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African Americans' Perceptions of Racial Inequality in Relation to Institutional and Social Trust

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AFRICAN AMERICANS' PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL INEQUALITY IN
RELATION TO INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL TRUST

by

Megan Betts

A Thesis Submitted in
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ABSTRACT

AFRICAN AMERICANS' PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL INEQUALITY IN RELATION TO INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL TRUST

by
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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2020
Under the Supervision of Professor Timothy O'Brien

Much of the research examining institutional and social trust explores the factors that affect these concepts, including race and ethnicity. Such studies involve comparing different racial groups and using race as a discrete independent variable in their analysis. Few researchers have sought to explore social and institutional trust within a single racial group, and when they have, it has only been in White respondents. In addition, few researchers have tied institutional and social trust to understandings of racial inequality. Due to the complex social and historical circumstances of African Americans, I propose there is a pattern in the way Black respondents develop social and institutional trust that is specific to their experiences with, and conceptualizations of, racial inequality. To examine this, I use items from the cumulative General Social Survey (1988 – 2018) measuring respondents' beliefs about racial inequality. Rather than comparing multiple racial groups, I isolate Black respondents so as not to position them as “other” in reference to White respondents, perpetuating the hegemony of White experience. Using binary logit and ordinary least squares regression models, I will explore how these racial ideology items affect institutional and social trust. These findings contribute to research on how racial ideologies affect individuals' worldviews and political dispositions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract	ii
List of Figures	iv
List of Tables	v
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction	1
II. Background	4
a. Explanations for Racial Inequality	4
b. Social Trust	9
i. How researchers define trust	9
ii. How social trust develops	10
iii. Factors that affect social trust	12
c. Institutional Trust	14
d. Studies on Black Public Opinion	15
III. Data	20
IV. Measures	21
a. Dependent Variables	21
b. Independent Variables	22
c. Control Variables	25
V. Methods	25
VI. Results	26
a. Confidence in Institutions	26
b. Social Trust	32
VII. Discussion	33
VIII. Conclusion	38
IX. References	47

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	46
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables	40
Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables	41
Table 3 Unstandardized regression coefficients for Institutional Trust	42
Table 4 Predicted Probabilities for each racial inequality explanation	43
Table 5 Unstandardized regression coefficients for Institutional Trust	44
Table 6 Unstandardized regression coefficients for Social Trust	45

INTRODUCTION

Amid the civil unrest that has developed during the spring of 2020, the importance of understanding public opinion on racial inequality is very salient with hundreds of protests happening all across the United States and all over the world against police brutality. Racial inequality is rooted in the violence of American slavery and deliberate institutional disenfranchisement. Despite efforts made in law and policy, critical research in academia, and grassroots activism, there are still large gaps in life outcomes between White people and people of color. This issue seems most evident in Black/White differences in outcomes such as socioeconomic status and wealth (e.g. Conley 2000; Darity and Myers 2004; Darity and Nembhard 2000; Mitchell 2013; Kraus et al. 2019). In a democratic society, how can we justify these differences? What factors perpetuate this inequality? There are many possible explanations for this phenomenon to which people can subscribe. Researchers identify two major camps, person-centered or individualistic reasons, and structural reasons. These systems of belief do not oppose each other and can be—and often are—asserted by the same person (Hunt 2007).

Individualistic explanations for racial inequality center on the failings of the individuals experiencing negative life outcomes. People who espouse this explanation argue that racial inequality stems from individual differences in will power, work ethic, or even natural abilities such as intelligence. In this view, it is these factors rather than race that explain differences in life outcomes. In contrast, structural explanations locate the cause of racial inequality in institutions and barriers built into the fabric of society. In this case, institutional racism and discrimination lead people to be treated differently by race, which in turn explains racial inequality in life outcomes. Structural explanations also highlight barriers to resources such as education and wealth which might aid in surmounting the obstacles of racism. Many researchers

(e.g., Hunt 2007; Kluegel 1990; Schuman et al. 1997) use items from the General Social Survey (GSS) to study these individualistic and structural explanations. Hunt (2007) specifically studied how race affects beliefs about racial inequality using the GSS items as the dependent variables. Instead, I examine these GSS items as independent variables to see if beliefs about racial inequality impact institutional and social trust.

There is a large body of research that examines institutional and social trust. Much of the discourse centers around how to define trust (Abbott and Freeth 2008; Delhey, Newton and Welzel 2011; Newton 2001; Sturgis and Smith 2010) and theorizing how trust develops (Glanville and Paxton 2007; Marschall and Stolle 2004; Van Lange 2015). Authors of these studies discuss whether trust is primarily a social or psychological phenomenon and whether it is context specific. There is also discourse surrounding the validity of the survey questions that ask about trust (Delhey, Newton and Welzel 2011). Many have studied social trust as a major aspect of social capital, something that greatly impacts social cohesion and belief in political legitimacy (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993).

Researchers have also sought to define institutional trust (Cook and Gronke 2005; Khodyakov 2007) as well as to find the connection between the two concepts (Freitag and Bühlmann 2009; Putnam 1993; Sønderskov and Dinesen 2015; Twenge, Campbell, and Carter 2014). Researchers found that inequality (Twenge, Campbell, and Carter 2014) and institutional integrity (Blanco and Ruiz 2013; Tyler 2001) have an impact on institutional trust. Factors such as political ideology (Gauchat 2012; Price and Romantan 2004) as well as levels of poverty (Twenge, Campbell, and Carter 2014) also have an impact on institutional trust. Researchers have explored the impact of race on both social and institutional trust as well, finding higher levels of social trust in White Americans (Smith 2010) and racial differences in perceptions of

different public institutions (Henderson et al. 1997, 2003; Klugman and Xu 2008). Black people also develop social trust in a way that is distinct from White people (Marschall and Stolle 2004).

However, while past studies have considered race and ethnicity discrete demographic categories, they are also complex systems of identity that develop through varied processes of socialization, lived experience, and understandings of history (Gosine 2002). This system is particularly complex in African Americans, due to the history of racial enslavement, state-sanctioned violence, and institutional racism. However, there is an apparent lack of research into the political attitudes of African Americans, especially as their own social group. Many researchers seek to compare racial and ethnic minorities to White people when studying social and institutional trust (Henderson et al. 1997; Marschall and Stolle 2004; Tyler 2001) as well as beliefs about racial inequality (Hinojosa and Park 2004; Hunt 2007; Kane and Kyyrö 2001; Kluegel and Smith 1982; McDonald 2001; Schuman and Krysan 1999; Smith 2014; Taylor and Merino 2011; Tuch and Hughes 1996). I argue that this perpetuates the hegemony and ubiquity of White experience and sets African Americans as “other,” an exception to the norm of Whiteness.

It also implies homogeneity in Black political thought, framing African Americans as one monolithic group. Studies that focus on Whites’ racial attitudes (e.g. Bobo 1988; Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Gilens 1995; Schuman and Bobo 1988; Sears and Jessor 1996) acknowledge the multitude of experiences that White people from all different walks of life have. In order to acknowledge their subjectivity and complexity, African Americans ought to be afforded the same privilege. Many studies in other contexts already showcase both the organized nature of Black political thought (e.g. Aberbach and Walker 1970; Davis and Brown 2002; Sigelman and Tuch 1997) and the heterogeneity within this thought (e.g. Cathy Cohen 1999; Hwang,

Fitzpatrick, and Helms 1998; Neville et al. 2005; Seltzer and Smith 1985; Sigelman, Tuch, and Martin 2005). I would like to contribute to this body of research.

I seek to explore whether Black respondents' belief about racial differences in socioeconomic status affects their trust in people and their trust in civic institutions. Stated another way, how do Black people's understandings of racial inequality affect their social and institutional trust? In order to answer this question, I will use data from the 1988 - 2018 GSS, focusing on respondents who identified as African American. I will use ordinary least squares and binary logit regression models to examine how Black respondents' beliefs about racial inequality relate to confidence in institutions and trust in people. Specifically, I create scales of institutional confidence and social trust and regress them on respondents' beliefs about the sources of racial inequalities. I then examine the individual measures of institutional confidence and social trust used to create the scale variables to determine whether the relationships of interest are specific to certain institutions or aspects of social trust. The regression models also include numerous control variables to isolate how respondents' racial inequality beliefs relate to their institutional and social trust net of other demographic and political characteristics.

BACKGROUND

Explanations for Racial Inequality

Understanding inequality and why it manifests has been a major topic of social science research. In 1994, Herrnstein and Murray wrote *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, a controversial book in which they argued that intelligence is a fixed biological characteristic which has an inevitable direct impact on the life outcomes of individuals. Herrnstein and Murray claimed that inborn intelligence had a profound impact on a person's position in the class hierarchy, and thus that class inequality was unavoidable and should be

accepted. There was no need for any intervention on the side of institutions. However, not long after, in 1996, Fischer et al. wrote *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*, a critique of what was called “the bell curve argument.” They re-examined Herrnstein’s and Murray’s data and found that intelligence only accounted for five to ten percent of the variation in life outcomes and that larger structural issues such as negative stigma, segregation, unequal education, etc. were the real causes of inequality. These works represent the two major arguments for racial inequality, the individualist explanation where African Americans underperform because of innate intellectual inferiority or pathological ethnic culture (claims of laziness, irresponsibility, etc.) and the structural explanation. They not only reflect the discourse within academia but also the competing arguments held by the American public.

A large body of sociological research documents persistent socioeconomic inequality between Black people and White people (e.g. Conley 2000, Darity and Myers 2004; Darity and Nembhard 2000; Mitchell 2013; Kraus et al. 2019). A related body of research examines public perceptions about the sources of this socioeconomic inequality. Many of these studies utilize the General Social Survey, which contains repeated measures of four items that examine respondents’ beliefs about racial inequality (e.g. Hunt 2007; Kluegel 1990; Schuman et al. 1997). They ask respondents whether they believe it results from discrimination, innate inferiority or disability, lack of education, or lack of will. Typically, these studies conceptualize discrimination and lack of education as structural explanations and disability and lack of will as individualistic explanations (Hunt 2007; Kluegel 1990; Schuman et al. 1997). This study takes the same approach. Hunt (2007) found that the use of innate inferiority as an explanation by non-Hispanic Whites has declined, but that they are not necessarily more likely to endorse discrimination as an explanation. Also, African Americans are more likely to endorse structural explanations than

Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites, though this gap is decreasing over time. These findings support the idea that belief in these two types of arguments is impacted by race.

The individualistic and structural explanations have substantially different implications for persistent differences in wages, educational achievement, and other life outcomes between White people and Black people. Much research has been done specifically on White Americans' beliefs about racial inequality (e.g. Kluegel and Smith 1982; McDonald 2001; Schuman and Krysan 1999; Tuch and Hughes 1996). According to Kluegel and Smith (1982), White Americans tend to deny the structural explanations for racial inequality, instead supporting the individualistic ones. Many also believe in the notion of "reverse racism," the idea that people of color receive better treatment than White people (Jones et al. 2016). Kluegel and Smith argue these findings may lead to decreased support in programs created to assist African Americans, such as affirmative action (p. 530). In contrast, Tuch and Hughes (1996) find that whether White respondents understood the persistent negative impact of racial discrimination on the lives of African Americans was the most influential factor in their support for race-targeted support policies. They even argue that educating White Americans on this fact could potentially have a positive influence for their support of these policies (p. 739). These studies show how beliefs about racial inequality can impact public support of programs geared toward aiding African Americans overcome the obstacles of racism, programs which greatly impact said inequality.

Another factor that affects beliefs about racial inequality in addition to race is education. Kane and Kyyrö (2001) used the data from the 1996 General Social Survey and found that while increased education had a positive impact on the rejection of segregation and individualistic explanations for inequality, it had less of an impact on recognizing discrimination or endorsing group-level remedies. This suggests that education decreases the use of individualistic and

victim-blaming explanations but does not necessarily increase the use of structural explanations. In this way, individualistic and structural explanations for racial inequality are not necessarily mutually exclusive or diametrically opposed, a point supported by other studies (e.g. Tuch and Hughes 1996). To account for this complexity, years of education will be included as a control variable in this study.

Researchers have also examined the impact of religion on beliefs about racial inequality and found that religious beliefs impact both the denial of structural explanations and the affirmation of individualistic explanations (Hinojosa and Park 2004). However, both Black and White Protestants were not found to be uniquely conservative when other factors were controlled (Taylor and Merino 2011). This again complicates how race interacts with different factors when influencing beliefs about racial inequality. Religion will be used as a variable in this study as well. Another factor that researchers explored was geographic location. Carter and Cora (2012) have found, also using the General Social Survey, that the gap between urban residents and rural residents has increased, with rural residents blaming inequality on individuals. In addition, Carter et al. (2014) found that living outside of the South had a larger impact on respondents' beliefs about racial inequality than living in the South. Due to this, I will also control for whether respondents lived in the South. Overall, beliefs about racial inequality are impacted in complex ways by multiple variables, which are therefore included as controls in the present study.

Most relevant to the present study, many researchers have also examined the intersections of these various factors with race. Kane and Kyyrö (2001) found that the impact of education was evident for White men, White women, and Black men but not for Black women. This finding also necessitates controlling for gender. When it comes to the impact of religion, Christian Whites were found to have more conservative views on racial inequality than non-

Christian Whites, and more generally Whites were less likely to favor structural explanations and more likely to favor individualistic explanations than Blacks (Taylor and Merino 2011). Also, researchers argue that whatever “cultural toolkit” is being taught by “Predominantly White Judeo-Christian religious traditions” does not affect Black worshippers’ beliefs about racial inequality in any consistent way (Hinojosa and Park 2004). This again supports the idea that African Americans’ patterns of belief operate differently than those of Whites, necessitating a study into their beliefs without comparing them to White people.

Another study explores how Black people’s beliefs about racial inequality have changed over time, finding that they are less inclined to affirm structural explanations due to period effects, but the increase in individualistic explanations is primarily due to cohort effects (Smith 2014). This indicates that decreasing subscription to structural explanations for racial inequality is impacted by changing opinions over time, perhaps impacted by the election of President Obama or other events that may seem to run counter to institutional racism in the eyes of African Americans. However, increasing support for individualistic explanations for racial inequality may be due to generational shifts. Perhaps younger African Americans internalize the individualistic explanations more so than their older counterparts. In addition, while the latest GSS data included in this study comes from 2018, the middle of President Trump’s administration, most of it comes from before. It will be interesting to see how beliefs about racial inequality change after his presidency. With the apparent impact of historical events and generational differences, I will include age as a control variable. Since the data I examine are comprised of pooled cross-sections, I include fixed effects for survey year to account for unobserved differences between years. It is important to note however, that holding either structural or individualistic beliefs about racial inequality regardless of one’s race is not

necessarily equivalent to holding racist beliefs. While similar, holding individualistic beliefs is more akin to victim blaming than racism, and in the Black respondents of this study I see it as more a denial of racism, both microlevel and macrolevel.

When it comes to beliefs about racial inequality, race interacts with other variables in complex ways, indicating the necessity for further study into this mechanism. Much research has already been done on the attitudes of White Americans as discussed previously. I aim to study African Americans' attitudes so to afford them the same complexity in their beliefs as Whites.

Social Trust

Altogether, there is a large body of research that has examined the *causes* of people's ideas about racial inequality. However, there is substantially less attention paid to the *consequences* of these beliefs. One potentially important implication of differences in beliefs about racial inequality is that it may undermine social and institutional trust.

How researchers define trust

There is some debate into whether the definition of social trust is as simple or intuitive as previously thought. Some scholars have found discrepancies in respondents' interpretations of questions in different national and international surveys that ask about social trust (Sturgis and Smith 2010). Others have explored the amount and type of people included in respondents' interpretations of "most people," the phrase commonly used in social trust questions. This is called the "radius of trust" (Delhey, Newton and Welzel 2011). Other scholars further distinguish between the concepts of trustworthiness and trustfulness, arguing that the questions most often used to measure social trust measure the extent to which respondents believe in the trustworthiness of the people in the environment rather than their own individual ability to trust

others (Abbott and Freeth 2008). This is important considering the various theories about how social trust is developed.

How social trust develops.

There are many proposed theories as to how trust develops. Some scholars explored the possibility of trust being a psychological disposition. Glanville and Paxton (2007) called this the “psychological propensity model” where trust is thought to be an overall personality trait developed from events that happened in childhood. Others explored whether people were predisposed to different levels of trust towards others and if this trait was fixed (Marschall and Stolle 2004). Others have also studied the impact of genetics on social trust and political leanings (Hatemi and McDermott 2012; Sturgis et al. 2009). These models imply that trust develops independent of the context in which people are found or are referencing when asked about their general trust in people. However, evidence supports the social learning model of social trust development where which trust is developed from localized contemporary experiences with others (Glanville and Paxton 2007). From there, scholars explore whether social trust, as the totality of multiple interactions, contributes to an overall theory of human nature which people employ to decide others’ trustworthiness (Marschall and Stolle 2004). This would also be independent of context.

I believe these theories which ignore momentary, positional, and situational context do not accurately show how social trust is developed. An alternative theory asserts that social trust is developed *in situ* and depends very much on the person’s environment. Marschall and Stolle (2004) studied the effect of race and neighborhood context and found that the process of developing social trust was different for Black respondents and White respondents and was based on the diversity of people with whom they interacted. Indeed, social trust is not

psychological or genetic, and it is heavily rooted in interaction (Van Lange 2015). In addition to being context specific, trust is also learned through cultural socialization, and the standards people use to judge whether others are trustworthy depends on the culture of their ethnic communities (Uslaner 2008).¹ Some scholars found that people with strong ties to their ethnic group have lower levels of civic engagement, something previously stated to be linked to social trust. People with weaker ties to their ethnic group have higher levels of civic participation (Uslaner and Conley 2003). Hooghe (2007) argues that social trust is an aspect of social capital most vulnerable to the effects of diversity, and that other scholars in the field should study how societies deal with that diversity in order to understand the levels of social trust and social capital.

I view social trust as the belief in the trustworthiness of the people around us (Newton 2001). It is essential to managing the risks that always come with relationships, especially when formal means of control such as laws and law enforcement are insufficient or incapable of incurring the cost of such maintenance (Nooteboom 2007). Trust among members of a community facilitates the cooperation necessary for effective social and political organizing, which in turn impacts government performance in a positive way, making institutions more effective, more representative of the desires of the people, and more legitimate (Newton 2001). This relational value makes trust in those around us a major element of social capital (Putnam 1993). Social capital—the networks and social relationships we belong to—can be used as a resource for means of cooperation, negotiation and compromise (Coleman 1988). For example, countries with higher levels of social trust tend to have higher levels of trust in their political

¹ Here, ethnicity is distinct from race as this study focuses on the country of origin of the subjects' grandparents and its culture

institutions since they tend to believe that the performance of their political system and officials are satisfactory (Newton 2001). Overall, trust is essential to the proper functioning of a democracy as it is correlated with increased civil engagement (Putman 1993). This is particularly pertinent to the present study as I am looking at levels of social and institutional trust in African Americans. The results can inform how we improve our institutions through understanding what factors impact how African Americans develop trust, making these institutions more representative of the desires of this group.

Factors that affect social trust.

Due to its importance for civic engagement and social cohesion, it is important to know what factors impact the levels of social trust. As previously stated, ethnic background has a strong effect on social trust as cultural attitudes toward human nature are passed down through generations (Uslaner 2008). In addition, scholars have explored the importance of neighborhood context and race in levels of social trust, finding that racial diversity and perceived neighborhood sociability positively affect social trust in Black community members but not in White community members. Also, the status of the neighborhood—informed by education levels and neighborhood problems—negatively affects social trust in White residents but not Black residents (Marschall and Stolle 2004). This is further evidence that social trust develops differently in Black respondents than in White respondents.

Marschall and Stolle (2004, p.146) state that “contexts in which close social interactions with individuals representing a broad, rather than narrow sampling of society take place increase the likelihood that trust is transferred to citizens of the ‘outside’ world,” and that Black residents “who are situated in these types of neighborhoods are more likely to make the leap of faith in extending trustworthiness to others whom they do not know.” In other words, African American

respondents who live in diverse neighborhoods are more likely to have high levels of social trust. What is interesting to know is if this relationship is impacted by beliefs about racial inequality. This would shed light on whether neighborhood diversity is related to subscribing to individuals' explanations for racial inequality. Unfortunately, this is outside the scope of the present study but could be a topic for future research.

In addition to neighborhood context, scholars have also sought to explore how social class affects social trust, finding that it only does in wealthy countries (Hamamura 2012). Since the United States is a wealthy country, I will include income as a measure of social class as a control variable in this study. Inequality also has a negative effect on social trust (Jordahl 2007; Uslaner and Brown 2005), which then effects participation in community organizations (Uslaner and Brown 2005). Finally, scholars have also explored how the power-sharing quality of institutions—the degree to which they are corrupt, act in the interest of social welfare, and how much they value the interests of the many—as an aspect of institutional performance and efficacy affects social trust (Freitag and Bühlmann 2009), a theory also connected to institutional trust which will be discussed below.

Overall, while many of these studies explore a multitude of factors that affect social trust, including ethnic background, neighborhood context, social class, levels of inequality, and the quality of institutions, they do not account for beliefs about racial inequality. Perhaps social class, levels of inequality, and perceptions of institutions are related to beliefs about racial inequality, especially for African Americans. I argue that these experiences may inform which explanations individuals subscribe to, which is then related to their social trust. In addition, the extant studies that explore race and ethnicity compare multiple groups to each other. As I stated

previously, I aim to isolate African Americans to better account for their unique position in society.

Institutional Trust

In addition to its potential importance to social trust, beliefs about racial inequality may also shape institutional trust. Institutional trust is found to have a causal effect on social trust (Sønderskov and Dinesen 2015), and Khodyakov (2007) proposed a new three-point model which includes two types of social trust—trust in close ties and generalized trust—and institutional trust all in the same social mechanism. As with social trust, there is discourse among scholars regarding the defining and operationalizing of institutional trust. Cook and Gronke (2005) proposed a new operationalization of institutional trust which distinguishes active trust and distrust from general trust and distrust, wherein active trust is the belief in the moral integrity of the government, and active distrust is the belief in the moral corruption of the government. Also, elements like agency and temporality need to be accounted for in defining institutional trust (Khodyakov 2007). This accounts for the individual spatial and temporal contexts in which people find themselves and how these experiences inform how they feel about institutions. Both social and institutional trust have decreased since the 1970s (Putnam 1993; Twenge, Campbell, and Carter 2014). Researchers have sought to identify factors which affect the public's trust in large institutions. High levels of inequality negatively affect social trust and high levels of poverty negatively affect institutional trust (Twenge, Campbell, and Carter 2014). Another factor that scholars have studied is the effect of political ideology and polarization on institutional trust (Gauchat 2012; Price and Romantan 2004), specifically their effect on trust in the Supreme Court, the presidency and in Congress (Price and Romantan 2004). Due to these effects, political ideology will be used as a control variable in this study.

Many other researchers have studied racial differences in perceptions of specific public institutions such as the criminal justice system (Henderson et al. 1997; Tyler 2001). High crime rates and rates of violence negatively impact institutional trust (Blanco and Ruiz 2013). In their study, trust in the criminal justice system was assumed to be based on perceptions of inefficiency and low job performance, but Tyler (2001) proposed the alternative theory that trust in the criminal justice system is based on the perceived fairness of the system's procedures. According to Tyler, perceptions of procedural fairness are linked to trust in this institution. Due to the disproportionate number of African Americans living in areas of high crime and high violence, this may also negatively impact institutional trust. While this is one specific institution, I believe that this is an example of how the contexts in which people live as well as their perceptions of institutional efficacy and fairness can impact institutional trust. More importantly, African Americans with experiences such as these may be more inclined to believe in structural explanations for inequality, which may mediate their trust in institutions.

Studies on Black Public Opinion

As previously stated, I am specifically interested in the beliefs and attitudes of African Americans. Scholar Bobo (2000) expressed the need to return to a Du Boisian sociological theory of race and racism, which will be useful in the present study in understanding African American's attitudes about racial inequality and their social and institutional trust. I believe the respondents' beliefs about racial inequality are based on their experiences, their perceptions of themselves, and their perceptions of how other people see them. This then affects their social and institutional trust. On average, African Americans have less trust in people than White Americans even when controlling for other variables (Smith 2010). Indeed, many scholars have

studied the impact of race on various attitudinal measures (Seltzer and Smith 1985), including social trust (Marschall and Stolle 2004) and institutional trust (Henderson et al. 1997).

However, much of said research centers on the attitudes of Whites. Many scholars have studied the effect of White Americans' racial attitudes toward government assistance programs (Gilens 1995), African Americans' housing rights (Schuman and Bobo 1988), and Affirmative Action (Bobo 1988). Scholars have tried to explore the role of White racism in White's racial policy attitudes (Sears and Jessor 1996), testing the validity of more individualist explanations for Whites' opposition to these programs in comparison to race-based explanations. Many found that Whites' negative views of African Americans as well as perceived group threat were the main factors in their opposition to these programs. In fact, scholars found that White Americans opposed all policies they perceived to be race targeted as they believed it to be discrimination against Whites (Bobo and Kluegel 1993). In a paper based on a lecture he gave in London in 2011, Bonilla-Silva (2011) talked about the "racial grammar" present in American culture that normalizes White supremacy and hegemony and facilitates the invisibility of racial domination. The findings of many of the studies previously referenced illustrate the impact of this racial grammar as well as the post racial society many White people believe we live in. I argue that it is especially meaningful to study the political attitudes of African Americans due to the impact of historical phenomena, institutional and social trust, organizing and consumption patterns among African Americans (Vercellotti and Brewer 2006). In addition, it is important to study African Americans on their own terms rather than in comparison to Whites, as such comparative studies run the risk of maintaining the assumption of Whiteness as normal and Blackness as exception. This will help disrupt that racial grammar and assumption or post-racism.

Scholars have found evidence of a Black political community, an ideology militantly opposed to oppression (Aberbach and Walker 1970; Davis and Brown 2002). This Black political community must also face a much larger and equally militant White political community that has a larger effect on policy. This erodes the trust Black people have in the government which favor the interests of Whites. This political ideology focused on Black power and Black liberation, and also transcended class in their study with African Americans of higher socioeconomic status being just as or more militant than their poorer counterparts (Aberbach and Walker 1970). This Black nationalist ideology persisted when controlling for other demographic factors and was associated with a disdain for White people but not for any other social group such as queer people, feminists, middle-class blacks and black conservatives (Davis and Brown 2002). In a study on college students, Black students reported more negative interactions with and perceptions of White students than White students of Black students (Stephan et al. 2002). Scholars also found that this “black nationalist belief system also correlates with intense perceptions of racism in society and less support for systemic means for combating perceived racial injustice” (Davis and Brown 2002, p. 239). In addition, research shows that African Americans’ perception of Whites’ negative views of them are generally accurate (Sigelman and Tuch 1997). This Black nationalist ideology could impact beliefs about racial inequality, perhaps making African Americans who believe in this ideology more likely to subscribe to institutional explanations such as discrimination than African Americans who do not believe in this ideology. Negative experiences with White people could impact their trust in people. These simultaneously impact “perceptions of racism in society” as stated before and could decrease their faith in institutions’ ability to eradicate it. This then may decrease institutional trust.

For this study then, my first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: Among African Americans, those who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have less social trust.

And, in contrast, my next hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: Among African Americans, those who believe in individualistic explanations for racial inequality have more social trust.

In addition, I also hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: Among African Americans, those who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have less institutional trust.

And, in contrast, my final hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 4: Among African Americans, those who believe in individualistic explanations for racial inequality have more institutional trust.

These are the ideas I seek to explore in this study. While there is not a lack of literature on Black public opinion, I'd like to make this contribution in understanding how Black people's beliefs about racial inequality impact their sense of social and institutional trust. However, African Americans are not homogeneous. Many scholars have explored the differences in political beliefs among them (Cathy Cohen 1999; Hwang, Fitzpatrick, and Helms 1998; Neville et al. 2005; Seltzer and Smith 1985; Sigelman, Tuch, and Martin 2005). Cohen (1999) speaks extensively about the perceived homogeneity in Black political thought but shows through the lens of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s how natural cleavages in the identities, experiences, and environments of Black people created highly varying political ideologies. Sigelman, Tuch, and Martin (2005) found that age, region, and the size of the city respondents lived in had an impact on their preference for either the label "African-American" or "Black." Moreover, they found that respondents were almost evenly split, implying differences in political

ideology even on what to label ourselves. Also, when it comes to political ideology, African Americans are generally more liberal than Whites, but the extent differs within African Americans by gender, age, income, education level, region, and type of political policy in question (Seltzer and Smith 1985). Middle-class African Americans were more critical of the system of stratification than lower-class African Americans, which perhaps is evidence of more ethnic competition among them (Hwang, Fitzpatrick, and Helms 1998). In fact, some propose that lower-class African Americans constitute a possible untapped conservative constituency considering their more conservative views on social and fiscal policies (Seltzer and Smith 1985)

Even when it comes to racial ideology there is heterogeneity. There is multiplicity in Black psychology, and the degree to which a person adopts the popular color-blind mindset varies from person to person and influences how they conceptualize racial inequality. The findings of Neville et al. (2005, p.40) support the link between color-blind racial ideology and what they call “psychological false consciousness” or “the degree to which one adopts a cognitive framework that works against his or her own individual or social group interest” in African Americans. Respondents with psychological false consciousness had more interracial friendships while those with “racialized egalitarian consciousness” had more intra-racial friendships. This indicated a higher connection to one’s own racial group. Complexity like this complicates the patterns of ideology African Americans follow.

Overall, race interacts with multiple variables in impacting beliefs about racial inequality. In addition to intersecting demographic characteristics, subscribing to a black nationalist ideology also impacts their beliefs. I argue that this then impacts their perceptions of their interactions with people outside their race—particularly White people—perhaps emphasizing the more negative ones. This then hinders the development of their sense of social trust. In addition,

this may also decrease their faith in both the ability of institutions to do something about racial inequities and when such interventions are morally acceptable. I argue that this will negatively impact their institutional trust. This is the essence of this study, and I outline how I will go about testing these hypotheses in the sections below.

DATA

I will use data from the cumulative General Social Survey (Smith et al. 2018). The survey has been conducted by the National Opinion Research Center annually or biennially since 1972. It utilizes in-person interviews given to adults in US households chosen by proportional sampling techniques. The survey used a modified probability sampling design for most of the years of issuance. The primary sampling units were Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas and non-metropolitan counties which were then stratified by race, age, and region before selection. In the second stage of sampling, the sampling units were narrowed to block groups and enumeration districts within the counties and Standard Metropolitan Statistical areas. These were then stratified by race and income before selection. In the third stage of sampling, blocks were selected based on probabilities proportional to their size. The average cluster had five respondents. The sampling frame changed multiple times throughout the survey's issuance, so sampling weights are used to account for the complex design. White respondents make up 80% of the total sample while black respondents make up about 14%, or 9,187 of the 64,814.

The sample is proportional to the data gathered in the US Census and thus is generalizable to the population of the United States. However, for this study only the Black respondents will be analyzed and only cases with complete data will be used. As stated previously, many socio-historical factors set African Americans apart as a unique social group. However, there is heterogeneity in the political ideas held in the Black community, and this

complexity must be accounted for. It is important to hold African Americans to their own standard instead of setting them against White people. In order to affirm their subjectivity and their humanity in the face of decades of academic pathologizing, I seek to examine them alone in this study.

MEASURES

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables are institutional and social trust. To measure trust in institutions, I used a series of survey questions about public institutions and the people who work in them. Respondents were read the following statement: “As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?” Respondents then were read a list of 13 institutions, including the US Supreme Court, the Scientific Community, the US Congress, the US Military, Television, Medicine, Banks and Financial Institutions, Major Companies, Organized Religion, Education, the Executive Branch of Federal Government, Organized Labor, and the Press. I recoded the variable to focus on those with “a great deal” of confidence compared to those with “only some” and “hardly any” confidence. From here forward I will be talking to about “confidence” in institutions rather than “trust” in institutions since this is the verbiage used in the GSS items. This is with the understanding that the terms are conceptually synonymous in this study. I first examine a standardized scale based on all 13 items measures to determine whether there is a relationship between explanations of racial inequality and global institutional trust. The interitem correlation among the 13 survey questions is strong ($\alpha=.83$), suggesting that they effectively tap the underlying construct of institutional confidence. I then examine each of these

13 items separately to determine whether the theorized relationships between explanations of racial inequality are specific to institutions.

To measure social trust, I used 3 items on the GSS. One asks respondents “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?” to which they can respond “can trust,” “cannot trust,” or “depends” (volunteered). Another item asks respondents “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?” to which they can respond “Helpful,” “Lookout for self,” or “depends” (volunteered). Finally, I use an item that asks respondents “Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?” to which they can respond “Take advantage,” “Fair,” or “depends” (volunteered). All three variables are recoded dichotomously to compare responses to “can trust,” helpful, and “fair” to the rest. I combine them into a scale to examine social trust in general. The interitem correlation is moderate ($\alpha=.55$), suggesting that the scale is a valid measure of social trust. After analyzing the social trust scale, I then examine the three items separately. Descriptive statistics for all the dependent variables are presented in table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

Independent Variables

The independent variables in this investigation are perceptions of the causes of racial inequality. To capture these beliefs, I use four survey items that measure respondents' thoughts on why there are differences in jobs, income, and housing between white people and black people. Respondents were read the following statement: “On the average (Negroes/ Blacks/ African-Americans) have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people.” Respondents then were asked four questions about the causes of these inequalities: “Do you

think these differences are mainly due to discrimination?” “Do you think these differences are because most (Negroes/ Blacks/African-Americans) have less in-born ability to learn?” “Do you think these differences are because most (Negroes/Blacks/African-Americans) don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty?” “Do you think these differences are because most (Negroes/Blacks/African-Americans) just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty?” The labels used in the GSS for African Americans varied across the years as indicated in the parentheses. Respondents were asked to answer either yes or no after each of these four questions. Below, I categorize explanations for racial inequality based on discrimination and education as “structural”, and explanations based on in-born ability and will power as “individualistic.” The descriptive statistics for each of these are provided in table 2.²

Based on the theoretical framework developed earlier, I use these four specific survey variables to create measures of four general explanations for Black-White differences, including structural explanations, individual explanations, explanations that include structural and individual elements, and explanations that include neither of these elements. Specifically, I set the first category, “person” based or individualistic explanations, to include respondents who answered “yes” to “in-born disability” and/or “lack of will” as explanations for racial inequality and no to the other options. Next, I set the second category, “mixed” or both individualistic and structural explanations, to include respondents who answered “yes” to explanations that count as both individualistic and structural (e.g. “discrimination” and “lack of will”). Then, I set the third category, “structural” explanations, to include respondents who answered “yes” to

² Cases with missing data were handled via listwise deletion and removed from the main analysis, which is a common strategy for analyses of GSS data.

“discrimination” and/or “lack of education” as explanations for racial inequality and no to the other options. Finally, I set the fourth category, “none,” to include respondents who answered “no” to all the explanations. Descriptive statistics for these variables are provided in Table 2.

Control Variables

To isolate the relationship between social and institutional trust and racial difference ideology, the regression models control for several other variables associated with cleavages in public opinion. These include income, education, age, sex, region, religiosity, and political views. Income is measured as household income in constant dollars which is then log transformed. Education is measured in years and ranges from 1 to 20. Age is also measured in years, and ranges from 18-89. Sex is measured as a dichotomous variable based on whether the respondent is identified as female. Region is measured as a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent lives in the South. Religiosity is measured using an item that asks how often respondents attend religious services on a nine-point scale ranging from (1) never to (9) more than once a week. Political views are measured using a seven-point self-identification scale ranging from (1) “extremely liberal” to (7) “extremely conservative.” Church attendance and political views are used as continuous variables in the models. I aggregate data from all survey years where variables of interest are included in order to maximize the sample size. I therefore include fixed effects for survey year to account for unobserved heterogeneity associated with survey years. Descriptive statistics for the control variables are provided in table 2.

[INSERT TABLE 2]

METHODS

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, I analyze the relationships between explanations for racial inequality and trust in institutions. Second, I analyze the relationships

between explanations for racial inequality and social trust. At both stages, I first use ordinary least squares regression to examine the latent institutional and social trust scales. I then use binary logit regressions to examine the institutional and social trust items separately. To interpret regression results, I use predicted probabilities. All analyses use the recommended sampling weights

RESULTS

Confidence in Institutions

Tables 3 and 4 contain results from regressions of institutional trust on respondents' beliefs about racial inequality and control variables. For all regression models, the category representing "individual" explanations is used as the reference category for the key variable measuring respondents' beliefs about the causes of racial inequality. The first model in the table regresses the institutional trust scale on beliefs about racial inequality and controls. The results suggest that being female, years of education, income, and survey year had negative effects on institutional trust while living in the South and religious service attendance had a positive effect. Put another way, female respondents generally have lower predicted levels of institutional trust compared to males. In addition, respondents with higher levels of education and income have less institutional trust compared to those with less education and income. The results also show that in general, institutional trust decreased over time (fixed effects for survey year not shown). In contrast, respondents living in the South as well as those who attend religious services more frequently had higher levels of institutional trust. All other variables were not statistically significant. These results are interesting to say the least with implications that could be explored in future studies. For the present paper, we will move forward to focus on the key independent variable, respondents' beliefs about racial inequality.

[INSERT TABLE 3]

When it comes to institutional trust, the scale ranges from -1.58 and 1.48 units. According to the regression model, beliefs about racial inequality have statistically significant effects on institutional trust. Holding all variables constant, respondents who have individualistic beliefs about racial inequality are predicted to have higher levels of institutional trust than those who have structural beliefs about racial inequality. These results support hypotheses 1 and 2 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in institutions while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability when holding all other variables constant. The left-hand panel in figure 1 illustrates this pattern more concretely. It contains the predicted value of the institutional confidence scale associated with each explanation for racial inequality. It shows that the expected level of institutional confidence is significantly lower for those who hold structural explanations for racial inequality compared to those who hold individual explanations.

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

The remainder of Tables 3 and 5 contain the results from the binary logit regressions of the 13 measures of trust in institutions used to construct the institutional trust scale. According to my models, the key variable measuring structural and individualistic beliefs about racial inequality did not have a statistically significant effect on whether respondents have “a great deal” of confidence in the US Supreme Court, the Scientific Community, Medicine, Organized Religion, Organized Labor, and the Press. However, structural explanations for inequality are associated with significantly less trust in several institutions, including Congress, the military, TV, banks, major companies, the education system, and the executive branch. Below, I focus my discussion of the institutions where the beliefs about racial inequality are associated with

statistically significant differences in institutional trust. To interpret the relationship between institutional trust and explanations for racial inequality, Table 4 contains the predicted probability of trusting institutions associated with each explanation for racial inequality. Predications are based on the regression results in Tables 3 and 5 and are computed to reflect the probability of trusting an institution when control variables are set to their means.

[INSERT TABLE 4]

For Congress, the predicted probability of a respondent who believed in individualistic explanations for racial inequality having confidence in this institution is about .16. In contrast, the predicted probability of confidence in Congress for a respondent who believes in structural explanations for racial inequality is only about .10. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in a mixture of individualistic and structural explanations is about .13. The predicted probability of a respondent who believe in neither individualistic nor structural explanations is about .11. Importantly, the difference in probabilities between individual and structural explanations is significantly different ($p < .05$). These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in this institution while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability when holding all other variables constant. The regression coefficients from which these predicted probabilities are derived are presented in Table 3.

For the Military, the predicted probability of a respondent who believed in individualistic explanations for racial inequality having confidence in this institution is about .48. In contrast, the predicted probability of confidence in the military for a respondent who believes in structural explanations for racial inequality is only about .38. The predicted probability of a respondent

who believes in a mixture of individualistic and structural explanations is about .38. The predicted probability of a respondent who believe in neither individualistic nor structural explanations is about .40. Importantly, the difference in probabilities between individual and structural explanations is significantly different ($p < .05$). These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in this institution while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability when holding all other variables constant. The regression coefficients from which these predicted probabilities are derived are presented in Table 3.

For Television, the predicted probability of a respondent who believed in individualistic explanations for racial inequality having confidence in this institution is about .17. In contrast, the predicted probability of confidence in TV for a respondent who believes in structural explanations for racial inequality is only about .11. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in a mixture of individualistic and structural explanations is about .17. The predicted probability of a respondent who believe in neither individualistic nor structural explanations is about .13. Importantly, the difference in probabilities between individual and structural explanations is borderline significantly different ($p < .10$). These results somewhat support Hypotheses 1 and 2 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in this institution while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability when holding all other variables constant. The regression coefficients from which these predicted probabilities are derived are presented in Table 3.

For Banks and other Financial Institutions, the predicted probability of a respondent who believed in individualistic explanations for racial inequality having confidence in this institution is about .26. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in structural explanations for racial inequality is about .15. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in a mixture of individualistic and structural explanations is about .20. The predicted probability who believe in neither individualistic nor structural explanations is about .22. Importantly, the difference in probabilities between individual and structural explanations is significantly different ($p < .05$). These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in this institution while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability when holding all other variables constant. The regression coefficients from which these predicted probabilities are derived are presented in Table 5.

[INSERT TABLE 5]

For Major Companies, the predicted probability of a respondent who believed in individualistic explanations for racial inequality having confidence in this institution is about .17. In contrast, the predicted probability of confidence in major companies for a respondent who believes in structural explanations for racial inequality is only about .09. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in a mixture of individualistic and structural explanations is about .18. The predicted probability of a respondent who believe in neither individualistic nor structural explanations is about .14. Importantly, the difference in probabilities between individual and structural explanations is significantly different ($p < .05$). These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in this

institution while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability when holding all other variables constant. The regression coefficients from which these predicted probabilities are derived are presented in Table 5.

For Education, the predicted probability of a respondent who believed in individualistic explanations for racial inequality having confidence in this institution is about .44. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in structural explanations for racial inequality is about .25. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in a mixture of individualistic and structural explanations is about .34. The predicted probability who believe in neither individualistic nor structural explanations is about .37. Importantly, the difference in probabilities between individual and structural explanations is significantly different ($p < .05$). These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in this institution while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability when holding all other variables constant. The regression coefficients from which these predicted probabilities are derived are presented in Table 5.

For the Executive Branch of the Federal Government, the predicted probability of a respondent who believed in individualistic explanations for racial inequality having confidence in this institution is about .18. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in structural explanations for racial inequality is about .11. The predicted probability of a respondent who believes in a mixture of individualistic and structural explanations is about .11. The predicted probability who believe in neither individualistic nor structural explanations is about .13. Importantly, the difference in probabilities between individual and structural explanations is significantly different ($p < .05$). These results only somewhat support Hypotheses

1 and 2 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in this institution while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability when holding all other variables constant. The regression coefficients from which these predicted probabilities are derived are presented in Table 5. The implications of this is discussed later on.

Social trust

Table 6 turns attention to trust in other people (i.e. their generally, fairness, helpfulness, and trustworthiness) rather than trust in institutions. The first model in the table regresses the social trust scale on beliefs about racial inequalities and control variables. When it comes to social trust, the scale ranges from about -.69 and about 1.66 units. The right-hand panel of figure 1 illustrates this further. It contains the predicted values of social trust associated with each explanation for racial inequality. It shows that the predicted level of social trust is slightly although not significantly higher for people who attribute racial inequalities to structural causes than it is for those who believe in individual explanations. These results do not support hypotheses 3 and 4 in that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a higher probability of having trust in people while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a lower probability when holding all other variables constant. The implications of this is discussed later on, and the regression coefficients on which these results are based are presented in table 6 as well as figure 1. Table 6 also contains the results from the binary logit regressions for the three social trust items on the types of explanations for racial inequality and control variables. According to my models, the key variable measuring structural and individualistic beliefs about racial inequality did not have a statistically significant effect on whether respondents believed that they generally “can trust”

others, that people were generally helpful, nor that people were generally fair. I will now explore the implications of these results.

[INSERT TABLE 6]

DISCUSSION

The latent variable for institutional trust reflects the overall pattern of the individual items, showing that African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of trust in institutions, while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability of trust in institutions. Overall, this makes some logical sense as it seems those who believe that racial inequality is caused by the shortcomings of individuals may have internalized the individualism of American culture, negative stereotypes about African Americans, and the color-blind ideology of the post-Civil Rights and post-Obama era, thus having no reason not to trust institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2015). In contrast, those who believe that it is caused by institutional racism may have personal experiences or knowledge of history that leads them to lack trust in institutions. Additionally, in some cases having a mixture of both structural and individualistic beliefs about racial inequality meant a higher probability of having trust in institutions than having either of those alone (e.g. trust in television and major companies). This study cannot decipher the meaning behind these patterns either, further complicating the results.

It is important to examine the types of institutions that are impacted by respondents' beliefs about racial inequality and in what direction the impact goes. Overall, seven of the thirteen institutions asked about on the GSS are impacted by beliefs about racial inequality, those being Congress, the Military, Television, Banks, Major Companies, Education, and the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. More than half of these are private institutions or

at least can be privately owned in the case of education and with the exception of Congress and the Military. While there was no significant association between explanations for racial inequality in the other six institutions, there were no instances where structural explanations were associated with more institutional confidence. The institutions that are not impacted by racial inequality beliefs—the US Supreme Court, the Science Community, Medicine, Organized Religion, Organized Labor, and the Press—are largely public institutions, or, like in the cases of the science community and the press, can be publicly funded. In all these instances, African American respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality have a lower probability of having trust in that institution while those who believe in individualistic explanations have a higher probability of such.

This may harken back to the previously discussed points about Black nationalist ideology, negative experiences with White people, and respondents' overall perceptions of racism in American society (Aberbach and Walker 1970; Davis and Brown 2002; Sigelman and Tuch 1997; Stephan et al. 2002) which may impact their trust in these institutions, specifically ones which can sometimes be privately owned and funded. Perhaps, whether consciously or unconsciously, African Americans may view institutions that are often privately owned as extensions of the rich and largely White and male owners who they may perceive to be, if not racist, then at least complicit in institutional racism. For the executive branch of the federal government, respondents may largely associate this institution with the President of the United States alone. They then apply the same conscious or unconscious rationale as that of potentially private institutions where it is an extension of the person at the top. Another exception to this is organized religion, which is usually private. This may be because religion has played such a large role in community building and consciousness raising in the African American community

and so is not affected by beliefs about racial inequality. In addition, Congress and the Military are not private institutions, but are very visible in the way that those in power within these institutions have worked to exploit or oppress African Americans, such as laws created to disenfranchise them and then being asked to risk their lives to fight for a country that does so. However, this pattern is weak and very muddled and so can only count as a possible explanation for what we see in the data.

Another possible explanation could be that some institutions are seen as more political than others. Most of the institutions that are impacted by beliefs about racial inequality—Congress, the Military, Television, Banks, Major Companies, Education, and the Executive Branch of the Federal Government—are part of highly political realms and have the power to impact the life outcomes of African Americans. Congress and the Executive Branch, for example, are very visible parts of the federal governments with major officials who are elected by the people. Perhaps those who are elected into office represent the beliefs of the American public and also directly impact the laws and policies that govern them. If Black respondents believe in structural explanations for racial inequality, perhaps they don't feel well represented by those elected officials and fear what policies they may put in place to further disenfranchise them. If they believe in individualistic explanations, perhaps they do feel sufficiently represented and if not totally trust than at least don't fear the policies that are put in place.

Moving on, the Military is a highly politicized institution as something seen as both complicit in the exploitation of Black people while also an opportunity to help individual Black people succeed. If Black respondents believe in structural explanations for racial inequality, then perhaps the history of segregation and exploitation are more salient to them and thus lack trust in this institution. In contrast, those who believe in individualistic explanations may see Military

service as a source of individual pride and ignore historical events. Television may be impacted by beliefs about racial inequality due to the debate around how Black people are portrayed in movies and TV. Those who believe in structural explanations may see the larger patterns of negative or one-dimensional portrayals of Black people while those who believe in individualistic explanations may not.

Banks are politicized in the way they provide Black people opportunities to advance themselves socioeconomically, whether that be giving out loans, allowing bank accounts to be opened, or organizing credit. Those who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality may see patterns in the ways Banks create barriers to Black people achieving financial stability and building wealth, while those who believe in individualistic explanations may not see these as patterns related to race. Major companies can also be political in their levels of inclusivity, whether that be in the products they provide, their marketing, hiring, and promotion of employees into higher positions of power. Black respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality may lack trust in many companies' commitment to inclusivity and social equity whereas those who believe in individualistic explanations may not worry about these things on a larger scale.

Finally, Education is a very politicized realm of society in the way that it directly impacts economic life outcomes. Black respondents who believe in structural explanations for racial inequality may see the way many schools are segregated by race and class and how many Black students are mistreated, ignored, and on a larger scale set on the school to prison pipeline. In contrast, Black respondents who believe in individualistic explanations may not see these as large-scale issues and so have no reason not to trust education. In all these institutions, the respondents who believe in individualistic explanations may not see those patterns where

political ideology plays a role in the way the institutions function and thus how they impact American citizens. They therefore have no reason to not trust them.

The institutions not impacted by beliefs about racial inequality—the US Supreme Court, the Science Community, Medicine, Organized Religion, Organized Labor, and the Press—may not be so because of their supposed lack of politicization at least in respondents’ perceptions. Unlike Congress and the Executive Branch, The Supreme Court is not as visible, nor does it have members that are elected by the people. So, while they do have immense power over laws and policies, they may not be as directly impactful in the eyes of normal citizens. Science and Medicine may be seen as apolitical institutions as their impact of the life outcomes of African Americans is not so obvious. For Organized Religion, as stated earlier, the Black Church has had a huge and largely positive impact on Black culture. Black churches are also largely headed by Black leaders and so may be exempt from any political scrutiny. Organized labor has been a very salient political issue in the past, but it is unclear if it is as salient during the years in which the GSS was taken in this study. In contrast, the press has not been seen as political in the past but may be becoming increasingly so. Perhaps in the future, the recent politicization of the press during the Trump administration may be reflected in the levels of trust people have in it and whether it is impacted by beliefs about racial inequality. While these inferences are interesting, it is hard to say whether they are accurate. In truth, the reasons why certain institutions are impacted by beliefs about racial inequality while others are not is difficult for me to decipher. Admittedly, it is hard for me to see an apparent pattern. Further research needs to be done on this topic.

In contrast, the patterns for the impact of racial inequality beliefs on social trust are significantly different. Respondents with individualistic beliefs about racial inequality had a

lower probability of believing people were generally helpful than those with structural beliefs, a reversal of the predictions of hypotheses 3 and 4 as well as the patterns for the institutions. However, these patterns were not statistically significant for either the latent variable for social trust nor the individual social trust items. This illustrates that these beliefs do not have an impact on social trust. Perhaps this is due to how racism is thought to manifest, especially in the post-Civil Rights era, where respondents understand racism to come from large structures and not from those around them (Bonilla-Silva 2015). This may at first seem to contradict the points proposed to explain the patterns with institutional trust, where African Americans seem to lack trust in the individuals in power within large institutions. However, I argue that there may be a difference in respondents' minds between the trustworthiness of people in power and people in the general public. People in charge of those institutions have the power to oppress African Americans in ways that their neighbors cannot. These not only have a larger impact on their lives but they also have the ability to gaslight African Americans in their experiences since many of these processes are invisible. So then, African Americans have more reason to distrust those in power than those around them. However, due to the nature of this study, it is impossible to know the true rationale behind respondents' feelings and what social and psychological mechanisms inform their beliefs. We can only make inferences based on the patterns we find. Further research needs to be done on this topic, perhaps qualitative, in order to understand the meaning behind these patterns.

CONCLUSION

I sought to examine the relationship between beliefs about racial inequality and institutional and social trust in African Americans. I hypothesized that those who subscribe to structural explanations will be less likely to have institutional and social trust while those who

subscribe to individualistic explanations will be more likely to have institutional and social trust. I found that there was only support for this regarding institutional trust. Even still, African Americans are a unique social group that deserve to be studied on their own terms so to understand the heterogeneity and complexity in their experiences and worldview. Even now as I write this, racial issues are much different than they were in 2018, the most recent GSS survey year. I hope this research can contribute to the literature on public conceptions of racial inequality, institutional and social trust, and Black political thought.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables

Variable	Mean/proportion	Range
Institutional Trust	-0.111	-1.58 -1.48
US Supreme Court	0.202	0-1
Scientific Community	0.268	0-1
US Congress	0.118	0-1
US Military	0.395	0-1
Television	0.143	0-1
Medicine	0.361	0-1
Banks & Financial Institutions	0.19	0-1
Major Companies	0.133	0-1
Organized Religion	0.231	0-1
Education	0.32	0-1
Exec. Branch	0.12	0-1
Organized Labor	0.129	0-1
The Press	0.123	0-1
Social Trust	0.026	-.69 - 1.66
Helpful	0.403	0-1
Fair	0.327	0-1
Trustworthy	0.151	0-1

N=1,412 Source: General Social Survey

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables

Variable	Mean/proportion	Range
Racial inequality due to discrimination	1.365	1-2
Racial inequality due to inborn disability	1.865	1-2
Racial inequality due to lack of education	1.44	1-2
Racial inequality due to lack of will power	1.573	1-2
Explanations for Racial Inequality	2.502	1-4
<i>Individual</i>	0.131	0-1
<i>Mixed</i>	0.328	0-1
<i>Structural</i>	0.453	0-1
<i>None</i>	0.089	0-1
Female	0.578	0-1
Lives in the South	0.549	0-1
Church Attendance	4.309	1-9
Political Views	3.9	1-7
Income	22,628.11	227-155,140
Years of Education	12.828	1-20
Age	41.815	18-89

N = 1,412 Source: General Social Survey

Table 3: Unstandardized regression coefficients for Institutional Trust

VARIABLES	Institutional Trust	US Supreme Court	Scientific Community	US Congress	US Military	Television	Medicine
Explanations for racial inequality							
Mixed	-0.160** (0.055)	-0.008 (0.245)	-0.530* (0.229)	-0.286 (0.283)	-0.454* (0.213)	-0.009 (0.295)	0.085 (0.227)
Structural	-0.197*** (0.049)	0.031 (0.242)	-0.383 (0.214)	-0.611* (0.269)	-0.442* (0.205)	-0.603* (0.297)	0.002 (0.212)
None	-0.062 (0.067)	0.052 (0.322)	-0.280 (0.305)	-0.539 (0.413)	-0.339 (0.270)	-0.337 (0.396)	-0.094 (0.296)
Female	-0.106** (0.035)	-0.432** (0.166)	-0.554*** (0.148)	-0.258 (0.203)	-0.583*** (0.131)	-0.680*** (0.194)	-0.414** (0.141)
Years of Education	-0.025*** (0.007)	-0.103** (0.035)	-0.037 (0.029)	-0.129** (0.041)	-0.077** (0.027)	-0.150*** (0.033)	-0.074** (0.027)
Age	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.007 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.007)	-0.012* (0.005)
Ln(income)	-0.047** (0.015)	-0.071 (0.067)	0.008 (0.066)	-0.167* (0.083)	-0.035 (0.063)	-0.250** (0.076)	-0.109 (0.064)
Lives in South	0.070* (0.034)	0.120 (0.164)	-0.039 (0.148)	0.195 (0.211)	0.219 (0.135)	0.227 (0.186)	0.055 (0.128)
Church Attendance	0.017* (0.008)	0.001 (0.030)	-0.025 (0.030)	-0.016 (0.038)	0.050 (0.027)	-0.011 (0.036)	0.015 (0.028)
Political Views	-0.007 (0.013)	-0.001 (0.055)	-0.003 (0.053)	-0.029 (0.072)	-0.017 (0.049)	-0.014 (0.068)	0.000 (0.047)
Constant	0.912*** (0.171)	-0.008 (0.812)	-0.530* (0.758)	-0.286 (0.950)	-0.454* (0.705)	3.495*** (0.891)	2.474*** (0.708)
Observations	1,412	1,382	1,412	1,412	1,412	1,412	1,412
R-Squared	0.111						

Statistics in table are unstandardized regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. Fixed effects for survey year are omitted from table. Reference groups are “Individual,” “Male,” and “does not live in the South.” Continuous items are modeled using OLS regression and binary items are modeled using binary logit regression. Source: General Social Survey

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 4: Predicted Probabilities for each racial inequality explanation

Items	Explanations for Racial Inequality			
	Individual	Mixed	Structural	None
Congress	.161	.129	.099	.105
Military	.481	.377	.380	.403
Television	.174	.173	.108	.134
Banks	.258	.205	.151	.222
Companies	.174	.176	.092	.141
Education	.445	.340	.253	.374
Exec Branch	.183	.113	.106	.135

N of Exec. Branch = 1,382. N for all others = 1,412. Source: General Social Survey

Table 5: Unstandardized regression coefficients for Institutional Trust

VARIABLES	Banks and Financial	Major Companies	Organized Religion	Education	Executive Branch	Organized Labor	The Press
Explanations for racial inequality							
Mixed	-0.322 (0.235)	0.011 (0.262)	0.022 (0.235)	-0.480* (0.219)	-0.595* (0.277)	0.351 (0.316)	-0.087 (0.298)
Structural	-0.714** (0.238)	-0.749** (0.268)	0.019 (0.235)	-0.928*** (0.224)	-0.665* (0.268)	0.008 (0.318)	-0.038 (0.279)
None	-0.209 (0.327)	-0.262 (0.361)	0.209 (0.310)	-0.320 (0.266)	-0.380 (0.386)	0.110 (0.406)	-0.282 (0.434)
Female	-0.161 (0.165)	-0.341 (0.182)	-0.463** (0.159)	-0.096 (0.142)	-0.288 (0.210)	-0.159 (0.193)	-0.415* (0.188)
Years of Education	-0.140*** (0.033)	-0.054 (0.040)	-0.127*** (0.035)	-0.086** (0.028)	-0.041 (0.040)	-0.079* (0.037)	-0.097* (0.044)
Age	-0.020** (0.006)	-0.016* (0.007)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.009 (0.005)	-0.000 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.007)
Ln(income)	-0.135 (0.077)	-0.006 (0.082)	-0.192** (0.066)	-0.294*** (0.068)	-0.167* (0.083)	-0.157 (0.080)	-0.241*** (0.070)
Lives in South	0.031 (0.168)	0.232 (0.181)	0.228 (0.164)	0.306* (0.148)	0.387 (0.221)	0.075 (0.196)	-0.148 (0.191)
Church Attendance	0.060* (0.030)	0.039 (0.037)	0.164*** (0.031)	-0.001 (0.028)	0.016 (0.040)	0.006 (0.037)	0.082* (0.038)
Political Views	0.003 (0.061)	0.025 (0.068)	0.008 (0.059)	0.013 (0.050)	0.011 (0.081)	-0.004 (0.071)	-0.053 (0.069)
Constant	2.934*** (0.771)	-0.258 (0.863)	1.839* (0.765)	4.209*** (0.746)	0.652 (0.940)	0.724 (0.901)	2.435** (0.870)
Observations	1,412	1,382	1,412	1,412	1,382	1,412	1,412

Statistics in table are unstandardized regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. Fixed effects for survey year are omitted from table. Reference groups are “Individual,” “Male,” and “does not live in the South.” Binary items are modeled using binary logit regression. Source: General Social Survey

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

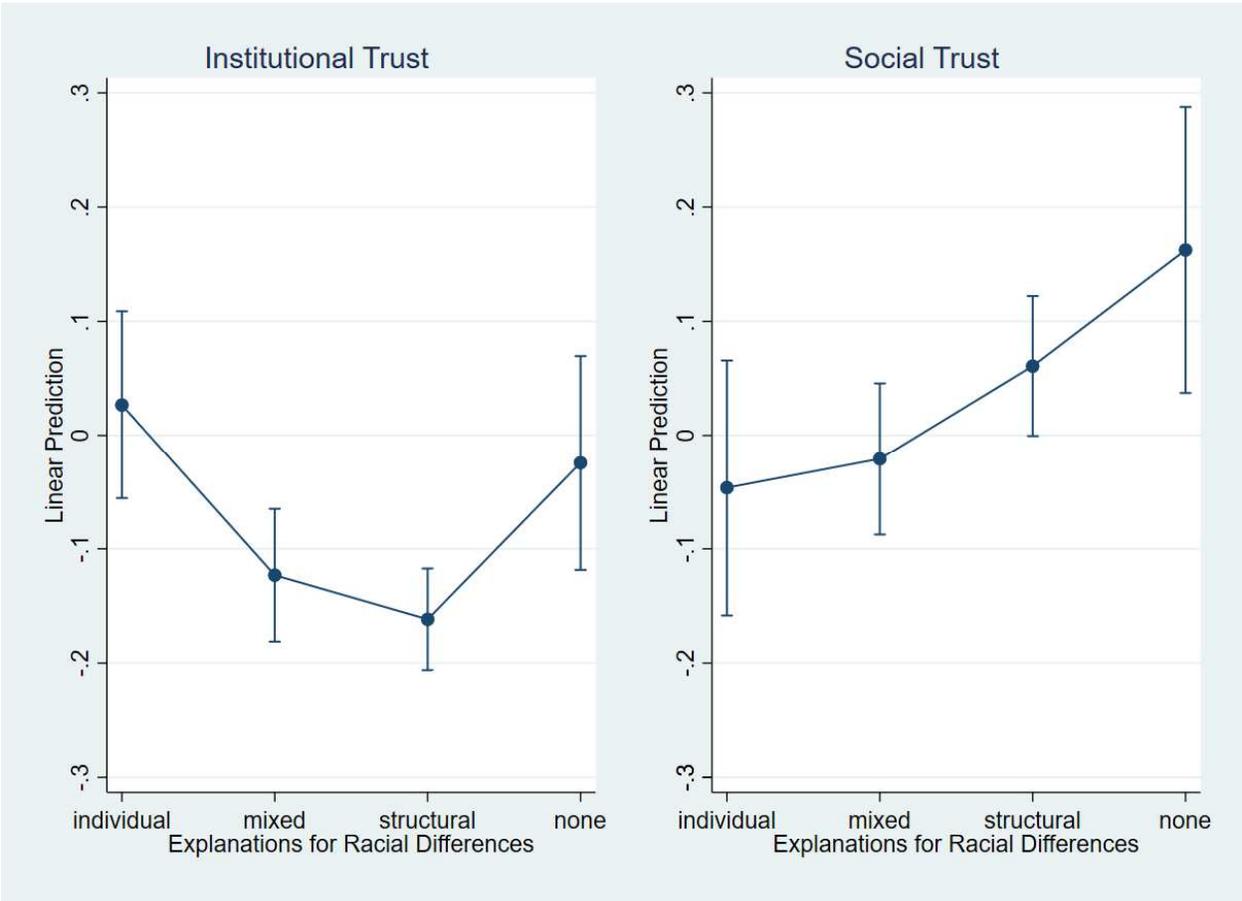
Table 6: Unstandardized regression coefficients for Social Trust

VARIABLES	Social Trust	Helpful	Fair	Trust
Explanations for racial inequality				
Mixed	-0.046 (0.073)	0.003 (0.223)	-0.071 (0.243)	-0.488 (0.324)
Structural	0.066 (0.075)	0.137 (0.217)	0.181 (0.231)	-0.289 (0.317)
None	0.196 (0.100)	0.784** (0.285)	0.408 (0.300)	-0.289 (0.414)
Female	0.020 (0.044)	0.105 (0.139)	0.274 (0.140)	-0.295 (0.188)
Years of Edu	0.058*** (0.010)	0.098*** (0.028)	0.116*** (0.030)	0.228*** (0.046)
Age	0.009*** (0.001)	0.019*** (0.005)	0.025*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.006)
Ln(income)	0.067*** (0.017)	0.144* (0.062)	0.207** (0.070)	0.254* (0.099)
Lives in South	-0.086 (0.044)	-0.112 (0.132)	-0.296* (0.135)	-0.205 (0.185)
Church Attendance	0.018 (0.009)	0.052 (0.026)	0.065* (0.030)	0.003 (0.039)
Political Views	-0.019 (0.016)	-0.073 (0.049)	-0.005 (0.051)	-0.083 (0.075)
Constant	-0.046 (0.073)	0.003 (0.223)	-0.071 (0.243)	-0.488 (0.324)
Observations	1,412	1,412	1,412	1,412
R-Squared	0.146			

Statistics in table are unstandardized regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. Fixed effects for survey year are omitted from table. Reference groups are “Individual,” “Male,” and “does not live in the South.” Continuous items are modeled using OLS regression and binary items are modeled using binary logit regression. Source: General Social Survey

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Figure 1: Predicted Institutional and Social Trust



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