

Rose Colored Glasses for Race

Unwarranted Optimism in Whites' Views of Racial Gaps

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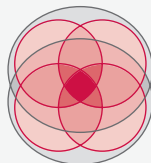
Although past and present racial gaps have been well-documented by social scientists and social justice advocates, relatively little is known about the degree of correspondence between the reality of racial gaps and naïve perceptions thereof. The correspondence between perceptions and reality is important because gap assessments have been empirically linked to socially harmful racial ideologies, racial group attitudes, and racial policy attitudes. Empirical confirmation of divergence between gap perceptions and reality would provide justification and direction to racial justice advocacy campaigns. Commonly used measures of racial gap perceptions, however, are limited in their ability to provide detailed and psychologically meaning characterizations of racial gap beliefs. In the present work, two novel measurement strategies designed to address this important limitation are presented.

Assessments of accuracy necessitate a comparative standard. Hence, following a review of work demonstrating the links between racial gaps and related constructs, an attempt is made to briefly characterize the reality of both past and present racial gaps.

Abstract

Although assessments of racial gaps play an important role in theories of racial ideology and policy, commonly used measures tend to be generalized and vague. These qualities render both the accuracy and psychological meaning of racial gap perceptions unclear.

In **Study 1** of the present paper, 137 Whites provided 15-year estimates of Black/White gaps between 1870 and 2050. In **Study 2**, 164 White participants were asked to choose a dollar value to represent the extremity of present-day Black/White gaps. In both studies, Whites perceptions were found to be substantially at odds with key indicators of actual racial gaps. ■



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Perceptions of Racial Gaps

Assessments of racial gaps have been linked to racial ideologies including modern/symbolic racism (Henry & Sears, 2002; McConahay, 1986) and racial colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Mazzocco, Cooper, & Flint, 2012). In both cases, the belief that racial gaps are minimal is said to provide partial justification for the ideology. Furthermore, belief in such ideologies increases opposition to programs like affirmative action. Hence, perceptions of minimal racial gaps can indirectly influence racial policy attitudes. More generally, and regardless of ideology, progressive racial policies are less likely to be deemed necessary to the extent that racial gaps are perceived to be minimal (e.g., Klugel, 1985; Klugel & Smith, 1983, 1986; Tuch & Hughes, 1996).

So how are Whites' beliefs about racial gaps determined? As a group, Whites are undoubtedly less likely to be exposed to the downside of racial gaps. Furthermore, most Whites do not receive systematic education regarding the reality of racial gaps. Even when they do, Whites' gap perceptions may also be influenced by their choice of judgmental standards. Eibach and Ehrlinger (2006) have established that Whites often think about racial gaps in terms of progress over time (i.e., how much closer to racial equality we are now), as opposed to how far we still have to go to achieve full racial equality. As a result, Whites tend to have a more positive view of the present state of racial gaps than do racial minorities.

It is also possible that Whites' racial gap assessments may in some cases be influenced by motivational factors. For example, Brodish, Brazy, and Devine (2008) found that high prejudiced Whites tended to believe that present day racial gaps were less extreme. Presumably, this belief allows prejudiced Whites' to negatively evaluate Blacks who continue to "play the race card." In a related vein, Swim and Miller (1999) demonstrated that perceptions of racial gaps were positively correlated with White guilt. To avoid such guilt, Whites may purposely minimize their estimates of present day racial gaps.

These studies demonstrate the importance of racial gap perceptions, and shed some light on their determinants. They also provide some clues as to why Whites, as a group, may underestimate present day gaps. However, returning to the central focus of the paper, extant studies have yet to characterize Whites' beliefs about racial gaps in a detailed and psychologically meaning fashion. Hence, the accuracy of Whites' racial gap assessments is still unclear. Before describing an initial attempt to provide such a characterization, it is important to summarize the reality of racial gaps in America.

The Reality of Racial Gaps

Racial gaps between Blacks and Whites across a variety of important socio-economic domains are still extreme (for comprehensive reviews of racial gaps, see Hacker, 2003; Massey, 2007). Relative to Whites, Black unemployment rates are 2.3 times higher, infant mortality is 1.8 times higher, median household incomes are approximately \$14,500 less, poverty rates are almost 2.5 times higher, home ownership rates are 61% lower, high school graduate rates are approximately nine percentage points lower, incarceration rates are almost six times higher, and, finally, life expectancies are almost four years less.

Some of these gaps have lessened over time. For example, in 1970 more extreme Black/White gaps existed with respect to graduate rates, poverty, and life expectancies. Other gaps, such as home ownership have remained relatively unchanged over the same period. However, for a number of important racial gaps, we see a widening in the last several decades. For example, unemployment rates among Blacks in 2013 were twice as high as those among Whites, a gap that has only increased since 1970 when Black unemployment was only 1.7 times higher. Interestingly, between 1880 and approximately 1940, there were no appreciable differences between Blacks and Whites in unemployment. Hence, present day unemployment gaps are about as extreme as they have ever been (Fairlie & Sundstrom, 1997). Similarly, infant mortality rates are presently 2.3 times higher among Blacks than Whites, whereas in 1970 Black infant mortality was only 1.8 times higher.

In 2004, Blacks had only 15% of the personal wealth that Whites did, a gap that has remained basically unchanged since 1984

Although gaps in income and unemployment may receive more press, Shapiro (2004) has argued persuasively that differences in personal wealth may be the most significant economic gap between the races. Here again, there are extreme racial gaps favoring Whites. In 2004, Blacks had only 15% of the personal wealth that Whites did (Jenkins, 2009), a gap that has remained basically unchanged since 1984 (Wolff, 2001).

EXTREME RACIAL GAPS FOR BLACKS, AS COMPARED TO WHITES	
Unemployment Rates: 2.3 times higher	Home Ownership: 61% lower
Infant Mortality: 1.8 times higher	High School Graduation: 9% lower
Median Household Incomes: \$14,500 less	Incarceration Rates: 6 times higher
Poverty Rates: 2.5 times higher	Life Expectancies: 4 years less

Though now somewhat dated, a report by Rank (2009) examined racial gaps in five additional areas thought to be fairly representative of general economic differences between Whites and Blacks. To briefly summarize their results, Blacks were 42.7% more likely to experience poverty and 41.7% less likely to experience affluence. Blacks were also more than twice as likely (averaged across adulthood) to experience asset poverty, which is defined as not being able to withstand a three-month loss of income. Finally, White home-ownership outpaced non-Whites by approximately 15%, and Whites were also roughly twice as likely to build large amounts of equity (\$50,000 plus) into their houses.

In conclusion, economic gaps between Blacks and Whites are extreme, and in many cases have stubbornly persisted over time or even increased. This basic conclusion also applies to important domains such as health (e.g., Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003), education (e.g., Lee, 2002), and criminal justice (e.g., Alexander, 2010). Finally, although the review above focuses on statistically quantifiable racial gaps, there also exist countless, more subjective differences in the everyday lived experiences of Blacks and Whites that once again tend to favor Whites (e.g., McIntosh, 1988; Rothenberg, 2004).

Two important conclusions can be derived from this punctuated review of racial gaps. First, in the present day, the average White person experiences a very different America than the average Black person. Second, although great strides have been made towards the goal of racial equity, the path of racial progress has not been one of continual improvement. The question remains, to what extent is the typical White individual aware of the true nature of racial gaps? To address this issue, two studies were conducted with the aim of gaining a more accurate and detailed understanding of Whites' assessments of interracial gaps. In Study 1, Whites' views of changes in racial gaps over time were elicited. Study 2 employed contingent valuation methodology to place estimates of racial gaps on a meaningful and easily interpretable metric: monetary valuations.

Study 1

Typical measures of racial progress assessments do not include specific time intervals. A representative example is provided by Brodish et al. (2008, p. 526), who asked participants, “How much racial progress has been made toward equality for racial minorities in the United States?” In the few instances where a specific time interval has been employed, the choice of time interval appears to be somewhat arbitrarily chosen. For example, Eibach and Keegan (2006, p. 460) asked participants to estimate “improvements in conditions for minorities since 1960.” Although such items have demonstrated predictive validity, they limit the precision with which descriptive conclusions can be drawn. How do Whites characterize racial progress over the long haul (e.g., since the time of slavery)? Do they believe the course of racial progress has been smooth or staggered? Do they perceive continual progress or a series of peaks and valleys? What are their predictions for the future?

In Study 1, participants were asked to make fifteen-year estimates of racial gaps between 1870 and the year 2005, and then to project them out to the year 2050. Present day (2014) estimates were also elicited. In addition, measures of racial ideology and racial policy were included to examine the predictive ability of the new measurement strategy.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 178 male (38.2%) and female (61.8%) adults drawn from a non-representative national online sample. The mean participant age was 33.76 (SD = 12.71; range: 18–72). The sample was comprised primarily of self-reported White individuals (77.0%), but also included African-Americans (7.3%), Asian-Americans (5.6%), Hispanic-Americans (6.2%). An additional 3.9 percent indicated a mixed racial background.

PROCEDURES AND MATERIALS

All measures were administered using an online data collection website. In the first task, participants were asked to estimate “statistical gaps” between Blacks and Whites every fifteen years between 1870 and 2050, the last three estimates being projections. They were also asked to estimate the present day racial gaps (2014). Specifically, there were instructed that: “Racial gaps’ means actual, measurable differences between Whites and Blacks in terms of employment, income, wealth, health care, education, housing, etc.” The instructions defined statistical gaps as “actual statistical differences between Whites and Blacks (e.g., employment, income, wealth, health care, education, housing, etc.), regardless of the reasons behind those differences.” This qualification was added to dissuade participants from allowing perceptions of differences in opportunities to influence estimates. Estimations were rated on a 201-point scale (-100 = “Statistical gaps favoring Blacks”; 0 = “No statistical gaps between Blacks and Whites”; 100 = “Statistical gaps favoring Whites”).

ADDITIONAL MEASURES

Participants were asked to respond to the statement “I am opposed to conversations about race in America”. Participants then completed a thermometer rating task (Campbell, 1971) in which they were asked to rate their warmth toward “Blacks” and “Whites” on a scale of 0 to 100, with higher numbers indicating increasing warmth.

Finally, participants were asked to report their political ideology (liberal vs. conservative) and political party preferences (Democrat vs. Republican). Both were rated on nine-point scales where higher numbers indicated support for conservatism and the Republican Party, respectively.

Results and Discussion

Main analyses focused on the White subset of the sample ($n = 137$). The mean estimates of racial gap perceptions among Whites by year appear in **FIGURE 1**. Visual inspection of the figure indicates that participants, on average, perceived racial gaps favoring Whites in the past and present, and also projected them into the future. A series of t-tests confirmed that each mean estimates between 1870 and 2050 (including 2014—not pictured) was in fact significantly different from zero (all $ps < .001$).

Next, additional trends in the data were examined. When focusing on the entire curve, the 2014 estimates were excluded from the analysis in order to preserve equal intervals between estimate points. Clearly, participants perceived constant progress from 1870 to the present date, and into the future. Correspondingly, there was a significant linear trend in the data, $F(1, 136) = 906.52, p < .001$. However, the linear trend was qualified by a significant cubic trend, $F(1, 136) = 89.60, p < .001$, indicating two inflection points occurring at approximately 1960 and 2020. These inflection points shed light on White participants' naïve understanding of the history of race in America: (a) gradual improvements following the abolishment of slavery, (b) hastened improvement presumably corresponding with the Civil Rights Movement, and (c) gradual changes improvement predicted to continue on into the future.

Given the nature of the gap estimation rating scale, it was also possible to categorize participant ratings for each year as indicating a perception of relative White privilege (gap estimates with positive values), racial equality (gap estimates of zero), or Black privilege (gap estimates with negative values). **TABLE 1** shows the percentage of White participants in each category across the various time intervals. At present (2014), approximately 20% of Whites in the sample believed that there were either no interracial gaps, or that gaps favored Blacks. This combined percentage rose to approximately 46 percent for the 2050 projections.

We can further examine how these perceptions varies by factors like level of anti-Black prejudice, political ideology, political party identification, and racial status (see **TABLE 2**). Predictably, Whites who were higher in anti-Black prejudice, who oppose conversations about race, or who were conservative (relative to liberal), generally perceived smaller interracial gaps. In contrast, the differences based on political party identification (not pictured in Table 2) were not sizeable. Finally, there were large difference in present and future estimations between Whites and non-Whites in the sample, such that non-Whites appeared to be more aware of ongoing racial gaps. Inspection of the sample sizes listed in Table 2 makes it evident that the online sample of Whites tended to be more liberal and less prejudice, and this should be taken into account when interpreting the results of Study 1.

In summary, White participants in Study 1 acknowledged a history of persisting racial gaps favoring Whites, and yet perceived continual and fairly consistent racial progress both throughout history, and continuing on into the future. Examination of the raw estimate values demonstrates that, to the extent that White do perceive racial gaps favoring Whites, they also perceive them to be fairly trivial. To wit, if the racial gap estimation instructions were transformed into a 0–10 scale where higher values indicated perceptions of greater pro-White gaps, average values from the present (2014) to the future (2050) would range between 1.0 and 2.4. Such perceptions are at odds with many of the earlier reviewed statistics regarding racial gaps. Important racial gaps in the areas of wealth, unemployment, life spans, and so on, have either stubbornly persisted over time, or have in some cases widened.

Study 2

In previous studies of racial perceptions, participants have generally been asked to provide generalized evaluations of racial gaps on scales with arbitrary valuations (typically simple likert scales). For example, as part of the five-item *White privilege scale*, Swim and Miller (1999) asked participants to evaluate (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) the following statement, “White people have certain advantages that minorities do not have in this society.” Such generalized measurement techniques are associated with at least two potential limitations. The first is that individual scores on such measures are meaningful only in the relative sense (e.g., with respect to group or condition differences; relative to the actual range of the scale). Second, it is not clear to what extent identical scores by different participants indicate equivalent psychological quantities—a limitation that may increase measurement error and reduce statistical power. For both reasons, the use of generalized measures of gap perceptions limits the precision of the conclusions that can be drawn, especially in the descriptive sense.

The same criticisms can be applied to Study 1 in the present article. Although the mean curve in **FIGURE 1** suggests that Whites acknowledge the history of racial gaps in America, as well as a continuing advantage for Whites, an intriguing question remains: What precisely do the gap estimates represent? The 2014 value of 23.91, though significantly different from the scale’s zero-point, still appears to correspond with a perception of trivial gaps. But perhaps this valuation is trivial only with respect to perceptions of massive gaps immediately following the abolishment of slavery. The values on likert-type rating scales typically convey little objective meaning.

Previous work by Mazzocco et al. (2006) used contingent valuation methodology to address such limitations. Contingent valuation scenarios require participants to assign monetary values to objects, experiences, choices, and so on (Cummings, Brookshire, & Schulze, 1986). In the case of racial gap assessments, participants can be asked to calculate cash values that represent their reckoning of the extremity of racial gaps on a familiar, easily interpretable, and comparable dimension.

Mazzocco et al. (2006) asked approximately 1,000 White participants, varying widely in age, geographic locale, and student status, to imagine that they were actually Black, but had until now been passing as White. They were then asked how much money they would need to change their racial status (correctly) to Black. The most representative value across all samples was about \$1,000. It was further demonstrated that participants who requested higher race-change values were also more supportive of slave-descendant reparations.

One potential criticism of the scenarios used by Mazzocco et al. is that participants did not, in fact, base their cash valuations entirely on racial gap perceptions. Instead, the low cash valuations may have been influenced by idiosyncratic qualities of the scenarios themselves (e.g., the seeming triviality of changing one’s racial status). In the present study, participants were explicitly directed to consider the costs and benefits of being Black vs. White in making their monetary valuations of racial gaps. In addition, the correlations between these valuations and several additional variables were assessed. Such analyses would not have been statistically appropriate in Study 1 due to the high interrelations between the various gap estimations (by year).

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 164 White male ($n = 61$) and female ($n = 103$) undergraduates at Ohio State's Mansfield regional campus. The mean participant age was 20.39 ($SD = 4.93$; range: 18–53).

PROCEDURES AND MATERIALS

All measures were administered using an online data collection website. At the outset of the study, participants read a brief cover story that began by invoking the common saying “everything has a price tag.” It went on to explain that although this statement was obvious for things like products and services, it also applied to other kinds of outcomes and experiences. Participants were given an example of how insurance companies and the federal government examine a variety of factors in an attempt to set the value of a human life. Participants were then informed that they themselves would be asked to follow a similar type of reasoning during the course of the study. On the next screen participants were instructed to “think about being the average Black person in America versus the average White person in America. Think for a moment about the relative advantages and disadvantages that each group enjoys or suffers over the course of the average lifetime.” They were then asked to choose one of the following three options: (a) It is easier to be the average Black person in America (as opposed to White); (b) It is easier to be the average White person in America (as opposed to Black); (c) It is not easier or harder to be the average White versus the average Black person in America. Following this choice participants were given space to report a dollar value that represented the “size/magnitude of the difference between the average Black and White person over the lifetime,” corresponding with the choice they had made.

ADDITIONAL MEASURES

To measure attitudes towards affirmative action, participants completed Kravitz and Platania's (1993) *affirmative action scale*; a six-item scale containing items such as, “The goals of race-based affirmation action are good” ($\alpha = .82$).

As a measure of anti-Black prejudice and racist ideology, participants also completed the eight-item *symbolic racism 2000* scale (Henry & Sears, 2000, $\alpha = .82$). The scale contains items such as, “It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites.”

Four items previously used to assess support for racial colorblindness was also used (Mazzocco, Cooper, & Flint, 2012; $\alpha = .81$). The four items of the scale are as follows: “Nothing good will come out of continuing to focus on race,” “America would be better off if we stopped placing so much importance on race,” “The topic of race is something that should generally be avoided,” and “Society would be better off if we all stopped talking about race.”

Participants also completed Swim and Miller's (2000) *White privilege scale* ($\alpha = .92$), comprised of five items designed to assess perceptions of White privilege (e.g., “I feel that skin color is an asset to Whites in everyday life”). Finally, participants indicated basic demographic information as well as indicated preferences regarding political party and ideology.

Results and Discussion

Gap valuations ranged from -\$20,000 to \$1,000,000 with a raw mean of \$28,241.09 ($SD = \$11,063.63$). The mean, however, was highly inflated by a relatively small number of extremely large requests (skew = 6.27, $se = .19$). For the purposes of descriptive analyses, then, the median valuation of \$7.50 provides a much more accurate picture of the central tendency of the distribution. **FIGURE 2**, which breaks down responses into dollar-range categories, paints a similar picture of central tendency. More than half (54.7%) of the cash valuations were 10 dollars or less (including \$0 and negative responses). Adding the responses between \$10 and \$100 accounts for 72.0% of the sample. Once again, keeping the earlier review of existing racial gaps in mind, participants appeared to have drastically underestimated relative White privilege.

Regarding the choice data, 55 (33.5%) participants selected “easier to be white,” 103 (62.8%) selected “no difference,” and just 6 (3.7%) selected “easier to be black.” Although, these percentages differed to some extent from the corresponding Study 1, 2014 values (**TABLE 1**), recall that the Study 1 mean values for the present day, though positive, were strikingly close to the zero point of the scale.

Correlations involving the cost-based racial gap valuation measure are presented in **TABLE 3**. Consistent with Study 1, the cost measure was significantly correlated with affirmative action attitudes, the symbolic racism 2000 scale, perceptions of White privilege, and the support for racial colorblindness, all in predictable directions (higher values predict less prejudice, less support for racial colorblindness, and perceptions of greater White privilege). In contrast, the cost-based gap valuation measure was not significantly correlated with political ideology or party identification, or gender. Based on the correlational methodology employed in Study 2, it cannot be determined whether racial gap valuations causally influence affirmative action attitudes, for example, or vice versa. It may be that pre-existing opposition to race-based affirmative action among Whites creates a corresponding motivation devalue Black costs. Future studies will be required to determine the direction of this relationship.

General Discussion

The present work provides the most detailed picture of Whites' perceptions of racial gaps and racial progress to date. In Study 1, participants provided fifteen-year estimates (or projections in some cases) of Black/White gaps from 1870 to 2050. To their credit, the typical White participant acknowledged at least a preponderance of White privilege throughout history. Nevertheless, their perceptions of extreme decline in racial gaps in the time since the Civil Rights movement would appear to be inconsistent with many important indicators of racial gaps reviewed above.

In Study 2, participants were asked to choose a dollar value to represent the extremity of present-day existing gaps between Blacks and Whites. Although there can be no single gold standard value with which to compare participants' responses, the median value of \$7.50 reported in Study 2 is surely a monumental underestimate of the true extremity of existing racial gaps.

These findings are relevant to conceptions of racial ideologies that are based on trivializations of present-day racial gaps (or overestimations of racial progress). For Whites with lingering racial resentment, perceptions of trivial and ever-narrowing racial gap estimations should feed into both value-based racism and affective prejudice due to exasperation over minorities' ostensibly fraudulent claims of continuing hardships. For egalitarians, such perceptions should increase the call for a more colorblind society to the extent that racial equality is believed to have been achieved. In all cases, support for programs like affirmative action would be predicted to continue to decline.

Explanations of Minimal Gap Estimations

How can the trivialization of present-day racial gaps by the typical White participant be explained? As discussed earlier, Whites as a group have limited exposure to detailed statistical information regarding racial gaps. Furthermore, it is not clear why they would be motivated to seek out such information given that doing so might uncover information that would be inconsistent with prevailing racial ideologies (such as racial colorblindness), or that might lead to White guilt (Swim & Miller, 1999). Lacking a storehouse of reliable information regarding gaps, Whites estimations of racial gaps are more likely to be influenced by salient comparatives. For the typical White person, these might include notable Black individuals who have achieved success (actors, sport stars, etc.), and, as established by Eibach and Ehrlinger (2006), thoughts and images of past hardships suffered by minorities. In fact, Mazzocco and Brunner (2012) demonstrated in the domain of health-care, that such comparisons do indeed influence racial perceptions and attitudes.

Such an explanation also gives reason for hope. The reality of statistical gaps is fairly unambiguous. It is likely that simple and straight-forward education of Whites on this reality would have a significant influence on gap perceptions. Consistent with this proposition, Mazzocco et al. (2006—Study 5) found that exposing participants to a short list of statistical gaps caused median racial gap cost valuations to increase from \$1,000 to \$500,000. Of course, it is important to frame such statistics in a way that avoids attributions to negative stereotypical traits such as low intelligence or poor work ethic and, instead, focuses on factors such as the long term effects of historical oppression, and present day structural inequalities. However, there exist examples of how such a case can be compellingly made (e.g., Carr, 1997; Loewen, 2005; Mazzocco et al., 2010; Robinson, 2001; Shapiro, 2004).

Limitations of the Present Study

The present studies did not employ representative samples. Participants in Study 1 appeared to be liberal-leaning, and Study 2 participants were all White college students (mainly between the ages of 18 and 22) from a small Midwestern campus. Regarding Study 2, relying solely on college students to make inferences about Whites as a group is not uncommon in the domain of racial gap perceptions (e.g., Brodish et al., 2008; Eibach & Eichinger, 2006; Kaiser et al., 2009). And while it is possible that the racial perceptions of college students may differ from the population at large, it is also the case that Mazzocco et al. (2006) did not find substantial differences in racial gap valuations based on study location (midwest vs. northeastern vs. southeastern), student status, or age. In fact, in one sample with a heterogeneous age profile (mean age = 44.63), they found that older individuals actually listed significantly *smaller* cash values. Future research can replicate the present methodology with a more heterogeneous sample of both White and non-White adults.

Another potential limitation of these studies is that participants may have used the monetary valuation measure to express their perceptions of opportunity gaps based on lingering prejudice and discrimination as opposed to statistically-based gaps like those reviewed in the Introduction section. In other words, participants may have been aware of the reality of statistical gaps, but felt that such gaps alone do not render the lives of Whites easier, or the lives of Blacks more challenging. This interpretation, however, is inconsistent with the previously reviewed results of Mazzocco et al. (2006—Study 5), who found using a conceptually similar measure that participants were willing to list high monetary values after being exposed to a list of racial gaps favoring Whites. It should also be pointed out that Shapiro (2004) and others have convincingly tied statistical gaps such as the wealth gap to corresponding opportunity gaps. Furthermore, opportunity gaps are possible even in the absence of prejudice and active discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Hence, the low valuations of racial gaps provided by White participants in Studies 1 and 2 indicate at the very least a misunderstanding of the relationship between statistical and opportunity gaps. Most likely, participants are unaware of the extent of both statistical gaps and opportunity gaps.

Conclusion

In the present work, Whites' perceptions of racial gaps were examined using two novel measurement approaches that allowed relatively precise and detailed conclusions about Whites' racial gap perceptions. Given what we know about the reality of racial gaps in America, it is safe to say that Whites' perceptions are at least somewhat inaccurate. Importantly, the direction of this bias is likely to reinforce racial ideologies such as modern/symbolic racism and racial color-blindness that may further impede real racial progress.

The present findings suggest that underestimation of racial gaps may be fairly pervasive among White Americans. Furthermore, trivialization of racial gaps is likely to have been accelerated by the election, and re-election of Barack Obama to the Presidency (the present data were collected prior to this event). In fact, Kaiser et al. (2009) reported that Obama's election was associated with perceptions of increased racial equality since the 1960s, and decreases in support for affirmative action among White college students measured before and after the election. In spite of these sobering findings, Obama's election also presents an opportunity to clarify on a national level that we still need to actively strive towards racial equality. Given that the level of national egalitarianism has risen high enough to allow the existence of a Black president, there is likely much good that can be done by spreading the word that the work of the Civil Rights movement is not yet complete.

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Table 1

Categorized Perceptions of Racial Gaps in Study 1

	EASIER TO BE WHITE	RACIAL EQUALITY	EASIER TO BE BLACK
PAST			
1870	100.0	0	0
1885	100.0	0	0
1900	100.0	0	0
1915	100.0	0	0
1930	100.0	0	0
1945	100.0	0	0
1960	99.3	0.7	0
1975	98.5	0	1.5
1990	93.4	5.1	1.5
2005	83.9	10.2	5.8
PRESENT			
2014	78.8	12.4	8.8
FUTURE			
2020	71.8	19.7	8.8
2035	63.5	27.7	8.8
2050	54.0	35.0	10.9

Note: Values are percentages of participants falling within a given category.

Table 2

Estimates of Racial Gaps by Various Categories

YEAR	RACIAL STATUS		ANTI-BLACK PREJUDICE		SUPPORT COLORBLINDNESS		POLITICAL IDEOLOGY	
	WHITE	NON-WHITE	LOWER	HIGHER	NO	YES	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL
n	137	41	87	50	110	17	35	79
1870	98.03	97.39	98.70	96.86	97.91	98.82	96.34	98.92
1885	96.28	94.95	97.01	95.02	96.39	95.29	94.11	97.47
1900	93.59	96.68	94.69	91.68	93.75	92.65	91.49	94.65
1915	91.46	91.80	92.67	89.36	91.50	91.47	88.54	93.08
1930	87.25	88.98	88.84	84.48	87.85	86.71	83.89	88.61
1945	82.15	85.44	83.52	79.76	82.82	82.59	78.74	83.96
1960	75.04	77.44	76.68	72.18	75.64	76.76	71.43	76.91
1975	60.74	65.20	63.07	56.68	60.81	64.24	56.66	62.32
1990	44.53	53.12	46.00	41.98	45.75	44.88	38.31	46.39
2005	30.00	41.49	34.17	22.74	33.41	21.18	23.66	35.46
2014	23.91	35.71	28.28	16.32	27.16	14.88	19.11	28.19
2020	19.40	32.68	25.33	9.08	23.79	9.47	15.20	24.13
2035	16.16	27.98	22.55	5.04	20.08	4.12	13.63	19.84
2050	10.61	24.46	16.34	0.62	14.74	1.00	9.37	13.89

Note: Higher numbers indicate perceptions of gaps favoring Whites relative to Blacks. Pairs of numbers in the same row for a given category that are bolded are significantly different from one another ($p < .05$).

Table 3

Correlates of Present-day Racial Gap Estimates

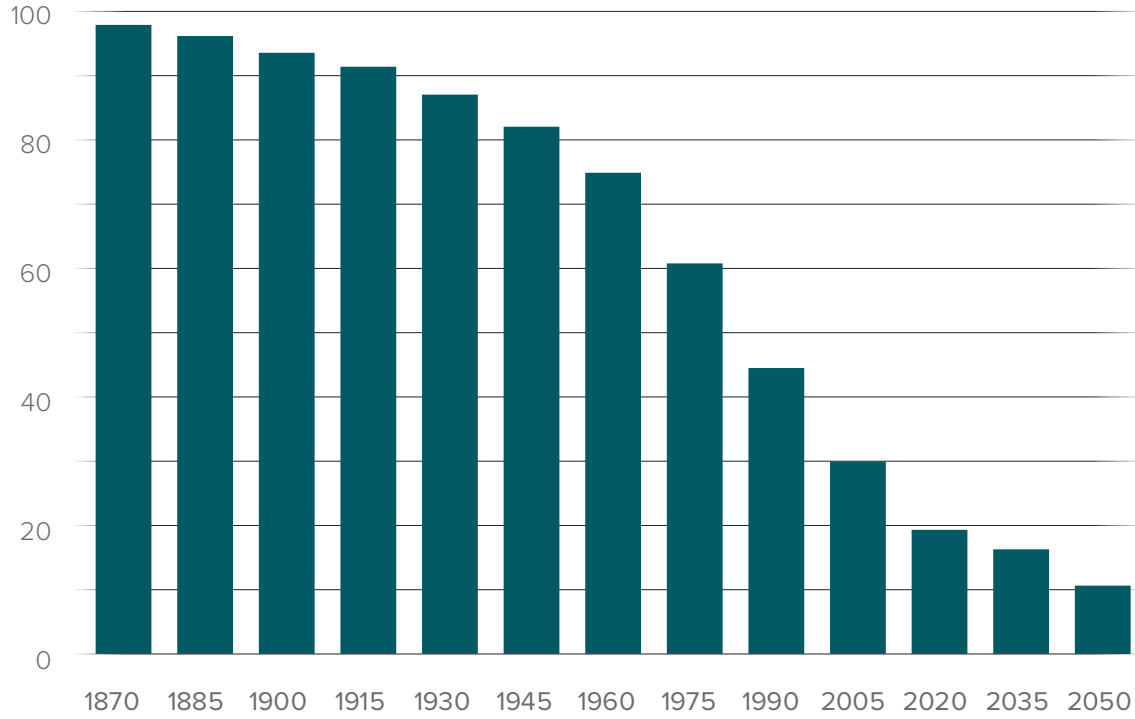
Affirmative Action Scale	.20*
Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale	-.24**
Racial Colorblindness Composite	-.20**
White Privilege Scale	.22**
Political Ideology ¹	.06
Political Party Identification	.02
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	-.09

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

1 Higher values on the political ideology and party items indicated a preference for conservatism and the Republican Party, respectively.

Figure 1

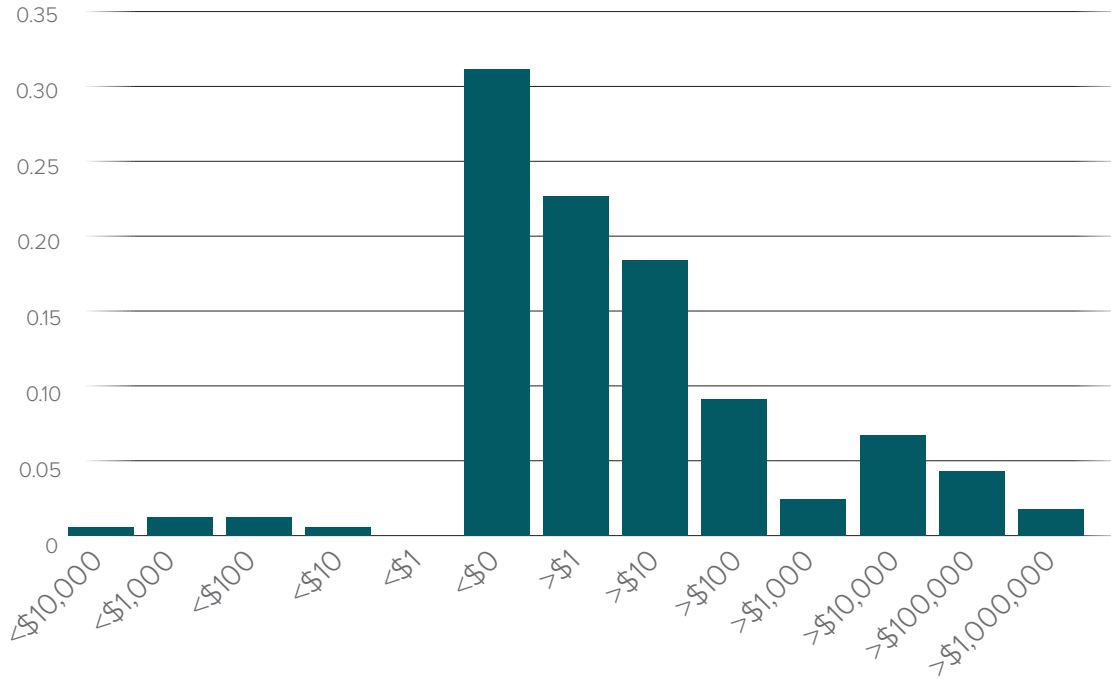
Perceptions of Black/White racial gaps by year (Study 1)



Note: Higher values indicate perceptions of racial gaps favoring Whites relative to Blacks.

Figure 2

Grouped frequency distribution of racial gap valuations (Study 2)

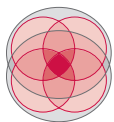


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