

Whites' Opposition to Busing: Symbolic Racism or Realistic Group Conflict?

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The theory of symbolic racism contends that whites' opposition to busing springs from a basic underlying prejudiced or intolerant attitudinal predisposition toward blacks, not self-interest or realistic group conflict motives. The present research argues that realistic group conflict motives do help explain whites' opposition to busing. Two major criticisms of the symbolic racism approach are made: (a) that the tests of symbolic racism versus group conflict explanations of opposition to busing have not been fair because of a narrow definition of group interests that ignores the role of subjectively appreciated threat and challenges to group status; and (b) that by forcing racial attitudes onto a single continuum running from prejudice to tolerance, the symbolic racism researchers overlook the importance of the perception that the civil rights movement is a threatening force. By reanalyzing the Michigan National Election Study data used by Sears, Hensler, and Speer (1979) and Sears, Lau, Tyler, and Allen (1980), the present research broadens the notion of self-interest and operates with a multidimensional conceptualization of racial attitudes and in so doing demonstrates that whites' opposition to busing reflects group conflict motives, not simply a new manifestation of prejudice.

Research on racial attitudes increasingly presents a paradox: Although there is continuing improvement in whites' beliefs about blacks and support for the general principles of racial equality and integration (Taylor, Sheatsley, & Greeley, 1978), there is pronounced opposition to specific policies like busing (Kelley, 1974), affirmative action (Lipset & Schneider, 1978), or any situation that might alter the predominance of whites over blacks (Farley, Schuman, Bianchi, Colasanto, & Hatchett, 1978; Smith, 1981). An important

new theory labeled *symbolic racism*¹ suggests that this paradox results from a growing tendency for whites to reject blatantly antiblack statements (e.g., "blacks are less intelligent than whites") representing "old-fashioned" racism but to express their basic prejudiced or intolerant feelings toward blacks on contemporary issues like busing (Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979; Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). Moreover, symbolic racism theory suggests that whites' responses to an issue like school busing in no way involve self-interest

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¹ Work dealing with symbolic racism has been given prominent and favorable treatment by several recent literature reviews on interethnic attitudes and discrimination (e.g., Ashmore & Del Boca, 1976; Fairchild & Gurin, 1978; Seeman, 1981). Abelson (1981) has suggested that a "symbolic" attitude approach can help resolve attitude-behavior inconsistencies in "deindividuated" behavioral settings. An earlier version of Kinder and Sears's 1981 symbolic racism paper received the Gordon W. Allport award in 1978. I would prefer to use the label *sophisticated prejudice* over symbolic racism. The former avoids the ambiguity of the term *symbolic* and the heavily judgmental overtones of the term *racism* while also being descriptive of the basic theory and related empirical tests. Because the appellation *symbolic racism* is the term used by the concepts proponents and is most widely known, it is retained for the present purposes.

or realistic group conflict motives (see Sears et al., 1979, 1980; in addition, see Kinder & Sears, 1981) but rather stem from an underlying *attitudinal* predisposition toward blacks instilled during early childhood socialization. The present research reanalyzes the data used in two of the symbolic racism papers (Sears et al., 1979, 1980) with the purpose of demonstrating that whites' opposition to busing does reflect realistic group conflicts, not simply a new manifestation of prejudice. In so doing, the present research also offers a more genuinely *social-psychological* perspective on whites' attitudes toward busing.

In particular, I argue that Sears and his associates (Sears et al., 1979, 1980; Kinder & Sears, 1981) operate with an unjustifiably narrow concept of self-interests and group interests and as a result are greatly hindered in their ability to perform a fair test of group conflict theory. (The three papers mentioned above henceforth are referred to as the 1979, 1980, and 1981 symbolic racism papers.) Second, I argue that the general strategy pursued by symbolic racism researchers of creating a single-scale index of racial attitudes running from prejudice to tolerance is misguided. Specifically, I demonstrate that the single-scale measures of racial intolerance used in the 1979 and 1980 symbolic racism papers are *not* unidimensional and that they contain items tapping group conflict motives: the extent to which whites perceive the civil rights movement to be threatening. Third, I suggest that the gap between support for the general principles of racial justice (i.e., equality and integration) and support for specific policies like busing is in part a result of the perception by many whites that blacks are a threat to real resources and accepted practices.

Symbolic racism has received various treatments and attempts at explication (in addition to references already cited, McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears & Kinder, 1971). The core elements of the theory, although some definitional differences between its various proponents exist, are well described by Kinder and Sears (1981):

[Symbolic racism is] a blend of antiblack affect and the kind of traditional American moral values embodied in the Protestant Ethic. Symbolic racism represents a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on

moral feelings that blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, the work ethic, and discipline. (p. 416)

Sears and colleagues maintained that symbolic racism is a negative attitudinal predisposition toward blacks acquired during early childhood socialization, which on the basis of cognitive consistency leads to a rejection of new issue positions favorable to blacks.²

Three recent attempts to provide empirical support for symbolic racism have countered it against self-interest or group conflict explanations of racial attitudes. Whites' resistance to busing (Sears et al., 1979, 1980) and their voting against a black mayoral candidate (Kinder & Sears, 1981) are hypothesized to result from a prejudiced attitudinal predisposition, not any real tangible threats blacks may pose to an individual white's well-being. All three symbolic racism papers maintain that realistic group conflict explanations of prejudice involve solely direct competition between group members. For example, Sears et al. (1979) argued that:

a "self-interested" attitude is usually defined fairly restrictively as one which is directed toward maximizing gains or minimizing losses to the *individual's* tangible private well-being. (p. 369, emphasis added)

Working with this limited notion of self-interest, the symbolic racism researchers operationalize realistic group conflict as the presence or absence of an immediate, *objective* vulnerability to busing (Sears et al., 1979, 1980) or a similar vulnerability to social contact with blacks, economic competition, and victimization by blacks (Kinder & Sears, 1981).

Next, the symbolic racism researchers try to develop measures of underlying *symbolic* attitudinal predispositions toward blacks, for example, racial intolerance and political conservatism. The primary aim in so doing is to rank respondents on a single scale running

² This definition will, for the moment, be taken as legitimate. Later, it is argued that the second portion of the definition—the sentence that includes the phrase “a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo”—allows the symbolic racism researchers to classify explicitly group-level political discontents as prejudice or symbolic racism. In other words, it is an escape hatch that allows symbolic racism to incorporate group conflict motives.

from prejudice to tolerance.³ Such a prejudice-tolerance scale becomes symbolic racism operationalized. Table 1 contains the wording of the rather heterogeneous group of eight items that Sears et al. (1979) used in their analysis (Questions 1 through 8) of the 1972 Michigan National Election Study data. The questions concern support for segregation ("Segregation"); fair housing ("Keep Out"); blacks' intelligence ("Less Intelligent"); guarantees by the federal government of fair job treatment for blacks ("Fair Job Treatment") and for access to hotels and restaurants ("Access to Accommodations"); and questions on whether the civil rights movement has pushed too fast ("Civil Rights Push"), has helped or hurt blacks' cause ("Actions Hurtful"), or has been largely violent or peaceful ("Actions Violent"). In addition, the five items used in the 1980 symbolic racism paper, which involved the 1976 Michigan National Election Study data, are also shown (see Table 1, Questions 2, 3, 4, 9, and 10).

Sears and colleagues found that measures of objective vulnerability to busing pale in comparison to their measures of symbolic racism (racial intolerance and political conservatism) in accounting for busing opposition or voting for a black mayoral candidate. Specifically, the 1979 symbolic racism paper demonstrates that a scale of racial intolerance (an additive scale composed of Items 1 through 8 in Table 1) and self-identification as a political liberal or conservative significantly predict opposition to busing; on the other hand, having heard that busing may soon occur, having children in the public schools and living in an area with largely white public schools do not. Sears et al. (1979) interpreted this result as follows:

It is apparently the *symbolism* evoked by the prospect of any white children's forced intimate contact with blacks, rather than the *reality* of one's own children's contact, that triggers opposition to busing. (p. 382).

The authors further speculated that most whites probably possess inaccurate information and beliefs about the impact of desegregation on white scholastic achievement, the safety of white children in desegregated schools, and so on. Thus, whites react to the complex of "symbols" that are associated with busing, not what it actually entails.

The central thesis underlying the present discussion is that racial attitudes reflect the existing economic, social, and political relationships between black and white Americans, in other words, the real features of group relations and conflict. Specifically, American social organization allows and fosters in whites the belief that blacks, in so far as they demand changes in the racial status quo, are a threat to their life-styles, as well as to other valued resources and accepted practices. Despite much progress and change in the 1960s and 1970s in terms of general attitudes and the concrete economic and political status of blacks, American society has not fully escaped a history of racism. Tremendous economic inequalities between blacks and whites persist (Farley, 1977b; Reich, 1981), along with extensive residential segregation (Farley, 1977a). Also portrayals of blacks in the media are limited and frequently unfavorable (Johnson, Sears, & McConahay, 1971; Weigel, Loomis, & Soja, 1980). Further progress in the struggle for racial equality and integration such as affirmative action goals or quotas will likely entail some material sacrifice by whites (see Rothbart, 1976, for a similar point) or upset some aspects of the social experience of most whites (e.g., eliminate segregated schools and housing). Therefore, many whites come to view a policy like busing as threatening to states-of-affairs with which they are quite comfortable—threatening to a social world and position in society they accept and value. Most whites have had no experience whatsoever with school desegregation plans, nor have they had sufficient intimate, equal status, nonconflictual contact with blacks to cause them to question

³ Kinder and Sears (1981) began to move toward a multidimensional conceptualization of racial attitudes but did not fully consider the adverse implications of multidimensional attitudes for a theory that postulates the existence of a strong, general, negative predisposition toward blacks. Instead, they argued that the "politically effective" forms of prejudice are carried only by certain types of items that reflect "abstract, moralistic resentments of blacks traceable to preadult socialization" (Kinder & Sears, 1981, p. 414). Operationally, this translates into group-level political discontents that the present perspective views as group conflict motives. Also, Kinder and Sears (1981) discussed but did not present results using a measure of political conservatism.

Table 1

Wording and Coding of Racial Attitude Items From the 1972 and 1976 National Election Studies and the 1974 Fall Omnibus Study

1. *Less intelligent.* Which of these statements (about the relative intelligence of black and white people) would you agree with:
 - (a) On the average, black people are born with more intelligence than white people. [scored 0]
 - (b) On the average, white people and black people are born with equal intelligence. [scored 0]
 - (c) On the average, white people are born with more intelligence than black people. [scored 4] *Don't know* and *depends* scored 2.
2. *Segregation.*^a Are you in favor of desegregation [scored 0], strict segregation [scored 4], or something in between [scored 2]? *Don't know* scored 2.
3. *Keep out.*^a Which of these statements would you agree with:
 - (a) White people have a right to keep black people out of their neighborhoods if they want to. [scored 4]
 - (b) Black people have a right to live wherever they can afford to, just like anybody else. [scored 0] *Don't know* and *depends* scored 2.
4. *Civil rights push.*^a Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel they haven't pushed fast enough. How about you: Do you think that civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast [scored 4]; are going too slowly [scored 0], or are they moving about the right speed [scored 2]? *Don't know* scored 2.
5. *Actions hurtful.* Do you think the actions black people have taken have, on the whole, helped their cause [scored 0] or, on the whole, hurt their cause [scored 4]? *Don't know* and *pro-con/helped, hurt some* scored 2.
6. *Actions violent.* During the past year or so, would you say that most of the actions black people have taken to get the things they want have been violent [scored 4], or have most of these actions been peaceful [scored 0]? *Don't know* and *pro-con/some violent, some peaceful* scored 2.
7. *Access to accommodations.* As you may know, Congress passed a bill that says that black people should have the right to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford, just like anybody else. Some people feel that this is something the government should support. Others feel that the government should stay out of this matter. Have you been interested enough in this to favor one side over another [no scored 2]? (If yes) Should the government support the right of black people to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford [scored 0], or should it stay out of this matter [scored 4]? *Don't know* and *depends* scored 2.
8. *Fair job treatment.* Some people feel that if black people are not getting fair treatment in jobs, the government in Washington ought to see to it that they do. Others feel that this is not the federal government's business. Have you had enough interest in this question to favor one side over the other [no scored 2]? (If yes) Should the government in Washington see to it that black people get fair treatment in jobs [scored 0] or leave these matters to the states and local communities [scored 4]? *Don't know* and *depends* scored 2.
9. *Dislike blacks.* (Reverse scoring of standard Election Study Thermometer item for feelings toward blacks. Ranges from 0 to 97. *Don't know* scored 50.0.)
10. *Dislike black militants.*^b (Reverse scoring of standard Election Study Thermometer item for feelings toward black militants. Ranges from 0 to 97. *Don't know* scored 50.0.)

^a Questions asked in all three surveys. Unmarked items were only in the 1972 Election Study and the 1974 Fall Omnibus Study.

^b Questions used only for the 1976 Election Study.

or to reject the perception that blacks demand unwarranted and disruptive changes.

Is this explanation of white resistance to busing best understood as symbolic racism or as realistic group conflict? There are several major statements of group conflict approaches to race relations (see, e.g., Blauner, 1972; Blu-

mer, 1958; Bonacich, 1972; Schermerhorn, 1956; Smith, 1981; Wellman, 1979; Wilson, 1973). In answering this question, the present research stresses two general aspects of group conflict approaches rather than emphasizing any particular theory.

First, group conflict involves not only ob-

jective conditions of competition between members of different groups but also the *subjective* perception that out-group members pose a threat to valued resources or preferred states-of-affairs (LeVine & Campbell, 1972, pp. 30–31).⁴ This observation is crucial to Marx's (1956) discussion of class consciousness, crucial to Weber's (1978) analysis of class and status groups and implicit in Bonacich's (1972, 1975, 1976) split labor market theory of ethnic antagonism.⁵ Indeed, any consideration of the connection between social conditions and responses to political issues would be incomplete if it considered only objective conditions or, conversely, only subjective states of mind (see Balbus, 1971, for a similar point).

The model of self-interest as conceptualized and tested by the symbolic racism theorists focuses on *objective* susceptibility to potentially unwanted contact with blacks. Such a formulation of self-interest treats subjective reactions to busing or other forms of contact with blacks as irrelevant or, more likely, *presumes* that they will be negative. Hence, as framed by the symbolic racism researchers, it is the immediate susceptibility to busing or other forms of contact with blacks per se that constitute self-interest or realistic group conflict. The crucial element of a subjectively appreciated threat is either not considered at all, as in the 1979 symbolic racism paper, or is considered only in reference to isolated individuals, as in the 1981 symbolic racism paper.

Second, and most important, group membership is a powerful basis for the development of self-identity and perceptions of individual interests (see Blauner, 1972; Blumer, 1958; and especially Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ashmore and Del Boca (1976), Blauner (1972), and Wellman (1979) have recently emphasized the distinctly "collective" character, origin, and implications of white resistance to black demands for change. Specifically, Ashmore and Del Boca (1976) argued that perceived threat, not prejudice as such, is of growing importance in explaining whites' attitudes:

Since the 1960s brought blacks into open and direct competition with whites, we should expect the development of attitudes that "explain" this competition—i.e., they are pushing to displace me and my kind. Also, the urban riots, while not directly aimed at whites, convinced whites that black violence could be directed at them in the future. (p. 105)

Inasmuch as group membership and status play a role in the calculation of individual interests, it seems inappropriate to view self-interest or group conflict as based solely on objective, immediate threats to an individual's private well-being; challenges to *group* status or position are equally important. Most notions of group conflict involve both objective conditions of competition and conflict between individual group members, shifts in relative group statuses, *and* the subjective assessment of a threat posed by out-group members to individual and collective interests.

For example, black sentiment and voting against Reagan is obviously not based on an immediate tangible threat posed by Reagan to most blacks. Equally as clear, however, is the extent to which blacks perceive Reagan to be inimical to their general, long-term interests

⁴ Dahrendorf (1959) made a similar point in his discussion of *latent* and *manifest* group interests. The latter concerns an analytically objective stake or interest in some outcome or set of social relationships, whereas the former concerns a subjective consciousness of having an interest at stake. Latent interests do not unambiguously become manifest interests, although both fall within the purview of realistic group conflict.

⁵ In two respects, Bonacich's work is compatible with the argument made here. First, her work establishes that intergroup hostility grows not only out of direct competition but also out of the *expectation* on the part of members of the dominant ethnic group (higher paid labor) that members of the subordinate ethnic group (lower wage labor) pose a threat to their standard of living. She wrote:

The presence of cheaper labor in areas of the economy where higher paid labor is not currently employed is also threatening to the latter since the former attract older industries. *The importance of potential competition cannot be over-stressed.* (Bonacich, 1972, p. 553; emphasis added)

Second, even the strictest theories of economic-material determinism inevitably make assumptions about individual perception and behavior (see House, 1977, and Inkeles, 1959, for similar arguments). Hence, Bonacich's work assumes that dominant-group members have a subjective appreciation of the threat posed to their life-styles by subordinate-group members. The crucial point for the present analysis is that the subjective element of perceived threat is a fundamental aspect of group conflict theories whether the issue is jobs or busing, whether it is explicitly acknowledged or left as an assumption. Kinder and Sears (1981) were more sensitive to this issue than the other symbolic racism papers have been in their use of an "expectancy value" model, but even for them subjective threat is gauged only at an individual level, not at the level of challenges to group status or position.

as members of a social group. Similarly, feminists now emphasize supporting any candidate with the "correct" stands on women's issues. Such support is not based in an attempt to maximize immediate individual gains or to prevent imminent losses but rather to secure and to advance long-term interests deriving from group membership and position in society. The thesis of this research is that the attitudinal opposition of whites to school busing is also largely a defense of group interests and position.

To understand such motives as symbolic—the nonrational, affective residues of socialization—is to have misinterpreted the dynamics of group conflict. This misinterpretation arises in part because symbolic racism embodies two *conflicting* tenets: the assertion that whites' attitudes are essentially the product of preadult socialization (a blend of antiblack affect and traditional moral values) and the assertion that whites' resistance to change is based in the perception that blacks are making illegitimate demands for change in the status quo. The former assertion is the concept of prejudice as social psychologists have long understood it. The latter concerns fairly rational motives for resistance to change (motives based in an ideology of distribution more likely to benefit whites than blacks) that differs trivially from the group conflict approach articulated herein. That is, the symbolic racism researchers have developed a theory of prejudice that is operationalized with *group conflict motives!* This is most evident in the 1981 symbolic racism paper in which four of the five questions used in the Expressive Racism scale are explicitly political, dealing with black political influence, affirmative action programs, and welfare dependency.

It might be argued that negative affect toward blacks today is expressed in more political terms ("blacks are pushing too fast for change" or "blacks receive unfair favoritism"), because it is unfashionable to express such attitudes in any other way. A *sophisticated prejudice* thesis of this kind hinges on the presence of remarkably selective social desirability effects. In contrast, it seems more parsimonious to suggest that the contemporary features of inequality and group conflict are indeed more focused on the pace of change and matters of resource distribution (like access to

quality schools). Thus it is no surprise that the salient attitudes are political in content, not parochial assertions of the inherent inferiority of blacks or preferences for complete segregation.

Still, it might be argued that the ultimate *source* of whites' political discontent with blacks is a core of antiblack feelings acquired during early childhood socialization. Neither this research nor that undertaken by the symbolic racism researchers can provide a full empirical test of this assertion. Convincing proof of the symbolic racism position, however, would exist if the attitudes of whites prove to be unidimensional: an undifferentiated tendency to accept or reject blacks. Even if attitudes are multidimensional, symbolic racism would retain credibility as long as each dimension contributes about equally to busing opposition. If there are multiple dimensions that contribute differentially to busing opposition, then the central thesis of symbolic racism—that there exists a powerful and long-standing negative predisposition toward blacks that drives opposition to busing—would be called into serious question.

Finally, the use of political conservatism as a measure of symbolic attitudes needs to be addressed. Self-identification as a political liberal or conservative should perhaps be understood more directly as a self-descriptive statement by the respondent of his or her political ideology (*ideology* is used here in the Mannheimian sense of a statement and justification of group interests; Mannheim, 1936) rather than as a "symbolic attitude." Self-ranking as liberal or conservative indicates either a basic satisfaction with the American social and political system as it is, in the case of conservatism or, in the case of liberalism, a tendency to perceive the existence of inequalities and problems requiring efforts at change (see Conover & Feldman, 1981; Miller 1974, p. 962).

On this basis then, it is hypothesized that one of the major predictors of whites' opposition to busing is the belief that the black political movement is a threatening rather than a progressive force. At this juncture a consideration of racial attitude measurement is needed.

Among the enduring lessons of recent attempts to address the sometimes small or non-

existent relationships between attitudes and behavior are the conclusions that attitudes are multidimensional and involve variable levels of intensity, specificity, and normative constraint (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Bagozzi & Burnkrant, 1979; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Schuman & Johnson, 1976). Although some researchers stress that racial attitudes fall into several issue clusters (Brigham, Woodmansee, & Cook, 1976; LeVine, 1971; Woodmansee & Cook, 1967) and others (Campbell, 1971; Harding, Proshansky, Kutner, & Chein, 1969; Jackman, 1977; Ostrom, 1969) focus on the attitudinal components of beliefs, affect and emotions, and behavioral predispositions, both groups eschew the strategy of placing racial attitudes on a single prejudice-tolerance continuum. Jackman (1977) argued that the prejudice-tolerance continuum approach to racial attitudes should be replaced with greater emphasis on the "complexities of a substantive problem involving beliefs, and feelings along with action orientations that may vary considerably from one context to another" (p. 165).

The political sociology literature, Jackman pointed out, treats the norm of tolerance as a unique configuration of negative affect toward a group and positive behavioral orientation (see, e.g., Sullivan, Marcus, Feldman, & Piereson, 1981; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1979). In addition, working with many of the same Michigan National Election Study items used by Sears and colleagues, Jackman found three empirically distinct dimensions: an affective orientation, and two forms of behavioral predisposition, a general and an applied policy orientation toward blacks.⁶

In contrast, the 1979 symbolic racism paper takes responses to the first eight questions in Table 1 and sums them into one omnibus measure of racial intolerance. They do so despite the results of a factor analysis suggesting that these data are characterized by three factors.⁷ These eight items should fall into three theoretically and empirically meaningful clusters. First is a general policy predisposition cluster (labeled *Segregationism*) composed of the items labeled "Segregation," "Keep Out," and "Less Intelligent." Second is an applied policy predisposition cluster (labeled *Opposition to Government Action*) composed of the "Fair Job Treatment" and "Access to Accom-

modations" questions. Third is a cluster composed of items on beliefs about the progressive or threatening nature of the civil rights movement ("Civil Rights Push," "Actions Hurtful," and "Actions Violent"). This cluster (labeled *Actions Harmful*) is taken as an indicator of perceived threat.

Some may contend, as do the symbolic racism theorist, that all of these questions reflect a basic disposition, namely, prejudice. If this were the case, then these items should be well described by a one-factor solution. If more than one factor emerges, however, a prejudice interpretation would remain viable if each factor makes approximately equal contributions to busing opposition and if the factors bear similar relationships to the indicators of objective interests and such traditional predictors of racial attitudes as age, education, and region. Younger people should generally be more positive on each attitudinal dimension, as should the highly educated and those living outside the South.

The comparison of symbolic racism and group conflict theories proceeds by (a) assessing the dimensionality of the racial attitude questions used in the 1979 and 1980 symbolic racism papers; (b) comparing symbolic racism (use of a single prejudice-tolerance scale) with an attitude component model of busing opposition; and (c) assessing the connections between measures of objective threat, age, education, and region and racial attitudes. The main tasks are to demonstrate that racial attitudes are multidimensional, differentially connected to busing opposition, and differ-

⁶ Jackman (1977) worked with the 1968 National Election Study data. She used the thermometer question for feelings toward blacks and created two additional scales each composed of two items. The general policy orientation scale was composed of responses to "Segregation" and "Keep Out" in Table 1 and reflects what Jackman called *segregationism*. Only one of the two items that were in Jackman's Government Action index was used by Sears et al. (1979), the question labeled "Fair Job Treatment" in Table 1. Jackman (1978) also found support for creating scales composed of the same two sets of items with the 1972 National Election Study data.

⁷ In the 1980 symbolic racism paper, 13 racial attitude items were subjected to factor analysis. Although more than one factor emerged, only those items that loaded highly on the *first* factor were included in the racial intolerance scale used in that analysis.

entially related to objective interest measures and other respondent characteristics. The upshot of such a set of results would be that whites' opposition to busing is more a matter of group conflict than sophisticated-prejudice or symbolic racism.

Method

Data

The primary data come from the 1972 and 1976 Michigan National Election Studies (NES) conducted by the Center for Political Studies. The following analysis, consistent with the 1979 and 1980 symbolic racism papers, is restricted to the white portion of each sample.⁸ In addition, the 1974 Fall Omnibus Study (FOS), conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan (Inter-University Consortium, 1982) asked all eight of the racial attitude items used in the 1979 symbolic racism paper.⁹ For some analysis, the white portion of the 1974 FOS sample is used. For all that follows I attempt to replicate the analysis performed by the symbolic racism researchers.

Objective Interests

Three measures of objective susceptibility to school busing are used in analyzing the 1972 NES data. A dummy variable gives respondents a code of 1 if they live in areas where busing is occurring or is rumored to happen, and a 0 otherwise. The second measure is also a dummy variable that codes respondents with no children and those with children attending private or parochial schools as 0 and people with children in the public schools as 1. The third measure of vulnerability to busing is an additive index of two questions, one dealing with the racial composition of the local elementary school and the other with the racial composition of the local high school.

Four measures of susceptibility to busing are used in analyzing the 1976 NES data. Two of those variables have already been discussed: whether or not busing may be occurring and whether or not the respondent has a child in the public schools. The third measure is a dummy variable distinguishing those people who have children currently riding a bus (coded as 1) from those who do not (coded 0). The fourth is a measure of neighborhood racial composition that runs from all black to all white.

Demographics

Education, age, and a region dummy variable (South vs. nonsouth, with the South coded 1) are used in analyzing both the 1972 and the 1976 NES data. For the 1976 NES analysis, family income and a gender dummy variable (males coded 1) are also included in the analysis.

Political Ideology

For analysis of the 1972 NES data, political ideology is measured by asking respondents to rank themselves on a 7-point scale running from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative), with middle of the road and am-

bivalent responses scored as 4. Four items are scaled for use with the 1976 data. Those items are the 7-point self-ranking scale described above, a 10-point political left-right scale (again with ambivalent responses scored to the middle), and a difference score between feeling thermometer scores toward conservatives and liberals.

Busing Attitude

The dependent variable for the following analysis comes from responses to the question:

There is much discussion about the best way to deal with racial problems. Some people think achieving racial integration of schools is so important that it justifies busing children to schools out of their own neighborhoods. Others think letting children go to their neighborhood schools is so important that they oppose busing. Where would you place yourself on this scale: 1 (bus to achieve integration) through 7 (keep children in neighborhood schools), or haven't you thought much about this? (*No* and *don't know* were scored as 4.)

Analysis

Do the questions used by the symbolic racism researchers reflect one underlying construct, namely, a prejudice-tolerance continuum, or do they sort into several attitude clusters? Oblique (promax) maximum likelihood exploratory factor analyses were performed on the eight racial attitude items from the 1972 NES (used in the 1979 symbolic racism paper) and the 1974 FOS, and on the five items from the 1976 NES (used in the 1980 symbolic racism paper). Use of a maximum likelihood estimation procedure yields a chi-square indicator of goodness of fit so that the relative merit of one-, two-, and three-factor solutions can be assessed. In addition, an oblique ro-

⁸ The 1972 NES is a multistage area probability sample of voting-age citizens in the coterminous United States ($N = 2,705$). The 1976 NES involves nonmoving panel respondents from the 1972 NES and the 1974 NES and a supplemental sample designed to create a usable cross-section ($N = 2,248$, weighted $N = 2868.5$). All analysis of the 1976 NES involves the use of a weight variable. For the 1972 NES the sample size for whites is 2,315, and for the 1976 NES the weighted sample size for whites is 2,494, the unweighted sample size, 1,962. Due to postelection interview attrition, missing data, and some split ballots (1972 NES), the sample sizes are further reduced for some analysis.

⁹ The 1974 FOS is a representative cross-section of adults residing in the coterminous United States ($N = 1,519$). The sample size for whites is 1,298. (See Inter-University Consortium, 1982, 71, Study #7524, in order to obtain more information about this study.)

tation is performed, because these items share a common attitude object, blacks and their rights; hence, any dimensions underlying these questions are likely to be correlated. The factor analysis results are reported in Table 2.

A three-factor model represents a significant improvement in fit over both one- and two-factor models for the 1972 NES data: one-factor $\chi^2(20) -$ three-factor $\chi^2(7) = 456.85$, $p < .001$, and two-factor $\chi^2(13) -$ three-factor $\chi^2(7) = 110.85$, $p < .001$, respectively. Similarly, for the 1974 FOS data, which involves the same eight racial attitude questions, the three-factor model again provides the best fit to the data when compared with both the one- and two-factor models: one-factor $\chi^2(20) -$ three-factor $\chi^2(7) = 190.16$, $p < .001$, and two-factor $\chi^2(13) -$ three-factor $\chi^2(7) = 46.41$, $p < .001$. Also, the ratio of the chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) is substantially

greater than 2 for both the one- and two-factor solutions in each year: 1972 NES (1) $\chi^2/df = 23.8$, (2) $\chi^2/df = 10.0$; and for the 1974 FOS (1) $\chi^2/df = 10.0$, (2) $\chi^2/df = 4.37$. Only for the three-factor solutions do the ratios approach 2 ($\chi^2/df = 2.73$ for the 1972 NES, and 1.49 for the 1974 FOS).

The composition of the factors largely coincides with present expectations. "Segregation" and "Keep Out" along with "Less Intelligent" load on the first, *Segregationism*, factor (see boxed entries Table 2, top panel a). "Actions Hurtful" and "Actions Violent" load on the second factor, which reflects a dimension that may reasonably be called *Actions Harmful*. "Access to Accommodations" loads most strongly on the third, *Opposition to Government Action*, factor along with "Fair Job Treatment." The "Civil Rights Push" question loads about equally on the Actions Harmful

Table 2

Maximum Likelihood Exploratory Factor Analysis of Racial Attitude Items From the 1972 and 1976 National Election Study (NES) and the 1974 Fall Omnibus Study (FOS)

Variables	Loadings for three-factor solution					
	1972 NES ^a			1974 FOS ^b		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
Less intelligent	.39	.08	-.02	.34	.12	.07
Segregation	.61	.05	.04	.49	.06	.11
Keep out	.75	-.05	-.01	.81	-.08	-.09
Civil Rights Push	.07	.30	.24	.07	.27	.29
Actions Hurtful	-.09	.67	.07	-.02	.73	-.04
Actions Violent	.08	.70	-.10	-.05	.67	-.02
Access to Accommodations	.28	-.04	.44	.21	.03	.43
Fair Job Treatment	-.07	-.03	.64	-.11	-.08	.70
$\chi^2(7)$		19.13			10.42	
n		2,315			1,211	
	Loadings for two-factor solution (1976 NES) ^c					
		1			2	
Segregation		.73			-.01	
Keep out		.64			-.09	
Civil Rights Push		.24			.33	
Dislike Black Militants		-.13			.66	
Dislike Blacks		.27			.21	
$\chi^2(1)$.41			
n			2,004			

^a The goodness of fit for the 1 and 2 solutions are $\chi^2(20) = 475.98$ and $\chi^2(13) = 129.98$, respectively.

^b The goodness of fit for the 1 and 2 factor solutions are $\chi^2(20) = 200.58$ and $\chi^2(13) = 56.83$, respectively.

^c The goodness of fit for the 1 factor solution is $\chi^2(5) = 91.66$. Analysis and n are based on the weighted data.

and Opposition to Government Action factors, while not loading at all on Segregationism. The above comments hold for both the 1972 NES data and the 1974 FOS data. For the 1972 NES, the three factors share between 25% and 32% common variance, and between 28% and 40% common variance for the 1974 FOS.

The 1976 NES data is best described by a two-factor model ($\chi^2/df = .414$). Again, "Segregation" and "Keep Out" form a Segregationism cluster. "Civil Rights Push" and "Dislike Black Militants" form a cluster to be labeled *Black Political Push*. The "Dislike Blacks" item has lower but about equal loadings on both factors. The two factors share about 25% common variance.¹⁰

Each group of boxed items in Table 2 are summed into additive scales for the upcoming analysis of whites' opposition to busing, except for the Black Political Push scale based on the 1976 NES data, which involves mean scores on standardized versions of "Civil Rights Push" and "Dislike Black Militants." Those items not included in boxed clusters (e.g., "Civil Rights Push" for the 1972 NES data and "Dislike Blacks" for the 1976 NES data) are treated separately. In addition, the Racial Intolerance scales used in the 1979 and 1980 symbolic racism papers are re-created. For the 1972 NES the eight racial attitude items are summed into a scale ranging from 1 to 17 where 17 represents high intolerance. For the 1976 NES the five racial attitude items were standardized, and mean scores across the five items were summed into a final score for each respondent. The 1972 NES and 1976 NES scales are referred to as Racial Intolerance(1) and Racial Intolerance(2), respectively. Table 3 reports the results of a multiple regression analysis comparing the symbolic racism and attitude component models for the 1972 and 1976 NES data.

First, as column 2 of Table 3 indicates, neither Segregationism(1) nor Actions Harmful are significantly related to busing opposition. Of the racial attitude variables, only Civil Rights Push and Opposition to Government Action are significant predictors of opposition to busing for the 1972 NES data. The omnibus Racial Intolerance(1) scale (shown in column 1) masks these differential effects.¹¹

A closely similar pattern emerges for the

1976 NES data (columns 3 and 4 of Table 3). The Dislike Blacks variable does not have a significant effect on busing opposition, whereas both Segregationism(2) and Black Political Push have significant positive relationships to busing opposition. It is important to note that when an indicator of applied policy predispositions similar to the Oppose Government Action scale (a scale composed of 1976 NES codebook variables v3264 and v3767) is included in the 1976 NES attitude component model, the coefficient for Segregationism(2) becomes insignificant (data not shown). Thus,

¹⁰ Examination of the simple correlation matrices supports the same conclusions. "Segregation" and "Keep Out" are always more strongly related to one another than to any other questions (1972 NES $r = .478$; 1974 FOS $r = .409$; 1976 NES $r = .423$). The same holds for "Actions Hurtful" and "Actions Violent" (1972 NES $r = .448$; 1974 FOS $r = .439$), and for "Access to Accommodations" and "Fair Job Treatment" (1972 NES $r = .321$; 1974 FOS $r = .314$). Also, because maximum likelihood estimation with use of a chi-square can, with large samples, lead to "overfactoring," two further tests for purposes of factor retention were made. First, using Kaiser's criterion (retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0), one finds two clear factors and one borderline factor (eigenvalue greater than .95) for both the 1972 NES and 1974 FOS data. Similarly, for the 1976 NES data, the second factor is borderline under Kaiser's criterion (its eigenvalue is also greater than .95). Strict application of Kaiser's criterion would lead to ignoring the Opposition to Government Action factor (the third factor for both the 1972 NES and 1974 FOS data) and the Black Political Push factor (the second factor for 1976 NES). As Rummel (1970) argued, however, "Disregarding such a [borderline] factor by applying an across-the-board cutoff risks missing important factors" (p. 363). Second, scree test graphs were made of the eigenvalues for the 1972 NES, 1974 FOS, and 1976 NES factor analysis results. The graphs level off between three factors for the two former studies and after two factors for the latter. On the whole, these further tests support retention of three factors for the 1972 NES and 1974 FOS data and two factors for the 1976 NES data.

¹¹ The simple correlations between the busing item and the other eight racial attitude items from the 1972 NES show much the same picture. The busing item correlates most highly with "Civil Rights Push" ($r = .263$) and "Fair Job Treatment" ($r = .215$) and has lesser correlations with the six remaining items: for "Less Intelligent" ($r = .116$), "Segregation" ($r = .180$), "Keep Out" ($r = .127$), "Actions Hurtful" ($r = .165$), "Actions Violent" ($r = .142$), and for "Access to Accommodations" ($r = .168$). The busing item is more highly correlated with the perceived threat items from the 1976 NES as well: "Civil Rights Push" ($r = .269$) and "Dislike Black Militants" ($r = .220$). Its correlation with the remaining variables tend to be lower: for "Segregation" ($r = .184$), "Keep Out" ($r = .094$), and for "Dislike Blacks" ($r = .181$).

for both the 1972 NES and the 1976 NES, measures of Segregationism—general principles—do not have a direct effect on opposition to busing when measures of perceived threat (Civil Rights Push and Black Political Push) and applied policy predispositions (Opposition to Government Action) are included in the model.

Consistent with the results reported by the symbolic racism researchers, the objective interest measures generally do not have a direct effect on busing opposition. Finally, political

ideology is a key predictor of opposition to busing across models and years.

Inevitably, a question arises as to the connection between objective interest measures and racial attitudes. Is it possible that racial attitudes spring from or are influenced by objective interests? Table 4 addresses this concern. In both 1972 and 1976 data sets, those people living in areas where busing is happening or where it may soon occur have significantly higher scores on Racial Intolerance(1) and (2), and on Civil Rights Push and

Table 3
Comparison of Symbolic Racism and Attitude Component Models of Whites' Opposition to Busing

Variables	Regression coefficients ^a			
	1972 NES		1976 NES	
	Symbolic racism model	Attitude component model	Symbolic racism model	Attitude component model
Objective interest				
White neighborhood schools	.04	.04		
Busing happening or heard of	.00	-.01	.03	.03
Has child in public school	.06	.06	.07*	.07
Has child who rides bus			-.04	-.04
White neighborhood			-.02	-.01
Political ideology ^b				
Conservatism (1)	.21***	.19***		
Conservatism (2)			.15***	.13***
Racial attitudes ^b				
Racial intolerance (1)	.20***			
Racial intolerance (2)			.23***	
Segregationism (1)		.01		
Segregationism (2)				.07*
Oppose government action		.10**		
Actions harmful		.03		
Civil rights push		.20***		
Black political push				.21***
Dislike blacks				.04
Demographics				
Age	-.02	-.01	.03	.02
South	.03	.05	.04	.04
Education	-.02	-.02	-.09**	-.10**
Family income			.09**	.09**
Male			-.05	-.05*
Adjusted R ²	.12	.15	.12	.13
n	873	873	1,791	1,791

Note. NES = National Election Study. (1) indicates that a particular version of a variable is used for the 1972 NES data; (2) indicates that the variable is used for the 1976 NES data.

^a Cell entries are betas. Analysis and *ns* for the 1976 NES are based on the weighted data.

^b See text for description of measures.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Black Political Push. These effects are small, but reliable. Moreover, "Busing Happening or Heard of" does not affect Segregationism scores in 1972, but does in 1976. This suggests that as busing became more prominent outside the South, it undermined whites' endorsement of the general principle of integration. Also, Racial Intolerance(2) scores and Segregationism(2) scores increase as neighborhood racial composition moves from largely black to largely white, whereas scores on the perceived threat variable, Black Political Push, are unaffected by neighborhood racial composition. Similarly, respondents whose children are in the public schools are lower in Racial Intolerance(2) and Segregationism(2) but are no different from other respondents on the Black Political Push scale. These results appear to be contradictory, but because school desegregation and busing have usually been implemented with few problems (e.g., U.S. Com-

mission, 1976), it seems reasonable to argue that people who kept their children in the public schools, if they experienced busing, found it to be much less troublesome than might have been imagined. These results are consistent with the claim that contact tends to improve intergroup attitudes (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969). Intergroup contact theory, however, notes that the attitude improving effects of contact do not generalize across all situations. It is plausible, then, that contact improves more general racial attitudes (e.g., Segregationism) but leaves political threat unaffected.

Table 4 also shows that political ideology has a somewhat stronger effect on the perceived threat variables (Civil Rights Push and Black Political Push) than it has on Segregationism. Also, education, age, and region tend to have stronger, more consistent effects on Segregationism than on the perceived threat variables,

Table 4
Influence of Objective Interest, Political Ideology, and Demographic Variables on Racial Attitudes

Variables	Regression coefficients ^a					
	1972 NES			1976 NES		
	Racial intolerance (1)	Segregationism (1)	Civil rights push	Racial intolerance (2)	Segregationism	Black political push
Objective interest						
White neighborhood schools	.02	.01	-.02			
Busing happening or heard of	.08**	.04	.09**	.08**	.05**	.05*
Has child in public school	.00	-.02	-.01*	-.07*	-.07*	-.01
Has child who rides bus				.02	.02	.00
White neighborhood				.08**	.10**	-.01
Political ideology						
Conservatism (1)	.18***	.11***	.15***			
Conservatism (2)				.17***	.06*	.25***
Demographics						
Age	.10**	.18***	.02	.10***	.11***	.14***
South	.25***	.34***	.10**	.17***	.17***	.12***
Education	.28***	.22***	.16**	-.22***	-.25***	-.09**
Family income				.00	-.03	.04
Male				.04	-.02	.03
Adjusted R ²	-.25	.28	.08	.17	.17	.13
n	825	825	825	1,794	1,818	1,829

Note. NES = National Election Study. (1) indicates that a particular version of a variable is used for the 1972 NES data; (2) indicates that the variable is used for the 1976 NES data.

^a Cell entries are betas. Analysis and *ns* for the 1976 NES are based on the weighted data.

^b See text for description of measures.

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

overall accounting for more of the variance on the former than on the latter.

Discussion

The data confirm the hypothesis that racial attitudes are a multidimensional phenomenon. Also, it is clear that one of the dimensions isolated here reflects a perception that the civil rights movement is politically threatening. Use of a single prejudice-tolerance continuum obscures both points.

The various attitudinal dimensions bore only slightly different relationships to education, age, and region, with clearer differences emerging for the measures of objective interest. But most important, the effects of these various dimensions of racial attitudes on busing opposition were substantially different. On the whole, these dimensions do not seem to be reducible to a single prejudice-tolerance continuum.

Perhaps the most significant result of the present research is the discovery that perceived threat and applied policy predispositions are the strongest predictors of whites' opposition to busing. Indeed, an apparent anomaly in the results points out the value of particular perceived threat variables. Questions about the *character* or methods of the civil rights movement ("Actions Hurtful" and "Actions Violent") *did not* influence opposition to busing, but questions concerned with the *pace and implications* of change did ("Civil Rights Push" and "Dislike Black Militants"). Taken together, these results go far in explaining the discrepancy between whites' tendency to endorse the general principles of integration and equality (e.g., to reject segregationist propositions) and the simultaneous tendency to reject specific integrationist policies like busing. In so far as whites view blacks as challenging goals and resources they possess and value, they are not likely to translate their favorable attitudes toward the principle of racial justice into support for specific policies like busing.

But why isn't the connection between objective interests and subjective threat stronger? The analysis presented here did find some consistent effects in this regard (e.g., the influence of "Busing Happening or Heard of"), but they are small. Objective individual vulnerability should have more to do with be-

havior than with attitude formation when dealing with a highly salient social issue like busing. People can form an opinion about an ongoing and controversial issue like busing simply by thinking in terms of the interests of "myself and people like me." People need not be touched by busing directly, as the earlier discussion of group and individual interests implied, in order to form an opinion. Some indirect proof of this point comes from Useem (1980) who found that a high proportion of the people in his study of the Boston antibusing movement are parents with children in school. Undoubtedly, any survey taken at the time would have shown overwhelming attitudinal opposition to busing irrespective of whether a person had a child in school, but it is largely those who are directly affected who become politically active.

Conclusions

Symbolic racism theory erroneously treats subjective reactions to political actors and events as outside the realm of realistic group conflict and approaches the conceptualization and measurement of racial attitudes in a manner that blurs important complexities in the data. The symbolic racism researchers set out to establish that the explicitly racial attitudes of whites are related to where they stand on an issue like busing. This is an important proposition that should not be discarded. Nonetheless, to say that racial attitudes help explain opposition to busing is not to say that *prejudice* is the problem or that realistic group conflict motives are not involved. On the contrary, whites need not hold blatantly stereotypical beliefs or hostile orientations toward blacks in order to justify to themselves and to others their resistance to black demands for change (e.g., Jackman & Senter, in press; Rothbart, 1976; Schuman, 1971). Such resistance appears to them as a simple defense of a lifestyle and position they think they have earned and do not question, not as a rejection of blacks as such.

The present research has demonstrated that whites are in part responding to busing as a threat to their social world, a world of near ubiquitous residential segregation and, as a result, school segregation. As Pettigrew (1979) argued, residential segregation is now the

“structural linchpin” of American race relations. This fact, coupled with economic inequalities, is the crucial feature of the real social relations between blacks and whites, and is the heart of why whites respond to blacks’ demands for change as if they stood to lose something valuable. Neither the issues, the reactions, nor the processes involved are “symbolic” in the sense of being largely affective (i.e., prejudice instilled during preadult socialization). If anything, school busing is a symbol to whites, a concrete and clear cut instance, of how the demands and political activities of blacks can produce *real* changes in aspects of their lives, changes that may not always be restricted to schools (e.g., open housing laws and affirmative action). Busing is a controversial and divisive issue, because it portends substantial changes in relationships between blacks and whites with regard to schools and other domains of life. It is in this sense that white opposition to busing should be understood as a reflection of the actual features of group relations and conflicts between blacks and whites in America today.

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