time adds a control for the state's black population density as well. Once we adjust for the state context, metropolitan respondents directly contradict the traditional backlash pattern, rising in symbolic racism as black density decreases.

CLARIFY lets me specify more clearly what these probit coefficients mean (see Table 11-4). Outside of metropolitan areas, judging from Model B, members of an all-white community would embrace the bootstraps rhetoric 73% of the time (standard error of 2.7). That figure rises to 77.3% (2.2) with a sprinkling of blacks, 82% (3.4) with a genuine black presence, and 90.9% (6.0) in a fully balanced setting. This is a weak backlash pattern. Once we control for the state's black population, metropolitan areas follow the opposite logic. In an 8.5% black state, judging from Model E, on

Table 11-4: CLARIFYing the Probabilities for Ethnic Comparison

Percentage Reporting that Blacks Should Lift Themselves

<i>County Racial Density:</i>	<i>No blacks 0%</i>	<i>Sprinkling of Blacks 9%</i>	<i>Black Presence 19%</i>	<i>Half Black 50%</i>
Rural or Small-Town Respondents	73.0 (2.7)	77.3 (2.2)	82.0 (3.4)	90.9 (6.0)
Metro Respondents (8.5% Black State)	69.8 (3.6)	63.7 (2.6)	55.6 (4.0)	32.5 (11.1)

Note: These predicted probabilities illustrate the meaning of the black density coefficient, as drawn from Table 11-3 Model B for the top row and from Table 11-3 Model E for the bottom row. The standard errors, which appear in parentheses, come from the CLARIFY software developed by Tomz, Wittenberg and King (2000).

average 69.8% (3.6) of those residing in all-white counties respond that blacks should work their way up without governmental assistance. This sentiment drops among whites as the African-American presence increases, to 63.7% (2.6) with a minor presence, 55.6% (4.0) with a more substantial one, and 32.5% (11.1) in a mixed-race metropolis. The pattern is the same in a 19% black state, albeit at higher levels; whites in a 19% black county show roughly the same attitude as those in all-white communities for a whiter state (68.3% with a 3.9 standard error).

I then turned to a multivariate analysis, using the same control variables as in the last subsection plus a dummy variable for whether one lives in a Southern state. The effect of these controls is, if anything, to strengthen the observed pattern in metropolitan areas (see Table 11-5, Model A). They eliminate the backlash pattern elsewhere (see Model B), but only because of the South dummy (see Model C). Once we know whether the respondent lives in a rural Southern county then additional

Table 11-5: Elaborated Ethnic Comparisons

Dependent Variables Explanatory Variable	<i>OTHRGRPS</i>			<i>MINCITY</i>	
	Model A (Metro Controls)	Model B (Non-Met Controls)	Model C (No South Dummy)	Model D (Simple)	Model E (Full Metro)
<i>Racial density: % black among voting-age pop</i>	-0.026 (.008)	0.007 (.01)	0.017 (.008)	-0.013 (.008)	-0.024 (.012)
State Racial Density	0.03 (.014)			0.03 (.012)	0.04 (.020)
5-point education scale	-0.20 (.064)	-0.17 (.07)	-0.18 (.07)		-0.09 (.088)
9-point family income scale	0.03 (.035)	0.07 (.035)	0.06 (.034)		0.12 (.052)
Year of Birth	-0.01 (.005)	-0.01 (.004)	-0.01 (.004)		-0.01 (.006)
Dummy variable for males	0.53 (.146)	0.12 (.146)	0.13 (.145)		0.21 (.200)
Dummy variable for South	0.34 (.199)	0.34 (.211)			
Intercept	17.45 (9.26)	12.60 (8.54)	12.81 (8.54)	-0.05 (.122)	16.95 (12.5)
observations	356	375	375	339	171
X^2	36.02	16.94	14.36	5.46	12.64
$p(>= X^2)$	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.07	0.05

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. All models use probit regression on a binary response, either whether blacks should lift themselves up as other ethnic groups have or whether minorities consume most urban aid. All except Model D restrict the sample according to the sort of community in which the respondent reported living. Models D & E only applied to a random subsample of whites.

detail about the county's racial density does not clearly help.¹⁷ This provides additional evidence,

¹⁷ I did try a few county-level demographics as well, but none made a substantial difference on these models. In particular, none of the interaction terms intended to capture other backlash approaches helped. Adding the respondent's party identification and self-reported political ideology, as some researchers are apt to do, also left the central finding unchanged.

in keeping with the Cultural Backlash approach, that rural racial attitudes represent a defense of the South's historical "way of life" rather than a concurrent competition for local resources.

In sum, the geographical study of this "symbolic racism" variable fully supports what I call the Cultural Backlash approach, one that supposes these symbols operate as part of a real group struggle. Not only does the backlash pattern appear in rural areas, primarily because of the agrarian South's distinctive racial mores, but a state-level backlash pattern appears among more metropolitan respondents as well. No county-level backlash pattern appears around cities, but this hardly suggests that attitudes are merely "psychological" or based on arbitrary "perception." The *reverse* geographical pattern there is strong and systematic, with those in heavily white areas the most favorable to bootstraps rhetoric—precisely what I would expect if the races clash over status or cultural capital, if racially isolated whites seek a justification for their middle-class subculture.

The Greedy City

A comic figure of our age, at least to those amused by hypocrisy, is the Limousine Liberal (also known as the BMW Bolshevik or Mercedes Marxist, depending upon the elite's automobile of choice). Although committed to racial justice in the abstract, this character only endorses equalizing policies as long as working-class whites bear the burden. They hunker down in token-integrated suburbs far from the poverty, crime and high taxes of American cities. They send their children to prestigious private universities, get them rewarding summer jobs at cushy establishments using personal connections, and pay their way into exclusive fraternities or sororities—ensuring full insulation within their safe, white world. They support inoffensively progressive social policies, and do so vocally, but oppose anything that cuts too close to home, such as busing or significant redistribution of educational resources toward urban schools.

I repeat this stereotype not to endorse its implicit criticism—it seems perfectly reasonable to seek

collective action on racial reform while refusing to bear the costs unilaterally—but to emphasize the importance of The City in this mythology. The City is what the Limousine Liberal flees, if not by escaping to a swank suburb, then by building a large stone wall around the neighborhood and posting a guard at the gate. The City is the monster they wish to tame, but only from a distance. Nor is The City's central role in race relations limited to liberals. For racial conservatives as well, the tendency is to distinguish between “good blacks” who escape from the ghetto based on their own merit, and an urban underclass of culturally deficient “bad blacks” who riot and demand undeserved assistance from government.

One question, applied to a random subset of the Kaiser sample, taps into whether whites view urban areas as a minority-dominated cash sinkhole. It asks whether most recipients of “federal aid for cities” are minorities (MINCITY). Tracing the path of government aid is difficult, of course, but as a factual matter it seems obvious that this statement is false. Of counties greater than 75% urban, non-whites on average only make up 18.5% of the recorded population.¹⁸ Thus the question allows me to gauge the distribution of a fallacious, but politically meaningful, perspective.

In theory, the traditional backlash logic could apply to this question. Whites in mixed-race areas might be particularly sensitive to resources invested on nearby minority communities, and particularly resentful of the effort. They may hold the most distorted view. On the other hand, whites who actually live in cities clearly have better access to casual information about where urban spending goes, and if they reside in cities with a significant black population may be more sensitive to the needs of nearby minorities. What about suburbanites? Although lacking intimate familiarity, presumably they would know more than small-town or rural respondents if contact drove the awareness. Not so if, as the Cultural Backlash approach suggests, the stereotype works in service of an underlying status conflict. Racially isolated whites might define themselves culturally as

¹⁸ Weighted by population, the non-white population is still only about a quarter of the total.

members of the “white middle class,” in contrast to needy, greedy urbanites dominated by minorities.

A quick glance at the distribution of fallacious answers jibes with this last interpretation. Self-reported suburban whites were most likely to consider urban aid a minority program, although the sample is small (see Table 11-6). About 60.2% of suburban whites hold this view of aid to cities, compared to 45.6% of urbanites and roughly 56% of those outside a metropolitan area. To get more directly at the effect of racial density, however, I used a probit regression model among white respondents. County black density alone did not predict opinions very well, but once I added a measure of state black density a pattern emerged (see Table 11-5, Model D).¹⁹ The more African Americans in a state, the more that whites think they suck up most urban aid. Actually living in a county with blacks may cut against this error, although the small sample size limits confidence in this result. The results are particularly strong in metropolitan areas (analysis not shown). Thus, it is not clear whether this initial backlash pattern represents a negative reaction to the black population, or a relative assessment of how much minorities are available locally to benefit from urban aid.

I followed with a multivariate analysis adding variables that might condition responses: family income, education, year born, and sex. The result is roughly the same. Racially isolated whites expected that minorities were gobbling up urban aid, even controlling for the size of the state's black population (analysis not shown), a finding that was strong and statistically significant among metropolitan respondents (Model E). In an all-white metropolitan county, on average, roughly 65.4% of whites embraced the fallacy (standard error of 6.1). The value falls to 57.7% (4.1) with a sprinkling of blacks, 47.6% (5.5) with a real black presence, and 23% (13.5) in a balanced county. The estimated change of 10.1% between the two middle categories has a standard error of 5, so the

¹⁹ The actual question says “minority groups” and not African Americans. I tried using non-white densities rather than black densities, but they revealed less predictive value. Many whites probably connect the term “minority” with blacks first and foremost. Certainly they overestimate the size of the nation's black population (Brodie 1995, 10).

Table 11-6: Suburban Resentment of Urban A

Statement:	Residential Location				
	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Small-Town</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Total</i>
minorities receive most aid to cities					
Agree	31	56	34	65	186
Disagree	37	46	26	43	152
% agreeing	45.6	54.9	56.7	60.2	55.0

Note: The Kaiser Race Poll asked a subsample of respondents whether they thought minorities received most urban aid. The disproportionate number of suburbanites who responded in the affirmative, even more than rural respondents who would be less likely to know better, suggests that they live in areas where residents see themselves as in conflict with greedy, heavily minority urbanites.

null hypothesis that black density makes no difference is outside a 95% confidence interval. Ironically, then, metropolitan whites are most likely to think minorities grab up urban aid precisely where no blacks appear to compete for money. The illusion that minorities suck up funds is thus not a product of resentment among the local whites with whom they compete for that money. It is more common among racially isolated metropolitan whites, who can entertain cultural stereotypes and define themselves in opposition to them.

Now You See It, Now You Don't

A series of questions gauged whether respondents considered racism and discrimination serious social problems. These questions are similar to those asking whether blacks enjoy equal opportunity as whites, discussed previously, although they accentuate the negative more. Whites wishing to defend the values and prerogatives that ensure their cultural prominence need not reside near an extensive black population to feel the threat. Rather, acknowledging “victim” status for racial and ethnic minorities threatens those most firmly within the white middle class social milieu, those who otherwise monopolize cultural capital to which minorities demand access. Generally that group, in

metropolitan areas, will be those enjoying the greatest degree of racial isolation, those in the white suburbs. This is the Cultural Backlash hypothesis that has been most prominent throughout the previous racial attitudes measures.

The first question asked respondents to assess changing racial and ethnic tensions (see TENSIONS in Appendix 11A). The respondent could report that tensions had increased, stayed the same, or decreased over the previous 10 years. Whites wishing minority claims to recede from the political arena presumably should downplay the significance of race. This sentiment bears no simple relationship with the racial demographics of a white respondent's county or state (see Table 11-7), with (Model A) or without (Model B) controls.

Testing the interactive hypotheses again indicates that a meaningful geographical pattern is suppressed by omitted variables—a pattern compatible with the Cultural Backlash logic. Whether the ordered probit uses level of urbanization (Model C) or professionalization of the work force (Model D), the results are the same. Outside of urbanized areas, whites who find themselves in proximity with a black population are most likely to accentuate American racial progress. Among the most urbanized and professionalized whites, by contrast, those who are the most racially isolated are at least as likely to emphasize racial progress as those in more mixed locales.

My interpretation has assumed that the assessment of tensions is ideological, not factual. The reader may object to this skeptical interpretation. I should stress, therefore, that a less cynical reading of the TENSIONS question does not undermine the Cultural Backlash interpretation that I am offering. Taking the answers to represent local empirical truth, rather than ideological interpretation of national forces, would mean that racial tensions were growing among professionals and those in metropolitan areas—just as I have suggested. Roughly 48.2% of suburban whites report that racial tensions are rising, the highest found in the four residential categories.

Table 11-7: Admitting Racial Tensions in a Polarized Country

Dependent variable: Whether racial tensions have lessened in recent years

Subset:

Explanatory Variable	WHITES				BLACKS
	Model A (Simple)	Model B (Controls)	Model C (Urbanization)	Model D (Professional)	Model E (Simple)
<i>Racial density: % black among voting-age pop</i>	0.011 (.008)	0.007 (.008)	0.034 (.015)	0.045 (.023)	-0.003 (.004)
<i>Interaction: county * state racial density</i>	-0.00 (.000)	-0.00 (.000)	-0.00 (.000)	-0.00 (.000)	
<i>State Racial Density (whites) & South dummy (blacks)</i>	0.00 (.008)	0.00 (.008)	-0.00 (.008)	-0.00 (.009)	0.28 (.119)
5-point education scale		-0.01 (.039)	-0.00 (.039)	-0.01 (.039)	-0.13 (.057)
9-point family income scale		0.04 (.021)	0.04 (.02)	0.04 (.021)	-0.05 (.027)
Year of Birth		0.003 (.003)	0.003 (.003)	0.003 (.003)	-0.000 (.004)
Dummy variable for males		0.06 (.086)	0.06 (.086)	0.06 (.086)	0.28 (.121)
<i>Integrated (white) & Suburban (black) Dummies</i>			0.18 (.087)	0.17 (.086)	-0.51 (.244)
% labor force in professional fields				0.01 (.011)	
<i>Interaction: % urban * racial density</i>			-0.0003 (.0001)		
<i>Interaction: % labor force professional * racial density</i>				-0.0018 (.0009)	
<i>Interaction: suburban residence * racial density</i>					0.02 (.01)
observations	796	745	742	742	439
X^2	1.98	8.67	18.12	16.32	32.57
$p(>= X^2)$	0.58	0.28	0.03	0.09	0.00
Cutpoint 1	-0.028	6.579	5.875	6.186	-0.370
Cutpoint 2	1.104	7.718	7.024	7.333	0.785

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. All are ordered probit models. The model for blacks replaces state black density with a simple dummy for the South, and replaces the dummy asking whether respondents lived in an integrated neighborhood with another indicating whether they were suburban.

This is a case where black attitudes can help understand white attitudes. Although for most of this research I have conflated racial “conservatism” and racial “polarization,” since black preferences were almost uniform, here black respondents should reveal a fair bit of variation themselves. Is it true that blacks find tensions highest in the heavily white suburbs? Model E shows an ordered probit evaluating which blacks are most pessimistic about race relations. In addition to my typical variables, county black density and the four controls, I have added three others: a dummy variable for the South, a dummy variable for whether the respondent resides in a suburban area, and an interaction term for suburbs with racial density. The results overwhelmingly reinforce a pessimistic assessment of suburban racial polarization. Suburban blacks are extremely pessimistic about racial tensions, even controlling for the radicalizing experience of higher education, a result that fades only as the suburb is embedded in a blacker county.

These results are interesting enough to explore with CLARIFY. Let's start with an African-American man in a small Northern town, only 5% black. He has average income and education. This fellow would be 56.2% likely to say racial tensions had increased (standard error of .05). Change nothing except his place of residence, moving him to a suburb, and suddenly he is 70.3% (.06) likely to be cynical! The difference disappears once the area reaches approximately 20% black. Racial polarization is worst in the suburbs.

Another question simply asks how big a problem racism is “in our society today” (RACISM). Do those whites follow a systematic geographical pattern? The bivariate results, using an ordered probit model, are not auspicious for the traditional backlash logic (see Table 11-8, Model A). If anything, whites who are racially isolated are most likely to downplay racism. That result is even stronger if I allow perception to interact with the state's racial density as well (Model B), and does not go away after adding the typical control variables (Model C).

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that living in diverse areas produces a heightened

Table 11-8: Who Sees Racism? Solving a Puzzle

Dependent variable: Whether racism is a problem in American society

Explanatory Variable	Model A (Simple)	Model B (State)	Model C (Control)	Model D (Faced Discrimination)	Model E (Not Faced Discrimination)
<i>Racial density: % black among voting-age pop</i>	0.007 (.004)	0.016 (.008)	0.007 (.004)	0.028 (.013)	0.007 (.012)
<i>Interaction: county * state racial density</i>		-0.000 (.000)		-0.0005 (.0005)	-0.000 (.000)
State Racial Density		-0.001 (.008)		-0.010 (.017)	-0.001 (.01)
5-point education scale			0.06 (.038)	0.13 (.083)	0.04 (.044)
9-point family income scale			-0.03 (.02)	-0.16 (.045)	-0.00 (.023)
Year of Birth			0.001 (.003)	-0.01 (.007)	0.00 (.003)
Dummy variable for males			-0.24 (.083)	0.07 (.184)	-0.32 (.095)
observations	793	793	743	174	569
X^2	2.95	4.91	15.17	21.34	13.01
$p(>= X^2)$	0.09	0.18	0.01	0.00	0.07
Cutpoint 1	-1.68	-1.67	0.95	-22.12	1.88
Cutpoint 2	-0.89	-0.88	1.80	-21.32	2.76
Cutpoint 3	0.36	0.38	3.06	-19.96	4.02

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. The variable ranges from a 1, which means racism is not a problem at all, through a 4, which means racism is a big problem. All models use ordered probit techniques. Whites in proximity to a larger black population consider racism a problem only if a member of their family has faced racial discrimination.

concern with social problems like anti-black prejudice. This model fails to recognize that white respondents may not be worried about the plight of African Americans at all. Rather, they may be complaining about racism directed at *whites*, at least certain categories of whites. The fact is,

judging from this survey, a quarter of whites feel either they or a family member has faced ethnic discrimination.²⁰

Obviously such a judgment relies on the individual's perceptions, and it is possible the likelihood of feeling victimized depends upon the symbols and values one uses to evaluate experiences. However, the evidence weighs against this being a merely "symbolic" judgment. First, it seems fairly clear that respondents who report racial discrimination against their families generally do not mean "reverse discrimination," as affirmative action policies are sometimes called. There is no relationship between a white respondent's views on affirmative action and whether they report discrimination. Other variables measuring "symbolic racism," discussed in earlier subsections, also reveal little if any correlation with this assessment of discrimination. Second, I find no evidence that these whites are particularly hostile to African Americans. Those having faced discrimination personally are no more likely, for example, to dread increases in the minority population. They are no more likely to value "merit" over "diversity" as a social value. There is every possibility that the respondents are reporting factual information about their treatment.

Models D and E break whites into two categories: those whose families have faced discrimination, and those whose families have not. Among those who have witnessed anti-white discrimination intimately, racial density strongly and significantly predicts their opinion whether racism constitutes a significant social problem (a finding all the more impressive given the limited sample size). Views of the remainder bear no relation to nearby density at all. One's assessment of the seriousness of racism therefore is not purely symbolic; it is closely related to experience with anti-white discrimination and the racial environment in which one lives.

Correlation is not causality, however. To interpret this contextual effect on concern with racism

²⁰ Naturally some of those whites have minority family members. However, only 30% of whites in this category did not report racial discrimination against themselves, so most of these respondents clearly are including anti-white behavior in their response. To whatever extent intermarriage ultimately clouds these findings, however, it only makes my eventual conclusion stronger: that whites and blacks in racially mixed areas share a common pessimism about "meritocratic" American society.

as sign of a territorial “group competition” dynamic is no more credible than a “symbolic” interpretation. We have no evidence that neighboring blacks are discriminating against the whites who live among them, or even that whites perceive this to be the case. Rather, whites who report facing ethnic discrimination are those who strongly identify with an ethnic grouping more specific than mere whiteness (ETHNID). Only 14.3% of whites with no specific ethnic identity report discrimination against them or their families. By contrast, 27.6% of whites with a strong ethnic identification report intimate experience with discrimination. The difference across categories of ethnic identification is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 11.8$, $n = 792$, $p < .005$), and might be even larger if we knew which non-ethnic whites had intermarried.²¹

Thus the most likely interpretation of these data comports with my claim that whites and blacks who share territory possess similar perceptions. Whites in mixed-race counties share a world view with the blacks who live around them: that the world is a rough place, that American society is hostile to people holding their ethnic identity, that the partitioning of American society is a serious problem. This commonality is the sort of shared interest upon which political coalitions are built, and contrasts with the rosier view of why people succeed or fail that characterizes racially isolated whites.

Fear of a Mongol Horde?

Thus far my research has concentrated on white attitudes about blacks. This decision does not in any sense suggest that I consider white attitudes about other racial and ethnic groups politically irrelevant (although the implication of my theoretical work is that all intergroup relations would not follow the same geographic pattern). Rather, it was an outgrowth of the excellent voting data in

²¹ Presumably someone who placed more emphasis on their ethnicity would be more likely to try marrying within that grouping. Whites with no ethnic identity would seem more likely to marry an Asian, Latino, or African American.

several Southern states where other ethnic populations are too small to have an impact. The same barrier does not hold me back with the Kaiser survey, which spans the entire country.

One question asked whites whether they thought the U.S. minority population was growing. Among those who knew that it was, interviewers then asked whether this growing minority population was a good thing or a bad thing (MINPOPGD). They also asked about blacks specifically (GDBADBL).

The main problem with expanding my methodology to all minorities is that I have no reason to expect that the pattern describing white-black polarization also would apply to, for example, white-Asian polarization. Asian values are not identical to African-American values, either in fact or according to white perception. In particular, Asians generally are not viewed as challenging the white-middle-class meritocracy, or as beneficiaries of race-conscious governmental policy, so I have no reason to suspect hostility to concentrate in the suburbs. Indeed, the absence of such a pattern would reinforce my claim that white racial attitudes are something more than a psychological intolerance for "otherness."

I began by computing county minority population densities for all three groups: blacks, Asians and white Hispanics. I also created a general variable to represent county minority population density, the sum of the other three. This latter variable ended up bearing no direct relation to the assessment of minority population increases, judging from an ordered probit model. However, Model A in Table 11-9 tells a different story once minority groups are broken up. Whites are somewhat more likely to dread minority population increases as the black density of their county grows, but do not show the same reaction to linguistic minorities. Indeed, whites surrounded by a relatively large Asian population are significantly more likely to look *favorably* upon minority population increases.

Model B adds the four demographic controls. These variables temporarily wash out the

Table 11-9: Fear of Other Minorities As Well?

Dependent variable: Whether increases in the U.S. minority population is a bad thing

Explanatory Variable	Model A (Simple)	Model B (Controls)	Model C (Asian State)	Model D (Metro)	Model E (GDBADBL)
<i>Racial density: % black among voting-age pop</i>	0.008 (.005)	0.008 (.005)	0.011 (.004)	0.021 (.007)	0.023 (.008)
5-point education scale		-0.18 (.045)			-0.06 (.053)
9-point family income scale		0.01 (.023)			0.01 (.028)
Year of Birth		-0.01 (.003)			-0.01 (.004)
Dummy variable for males		-0.10 (.097)			-0.03 (.115)
State % Asian among voting-age population			0.06 (.035)	0.06 (.036)	0.03 (.039)
<i>Racial density: % Asian among voting-age pop</i>	-0.04 (.018)	-0.02 (.019)	-0.15 (.042)	-0.13 (.043)	-0.00 (.031)
<i>Racial density: % Latino among voting-age pop</i>	0.00 (.000)	0.00 (.006)	-0.00 (.005)	0.00 (.005)	-0.01 (.007)
<i>Interaction: metro dummy * racial density</i>				-0.02 (.008)	-0.02 (.009)
<i>Interaction: % state * % county Asian population</i>			0.01 (.005)	0.009 (.006)	
observations	622	579	622	615	593
X ²	6.95	34.22	20.56	23.99	21.91
p(>= X ²)	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
Cutpoint 1	-1.14	-16.15	-1.15	-1.12	-23.76
Cutpoint 2	0.43	-14.49	0.45	0.49	-20.79

Note: All models are ordered probits. For both variables, a value of 1 means increasing minority population is a good thing, 2 represents a neutral answer, and 3 means minority population increases are a bad thing. The last column uses a different variable, one that singles out blacks rather than all minorities.

intriguing positive reaction to Asians, but do little harm to the negative reaction that blacks invoke. The next step is to implement the interactive hypotheses. Whites who actually live near Asians may be relatively assimilated, and thus consider increases a good thing, but I doubt whites elsewhere in the state would feel the same way. They would share few interests with distant Asians, yet presumably would consider themselves in cultural conflict with a large immigrant population. Model C therefore adds a measure of the state Asian population, plus an interaction between that variable and the county density.²² As anticipated, the Near Proximity pattern appears: whites are more likely to embrace minority population growth when they reside in heavily Asian *counties*, but they become much less sanguine in similarly diverse *states*.²³

Next I walked through the interaction terms available for blacks, to see whether the typical Cultural Backlash phenomenon appears. It does. Whether I use the professionalization term, the urbanization term, or simply whether respondents reported living in a metropolitan area, the result is the same: whites respond badly to nearby blacks when they reside in rural areas, but the pattern disappears in the more urban locales. Model D offers one example, the simple metropolitan model.²⁴ In keeping with my rebuttal of the traditional white backlash argument, results presented here for Asians suggest that ethnic polarization is not necessarily localized. Whites in both urban and rural areas respond the same way to Asians, becoming more friendly to minorities as the Asian population increases. Similarly, white attitudes about minorities do not respond negatively to the presence of a large local Hispanic population. Only black-white proximity increases white hostility to minorities as a group, and only then in rural areas—more historical residue than contemporary competition.

²² Other interactive hypotheses, parallel to those used for blacks, show little effect on the county-level variable.

²³ Measures for the state black and Hispanic populations did not behave the same way. That for Hispanics did nothing. That for blacks, meanwhile, cut into the county-level black effect because of multicollinearity, but gave no sign of being a better predictor or having independent effects on the dependent variable.

²⁴ Offering parallel black and white variables—a state density variable and a metropolitan interaction variable—does not overturn this pattern.

Heavily black rural areas in the South stand out for anti-minority attitudes that date back several centuries, but outside the South or in metropolitan areas familiarity simply does not breed contempt with any racial or ethnic group.

Model E switches to the question that singles out black population increases. I suspect fairly similar patterns with this variable as observed with the last, because most whites probably conflate the terms “minority” and “black” (the exception being those in a state or county with many immigrants). The results reported for Model E mostly uphold my expectations. The main change, not surprisingly, is that nearby Asian populations no longer matter, for good or ill. Otherwise, though, both variables allow the same conclusion: outside of rural areas, whites do not react negatively to a large black population.

Merit According to Whom?

Affirmative action elicits strong opposition from whites. The Kaiser survey, for example, asked whether Congress should limit affirmative action, eliciting approval from more than two-thirds of white respondents who expressed an opinion. Almost half said they *strongly* supported such a move. Even including the uncertain respondents, a solid majority of whites opposed the policy. Of course, ask the question a different way, and the numbers can shift around—but it takes a truly tortured question to produce the illusion that whites *endorse* treating people differently depending upon race.

What makes this racial policy particularly interesting is the strange pattern of incentives it sets up. First, the risk of losing a job or admission to an educational program because of affirmative action is relatively small. Even with the most extreme racial preference, say a 15% quota for African American applicants in a 200-member class at an elite law school, at most 30 whites could lose out to minority candidates who were less qualified. That number only decreases, of course, if some of those 30 blacks would have won admission without special preferences. Considering the hundreds

of applications such a school would receive, the probability of falling prey to racial favoritism is quite small even for those who apply, and of course no one else suffers any risk at all.

Equally important is that affirmative action's costs seldom fall upon a localized constituency. Rather, affirmative action policies appear most prominently (or, at least, most contentiously) among professions and institutions that draw from a geographically dispersed candidate pool: academia, journalism, law, education, the military. Occasionally controversy swirls around local secondary schools or the community police force, and to a certain extent these job markets are more centralized, but affirmative action is likely to play little role in the unskilled and semi-skilled markets that draw from the narrowest labor pool. The policy therefore not only represents minimal risk to individual whites, it spreads that risk fairly evenly across the white population.²⁵

Affirmative action is quite different from school busing, the desegregation policy upon which much of the symbolic racism literature draws for evidence. Tracing the costs of busing minority students into majority-dominated schools is not difficult. Any risk or sacrifice necessarily would fall only upon whites with children, and only upon those who live in a city diverse enough to require such measures. We reasonably might expect opinions to follow predictable geographical patterns for the busing issue—which is why the apparent absence of such patterns represents such compelling evidence against considering racial conservatism an outgrowth of real group conflict. The unpredictability of self-interest for affirmative action, by contrast, should provide an easy case for showing that racial ideology rather than racial interest drives individual preferences. White resentment surely must drive policy preferences when the sacrifices are so diffuse as to make self-interest untraceable.

However, the above reasoning makes a critical (and common) assumption: that opposition to affirmative action primarily derives from fear of being squeezed out of racial privileges. Yet this

²⁵ I do not mean to imply that every white has the same level of self-interest on affirmative action—only that the arrangement of interests bears little relation to geography or the distribution of a state's minority groups.

is flawed logic. It ignores the plausible alternate hypothesis that some whites have more to lose from an alternate cultural voice than others do, and therefore may oppose affirmative action for the emphasis it places on diversity. It ignores that some whites have more vested in America's meritocratic myths than others do, have more vested in the legitimacy of the country's structured social inequalities. They therefore feel more sharply the implicit criticism upon which affirmative action is based.

That these alternative pressures may play a greater role in the policy environment should be clear when we consider exposure to any given admissions policy. Take, for example, the hypothetical 200-student admissions pool, with 30 slots set aside for minorities and 2,000 white applicants. Even if not a single minority candidate managed to fall in the top 200, an applicant's chance of losing a slot from the policy would be quite small ($30 / 2,000 = 1.5\%$); the chance for anyone else would be nil. By contrast, the chance of attending the now-diverse school would be significantly higher ($170 / 2,000 = 8.5\%$). If whites find diversity unpleasant or even threatening, they are more likely to pay the "costs" of affirmative action than whites who simply do not want to give up access to privileged resources. Meanwhile, by implying that past admissions were unfair, the policy might threaten any whites who previously graduated from the institution, and perhaps offend the sensibilities of many more.

The Kaiser poll shows that these general value orientations do indeed correspond to more specific policy preferences. Whites who consider diversity more important than purely meritocratic practices (MERIT) are almost two-thirds likely both to consider affirmative action a good thing (JUDGAFFA) and oppose scaling it back (POLAFFAC). The difference from other whites is dramatic, and clearly statistically significant ($p < .001$). We cannot rule out, therefore, that opposition to affirmative action reflects an encompassing distaste for diversity rather than merely a fear of economic exclusion. It is possible that opposition stems from genuine cultural struggle:

over what constitutes value when one is hired or admitted, over the voices that are included and excluded within important institutions. In that case, we would indeed expect a geographical pattern to emerge on the affirmative action issue, just as it has on the supposedly “symbolic” racial orientations. White suburbanites should reveal as much opposition to affirmative action as whites in much more diverse locales, because residents typically enjoy the cultural advantages rewarded best in a “meritocratic” system, and in practice have the least experience with racial diversity.

Model A in Table 11-10 presents an ordered probit model predicting the desire to cut affirmative action, using only county black population density as an explanatory variable. Unlike with the symbolic politics measures, even this simple model indicates that preferences are geographically distributed. Whites who reside in blacker counties tend to want limits on the policy, represented by the positive sign on the coefficient—a pattern inconsistent with either naive or complex psychological threat models. Adding the typical controls in Model B does not change the basic picture: county black density still helps predict policy preferences, even after considering both the opposition men typically reveal and the higher levels of support that characterize the educated elite.

One possibility is that this “threat” pattern actually reflects historical patterns of racial resentment. Model C adds a control for respondents who reside in the South. Once we know that the respondent is a Southern white, having the actual population density of their county appears to provide little extra predictive power. However, the weakness of the racial density measure as usual results from failure to consider differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Model D adds a dummy variable identifying respondents who live in metropolitan areas, as well as an interaction between that variable and the racial density measure.

The effect of racial density is strong and significant outside of metropolitan areas: the blacker a county, the more whites oppose affirmative action. CLARIFY indicates that whites residing in a

Table 11-10: Racial Conservatism on a Policy Question

Dependent variable: Whether Congress should limit affirmative action

Explanatory Variable	Model A (Simple)	Model B (Control)	Model C (South)	Model D (Metro Interaction)	Model E (Symbolic Controls)
<i>Racial density: % black among voting-age pop</i>	0.011 (.004)	0.011 (.004)	0.006 (.005)	0.025 (.008)	0.027 (.009)
<i>Interaction: county racial density * metro dummy</i>				-0.029 (.01)	-0.026 (.01)
Dummy variable for metro areas				0.216 (.119)	0.277 (.123)
5-point education scale		-0.10 (.042)	-0.09 (.042)	-0.10 (.042)	-0.05 (.044)
9-point family income scale		0.03 (.022)	0.03 (.022)	0.03 (.023)	0.02 (.023)
Year of Birth		0.00 (.003)	0.00 (.003)	0.00 (.003)	0.00 (.003)
Dummy variable for males		0.30 (.091)	0.30 (.091)	0.30 (.091)	0.22 (.095)
Dummy variable for South			0.27 (.114)	0.21 (.118)	0.08 (.123)
Should rise like other groups?					0.68 (.106)
Lower standard of living?					-0.21 (.100)
Tensions growing?					-0.00 (.069)
Racism a serious problem?					-0.09 (.066)
observations	672	633	633	631	608
X^2	6.66	23.40	29.19	39.08	99.72
$p(>= X^2)$	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cutpoint 1	-0.88	-0.19	0.19	0.16	1.80
Cutpoint 2	-0.39	0.30	0.69	0.66	2.32
Cutpoint 3	0.18	0.89	1.28	1.26	2.96

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. The variable ranges from a 1, which means the respondent strongly opposes Congress cutting affirmative action, to a 4, which means the respondent strongly supports such a move. All models use ordered probit techniques. "Symbolic racism" measures do help explain affirmative action preferences, but they do not wash out the Cultural Backlash pattern.

25% black county would have a 63.6% chance of strongly opposing affirmative action (standard error of 6.4), compared to only a 44% (2.7) chance among a 5% black population. Within metropolitan areas, by contrast, local population demographics matter little. The interaction term actually flips the estimated effect of black density until it is slightly negative. Whites in racially cloistered suburbs and cities are, if anything, more likely to oppose affirmative action than those in more diverse counties.²⁶

Model E reinforces the point by adding several “symbolic racism” variables from earlier in this chapter: whether blacks should raise themselves up as other ethnic groups did, whether blacks enjoy the same standard of living, and whether racism and racial tensions are significant social problems.²⁷ Something prompts racially isolated metropolitan respondents to reveal as much hostility to affirmative action as those in more diverse locales—a trend that does not go away when I control for “symbolic racism,” a trend that does not change depending upon the mobility of the white population or their economic resources relative to the black population. More plausible than explanations based upon migration, contact or hereditary resentment therefore is the Cultural Backlash interpretation that has received consistent support through this research. The stakes of racial conflict unite whites who, because of their residential patterns, have the greatest investment in “white middle class” culture: those in rural counties and small towns where they must compete with a sizeable black population for control of local institutions, as well as those in suburbs isolated from the nation’s African Americans.

²⁶ The analysis did not vary if I added controls for the county Hispanic and Asian populations. It was also similar, although slightly weaker, for the other affirmative action question, whether affirmative action has had a positive effect (JUDGAFFA). Racial density always predicts affirmative action views outside of metropolitan areas, but not inside them.

²⁷ These were selected because they were the four asked of my entire white sample. The other variables, while interesting, would have decimated the sample.

Conclusion

Consistent with previous literature in the symbolic politics vein, I find using simple contextual models that “material incentives” fail to predict adherence to symbolic racism’s articles of faith. However, I then explored the possibility that self interest follows somewhat more complicated patterns, in the form of interactive backlash hypotheses. The results indicate that survey responses usually interpreted to reflect a psychological orientation actually follow a clear and systematic geographical pattern, entirely consistent with the Cultural Backlash approach. The same rough pattern also appears when I develop a predictive model for opposition to affirmative action: a backlash pattern outside of metropolitan areas, but if anything a reversed pattern inside. This chapter thus makes clear that the findings reported in this thesis are not merely a product of using aggregate data. The Cultural Backlash results are consistent regardless of the sort of data one uses.