BLACK INTERGROUP ATTITUDES

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During the 1980s, a record nine million people entered the U.S., exceeding the previous high of three-quarters of a million recorded for 1900-1909. A 1990 *TIME* cover story predicted the influence this primarily Latino and Asian immigration will have on this country's ethnic future. In "America's Changing Colors," the magazine claimed, "someday soon white Americans will become a minority group." This emerging demographic diversity again raises fundamental questions about the role of race and race relations in America's identity.

These changes have been accompanied by increasing levels of racial tension. While mass media features several groups as focal points of this conflict, black American intolerance is of singular interest. Social science research has taken a similar slant, stressing black xenophobia and nativism. Nevertheless, these popular characterizations are based on isolated cases. This remains an issue rarely explored.

With a colleague, I became interested in going beyond these too simplistic views and exploring this issue in greater detail. This essay will describe a project in which I examine factors that predict positive attitudes toward Africans, West Indians, American Indians, Hispanics and Asian Americans. In each section below, I review empirical evidence about which sociodemographic factors affect black attitudes for each group, and summarize recent analyses we conducted on the influence of religious and nationalist attitudes on black intergroup feelings.

Africans

Despite its unparalleled influence on our psyche, how blacks feel about Africa and Africans has been rarely explored empirically (Morrison, 1987; Moikobu, 1981). Thornton and Taylor (1988a) described some basic demographic influences on these views. While most felt close to Africans, older blacks and those from the working class held a special affinity. Men were also more likely than women to identify with Africans.

More generally, past work suggests that nationalistic feelings and religious involvement hold important sway among blacks. This literature hints that black power and religious ties are conservative influences on bonds with other non-black groups (Van DeBerg, 1992; Ellison, 1991). Building on our previous work, in recent analyses we examined how black nationalism (e.g., should you vote black or shop in black-owned stores) and religious feelings were associated with links to Africans. This work

exposed a complex relationship between these sets of ideas and intergroup attitudes. Both men and women who support nationalistic statements that blacks should give their children African names and have them learn African languages feel an affinity with Africans. Men who felt close also agreed with the statement that blacks should vote for other blacks. A significant sex difference also occurred when we examined the impact of a set of religious factors (e.g., the racial composition of the church they attended, how often they went to church services and how important this was to them). Male religious attitudes told us little about their feelings, while only women who described themselves as very religious felt a special bond with Africans. In sum, for blacks, supporting cultural aspects of nationalism is related to closer ties to Africans. For women, strong ties to religion also predicted positive feelings toward Africans.

West Indians

While Africans have clearly been captivating figures in our communities, the nature of black American links to West Indians is unclear. Presumably a common ancestry would bond black Americans to Caribbean blacks. Foner (1987) found a tenuous relationship between black Americans and Jamaicans, the latter often using stereotypes of native blacks to remain aloof from them. In contrast to their views of Africans, male views of West Indians were unrelated to nationalistic feelings. For women, only those who agreed that children should be given African names felt a special affinity with West Indians. Among religious determinants, non-Baptist men were closer than their Baptist counterparts, as were women who rarely attended church services but who saw themselves as very religious. Thus, for women, religious identity and some aspects of cultural nationalism predict closer ties to West Indians. Influences on men's views remain unclear.

American Indians

Among minority groups, blacks hold the most intricate connection with Native Americans (Forbes, 1984). Three centuries of contact has been frequent and mostly peaceable (Littlefield, 1977; Grinde and Taylor, 1984). Early unions between them were seldom well-organized or planned in advance, often arising from specific conditions and needs at the time (Perdue, 1979). This mingling resulted in black-red communities in places like Long Island and the Carolinas, and in an enhanced biological intersection, producing American luminaries such as Crispus Attucks and Frederick Douglass (Katz, 1977; Forbes, 1984; Wright, 1981). Among the Seminoles, blacks were warriors, interpreters, and advisors, while elsewhere they voted and sat on juries (Littlefield, 1977). Alternatively, some Indian nations enslaved them. Among the Choctaw, blacks lived in a system like that of the southern Black Codes following the Civil War (Porter, 1948; Jones, 1977; Halliburton, 1977).

In our analysis, male support for cultural nationalism (i.e., black children receiving African names and being taught African languages) was associated with closer ties to American Indians. For women, a bond with this group accompanied support for learning a language. Religiously, when men attended primarily white churches they felt closer to American Indians. Among women, those who felt it unimportant to attend church services, who said they were very religious, and attended white churches identified with Indians. Cultural nationalism was predictive of closer ties to American Indians among blacks, while religion was again important in leading women to more likely bond with this outgroup than men.

Hispanics

Dyer, et al. (1989) described social class as related to black views of Mexican Americans. Middle and upper class blacks were more positive toward Hispanics than were their working class counterparts. That study also found a similar trend among non-Baptists when compared to their Baptist and Catholic companions. A study focusing on Los Angeles, found young blacks and those who felt they competed against Hispanics for jobs and economic security particularly antagonistic (Oliver and Johnson, 1984).

For our analyses, nationalist feelings again were partially related to attitudes. Only men and women who agreed that children should learn an African language felt a bond with Hispanics. Religion was also unimportant in male attitudes, while women who infrequently attended church services, went to a white church,, or saw themselves as very religious were likely to feel a likeness to Hispanics.

Asian Americans

Historical evidence suggests that common bonds of persecution link blacks with Chinese and Japanese. However, Blacks have often loathed peculiar habits and lifestyles of Asians, such as their religious practices and their lack of English skills. They resented their receiving more government attention than native-born blacks and that on occasion Asians absorbed anti-black attitudes and behavior. They also viewed them as competitors in the unskilled labor market. Nevertheless, because they saw them as racially inspired and advanced by mutual enemies, black Americans all but unanimously and consistently rejected schemes to limit or exclude Asian immigrants (Shankman, 1982). Until recently, blacks found comfort in the model minority myth. Many reasoned that if another visible minority group could overcome racial barriers, they could too (Shankman, 1978; Hellwig, 1979).

Evidence during the seventies suggests that older black rather than white soldiers were more likely to relate positively with Vietnamese (Fiman, Borus and Stanton, 1975;

Stanton, 1972; Borus, 1973). Thornton and Taylor (1988b) found that while most blacks in a national sample did not identify with Asian Americans, those who did were older, males and lived in rural areas.

Our recent analyses showed that for both men and women, learning an African language was related to closeness. Women who argued that blacks should not vote for black candidates also bonded with Asian Americans. Greater ties to religion were associated with feeling close to Asians in America for both males and females, the former when attending white churches. Among females, those who felt an affinity rarely attended services, went to white congregations, and saw themselves as very religious.

CONCLUSIONS

Our work shows that, contrary to common belief, support of black self- determination is associated with bonding with non-black groups. Another so- called conservative influence, the black church, was, at least among women, a catalyst for building attachments to others as well. However, the nature of the associations remain unclear and need to be examined more fully.

Analysis not reported here also uncovered patterns contrary to common knowledge. Among whites, traditionally youth and higher social class are associated with racial tolerance. We have found older not younger blacks uniformly more likely to feel an affinity to outgroups. Social class was rarely important, a unique finding in the literature.

Contrary to popular opinion, black attitudes toward other groups are complex and contradict traditional depictions of intergroup attitudes. This is not surprising in that previous literature reflects a general disregard for both the unique cultural and socio-historical contexts in which black views are formulated. Growing evidence suggests that blacks function in at least two cultural and racial spheres, such that the predominant view of race relations differs markedly from other groups, especially whites (Sigelman and Welch, 1991; Jackson, McCullough, Gurin and Broman, 1991; Gurin, Hatchett and Jackson, 1989). Not surprisingly, the functional realities of black life are manifested in unique perceptions and linkages to other groups of color.

This new work suggests that standard wisdom provides an inadequate framework for explaining black perspectives on racial boundaries. What factors invite this different type of cross-racial identification and/or affinity needs to be explored in greater detail. Some may use other factors, such as minority status, to create a different type of identification and/or bond across racial boundaries. This work intimates that the social distance between any two groups is contingent on the nature of past mutual relationships and the unique and respective histories of each group involved, factors seldom examined in work on intergroup attitudes.

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