

'Bootstraps' or 'Helping Hand:' An Exploration of the Relationship between Economic Stratification among Black Americans and Their Racial Attitudes toward Merit-Based Opportunities and Affirmative Action

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Joe Rollins

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**ABSTRACT**

‘Bootstraps’ or ‘Helping Hand:’ An Exploration of the Relationship between Economic Stratification among Black Americans and Their Racial Attitudes toward Merit-Based Opportunities and Affirmative Action

Sherman Ernest Lee Jr.

Advisor: Professor Joe Rollins

Over the last thirty years, much has been written about the increasing disparity between Black Americans who have achieved upward mobility and those at the lower end of the economic spectrum. This dissertation utilizes the General Social Survey (GSS) to contribute to this dialogue on stratification within the Black American community. More specifically, it asks the questions: from 1994-2006 – during the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations – how did socioeconomic status affect Blacks’ racial attitudes about themselves? To answer this question, the racial attitudes of a sample of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status will be compared to the racial attitudes of their higher socioeconomic status counterparts across several demographic, attitudinal, and economic variables. The theoretic framework for this investigation includes stratification theory (Weber), group interest theory (Dawson, Shelton & Wilson), and the theory of opportunities and group consciousness (Chong & Kim).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan “press on” has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race” – Calvin Coolidge*

Eight years after my mother’s passing, I still have the letter with these words that she sent me my freshman year of college. It remains one of my most treasured possessions. My mother always used to tell me that “God has a plan for you”, and while I have been working to fulfill this plan over the years, it took some time and persistence to come back to my goal of finishing my doctorate. I have been blessed with wonderful and supportive parents who stressed education and faith in God. My mother, a strong woman who raised thirteen children of her own as well as six stepchildren, was a fixture at my school during my early years making sure that I was tested to ensure that I was in the right academic classes. Throughout my life she remained a strong maternal figure, and as I grew older, a confidante. She has always been the closest thing to perfect that I have known. My father, who passed away ten years ago, was a Buffalo Soldier in WWII with the 92<sup>nd</sup> infantry, and always held at least two jobs to take care of his family. He would spend his last nickel to make sure his family was taken care of with no thought for himself. He was truly a great example of a strong, selfless Black man. In fact, he worked full time even after he retired up until he went in to the hospital for heart surgery, a procedure he never recovered from. I could never repay my debt to my parents for the upbringing they provided me and the faith, work ethic, and pride that they instilled in me.

I would also like to acknowledge my oldest two children, Ishara and Christopher. They were with me for this journey and have had to make sacrifices along the way. Yet I wouldn’t take back a minute of our time together, and as I watch them both in college now, I am so grateful and proud of the young adults that they have become. I would be remiss without

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

“...it is clear that economic divisions now exist among blacks, divisions which show every sign of deepening and which have profound implications for the significance of race in the American experience.”

--William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978)

#### Introduction

In the thirty-four years since Wilson made this statement in his controversial book, *The Declining Significance of Race*, the economic stratification among Black Americans has not only persisted, but, as Wilson foretold, has also worsened. This dissertation seeks to address those “profound implications” regarding the impact of economic stratification on Black Americans that Wilson described. As the socioeconomic gap between Black Americans<sup>1</sup> of higher socioeconomic status (SES)<sup>2</sup> and those living at, or near, the poverty level grows, how does SES impact Black Americans’ racial attitudes? Given the history of Black Americans in this country, how does this group view the ideas of merit-based mobility/opportunities<sup>3</sup> and affirmative

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<sup>1</sup> The term Black American will be defined as those individuals identified as Black on the GSS survey. For the purpose of this study the term will be used interchangeably with the terms Negro, Black, Afro-American, and African American in the literature.

<sup>2</sup> Socioeconomic status (SES) is defined as the combination of education, income, and occupation that leads to a specific social standing or class. For this study, SES will be measured through the variable Socio-economic index (SEI) on the General Social Survey.

<sup>3</sup> Merit-based opportunities ensure equality of opportunity by providing opportunities to individuals that are based solely on merit or ability. For this dissertation, merit-based opportunities will be defined as Black Americans not needing any governmental assistance and progressing on their own efforts. It will be measured by the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors.*’

action?<sup>4</sup> Additionally, how have the attitudes of Black Americans of different socioeconomic statuses changed over a specific period of time, in this case from 1994-2006? Finally, how do the political environments during which Black Americans live facilitate any changes in their racial attitudes?

While the intersections of class and race have been widely studied, the relationship and relative strength of each is still debated. For many, the election of President Barack Obama serves as an example that America now operates as a true meritocracy, in which policies such as affirmative action are no longer necessary. This idea is buttressed by the sight of Black Americans in other prominent positions in politics and business. As an example, in the fall of 2011 it appeared that the United States was on the cusp of having a sitting Black American President being challenged by Herman Cain, another Black American and successful businessman, of the opposing party.<sup>5</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, between 2009 and 2010, the poverty rate for Black Americans increased from 25.8 percent to 27.4 percent (CPS ASEC, 2010) and Black Americans continue to lag behind on other key indicators, such as median income, educational attainment, employment rates, and home ownership. The fact that such a wide dichotomy between the “haves” and “have nots” continues to exist makes a reading of the opportunities for Black Americans very complex. It becomes even more complex when specific economic and political environments are taken into account.

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<sup>4</sup> Affirmative Action is commonly defined as “compensatory action toward groups/individuals who have been party to discriminatory practices.” For the purposes of this study affirmative action will be defined as preferential treatment in hiring for Black Americans. It will be measured by the dependent variable ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks.*’

<sup>5</sup> Herman Cain’s bid to obtain the Republican Party’s Presidential nomination came to an end after several women came forward to allege that he had sexually harassed them. In addition, another woman came forward to allege a long term affair.

Since socioeconomic status affects life opportunities, what are Black Americans racial attitudes and perceptions of mobility in America? And how are racial attitudes influenced by specific demographic, attitudinal, and economic variables? Do Black Americans' attitudes remain consistent, or do they change over time? This dissertation seeks to answer these questions.

Research has demonstrated that a growing group of upwardly mobile Black Americans has attained higher socioeconomic status, mainly through educational attainment. Du Bois (1903) found that 2,331 Black Americans had attained a college degree by the year 1899, with a majority of those having earned their degrees after 1876. Juxtapose this figure with the 1.8 million Black Americans in college in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics).<sup>6</sup> Yet, despite these gains in education, a disproportionate number of Black Americans still live in poverty at the lowest level of the socioeconomic spectrum. The increasing gap between Black Americans of higher and lower socioeconomic status endures despite national efforts to dismantle the barriers to educational attainment and to eradicate discrimination.

As a result of this economic stratification, one report described Black Americans as living in “two separate nations” with very different opportunities for social and economic mobility (*Frontline*, PBS). Such differences in opportunities have resulted in a proportionately smaller group of Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status who have “made it” (at least economically) to the point of having attained advanced degrees, well-paying occupations with prestige, and home ownership. In short, they have accumulated all of the trappings of the “American Dream.” Yet a closer look at the numbers demonstrates that, despite all of the positive achievements of this group, Black Americans continue to lag behind other groups in

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<sup>6</sup> Despite this relatively and seemingly large number, this figure represents only 13.8% of students enrolled in four year degree institutions.

wealth accumulation (Pew Research Center Analysis, 2011). Moreover, any economic crisis, such as the most recent recession, is likely to disproportionately impact minorities (especially Black Americans). This likelihood raises the possibility that many Black Americans who are currently classified as socioeconomically successful may suddenly find themselves relegated to a lower socioeconomic level (Center for American Progress, 2010).

While a number of Black Americans are finding success, a disproportionate number of Blacks of low socioeconomic status, living at, or near, the poverty level, come from single parent households, lack adequate healthcare, and experience high dropout and incarceration rates. (Fiscella, Franks, Gold, & Clancy, 2008; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Such barriers to socioeconomic success will not only continue to afflict communities of color, but will also have broader implications for American society as a whole, especially in terms of public policy and the allocation of tax dollars. Additionally, if these trends continue, not only will Black Americans of lower socioeconomic status continue to suffer the consequences, but Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status will continue to be associated with the challenges their lower socioeconomic peers face. This, in turn, will impact their social and economic prospects in American society.

Black Americans' racial attitudes and perceptions of opportunities in America are important in determining how to ameliorate the economic stratification within the Black community. Therefore, a closer examination of the differences in racial attitudes based on the socioeconomic status of Black Americans is critical. Understanding these attitudes and how they change over time provides a useful framework by which to analyze existing programs, or to develop new programs aimed at changing the economic and political climates that influence these attitudes.

## **The Politics of Merit-based Opportunities and Affirmative Action**

While America has always prided itself on being a meritocracy, with a strong emphasis on individualism, the past two decades have seen a shift from the quest for diversity to an emphasis on merit-based opportunities (JBHC Foundation, 2003; Longanecker, 2002). This is particularly true in our institutions of higher education. Increasingly, need-based and diversity enhancing pools of resources have decreased in favor of merit-based support. The result has been a shift to ensure that a majority of aid is ‘merit-based,’ and efforts that support need and group-based aid have been increasingly deemed illegal or unconstitutional (Allen, et al. 2002). While the Department of Justice failed in its efforts to sue eight Ivy League institutions and MIT, claiming that their collective need-based aid policies violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, such attempts have forced a change in university policies.<sup>7</sup> (<http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/1992/reasoning-0415.html>) As these attacks on need and group-based aid continue, many universities have either eliminated scholarships that were previously group based only, or have opened them up to other constituencies (Cortes, 2010).<sup>8</sup> While White liberals, and many Black Americans, view these changes as a departure from ensuring equality of education, many conservatives take the stance that such changes signal a necessary shift toward rewarding individualism.

Further complicating the debate over needs versus merit-based aid is the issue of affirmative action. From its inception under President Lyndon B. Johnson, affirmative action has been a volatile issue. The question of how to compensate members of groups who have suffered a history of discrimination, without discriminating against individuals themselves, has proven to

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<sup>7</sup> The Ivy League schools were Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania and Yale.

<sup>8</sup> A Supreme Court decision to let stand a lower-court ruling that a scholarship program intended exclusively for blacks at the University of Maryland was unconstitutional based on the fourteenth amendment prompted many of these changes. (<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/23/us/minority-scholarship-plans-are-dealt-setback-by-court.html>)

be a difficult one. Exacerbating the debate is the fact that increasing numbers of successful Black Americans are beginning to question whether their individual achievements and hard won successes have become obscured by the prevailing stereotype of the “affirmative action baby” (Carter, 1992; Close, 1993). The issue of affirmative action, at least as it affects academic admissions, will once again be heard by the Supreme Court this year.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the debate regarding affirmative action versus merit-based opportunities centers on education. The idea that an individual’s level of education impacts life choices, quality of jobs, and pay rate has been widely accepted and explored (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Julian & Kominsky, 2011; Manna, 2007; Zhan, 2011). Therefore, an examination of the status of educational attainment among Black Americans proves instructive.

The statistics regarding the academic performance of Black Americans are disheartening. An analysis of the numbers for high school (the highest level of education for a majority of Black Americans, and also the main determinant of readiness for higher education) explains why. The data show that, in 2011, Black Americans possessed an average GPA of 3.02, well below the national mean of 3.34, and the lowest average GPA among all racial groups. (College Board, 2011). The College Board noted that Black Americans participated in the SAT proportionately at the lowest numbers and continuously have the lowest scores on the test (College Board, 2012). It was also found that Black Americans’ participation in Advanced Placement courses and test taking, while increasing, was still the lowest of all racial groups (AP Report, 2012). In fact, the data showed that “four out of five Black/African American graduates were either left out of an AP subject ...or attended a school that did not offer the subject” (AP

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<sup>9</sup> While conservatives are elated at the prospect of defeating university affirmative action policies, supporters fear that the Court’s decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), which ruled that public colleges and universities could take race into account to ensure academic diversity, may be at stake.

Report, 2012). In terms of graduation rates, Black Americans had the second lowest (just ahead of Hispanics) high school completion rates (78%) in 2008 (ACE, 2012).

A look at the New York City school system highlights the issues of Black Americans in education. New York City remains one of the largest and most diverse school districts in the country, with 70% of the student population made up of Black and Hispanic students. The city's mayor and school superintendent were quoted as touting the city's 2010 60% graduation rate for Blacks (a 20% increase over 2005) as a success (<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2011-2012/janregents080311>). While this increase is laudable, it is tempered by the latest data which finds that only 20% of the school system's graduates are college prepared (New York State Board of Education).<sup>10</sup>

At the post-Secondary level, the numbers are also telling. The college enrollment rate for Blacks increased by 12% in the two decades prior to the year 2008, during which Black enrollment stood at 34%. For Black women, the enrollment rate increased to 40%, leading to the largest gender gap of any racial/ethnic group (ACE, 2012). In terms of performance in school, Blacks had the lowest retention rates at both four year (73%) and two year institutions (47%).

This is not to say that all Black Americans are underperforming. There has always been a group of successful Black Americans who belie the above statistics. However, this number is disproportionately smaller than the number of those who inhabit the lowest end of the socioeconomic spectrum. While the number of Blacks receiving post baccalaureate degrees is increasing, these numbers are not proportionate to the overall Black population. The statistics demonstrate that, in 2007, while Black Americans made up about 12.5% of the undergraduates in

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<sup>10</sup> Preparedness for college is defined as scoring a 75 on the English Regents and an 80 on the Math Regents. Students scoring under these numbers were assessed as likely needing remedial classes when they entered college.

U.S. colleges and universities, they represented only about 9.2% of Masters Degrees conferred, and only 6.1% of the doctorates awarded (ACE 24<sup>th</sup> Report, 2010).

Statistics such as these raise further questions regarding the attitudes of Black Americans towards affirmative action and merit-based aid. In other words, what variables impact the racial attitudes of Black Americans toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action? Do these variables differ for Black Americans of low socioeconomic status and higher socioeconomic status respectively? And, finally, have the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low versus higher socioeconomic status changed over time? Discussions of how to truly ensure equality of opportunity in our society, whether through rewarding individual merit or by ensuring non-discriminatory practices, are usually held at levels of society where Black Americans make up only a small segment of the population, thus diluting the impact of the Black American perspective on such discussions, and appearing paternalistic when the discussions take place among non-Black Americans. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the racial attitudes of Black Americans themselves on the issue of opportunities in the United States.

### **Political Environment**

Essential to an examination of the attitudinal changes of Black Americans is a discussion of the particular political environments and time periods from which these changes have evolved. The three years explored in this dissertation are: 1994, 2000, and 2006. This time period is the focus of the most complete recent data available, and includes the last six years of the William J. Clinton administration and the first six years of the George W. Bush administration. Spanning the administrations of both a moderate Democrat and a conservative Republican, such data provide a useful lens through which to analyze questions of affirmative action and merit-based aid, as well as to assess the attitudes of Black Americans towards these very different policies. It

is anticipated that the ideology, policies, and perceptions of the presidential administrations during these years facilitated differences in racial attitudes based on socioeconomic status.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

In order to place the phenomenon of economic stratification among Black Americans into a larger context, Chapter Two of this dissertation will provide a historical perspective on the rise of the Black American middle class and how it contributed to the growing stratification of the Black community. This chapter will also explore the political environments of the years in question, and outline the theoretical framework that informs the dissertation as a whole. On the macro-level, the current study draws on Weber's three part theory of stratification, while on the mid-level, it utilizes both Du Bois's theory of the "talented tenth," and Dawson's group interest theory. Finally, Chapter Two will examine the literature that explores the relationship between, and among, socioeconomic status, racial attitudes, and the independent variables of the current study.

Chapter Three will present the database and methodology used in the current study. The chapter will provide a description and explanation of the General Social Survey (GSS), as well as the rationale for using the database. It will also outline the specific dependent and independent variables used in the study, and describe the overall analytic plan for conducting hierarchical regression analysis.

Chapter Four of this dissertation will present the detailed findings from an analysis of the data. This includes the univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis. This chapter will specify which independent variables demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with the racial attitudes of Black Americans.

Chapter Five will detail the findings of the study regarding the relationship between the independent variables and the racial attitudes of Black Americans. This will be done by placing the results of this study in relationship to the literature that has already been written on the topic. This chapter will also examine which theories were supported or refuted.

Finally, Chapter Six will provide an overview of the overall findings of the study and revisit the initial questions put forth in the dissertation. This chapter will also outline the limitations of the study and suggest directions for future research.

### **Contribution to the Field**

This dissertation examines the ways in which the racial attitudes of Black Americans of varying socioeconomic status levels toward affirmative action and merit-based mobility have changed over the twelve year period under investigation. The import of this research is threefold. First, it will examine the growing phenomenon of Black socioeconomic status stratification and its impact on racial attitudes, both overall and as influenced by demographic, attitudinal, and economic variables. This is critically important, for if Black Americans do not share broad attitudes regarding their status in American society, many of the issues that negatively impact the group and continue to promote economic stratification within the Black community will not be addressed. This is particularly true if higher socioeconomic status Black Americans display attitudes demonstrating that they no longer “care” about the plight of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status.

Secondly, this research will further inform stratification theory, contributing to the literature on intra-group stratification within the Black American community, specifically in reference to how this stratification impacts racial attitudes and whether these attitudes change over time.

Finally, the results of this study will bring to the foreground the perspectives of Black Americans regarding the debate about affirmative action and merit-based opportunities, and pinpoint the policies they themselves think should be adopted in order to ensure equal opportunity among Blacks. The study will also explore how the socioeconomic status of Black Americans, and the political environments in which they live, influence their attitudes towards these policies.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter One discussed the impact of economic stratification on Black Americans, with a specific emphasis on education. It also provided a synopsis of the politics of merit-based opportunities and affirmative action, as well as a discussion of the importance of the political and economic environments from which debates about these policies arise. Chapter Two explores the stratification within the Black American community from a historical perspective and provides an overview of the specific political environment during the time periods examined in this dissertation. This chapter will also introduce the theoretical frameworks the current study utilizes to explain the relationship between the economic stratification of Black Americans and their racial attitudes, followed by a review of the research examining the factors that impact Black Americans' racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action.

#### Background

##### Historical Roots of the Black American Middle Class

While a small number of Blacks either were able to buy their freedom or were freed by their owners during slavery, the vast majority of Blacks operated as property in America's system of chattel slavery. Under this system, the labor of Black slaves existed solely for the benefit of their masters. It was not until after the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the passage of

the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments<sup>11</sup> to the Constitution that the process of incorporating Blacks politically began. It was also at this point that Blacks could begin to earn wages and labor for themselves.

Initially, Blacks were able to make both political and economic progress during the “Reconstruction” period of 1865-1877. However, with the end of Reconstruction and the protection of Blacks provided by the Northern military, Blacks began to lose the political, economic, and social gains acquired as southern states implemented a system of “Jim Crow” laws.<sup>12</sup> With the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision, which ruled that “separate but equal” facilities for Blacks and Whites did not violate the fourteenth amendment, these “Jim Crow” laws were sanctioned by the country’s highest court. These developments not only made it virtually impossible for Black Americans to exercise their political rights, but it also curtailed much of their economic development.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the debate concerned what path Black Americans should take in order to progress in American society. The two prominent Black Americans who have come to define this debate are W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee University, made an argument that is commonly associated with the modern conservative movement (*Frontline*, PBS). Washington advocated that, instead of focusing on issues of civil rights and equality, Black Americans should focus on developing a work ethic that would eventually result in economic progress and equality. In his famous Atlanta Compromise Speech of 1895, Washington asserted, “No race can prosper till it learns that there

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<sup>11</sup> These “civil war amendments,” as they came to be known, were enacted between 1865 and 1870, and led to the abolition of slavery (13<sup>th</sup>-1865), equal protection under the constitution (14<sup>th</sup>-1868), and right to vote for Black males (15<sup>th</sup>-1870).

<sup>12</sup> “Jim Crow” was a system of laws passed (largely) in Southern states that made integration illegal and led to the complete social, economic and political separation of people based on race.

is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities”

(<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/88/>).

Du Bois, one of the first “radical” Black intellectuals, offered a different perspective. He maintained that Black Americans had to fight for their civil rights through political action. This was only possible by focusing on social change through education, namely through the leadership of a small cadre of college educated Black Americans that he labeled “the talented tenth.” Du Bois directly refuted Washington when he said,

to say that with freedom Negro leadership should have begun at the plow and not in the Senate...[is] a foolish and mischievous lie; two hundred and fifty years that black serf toiled at the plow and yet that toiling was in vain till the Senate passed the war amendments; and two hundred and fifty years more the half-free serf of to-day may toil at his plow, but unless he have political rights and righteously guarded civic status, he will still remain the poverty-stricken and ignorant plaything of rascals, that he is now. (Du Bois, 1903)

### **Growth of Black Middle Class**

It was out of this debate and the two competing schools of thought that the Black middle class began to grow in the late nineteenth century (Durant & Loudon, 1986; Frazier, 1957). As the twentieth century unfolded, Black Americans continued to face a litany of hurdles to their economic development. These included intimidation from groups such as the KKK, unfair share cropping arrangements, peonage, and exclusion from educational and economic institutions. While many Black Americans were able to thrive economically despite these barriers, the development of Black Americans as a whole was impacted negatively by these acts. While there

were approximately 4 million slaves and poor Whites at the end of the Civil War in 1865, the 4 million Whites evolved into 40 million middle class Americans by 1941 (*Slavery by another name*, PBS). Conversely, the 4 million former slaves were hampered by the above impediments, which enforced a form of pseudo-slavery on Black Americans that had a debilitating impact on their economic development.

One way that Black Americans began to improve their economic prospects was by moving away from the South. Starting in 1915 (Frazier, 1957), Black Americans began what came to be known as the “Great Migration” from Southern to those Northern states. The reasons for this migration were many, including the increasing industrialization of the nation, better job prospects, and the perceived liberal attitudes of White Northerners. However, for the 4.8 million Black Americans, estimated at half the population, who remained in the South, economic opportunities were not as forthcoming (*Slavery by Another Name*, PBS).

The economic prospects for Black Americans began to improve markedly with the end of World War II. While discrimination and segregation still persisted in much of the country, the expansion of the American economy led to much better employment and wage prospects for Blacks. This ushered in what some scholars have called the modern Black middle class, as the number of Blacks employed in such white collar jobs as clerical and sales quadrupled between 1950 and 1981 (Durant & Loudon, 1986). In addition to these new white collar jobs, the growth in the number of Black Americans working for the government also increased tremendously from 1940-1980 (Dawson, 1994). The government therefore provided a stable base of well-paying jobs with benefits for Black Americans that allowed them to establish an economic stake in American society. In addition to providing employment opportunities, the government also aided the growth of the Black middle class through many of the initiatives of the 1960s, such as

the major civil rights legislations, the “War on Poverty,” and affirmative action.<sup>13</sup> Anderson (2000) purports that these initiatives led to the breakup of the “traditional caste like system” and led to a “complex class configuration among blacks.” From 1960-1991, the Black middle class more than doubled in size (Dawson, 1994).

While most of the research has focused on the growth of the Black middle class, Robinson (1997) used US Census Data from 1960-1995 to argue that what really occurred was the growth of the upper class Blacks. Robinson demonstrated that the Black middle class actually got smaller as more Blacks moved into either the upper class or receded into the lower class. This phenomenon has led to greater stratification among Black Americans.

### **Growth of Economic Stratification among Blacks**

The complex class configuration that Anderson (2000) discusses began to exacerbate the economic stratification among Black Americans. Parent and Stekler (1985) marked 1960 as the beginning of economic stratification among Black Americans, contending that, before this time, economic status did not fundamentally change the life chances and personal contacts of the Black middle class. At the same time that the modern Black middle class was growing, statistics demonstrated that, in 1960, 50% of Black Americans were living in poverty. Dawson (1994) also pointed out that, “in the 1980s, Black unemployment rates in states such as Illinois and Michigan were significantly higher than 20 percent” (Dawson, 1994, p. 9). Allen & Farley (1986) discussed the emergence of this stratification within the Black community from 1950- 1984. The results of their study demonstrated that race and socioeconomic status are “inexorably” linked. These findings directly refuted the groundbreaking research of Wilson (1978), which found that

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<sup>13</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 were instrumental in giving the government the power to fight discrimination. The “War on Poverty” led to programs such as “free lunch” and Head Start that benefited many Black Americans and their children. Affirmative action initially led to many more Black American civil servants.

class was more determinative of Black Americans' opportunities than was race. However, there is also evidence that supports Wilson's argument. For example, US Census data between 1968-1995 show that, while the income of the richest Black Americans rose over this period by 40%, the income of the poorest Black Americans actually decreased slightly (PBS, *Frontline*, "Two Nations of Black America").

While mobility among Black Americans, particularly those of high socioeconomic status, increased from 1940 into the 1980's, evidence indicates that discrimination was still evident in employment practices and in the wider society. This discrimination led to the classification of the Black middle class as "fragile" (Collins, 1983). Economic stratification also had implications in relation to gender for Black Americans. As fewer Black American males complete their high school education or enroll in or graduate college, the educational gap between Black American males and females is growing. This has led to a 12% decrease in median income for Black men from 1974-2004, and a corresponding 75% increase in the median income for Black women ([www.blackdemographics.com](http://www.blackdemographics.com)). This, along with the number of Black men in prison and the decreasing rates of marriage among Blacks, has led to the growth of a new phenomenon, the single Black American female middle class. Yet, while more Black American women are making educational and economic gains, allowing them to enter the middle class with or without partners, the vast majority of Black families living in poverty are headed by women (Dawson, 1994; Leib & Thistle, 2005; Pew Research, 2010; Pinkney, 1984).

### **Retrenchment**

While the tremendous growth of the Black middle class in the second half of the twentieth century has led to greater economic stratification, it has also been noted that this middle class is fragile (Collins, 1983; Dawson, 1994). In fact, Walters (2006) notes that the

comparative mobility of Blacks (as opposed to Whites) has stagnated over the past two decades. A report sponsored by Brandies University demonstrated that a full 33% of Black middle class families were in danger of slipping out of the middle class (*By a Thread*, 2008).

While Black Americans have benefitted from the growth of the US economy, they also disproportionately bear the brunt of any economic downturn or shift in industry. This was evidenced by the last two major US recessions. After the 1991 recession, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) released a report that specifically examined whether Blacks were “uniquely” impacted by the 1990-1991 recession. In this report the GAO noted the following:

... (1) during the 1990 through 1991 recession, blacks were 15 percent more likely to lose their jobs than whites; (2) of the four racial groups examined, Hispanic and black workers had the highest layoff rate and Asians had the lowest layoff rate; (3) although the high displacement rate among blacks was due in part to the recession's impact on industries and occupations in which they were overrepresented, differences persisted after accounting for industrial and occupational affiliations, education levels, and worker age; (4) displaced black workers were unemployed slightly longer than workers in the other groups; (5) between 1990 and 1991, black workers averaged about 12 weeks of unemployment, white workers averaged 11 weeks of unemployment, and Hispanics averaged 10 weeks of unemployment; (6) although reemployed black workers experienced the highest loss in weekly earnings, white and Hispanic employees experienced average earnings losses of about 9.5 percent and 5.3 percent, respectively; (7) during years of economic growth, workers of all races experienced less job displacement and displaced workers spent less time on unemployment; and (8) black

workers consistently experienced the worst labor market outcomes regardless of the state of the economy. (GAO Report, 1994)

Evidence shows that in the most recent United States economic recession, which economists have determined began in late 2007, Black Americans have been disproportionately impacted to the point that “many economic gains made in the previous economic expansion have been erased” (Reidenback & Weller, 2010). Between 2009-2010, the median income for Black American households, which was already the lowest of any racial group, fell by 3.2%, more than for any other group besides Asian families, who had the highest median income at 3.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Kochhar, Fry, and Taylor (2011) also found that the median wealth of black households was 20 times less than that of white households, which was twice the average ratio of the prior two decades ([www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26)). This widening gap came as median wealth for Black households fell 53% (Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011). Much of the above can be credited to the rising unemployment rate for Blacks. While Black unemployment is traditionally higher than for other groups, the unemployment rate for Blacks went from 8.6 percent at the beginning of the recession to 15.8 percent two years later (Reidenback & Weller, 2010). A prime example of how one industry can have an impact on Black Americans is that of the United States Postal Service (USPS). Rubio (2011) discussed how the USPS’s proposed closing of 3,700 post offices has endangered an industry that has employed Black Americans since the Civil War, and that has provided some of the most preeminent positions allowing Black Americans to move into the middle class.

While the above statistics are disheartening, some research refutes the idea that the Black middle class is fragile and shrinking. Marsh, et al. (2007) examined the rise of SALA (Single and

Living Alone) Black Americans and contended that this group comprises a growing and vibrant trend that is actually increasing the durability of the Black middle class.

### **Political Environment 1994-2006**

While examining the impact of this stratification on the racial attitudes of Black Americans, it is also important to analyze the political contexts from which these attitudes have risen. The following discusses the shifting political environment during the years 1994-2006, a time period that spanned the administrations of Former President William Clinton (1993-2001), a Democrat, and Former President George W. Bush (2001-2009), a Republican.

### **Clinton Administration**

William Clinton was elected by an American public that had just suffered through the economic recession of 1991-1992. Clinton ran against an incumbent, George H.W. Bush, who served as Vice-President under the two term administration of conservative hero Ronald Reagan. Yet George H.W. Bush was seen by many as a candidate who was both out of touch with the public<sup>14</sup> and who had broken his 1988 campaign promise of “read my lips: no new taxes.” Clinton, on the other hand, campaigned under the slogan “It’s the Economy, Stupid!” which touched on the concerns of most Americans. Shortly after Clinton was elected president in 1992 the economy began to recover, leading to one of the most prosperous periods in this country’s history.

Many scholars have discussed the strong kinship that Black Americans felt for Clinton, even to the point of referring to him as our first “Black” president (Harris-Lacewell & Albertson, 2005; Henry, 2001; Kenney, 1999; Wickham, 2002). One interesting phenomenon that resulted from this affinity for Clinton was that Blacks perceived themselves as doing better economically

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<sup>14</sup> The infamous scenario of Bush thinking that electronic scanners in grocery stores (which had been around for years) were new is an example of why people felt this way regarding Bush.

than they actually were (Harris-Lacewell & Albertson, 2005). Ample evidence shows that the economic position of Black Americans did improve during the Clinton Administration. For example, Clinton appointed one of the most diverse cabinets ever, and during his administration, the country experienced 115 straight months of economic expansion. The country also had the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, and Black Americans, in particular, had the lowest rate of unemployment on record. Furthermore, the income of Black Americans increased during Clinton's administration by \$7000 from 1993-2000, much of this gain in the bottom 20%. Also during this period, the country experienced the largest poverty drop in 30 years (<http://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/Accomplishments/additional.html>).

While the strength of the connection of Black Americans to Clinton is undeniable, some evidence suggests that Clinton's policies were not as beneficial to, or as targeted at, Black Americans as commonly thought. Many have argued that Black Americans who supported Clinton should have been disappointed that many of his policies did not support or benefit Black Americans (Henry, 2001; Kenney, 1999). In particular, Clinton's lukewarm support for affirmative action, with his infamous "mend it, don't end it" policy, has been called into question (Kenney, 1999). Others have discussed the failure of Clinton's Initiative on Race.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Walters (2006) questions one of Clinton's biggest "successes," the Clinton Omnibus Crime Bill of 1994, which Walters contends led to the imprisonment of millions of Black Americans. Those who argue that Clinton was not such a boon for the Black community believe that any gains that came to Black Americans during the Clinton Administration were a result of the cyclical economic expansion of the U.S. economy, rather than as a result of any specific Clinton initiatives.

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<sup>15</sup> In June of 1997, Clinton launched his Initiative on Race, which was an attempt to get the country to embrace diversity by bringing together groups of people in town hall like venues to discuss the issue of race.

## **Bush Administration**

George W. Bush came to office in 2001 after the contentious 2000 Presidential election in which he was declared the winner of Florida's Electoral College votes and the Supreme Court ruled that the recount in progress be halted. Al Gore, the former Vice-President under Clinton, won the popular vote. Because of these events, George W. Bush's presidency began with an uphill battle to win support, as many Americans questioned the legitimacy of his presidency. During his first year in office, two major events, the "dot com" bubble burst and 9/11, occurred. These events, in addition to the Bush Administration's decision to give Americans a tax rebate, left the country with a deficit and engaged the nation in costly military actions, a state of affairs that plagued the nation for the remainder of the administration.

When running for president, George W. Bush described himself as a "compassionate conservative," a label that many Republicans began to use in the 1990s to recruit a wider base, particularly among Black Americans. Bush made increasing home ownership for Black Americans a key policy of his administration (Walters, 2006). He also appointed Black Americans to two high profile positions in his administration. General Colin Powell was appointed as Bush's Secretary of State during his first administration, and Condoleezza Rice was appointed as National Security Advisor, and later replaced Colin Powell as the Secretary of State. These actions, along with an emphasis on "family values" issues (anti-gay marriage, abortion, etc.) that poll well with Black Americans, were seen as a strategy to appeal to Black Americans, or at least appeal to a segment of religious and conservative Black Americans.

Despite the above actions, George W. Bush was never able to make inroads towards achieving the support of Black Americans. His opponents, Al Gore in 2000 and John Kerry in 2004, overwhelmingly won the Black American vote with 90 and 88 percent respectively. Many

reasons have been offered for Bush's lack of appeal to Black Americans. One view is that Black Americans did not believe that "compassionate conservatism" applied to them (Henry, 2001) and that they also felt "cheated" by the 2000 election (Hubbard, 2001). This was borne out by the fact that race became central to Bush's reelection during a very polarizing 2004 campaign, in which the key to Bush's victory was an increase in his support among whites (Abramowitz & Stone, 2006; Wing, 2005). Articles in the *Journal of Black Issues in Higher Education (JBHEE)*, 2001; 2005) contended that Bush's Black American appointees had poor records on Black issues (*JBHE*, 2001). These articles also maintained that the Bush Administration's policies on Pell Grants, Perkin's Loans, and affirmative action in admissions damaged Black Americans' opportunities in higher education (*JBHE*, 2006). Walters (2006) added that, while one of the goals of the Bush Administration was to equalize housing, the program put into place to do that was ineffective due to a lack of funds caused by our involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Reeder (2005) pointed to a report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights that found that the Bush Administration's policies divided the country. However, most damaging was a report by Austin (2008) for the Economic Policy Institute that found that Black Americans were worse off in 2007 than they were in 2000.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To explain the enduring economic gap between Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status and their lower income peers, one theory that emerges is stratification theory/ideology, which posits that individuals and/or groups have unequal access to such resources as wealth, education, status, and political power. While commonly used to explain the gaps between people of different classes in general, this theory can be employed to examine the intra-group stratification of Black Americans by socioeconomic status.

### **Weber's Three Part Theory of Stratification**

Predominantly utilized by Political Science scholars in reference to the legitimacy of the State, Weber emerges as a prominent proponent of stratification theory. Weber's theory of stratification revolves around power, which he defines as "the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in that action" (p. 180). This power applies to the distribution of resources, which is always unequal. Weber developed a three part theory of stratification which involves class, status, and parties. These three parts interact and influence each other to determine individuals'/groups' potential to take part in a communal action.

Class, which makes up the economic arena, is discussed exclusively in terms of the market. Weber described a class as a group of people who "have in common a specific causal component of their life chances ... where this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income" (p. 181). Within this structure, it is hard to develop a class interest leading to collective action, particularly if the class "situation" is accepted by members of society. Therefore, being a member of a class and a member of a community or group is not the same. The change from simply belonging to a socioeconomic class to participating in a class situation that motivates action requires a social component.

Unlike classes, status groups, which make up the social component, involve communities. In status groups, social honor plays an important role. Status groups are defined by the social intercourse of the group. While belonging to a certain economic class can be an honor, status groups do not have to be made up of members of the same class. Instead, it is the status honor, namely a specific style of life, that predominantly determines the make-up of a status

group. Weber goes on to discuss status order, which is the community's way of establishing social honor. A status group can take the form of membership from kinship, education, ethnicity, or in the most extreme form, caste.

The final component of Weber's theory of stratification and parties constitutes the political order. In particular, parties are interested in acquiring social power that will lead to communal action. These political parties are influenced by the class and status situations of the individuals involved, and are markedly different based on both the type of communal action they want to effect, as well as "whether the community is stratified by status or by classes" (p. 195).

In assessing Weber's theory from the perspective of this dissertation, it is clear that Black Americans make up a status group. For most of their history in the United States, Black Americans have been bonded by a "style of life" imposed from outside their group, whether it be slavery, sharecropping, segregation, or civil rights. These events have limited the life opportunities of Black Americans, which have kept most of them at the lower end of the economic spectrum. In the fight for freedom and equality, this situating of Black Americans at a lower socioeconomic level has been beneficial, in that it has led to political parties and action based on status. However, with increasing life choices contributing to the extreme economic stratification among Black Americans, certain questions now arise: Are Black Americans still one status group? And are the communal actions that come out of their parties based on status or on class?

### **Du Bois's Theory of "Double Consciousness" and the "Talented Tenth"**

Another important thinker who contributed to the debate about Black stratification specifically was W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois (1903) presented his theories of "double

consciousness” and the “talented tenth.” In discussing his theory of “double consciousness,” Du Bois describes the phenomenon as:

This sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p.2)

Du Bois viewed this “double consciousness” as a phenomenon that generated strife among Black Americans, as they strove to capitalize on their post slavery liberty to become accepted, while simultaneously fighting the overwhelming evidence that, for many Whites, being Black was un-American in itself. This dilemma has often caused shame in Black Americans who realize the futility of attempting to overcome this ideal. This dilemma was exacerbated by the failure of freedom to produce land or opportunities after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. Because of the failure of the Civil War Amendments to the Constitution to incorporate Black Americans into American society, Du Bois asserted that the path to overcome these challenges lay in education, which he viewed as a difficult, yet direct path to ensuring Black Americans true liberty, equality, and status as true “Americans.”

Du Bois’s emphasis on education was also evident in his theory of the “talented tenth.” In this theory, stratification is a necessary process for the advancement of Black Americans. Du Bois felt that a “talented tenth” should be developed to serve as “group leaders.” These “group leaders” would play two important roles. First, they would serve as an example to the masses, particularly in demonstrating to them what it meant to be educated. Secondly, they would function as the leaders in the fight for “political rights and . . . .civic status.” Du Bois’s theories

are particularly instructive when considering that he formulated them at a time when Black Americans were confronting the crisis of how to advance as recently freed members of American society.

In the context of this dissertation, can it be determined by the racial attitudes of Black Americans whether this “double consciousness” impacts them today, and—if so—does it differ according to their social economic status and the time periods in which they live? There are parallels in examining the predicament of Black America today, which many believe to be in a state of crisis in the post-Civil Rights era, through the lens of the “talented tenth.” In utilizing this theory, it would be expected that there would be continuity in the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low and higher socioeconomic status, as Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status assume leadership roles.

### **Dawson’s “Group-Interests Perspective”**

Dawson (1994) expanded upon Du Bois’s theories with his “Group-Interests Perspective” on African American Politics. This perspective posited that, because race, rather than class or social position, has historically determined opportunities for Black Americans, it has become pragmatic for Black Americans to embrace the good of the race over the good of the individual. As a result, Black Americans have tended to share political behaviors and attitudes. Dawson called this tendency “the black utility heuristic” (Dawson, p. 10), which he asserted would change under two conditions:

One way is if information about the political, economic, and social world of black America becomes less accessible, either because individual blacks do not live in the black community .... or because social networks in the black community are breaking down ....

The other way, particularly for the new black middle-class, is if race becomes less salient in individuals' own lives. (Dawson, p. 11)

Without these two conditions, diversity of political views among Black Americans would be slow to develop, particularly with Black Americans being the most racially segregated group in the country. Yet, as Black Americans make economic and political gains, it would be expected that a tipping point would be realized that would lead to a change in the black utility heuristic. In developing his theory, Dawson utilized cognitive psychology to explore “perceptions of racial group status” (p. 11) Because of his reliance on psychology and economics, much of Dawson’s work explored this phenomenon from the individual level. In analyzing whether class had become more important than racial group status, Dawson asked, ” If well-off blacks are becoming more like whites economically, are they becoming more like whites politically?” (p. 39) If the answer to this question is affirmative, then it would be expected that not only is the “black utility heuristic” changing, but that there would be great differences in racial attitudes among Black Americans based on socioeconomic status.

### **Shelton’s and Wilson’s Theory of Group Interest**

More than a decade after Dawson, Shelton and Wilson (2006) revisited the impact of group status, or the “black utility heuristic,” on Black Americans. In their study, Shelton and Wilson explored the question of which theory was more useful in explaining the racial interests of Black Americans—group interest theory, which contended that Black Americans are more concerned with race over class, or dominant ideology theory, which emphasized individuality, along with merit and choice. Shelton and Wilson argued that if dominant group theory was accurate, then socioeconomic status or “income, education, and occupational prestige measures take precedence over racial group interests in structuring black racial ideology” (Shelton &

Wilson, 2006, p. 188). However, if the theory of group interest was more accurate, racial group interests “take precedence over the socioeconomic indicators in structuring black racial ideology” (Shelton & Wilson, 2006, p. 189). If this latter is the case, then Black Americans of different socioeconomic status would be expected to all share common racial attitudes.

The results of this study indicated that such racial group factors as perceptions of discrimination exceeded individual social class factors in determining racial attitudes. In other words, the results suggested that socioeconomic factors enhanced group cohesiveness. This finding contradicts the mainstream literature that has concluded that higher socioeconomic status results in more conservative and individual views. While the conclusions of this study are based on a small sample of Black Americans from one Midwestern city, the results are nonetheless important because of the contending view of the relationship between race and socioeconomic status.

### **Chong’s and Kim’s Theory of Opportunities and Group Consciousness**

The impact of the socioeconomic stratification of Black Americans was perceived as intensified when viewed through Chong’s and Kim’s (2006) theory of opportunities and group consciousness. Chong’s and Kim’s theory posited a relationship between perceptions of opportunities (mobility) and discrimination, and also studied the impact of these perceptions on group identity. In formulating their theory, Chong and Kim drew from Henri Tajfel, et al.’s (1979) theory of social identity, which stated that those who wanted to improve their position would do so from either individual or group means. If individuals believed that equal opportunities existed in society, they would utilize individual means. However, if individuals believed that such opportunities did not exist, they embraced group means to promote

advancement. Chong and Kim built on this relationship between mobility and group identification in their theory.

In looking at the effects of economic status on group consciousness in racial and ethnic groups, Chong and Kim theorized that the level by which economic status would influence an individual's favorable view of group interest was dependent on how he or she perceived opportunities for mobility. In testing this theory, they put forth two hypotheses. The first hypothesis asserted that, relative to other minority groups, economic status had the least impact on African Americans, because they faced the most societal impediments to their mobility, which, in turn, caused them to view opportunities through a racial lens. The second hypothesis stated that, within groups, economic status impacted group consciousness. Those who experienced greater economic success were likely to view group factors as less relevant, while those having less economic success tended to view group factors as more relevant, thus leading to a stronger group consciousness.

While Chong and Kim compared different minority groups, their theory has specific implications for this current study, which solely examines the intra-group attitudes of Black Americans. According to the theory of opportunities and group consciousness, it follows that, if economic status influences group consciousness, then Black Americans of different socioeconomic statuses will have different racial attitudes. However, as Chong and Kim noted, "African Americans are least responsive to changes in economic circumstance because they are on the whole more pessimistic about their life prospects and more likely to encounter discrimination" (2006, p. 335). This statement once again demonstrates the importance of group consciousness in examining the dynamics of Black Americans racial attitudes when socioeconomic status is taken into account.

## **Literature Review**

In general, research has shown a relationship between socioeconomic status and racial attitudes as delineated by support for racial policies. For example, Othman (2001) found that, for the general public, socioeconomic and demographic variables were correlated with an individual's level of support for government spending on social welfare. Later, Branton and Jones (2005) discussed how high socioeconomic status within diverse contexts correlated to higher levels of support for racial/social issues.

When it comes to the literature on the relationship between socioeconomic status and the racial attitudes of Black Americans, the results are less conclusive. Several scholars have identified a relationship between socioeconomic status and racial attitudes (Hwang, Fitzpatrick, & Helms, 1998; Parent & Stekler, 1985; Shelton & Wilson, 2006; Welch & Foster, 1987; Wilson, 1978). Wilson (1978) proposed that, in the modern era, class has become more influential and predictive of Black Americans' racial attitudes than race. Similar research has found that middle class Blacks were more conservative on social welfare and affirmative action (Welch & Foster, 1987), less likely to support race neutral and race specific policies (Shelton & Wilson, 2009), and more likely to have critical attitudes toward the stratification system (Hwang, Fitzpatrick, & Helms, 1998).

Other scholars, however, have disagreed that class has been a bigger predictor of racial attitudes than race. Carter and Helms (1988) found no relationship between racial attitudes and social class, which caused them to propose that the two concepts were "separate constructs." Other researchers' findings have gone even further by asserting that racial group interest was more important than socioeconomic class in determining racial ideology (Shelton & Wilson, 2006).

Indeed, the vast majority of the literature on this topic has provided conflicting results. For example, one study found no differences in political identification by class for Black Americans, but significant difference in attitudes toward government policies towards the poor, with middle class Blacks identifying by race and lower income Blacks identifying by class (Parent & Steckler, 1985). Research also found that, when it came to neighborhood quality, which many associate with socioeconomic status, race was less relevant in better neighborhoods overall, but more relevant in higher socioeconomic neighborhoods (Gay, 2004). Related to the neighborhood research was research that found that demographic variables were more associated with level of support for government spending than were socioeconomic variables, with the exception of education (Othman, 2001).

An abundance of literature also demonstrated that women were more liberal than men in their attitudes towards race positive policies, specifically in their attitudes towards affirmative action (Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Golden, Hinkle, & Crosby, 2001; Harrison, et al., 2006; Kravitz & Plantania, 1993). When race was considered, White women, who have benefitted the most from affirmative action, were shown to remain silent when the policy of affirmative action was attacked. On the other hand, while Black women were found to have very strong feelings about gender, their race was primary in determining their political attitudes (Gay & Tate, 1998). Kravitz, et al. (2000) found that, while White women who experienced discrimination had negative attitudes towards affirmative action, non-White women who experienced discrimination had more positive attitudes. These studies concluded that no correlation existed between gender and attitudes towards affirmative action.

In terms of education, research has explored common assumptions that, the more educated individuals are, the more liberal they become (Himmelstein & McRae, 1988). One

study found that the higher the educational level of respondents, the more liberal their views, with the notable exception of their lack of support for affirmative action in university admissions (Glaser, 2001). Such findings have been supported by research that found that individuals who were more highly educated regarded affirmative action as a monitoring process, and therefore supported the policy (Golden, Hinkle, & Crosby, 2001). Other researchers have viewed the link between levels of education and perceptions of affirmative action differently, suggesting a long term connection between personal ideology and the issue, with people of more conservative ideology maintaining their anti-affirmative action attitudes (Sidanis, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996).

The relationship between religiosity and racial attitudes has also been examined. Research has shown that people who were more religious held less progressive views than did people for whom religion was not important (Edgell & Tranby, 2007). White Christians in particular had views that were different from those of other races (Edgell & Tranby, 2007), and were generally more racially conservative than non-Christian Whites (Taylor & Merino).

As far as the link between race and ideology goes, much of the literature has addressed the concept of “Black conservatives.” One view is that there has always been a history of Black conservatism and that modern conservatism has support among Blacks (Lewis, 2005). While some researchers attribute Black conservatism to a total belief in equality (Asumah & Perkins, 2000), others have asserted that Black conservatives exhibit racial resentment (Orey, 2004). In a rebuttal of Wilson (1978), one study challenged the view that, for Black conservatives, class outweighs race, arguing instead that the variables were intertwined (Boston, 1985).

When examining the literature that discusses how Black Americans identify politically, it is important to note that the Democratic Party has received at least 88% of the Black vote in the past three elections. An overview of this issue reveals that, while there is a relationship between

class and political party affiliation for all races, race mediates the relationship between issue specific political attitudes and class (Wilson, 2001).

### **The Current Study**

This dissertation seeks to investigate the following questions: As the socioeconomic gap between Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status and those living at, or near, the poverty level grows, how does socioeconomic status impact Black Americans' racial attitudes? Given the history of Black Americans in this country, how does this group view the ideas of merit-based mobility/opportunities and affirmative action? Additionally, how have Black Americans of different socioeconomic backgrounds changed over a specific period of time, in this case from 1994-2006? Finally, how do political environments facilitate any changes in Black Americans' racial attitudes?

As the preceding sections of this chapter have established, a plethora of literature has explored class, economic stratification, and the variables that impact the racial attitudes of Black Americans. Much of this literature has tended to focus on either the Black middle class or on the Black lower class exclusively. This literature has also tended to discuss attitudes toward race specific government policies at one specific time. Because of these shortcomings, this literature has not answered the above questions. The goal of this dissertation, then, is to correct these shortcomings by determining the impact of several variables on the racial attitudes of a sample of Black Americans of low and higher socioeconomic backgrounds toward merit-based mobility/opportunities and affirmative action over three different time periods.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

The first two chapters of this dissertation discussed economic stratification and the impact of specific factors on the racial attitudes of Black Americans. This chapter explores the question of whether or not the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status differ from those of their higher socioeconomic status counterparts, and which variables impact these attitudes. Additionally, Chapter Three provides an explanation of the methodology utilized for this research.

The General Social Survey (GSS) was utilized to examine how the attitudes of Black Americans from different socioeconomic status levels have changed regarding affirmative action and merit-based mobility between 1994 and 2006. Change is an important element of this study, and having a database which can allow for the analysis of the same variables at different points is critical. This particular time period of change is also important. First, it comprises the most recent, complete data that is available. Second, this period allows for the examination of these variables over two distinct political periods, in this case the last six years of the Clinton presidential administration and the first six years of the George W. Bush presidential administration.

This dissertation examines the variance between the racial attitudes of groups of low and higher socioeconomic status Black Americans by utilizing OLS regression modeling. Such modeling allows for an assessment of which independent variables have the greatest impact on

the racial attitudes of low socioeconomic status Black Americans versus those that impact Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status.

This chapter is divided into sections. The first section describes the *Dataset* (GSS) in terms of how it was designed, the selection of respondents, and the elements included in the study. The next section describes how the *Analytic Samples* drawn for the study were created for analysis. The following section discusses the *Measures*, in terms of the outcome variables and independent variable predictors. The final section, *Analytic Strategy*, outlines the data analysis methods.

### **Dataset**

The present study utilizes data from the nationally representative General Social Survey (GSS) administered by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). Until 2010, the GSS had been conducted in 28 different years beginning in 1972, which then produced a cumulative database of 55,087 interviews of adult people of at least 18 years of age. While different sampling designs have been used in different survey years (for example, block quota sampling of households in the beginning years of the survey and full probability sampling of households in later years), for the years of interest for the present study (1994, 2000, and 2006), a full probability sample was employed. In addition, in the year 2006, a sub-sample of non-respondents was drawn. Moreover, once households were selected, the number of eligible adults to interview depended upon household size. Therefore, people living in large households were less likely to be interviewed, since just one interview was conducted in each selected household (Smith et al., 2011). In order to address the bias derived from both the unequal probability of eligible adults being interviewed (in the survey years 1994, 2000, and 2006), and the non-responsiveness

sampling design (in year 2006), weights were used during the analysis to infer characteristics of the whole population. In the specific cases at hand, the appropriate weight that ensures the national representativeness – at the level of households – is ‘Weight Variable’ (WTSSALL), applicable in all survey years under study.

### **Analytic Sample**

As mentioned above, for the specific problem under investigation the data from three survey years were selected: GSS 1994, 2000, 2006. Since the goal was to study the racial attitudes of Black American respondents, the specific ethnic group was drawn from the full sample for each year by using the variable-category ‘RACE = 2. Black.’ After this was completed, the three sub-samples contained the following total number of cases: for the 1994 survey, N = 388; for the 2000 survey, N = 429; and, finally, for the 2006 survey, N = 634. The analytical sample sizes of the respective years dropped further during analysis due to missing data (see Tables for complete details).

Since 1972, the GSS has provided a large database of information on American demographics, attitudes, and behaviors. Because of the size and longevity of the GSS, as well as the difficulty in acquiring large samples of Black Americans, the GSS has been utilized by many scholars who study Black Americans or race in general. For instance, Wilson and Dunham (2001) utilized the GSS to examine middle-class African Americans’ views of policies of crime control. Wilson (2001) examined the relationship between political attitudes and class when race was taken into account. Taylor and Merino utilized the GSS to explore the relationship between, and among, race, religion and racial policy views. Also, Shelton and Wilson (2009) drew on GSS data to examine group alignment and whether privileged Blacks supported redistributive policy.

## Measures

In the following section, the list of variables selected for the survey years 1994, 2000, and 2006, will be discussed. All of the variables refer to the so-called “replicating core” of the GSS items, which were collected consistently in each year of the data collection by using survey questions with the same wording, thus facilitating studies focused on time trends and/or replications of earlier findings (Smith et al., 2011). The sensitivities and ranges of the variable were also the same across all years, except for the variable referring to ‘Respondent Family Income,’ which changed the upper limit in each of the years selected (see below for the complete details).

The intercept in this study deserves further discussion. The meaning and interpretation of the intercept depends on the metric of the independent variable used. In order to have an interpretable intercept with an estimate within the region of plausible values given all the measures used in the analysis, all the variables have been rescaled by subtracting their minimum value so that they all have the lower limit starting from 0.

In turning to the specific variable employed in this dissertation, the dependent variables will first be outlined and explained. This will be followed by a presentation of the operational definitions of the independent variable predictors according to their specific group: main independent variable, demographic variables, and attitudinal variable.

### Dependent Variables

***Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*** is an original variable selected from the GSS Dataset referring to the item, ‘Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with the following statement: Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors’ (WRKWAYUP = from 1 ‘Agree Strongly’ to 5 ‘Disagree Strongly’). For the purpose of the analysis, this variable was flipped in order to have a semantic direction in which higher numbers represented higher levels of conservatism on the issues, and rescaled to a new range running from 0

*‘Disagree Strongly’ to 4 ‘Agree Strongly.’* *Wrkwayup: Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*

*Question - Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with the following statement: Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors.*

*Values Categories*

- 0. Disagree strongly*
- 1. Disagree somewhat*
- 2. Neither agree nor disagree*
- 3. Agree somewhat*
- 4. Agree strongly*

***Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*** is an original variable selected from the GSS Dataset referring to the item, ‘Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion is wrong because it discriminates against whites. What about your opinion – are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of Blacks?’(AFFRMACT = from 1 ‘Strongly Support Preference’ to 4 ‘Strongly Oppose Preference’). This variable was rescaled so that it ranged from 0 ‘Strongly Support Preference’ to 3 ‘Strongly Oppose Preference.’ The variable was used with the original semantic direction in which higher numbers indicate a higher level of conservatism on this specific issue.

*Affrmact: Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*

*Question – Some people say that because of past discrimination, Blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion is*

wrong because it discriminates against Whites. What about your opinion – are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of Blacks?

*If favors:*

- A. Do you favor preferences in hiring promotion strongly or not strongly?

*If opposes:*

- B. Do you oppose preference in hiring and promotion strongly or not strongly?

*Values Categories*

0. Strongly support preferences
1. Support preferences
2. Oppose preferences
3. Strongly oppose preferences

*Independent Variable*

*Main Independent Variable:*

***Respondent Socio-Economic Index is in 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile*** is a dummy variable obtained by recoding the Socio-Economic Index (SEI), computed by NORC on the basis of Prestige Score, Age-Standardized Education, and Income levels (Nakao & Treas 1992) for the overall population in quartiles and coding 1 the respondents whose values fell in the 1<sup>st</sup> quartile and coding 0 the remaining values (e.g. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> quartiles). The cutting point on the original SEI for the 1<sup>st</sup> quartile was 32.4 out of the original range running from 17.1 to 97.2 (with mean = 47.3 and standard deviation = 18.8). When the ethnic group, Black Americans, was then selected, the percentage of cases falling into the 1<sup>st</sup> quartile *Values Categories*

0. Not in 1<sup>st</sup> quartile
1. Respondent is in 1<sup>st</sup> quartile

### Demographic Variables

**Respondent is Male** is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent was male (coded 1) or female (coded 0). It is obtained by recoding the original GSS variable 'SEX = Respondent Sex.

*Sex: Respondents' sex*

*Values Categories*

0. Female

1. Male

**Respondent Age in Years** is a continuous variable (AGE) originally ranging from '18' to '89 or more.' This variable has been rescaled by subtracting the minimum value so that the new range ran from '0' to '71 or more.'

**Respondent Highest year of School Completed** is a GSS variable measuring the educational attainment of respondents (EDUC). It ranged from '0' to '20.'

*Variable Educ: Highest Year of School Completed*

*Values Categories*

0. Corresponds with no schooling

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8. *Corresponds with eight years of schooling (middle school)*
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
12. *Corresponds with twelve years of schooling (high school diploma)*
13. *Corresponds with first year of post secondary education*
- 14.
- 15.
16. *Corresponds with four years of college*
17. *Corresponds with first year of post baccalaureate education*
- 18.
- 19.
20. *Corresponds with four years of post baccalaureate education*

***Respondent Has Never Been Married*** (reference category) is a dummy variable resulting from the recoding of ‘Are you currently – married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?’ (MARITAL = from 1 ‘married’ through 5 ‘never married’).

*Values Categories*

0. *Been married previously*
1. *Never been married*

***Respondent Has Been Married Previously*** is a dummy variable obtained from the recoding of ‘Are you currently – married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?’ (MARITAL = from 1 ‘married’ through 5 ‘never married’). Respondents had value ‘1’ in case they were either widowed or divorced or separated and ‘0’ in all other situations.

*Values Categories*

0. *Currently married or Never been married*

1. *Been married*

***Respondent is Married*** is the last dummy variable of the series obtained from the recoding of ‘Are you currently – married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?’ (MARITAL = from 1 ‘married’ through 5 ‘never married’). In this case, value ‘1’ is assigned to respondents who were married at the time of the interview and ‘0’ in all other situations.

*Values Categories*

0. *Been Married or Never been married*

1. *Married*

***Respondent Total Family Income*** is an original ordinal measure assumed as a continuous variable for the purpose of the analysis, aimed to measure the level of economic capital of the family of the respondent’s family. It was collected by the item ‘In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes.’ The 1994 survey included such income with reference to the fiscal year 1991 (INCOME91); the 2000 survey instead considered the variable with reference to the fiscal year 1998 (INCOME98); while the 2006 survey reported as a year of reference for such income in 2006 (INCOME06). The range of this variable was different across the selected three years of the survey, although the distances among the first twenty levels of the measure were constant across years. More specifically: INCOME91 ranged from ‘1 = less than \$1,000’ to ‘21 = \$75,000 or more;’ those levels were included in the INCOME98 but the higher limit in this year was ‘23 = \$110,000 or more;’ finally, all of the levels of this second version of the variable were part of INCOME06, but the upper limit was ‘21 = \$150,000 or more.’

*Income98: Total Family Income*

*Question—In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year, before taxes, that is? Just tell me the letter.*

*Values Categories*

- 0. Under \$1000*
- 1. \$1000 to 2999*
- 2. \$3000 to 3999*
- 3. \$4000 to 4999*
- 4. \$5000 to 5999*
- 5. \$6000 to 6999*
- 6. \$7000 to 7999*
- 7. \$8000 to 9999*
- 8. \$10000 to 12499*
- 9. \$12500 to 14999*
- 10. \$15000 to 17499*
- 11. \$17500 to 19999*
- 12. \$20000 to 22499*
- 13. \$22500 to 24999*
- 14. \$25000 to 29999*
- 15. \$30000 to 34999*
- 16. \$35000 to 39999*
- 17. \$40000 to 49999*
- 18. \$50000 to 59999*
- 19. \$60000 to 74999*

20. \$75000 to 89999

21. \$90000 to \$109999

22. \$110000 or over

### Attitudinal Variables

**Respondent Attendance of Religious Services** is an ordinal variable, assumed as a continuous measure, referring to the survey item ‘How Often Respondent Attends Religious Services?’ (ATTEND = from 0 ‘never’ through 8 ‘more than once a week’). This indicator was conceptualized as representing the level of moral traditionalism/conservatism.

*Attend: How Often R Attends Religious Services*

*Question—How often do you attend religious services?*

*Values Categories*

0. *Never*

1. *Once a year*

2. *Several times a year*

3. *Less than once a year*

4. *Once a year*

5. *Several times a year*

6. *Once a month*

7. *2-3x a month*

8. *Nearly every week*

9. *Every week*

10. *More than once a week*

***Respondent Level of Liberalism*** is the flipped and rescaled version of the variable ‘POLVIEWS = We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I’m going to show you a seven-point scale on which political views that people may hold are arranged from extremely liberal – point 1 – to extremely conservative – point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?’ The range of this new version of the measure ran from ‘0 extremely conservative’ to ‘6 extremely liberal.’ This variable was considered to explore the continuum ‘conservative versus liberal’ in the political context.

*Polviews: Think of Self as Liberal or Conservative*

*Question—We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I’m going to show you a seven-point scale on which political views that people may hold are arranged from extremely liberal – point 1- to extremely conservative – point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?*

*Values Categories*

1. *Extremely Liberal*
2. *Liberal*
3. *Slightly Liberal*
4. *Moderate*
5. *Slightly Conservative*
6. *Conservative*
7. *Extremely Conservative*

***Respondent Identifies with Democratic Party*** is a dummy variable obtained by recoding the original measure of political party affiliation collected by asking ‘Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?’

(PARTYID = from '0 strong democratic' to '7 other party'). Respondents were coded '1' if they identified themselves as either 'strong democratic (category 0)' or 'not strong democratic (category 1), whereas they were coded '0' in all other cases. For the group of Black American respondents, the percentage of those who identified themselves as democratic were: 69% in 1994; 60% in 2000; and 64% in 2006.

*Partyid: Political Party Affiliation*

*Values Categories*

*0. Does not identify with the Democratic Party*

*1. Identifies with the Democratic Party*

**Analytic Strategy**

The goal of this dissertation is to examine the overall and comparative influence of a succession of demographic, attitudinal, and economic variables on the racial attitudes of a large sample of Black Americans of high versus low socioeconomic status. In order to accomplish this objective, data from the GSS were analyzed in the following manner:

First, six separate change scores were developed. These change scores examined the changes in racial attitudes of Black Americans between the three time periods of the study. These change scores were:

- 1) The change in the mean scores of all Black Americans regarding attitudes toward merit-based opportunities from 1994-2000.
- 2) The change in the mean scores of all Black Americans regarding attitudes toward merit-based opportunities from 2000-2006.
- 3) The change in the mean scores of all Black Americans regarding attitudes toward merit-based opportunities from 1994-2006.

- 4) The change in the mean scores of all Black Americans regarding attitudes toward Affirmative Action from 1994-2000.
- 5) The change in the mean scores of all Black Americans regarding attitudes toward Affirmative Action from 2000-2006.
- 6) The change in mean scores of all Black Americans regarding attitudes toward Affirmative Action from 1994-2006.

The second step entailed determining the changes in attitudes regarding merit- based opportunities and affirmative action for Black Americans of high versus low socioeconomic status. This was accomplished by dividing the total population into quartiles by socioeconomic status (using the recoded SEI variable outlined above). The highest three quartiles of Black Americans were then compared to the lowest quartile of Black Americans. These data were utilized to map out where the attitudes of Black Americans of high and low socioeconomic status fall relative to the change scores of Black Americans as a whole. It is expected that there will be a gap between the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status and those of higher socioeconomic status.

After determining the racial attitudes and changes from 1994-2006, OLS regression modeling was utilized to conduct a multivariate analysis to establish which independent variables influence the racial attitudes of Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status and which influence the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status. The models utilized for these regressions were:

***Model 1*** – Main Independent Variable: *Respondent Socio-Economic Index is in 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile*

**Model 2** – examines the influence of Demographic Variables – in the GSS data

this category includes variables such as:

- a. Educ: highest year of school completed
- b. Race: race of respondent
- c. Sex: respondent's sex
- d. Income: total family income
- e. Age: age of respondent
- f. Marital: marital status

**Model 3** –Attitudinal Variables are added to the regression– in the GSS data this

category includes variables such as:

- g. Partyid: political party affiliation
- h. Polviews: think of self as liberal or conservative
- i. Attend: how often R attends religious services

One of the major goals of this research is to examine the influence of the selected independent variables on the dependent variables – attitudes toward merit- based opportunities (Arkwayup) and affirmative action (Affrmact) – between Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status and Black Americans of low socioeconomic status. OLS regression modeling was the best method to accomplish this.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter aims to answer the question: Are there statistically significant differences in the influence of specific demographic and attitudinal variables on the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status versus their high socioeconomic status counterparts? In order to address this question, data from the nationally representative General Social Survey (GSS), which is administered by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), were utilized. With a cumulative database of 55,087 interviews of adult people at least 18 years of age from 1972-2010, the GSS allows for a sample of Black Americans' racial attitudes to be drawn at different time periods. This dissertation focuses on the time periods 1994, 2000, and 2006.

The three sub-samples drawn from the GSS for this dissertation had the following total number of cases: for the 1994 survey, N = 388; for the 2000 survey, N = 429; and for the 2006 survey, N = 634. In order to better understand the changes and trends in racial attitudes of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status versus their higher socioeconomic status counterparts, OLS regression modeling was conducted to explore which independent variables have the greatest impact on the these racial attitudes.

#### **Univariate Analysis**

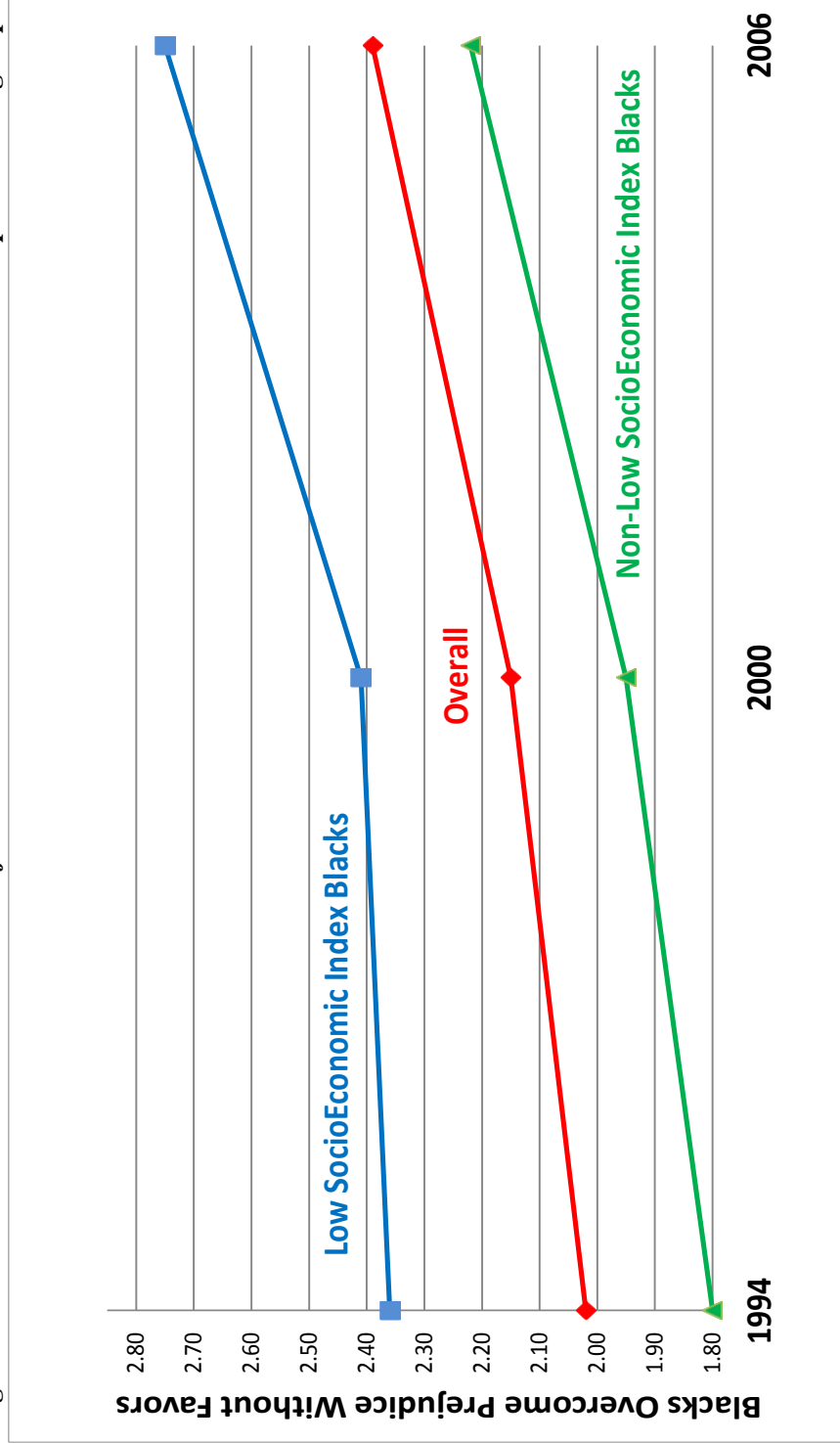
Figure 4.1 illustrates the mean scores on the Dependent Variable *Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors* across the years 1994, 2000, and 2006 for the Overall Sample of Black Americans and the socioeconomic status subgroups. While this variable ranged from '0 =

Disagree Strongly' through 4 = Agree Strongly,' the mean scores for Black Americans of all groups went from 1.80 to 2.75. Specifically, the overall means for Black Americans Overall were 2.02 (in 1994), 2.15 (in 2000), and 2.39 (in 2006). For Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status the mean scores were 1.80 (in 1994), 1.95 (in 2000), and 2.22 (in 2006). And, finally, for Black Americans of low socioeconomic status the mean scores were 2.36 (in 1994), 2.41 (in 2000), and 2.75 (in 2006). Figure 4.1 shows a noticeable gap between the mean scores of the groups for all three years, with Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status falling below the mean scores of Black Americans Overall in all three years and Black Americans of low socioeconomic status falling above the mean scores of Black Americans Overall. This indicates that as a group Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status score lower on the Dependent Variable *Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*, while Black Americans of low socioeconomic status score higher.

**Insert Figure 4.1 here**

Graphics

Figure 1. Mean Scores on *Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*<sup>a</sup> across Years for Overall Sample<sup>b</sup> and Subgroups



<sup>a</sup> Range from '0 = Disagree Strongly' thru '4 = Agree Strongly'.

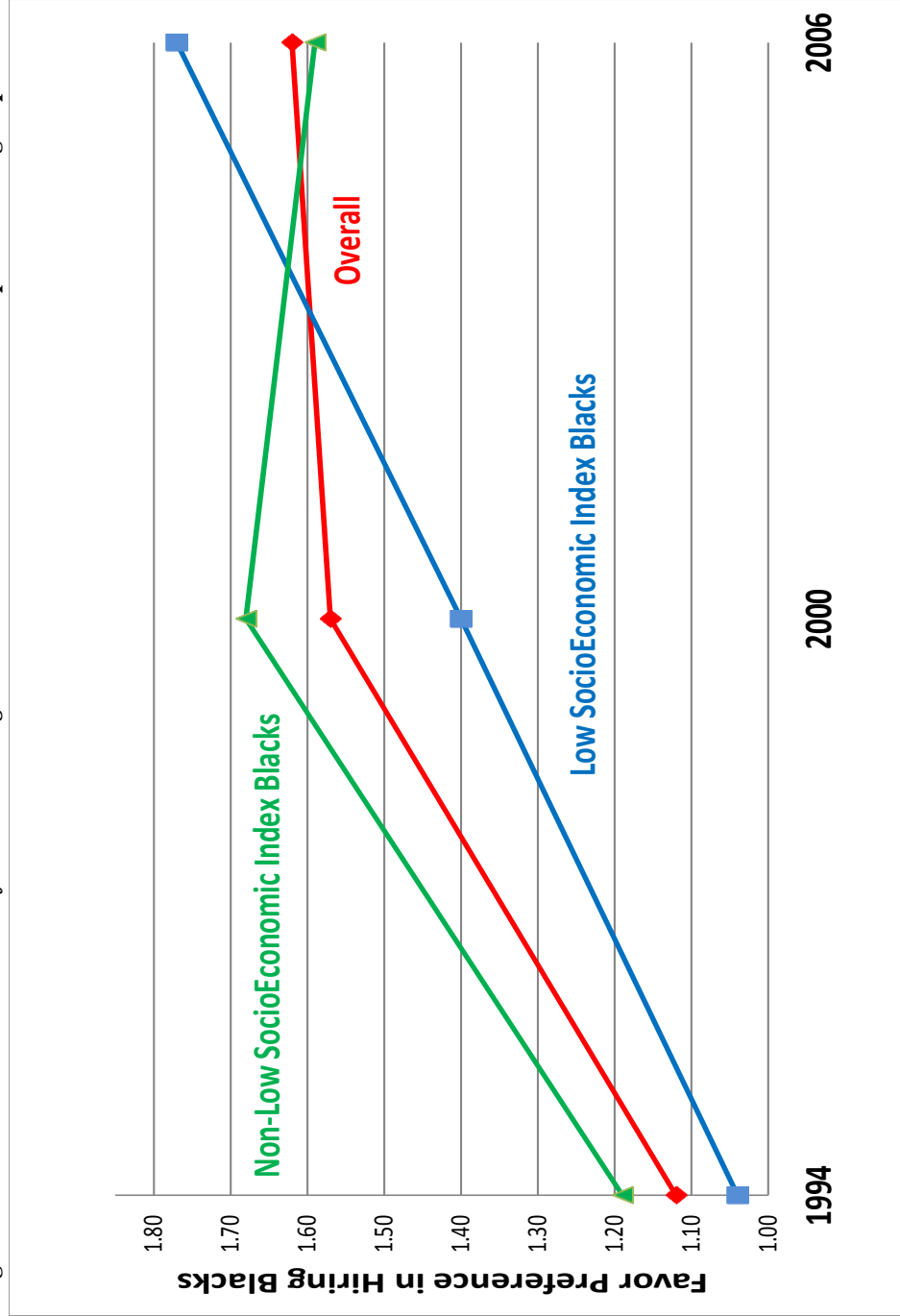
<sup>b</sup> The number of cases for each year is: Year 1996, N = 189; Year 2000, N = 293; Year 2006, N = 277.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the mean scores on the Dependent Variable *Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks* across the years 1994, 2000, and 2006 for the Overall Sample of Black Americans and the socioeconomic status subgroups. While this variable ranged from ‘0 = Strongly Support Preference’ through 3 = Strongly Oppose Preference,’ the mean scores for Black Americans of all groups went from 1.04 to 1.77. Specifically, the overall means for Black Americans Overall were 1.12 (in 1994), 1.57 (in 2000), and 1.62 (in 2006). For Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status the mean scores were 1.19 (in 1994), 1.68 (in 2000), and 1.59 (in 2006). And, finally, for Black Americans of low socioeconomic status the mean scores were 1.04 (in 1994), 1.40 (in 2000), and 1.77 (in 2006).

Figure 4.1 shows a noticeable gap between the mean scores of the groups between the years 1994-2000, with Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status falling above the mean scores of Black Americans Overall, and Black Americans of low socioeconomic status falling below the mean scores of Black Americans Overall. However, between the years 2000 and 2006, a noticeable shift occurs, with the mean scores of Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status falling below Black American Overall, while the mean scores of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status rose above that of Black Americans Overall.

**Insert Table 4.2 here**

Figure 4.1. Mean Scores on Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks<sup>a</sup> across Years for Overall Sample<sup>b</sup> and Subgroups



<sup>a</sup> Range from '0 = Strongly Support Preference' thru '3 = Strongly Oppose Preference'.

<sup>b</sup> The number of cases for each year is: Year 1996, N = 179; Year 2000, N = 277; Year 2006, N = 264.

Table 4.1 provides the descriptive statistics for the weighted means, standard deviations, ranges, and descriptions of variables for Black Americans surveyed by the GSS in 1994, 2000, and 2006. The table presents the results of the univariate analysis of the distribution of individual variables. For each variable, the original question and the possible answer categories are provided. To ensure consistency, and for ease of analysis, all answer categories are coded so that the higher numbers reflect more conservative answers.

### Dependent Variables

***Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors:*** the mean scores for Black Americans of all groups went from 1.80 to 2.75. Specifically, the overall means for Black Americans were 2.02 (in 1994), 2.15 (in 2000), and 2.39 (in 2006). For Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status, the mean scores were 1.80 (in 1994), 1.95 (in 2000), and 2.22 (in 2006).

***Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks:*** the overall means for Black Americans were 1.12 (in 1994), 1.57 (in 2000), and 1.62 (in 2006). For Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status the mean scores were 1.19 (in 1994), 1.68 (in 2000), and 1.59 (in 2006). And, finally, for Black Americans of low socioeconomic status the mean scores were 1.04 (in 1994), 1.40 (in 2000), and 1.77 (in 2006).

### Main Independent Variable – Socioeconomic Status in 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile

The percentage of cases falling into the 1<sup>st</sup> quartile was: 47% (in 1994); 39% (in 2000); and 36% (in 2006). This indicated that, for all three time periods, Black Americans of low socioeconomic status comprised a disproportionate percentage of the total Black Americans surveyed. The original range in scores on socioeconomic status was from 17.1 to 97.2. The

cutting point for those in the 1<sup>st</sup> quartile who were considered of low socioeconomic status was 32.4.

### Demographic Variables

***Respondent is Male:*** The percentage of cases that were male was: 42% (in 1994); 39% (in 2000); and 39% (in 2006). Therefore, the sample was overrepresented by women in all three years.

***Age in Years*** (rescaled): The actual range on the GSS was 18-89. These were rescaled to 0-71 to bring the intercept to 0. The mean age of the subject was (actual age in parentheses): 5.02 (43.02) in 1994; 24.64 (42.64) in 2000; and 24.72 (42.72) in 2006.

***Highest Year of School Completed:*** On a scale of 0-20 the mean highest year of school was: 12.33 (in 1994); 12.39 (in 2000); and 12.83 (in 2006). This indicates that for all three time periods examined Black Americans averaged just over a high school diploma. The actual values with select categories are below.

***Has Never Been Married:*** The percentage of cases that had never been married was: 30% (in 1994); 35% (in 2000); and 41% (in 2006).

***Has Been Married Previously:*** The percentage of cases that had been married previously was: 25% (in 1994); 29% (in 2000); and 23% (in 2006).

***Is Married:*** The percentage of cases that were currently married was: 45% (in 1994); 36% (in 2000); and 36% (in 2006).

**Total Family Income:** The mean income was: 13.43 (\$20000 to \$22499) in 1994; 13.56 (\$20000 to \$22499) in 2000; and 15.12 (\$20000 to \$22499) in 2006.

#### Attitudinal Variables

**Attendance of Religious Services:** The mean attendance was: 4.46 (in 1994); 4.29 (in 2000); and 4.48 (in 2006). This indicates that for all three years Black Americans on average attended religious services at least once a month but less than 2-3 times a month.

**Level of Liberalism:** The mean scores were: 3.23 for 1994; 3.10 for 2000; and 3.23 for 2006. This indicated that Black Americans in all three time periods identified as close to the center, or moderate with a slight liberal bend.

**Identification with Democratic Party:** The percentage of cases that identified with the Democratic Party was: 69% (in 1994); 60% (in 2000); and 64% (in 2006). This indicated a definitive trend of Black Americans identifying with the Democratic Party.

**Table 4.1. Weighted Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges of Variables for Black Respondents**

Variables	Year 1994				Year 2000				Year 2006			
	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Range	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Range	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Range
<i>Dependent Variables</i>												
Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors	189	2.02	1.52	0 – 4	293	2.15	1.54	0 – 4	277	2.39	1.45	0 – 4
Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks	179	1.12	1.23	0 – 3	277	1.57	1.25	0 – 3	264	1.62	1.22	0 – 3
<i>Main Independent Variable</i>												
Resp. Socio-Economic Index in 1 <sup>st</sup> Quartile	365	0.47	0.50	0 – 1	396	0.39	0.49	0 – 1	575	0.36	0.48	0 – 1
<i>Demographic Variables</i>												
Resp. Is Male	388	0.42	0.49	0 – 1	429	0.39	0.49	0 – 1	634	0.39	0.49	0 – 1
Resp. Age in Years (Rescaled) <sup>a</sup>	386	25.02	15.54	0 – 71+	426	24.64	15.33	0 – 71+	632	24.72	15.41	0 – 71+
Resp. Highest Year of School Completed	386	12.33	2.91	0 – 20	426	12.39	2.61	0 – 20	630	12.83	2.82	0 – 20
Resp. Has Never Been Married (Ref. Cat.)	388	0.30	0.46	0 – 1	429	0.35	0.48	0 – 1	634	0.41	0.49	0 – 1
Resp. Has Been Married Previously	388	0.25	0.43	0 – 1	429	0.29	0.46	0 – 1	634	0.23	0.42	0 – 1
Resp. Is Married	388	0.45	0.50	0 – 1	429	0.36	0.48	0 – 1	634	0.36	0.48	0 – 1
Resp. Total Family Income <sup>b</sup>	317	13.43	5.41	1 - 21	360	13.56	5.62	1 - 23	530	15.12	5.83	1 - 25
<i>Attitudinal Variables</i>												
Resp. Attendance of Religious Services	383	4.46	2.45	0 – 8	415	4.29	2.66	0 – 8	632	4.48	2.83	0 – 8
Resp. Level of Liberalism	366	3.23	1.37	0 – 6	392	3.10	1.37	0 – 6	601	3.23	1.40	0 – 6
Resp. Identifies with Democratic Party	378	0.69	0.46	0 – 1	425	0.60	0.49	0 – 1	628	0.64	0.48	0 – 1

<sup>as</sup> The variable “Resp. Age in Years” has been rescaled by subtracting the minimum value, that is, 18 years of age (cf. Method Section for further details).

<sup>b</sup> The variable “Resp. Total Family Income” for 1996, 2000, and 2006 refers respectively to such income declared in 1991, 1998, and 2006.

## **Bivariate Analysis**

Table 4.2 provides the weighted comparison of means on dependent variables by independent variables. This table presents the bivariate analysis of the relationship between two or more variables. Specifically, the table shows the results of the T-tests that were performed on the dummy variables in Table 4.1 in regard to their relationship to the dependent variables ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*’ and ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks.*’ The bivariate analysis revealed:

***Socio-Economic Index in 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile:*** The scores for Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status were significant for all three time periods for the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors.*’ However, this was not the case for the dependent variable ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*’ where no significance was found. For Black Americans of low socioeconomic status, scores were not significant for either dependent variable in any of the time periods.

***Respondent is Male:*** For the scores of Black American women a significant difference was found for the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*’ in the years 2000 and 2006, but not in the year 1994. A significant difference was found for the scores of Black American women for the dependent variable ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*’ only in the year 2006.

***Identifies with the Democratic Party:*** For Black Americans who less strongly identified with the Democratic Party, significant difference was found on both dependent variables, but only in the year 2000. For the other two time periods no significance was found. For Black

Americans who more strongly identified with the Democratic Party no significance was found for either dependent variable in any of the time periods.

**Table 4.2. Weighted Comparison of Means on Dependent Variables by Independent Variables (n<sub>i</sub> and N in parentheses)**

<i><u>Independent Variables</u></i>	<i>Year 1994</i>		<i>Year 2000</i>		<i>Year 2006</i>	
	<b>Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors</b>	<b>Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks</b>	<b>Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors</b>	<b>Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks</b>	<b>Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors</b>	<b>Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks</b>
<i><u>Resp. Socio-Economic Index in 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile</u></i>						
No	1.80** (97)	1.19 (93)	1.95** (168)	1.68 (163)	2.22** (169)	1.59 (161)
Yes	2.36 (81)	1.04 (75)	2.41 (102)	1.40 (93)	2.75 (86)	1.77 (81)
<i><u>Resp. Is Male</u></i>						
No	1.98 (125)	1.04 (117)	2.30* (190)	1.58 (180)	2.15*** (179)	1.51* (173)
Yes	2.10 (64)	1.24 (62)	1.92 (103)	1.56 (97)	2.82 (98)	1.82 (91)
<i><u>Resp. Identifies with Democratic Party</u></i>						
No	1.93 (51)	1.26 (49)	2.37* (121)	1.76* (118)	2.63 (93)	1.62 (87)
Yes	2.08 (136)	1.08 (128)	2.02 (170)	1.45 (157)	2.29 (183)	1.63 (176)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.02</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>2.15</b>	<b>1.57</b>	<b>2.39</b>	<b>1.62</b>

Note: Within each predictor on both dependent variables, the level of statistical significance is placed just on one of the two categories. The compared means within each predictor without a superscript do not differ from each other at any of the levels of statistical significance considered.

\* p = .05      \*\* p = .01      \*\*\* p = .001

Table 4.3 provides the weighted comparison of means on dependent variables by the marital status variables ‘Has Never Been Married,’ ‘Has Been Married Previously,’ and ‘Respondent is Married.’ In analyzing these marital status variables, a statistically different significance was found between ‘Has Never Been Married’ and ‘Has Been Married Previously’ on the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*’ in the year 1994. A statistically different significance was also found between ‘Has Been Married Previously’ and ‘Respondent Is Married’ on the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*,’ also in 1994. However, there was no statistically different significance among any of the marital status variables on the dependent variable ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*’ in 1994.

In 2000, the only differences were between ‘Has Never Been Married’ and ‘Has Been Married Previously’ on the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*,’ and ‘Has Never Been Married’ and ‘Respondent Is Married’ on the dependent variable ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*.’

Finally, in 2006 statistically different significance was found between ‘Has Never Been Married’ and ‘Has Been Married Previously’ on the dependent variable ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*’ in the year. A statistically different significance was also found between ‘Has Been Married Previously’ and ‘Respondent Is Married’ on the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*.’ However, there was no statistically different significance among any of the marital status variables on the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*.’

**Table 4.3. Weighted Comparison of Means on Dependent Variables by Marital Status Variable ( $n_i$  and  $N$  in parentheses)**

<u>Resp. Marital Status</u>	<i>Year 1994</i>		<i>Year 2000</i>		<i>Year 2006</i>	
	<b>Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors</b>	<b>Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks</b>	<b>Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors</b>	<b>Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks</b>	<b>Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors</b>	<b>Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks</b>
Resp. Has Never Been Married	1.78 <sup>a</sup>	0.82	1.96 <sup>a</sup>	1.31 <sup>a</sup>	2.56	1.80 <sup>aaa</sup>
Resp. Has Been Married Previously	(53) 2.47 <sup>a-b</sup>	(54) 1.35	(109) 2.54 <sup>a</sup>	(102) 1.57	(103) 2.04	(97) 1.16 <sup>aaa-bbb</sup>
Resp. Is Married	(70) 1.85 <sup>b</sup>	(68) 1.15	(96) 2.05	(90) 1.82 <sup>a</sup>	(95) 2.50	(90) 1.78 <sup>bbb</sup>
	(66)	(57)	(89)	(85)	(79)	(77)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.02</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>2.15</b>	<b>1.57</b>	<b>2.39</b>	<b>1.62</b>
	<b>(189)</b>	<b>(179)</b>	<b>(293)</b>	<b>(277)</b>	<b>(277)</b>	<b>(264)</b>

Note: Within the predictor on both dependent variables, two categories share a common superscript if their difference is statistically significant at either .05 or .001 level (“a” or “b” indicate  $p = .05$  whereas “aaa” or “bbb” represent  $p = .001$ ). Those compared means without a common superscript do not differ from each other at any of the levels of statistical significance considered.

Table 4.4 provides Pearson's Correlations that were performed on the continuous variables in Table 4.1 in order to analyze their statistical significance on the dependent variables '*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*' and '*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks.*' The Pearson's  $r$  provides a measure of the estimate of the positive or negative linear relationship between interval-ratio independent variables and the dependent variables. The Pearson's Correlations revealed:

***Dependent Variables:*** There was a positive statistically significant impact at the .01 level between the dependent variables '*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*' and '*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*' for all three years.

***Age in Years:*** In the year 2006, the age of Black Americans had a negative statistically significant impact at the .05 level on the dependent variables '*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*' and a negative statistically significant impact at the .01 level on the dependent variable '*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks.*' However, the age of the respondent had no statistical significance on either dependent variable in 1994 or 2000.

***Highest Year of School Completed:*** The number of years of education of Black Americans had negative statistically significant impact at the .01 level on the dependent variable '*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*' in all three years. Years of education had no statistical significance on the dependent variable '*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*' in any of the three years.

***Total Family Income:*** Income levels of Black Americans had a positive statistically significant impact at the .01 level on the dependent variable '*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*'

in 2000. However, there was no statistically significant impact found for income level on the dependent variable '*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*' in 2000. Moreover, no statistically significant impact was found on either dependent variable in 1994 or 2006.

***Attendance of Religious Services:*** The frequency of attendance at religious services of Black Americans had a negative correlation with both dependent variables across all three years. However this correlation was found to have no statistical significance.

***Level of Liberalism:*** Black Americans' ideological ties to liberalism were found to have a positive statistically significant impact at the .05 on the dependent variable '*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*' in 1994. These ties to liberalism were found to have a negative statistically significant impact at the .05 level on the dependent variable '*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*' in 2000, and a negative statistically significant impact at the .01 level on the dependent variable '*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*' in 2006.

**Table 4.4. Weighted Pearson's Correlations between Dependent and Independent Variables (N in parentheses)**

Variables	Year 1994		Year 2000		Year 2006	
	Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors	Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks	Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors	Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks	Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors	Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks
(1) Blacks Overcome Prejudice w/o Favors	---	---	---	---	---	---
(2) Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks	.22**	---	.23**	---	.33**	---
	(174)		(266)		(262)	
Resp. Age in Years	.06	.07	.08	-.01	-.14*	-.17**
	(188)	(178)	(292)	(276)	(276)	(263)
Resp. Highest Year of School Completed	-.24**	.07	-.21**	.03	-.25**	-.10
	(188)	(179)	(292)	(276)	(276)	(263)
Resp. Total Family Income	.06	.13	-.06	.16**	-.08	.05
	(186)	(176)	(283)	(270)	(276)	(263)
Resp. Attendance of Religious Services	-.07	-.10	-.08	-.04	-.06	-.05
	(180)	(171)	(271)	(256)	(267)	(256)
Resp. Level of Liberalism	-.06	.18*	-.14*	.12	-.20**	-.11
	(152)	(144)	(247)	(238)	(240)	(230)

\* p = .05

\*\* p = .01

## **Multivariate Analysis**

This dissertation utilizes the GSS to draw a sample of Black Americans of low and higher socioeconomic status from which to determine the impact of a group of demographic and attitudinal variables on their racial attitudes, particularly their attitudes on merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. To determine the overall and relative impact of the above variables on Black Americans of low socioeconomic status versus higher socioeconomic status, OLS regression modeling was utilized.

Before undertaking an analysis of the findings of the OLS regression, a point of explanation is necessary regarding the intercept as it is utilized on the independent variables. The intercept (for example, 0, on the version of the variables used in the analysis, equals to the lower limit of the original version of such measures) in this study represents the outcome when all predictors is equal to zero. For example, in the regression model where all variables are entered (see Models III, VI, and IX in both Tables 4.5 and 4.6), it is the outcome of a respondent who: had a non-low Socio-Economic Index, was an 18 year old female, never married, with a family income of \$0, never attended religious services, was politically extremely conservative, and identified with a political party which was not the Democratic Party.

Models I, IV, and VII consider the control variable Socio-Economic Index in 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile. Models II, V, and VIII consider the effects of the *Demographic Variables*. These variables include Sex ('Respondent Is Male'), Age ('Age in Years'), Education ('Highest Year of School Completed'), Marital Status ('Has been Married Previously' and 'Is Married'), and income ('Total Family Income').

For Model III, VI, and IX, *Attitudinal Variables* are included in the regression. These variables include 'Attendance of Religious Services,' 'Level of Liberalism,' and 'Identifies with

the Democratic Party.’ It was anticipated that the inclusion of these variables would be important to the study of Black Americans’ racial attitudes.

This dissertation seeks as one of its primary goals to compare the impact of a select group of independent variables on the dependent variables ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*’ and ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*’ between Black Americans of low socioeconomic status and Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status in the years 1994, 2000, and 2006.

Table 4.5 presents the OLS Regression on the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors*’ for Selected Years (Betas in parentheses).<sup>a</sup>

Table 4.6 presents the OLS Regression on the dependent variable ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*’ for Selected Years (Betas in parentheses).<sup>a</sup>

#### Low Income (Socio-Economic Index in 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile)- Control Variable

When the regression analysis was performed, a divergence was found in Model 1 between ‘Socioeconomic index in the 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile’ (SEI) and the two dependent variables. When tests were conducted on the dependent variable of ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Black,*’ SEI was not significant in any of the years. However, when SEI was tested in relationship to the dependent variable ‘*Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors,*’ SEI was found to have a positive statistically significant impact in 1994 and 2006, but was not significant in 2000.

When relaying the results of the individual independent variables in the demographic and attitudinal blocks, it should be kept in mind that all other variables were controlled for.

#### Demographic Variables

The variable gender (‘Male’) was not statistically significant on the racial attitudes of Black Americans on either merit-based opportunities or affirmative action in the years 1994 or

2000. However, sex ('Male') had a strong positive impact at the .01 level on the racial attitudes of Black Americans on both merit-based opportunities and affirmative action in the year 2006. When the block of "Attitudinal Variables" was added to the regression, the above pattern remains the same.

In regard to the variable 'Age,' this variable had no statistically significant impact on Black Americans' racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities in either 1994 or 2000. Yet there was a positive statistical significance at the .01 level on Black Americans' racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities in 2006. In reference to Black Americans' racial attitudes towards affirmative action, 'Age' had no statistically significant impact in either 1994 or 2006. However, there was a negative statistical significance at the .01 level on Black Americans' racial attitudes towards Affirmative Action in 2000. When the block of 'Attitudinal Variables' was added to the regression, the above pattern remains the same.

The independent variable 'Education' had no statistically significant impact on Black Americans' racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities in either 2000, but results indicated a significantly significant negative impact on these relationships at the .01 level in 1994 and 2006. In turning to Black Americans' racial attitudes towards affirmative action, 'Education' had no statistically significant impact on these attitudes in any of the three years. When the block of 'Attitudinal Variables' was added to the regression, the only change in the significant impact on Black Americans' racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities is that it was not as strong (.05 level, as opposed to the .01 level) for 2006. In regard to Black Americans' racial attitudes towards affirmative action, the lack of statistical significance remained consistent.

The marital status 'Married Previously' was found to have a statistically significant positive impact at the .01 level on Black Americans' racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities

in 2000, but had no statistical significance on these attitudes in 1994 and 2006. When it came to Black Americans' racial attitudes towards affirmative action, 'Married Previously' had a statistically significant impact at the .05 level in 1994 and 2000, and had no statistical significance on these attitudes in 2006.

When 'Attitudinal Variables' are added to the regression, 'Married Previously' loses its statistical impact on Black Americans' racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities in 1994, but retains its statistical impact at the .01 level in 2000. In regard to Black Americans' racial attitudes towards Affirmative Action, 'Married Previously' loses all statistical significance when the block of 'Attitudinal Variables' was added to the regression.

The marital status 'Married' exhibited no statistical significance on Black Americans' racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities in any of the three years. In regard to Black Americans' racial attitudes towards Affirmative Action, 'Married' had a statistically significant impact at the .05 level in 2000, and had no statistical significance on these attitudes in 1994 and 2006. This relationship remains the same when 'Attitudinal Variables' are added to the regression.

'Total Family Income' exhibited no statistical significance on Black Americans' racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities in any of the three years. In regard to Black Americans' racial attitudes towards affirmative action, 'Total Family Income' had a statistically significant impact at the .05 level in 1994 and had no statistical significance on these attitudes in 2000 and 2006. These relationships remained the same when the block of "Attitudinal Variables" was added to the regression.

### Attitudinal Variables

The independent variable ‘Attendance of Religious Services’ had no statistical significance on the racial attitudes of Black Americans on merit-based opportunities in any of the three years. For Black Americans’ attitudes toward affirmative action, ‘Attendance of Religious Services’ also had no statistical significance in any of the three years.

The variable ‘Level of Liberalism’ had a statistically significant negative impact at the .05 level on both the racial attitudes of Black Americans on merit-based opportunities and Black Americans’ racial attitudes toward affirmative action in 1994. However, ‘Level of Liberalism’ had no statistical significance on the racial attitudes of Black Americans on merit-based opportunities or Black Americans’ racial attitudes toward Affirmative Action in 2000 or 2006.

Finally, ‘Identifies with Democratic Party’ had no statistical significance on the racial attitudes of Black Americans on merit-based opportunities in any of the three years. For Black Americans’ attitudes toward affirmative action, ‘Identifies with Democratic Party’ also had no statistical significance in any of the three years.

**Table 4.5. OLS Regression on Blacks Overcome Prejudice Without Favors for Selected Years (Betas in parentheses)<sup>a</sup>**

Variables	Year 1994 (N = 134)			Year 2000 (N = 210)			Year 2006 (N = 214)		
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V	Model VI	Model VII	Model VIII	Model IX
<i>Main Independent Variable</i>	.52*	.30	.36	.31	.16	.15	.54**	.20	.22
Resp. Socio-Economic Index in 1 <sup>st</sup> Quart.	(.18)	(.10)	(.12)	(.10)	(.05)	(.05)	(.17)	(.06)	(.07)
<i>Demographic Variables</i>	---	.21	.34	---	-.39	-.38	---	.56**	.57**
Resp. Is Male	---	(.07)	(.22)	---	(-.12)	(-.12)	---	(.19)	(.19)
Resp. Age in Years ( <u>Rescaled</u> )	---	-.01	-.01	---	-.01	-.01	---	-.02**	-.02**
Resp. Highest Year of School Completed	---	(-.07)	(-.06)	---	(-.10)	(-.08)	---	(-.20)	(-.20)
	---	-.13**	-.13**	---	-.08	-.07	---	-.10**	-.09*
Resp. Has Been Married Previously	---	(-.26)	(-.25)	---	(-.13)	(-.13)	---	(-.18)	(-.17)
	---	.83*	.70	---	.82**	.77**	---	-.09	-.11
Resp. Is Married	---	(.25)	(.22)	---	(.24)	(.22)	---	(-.03)	(-.03)
	---	.43	.17	---	.38	.35	---	.29	.24
Resp. Total Family Income	---	(.15)	(.06)	---	(.12)	(.11)	---	(.10)	(.08)
	---	.01	.02	---	-.01	-.01	---	-.04	-.04
<i>Attitudinal Variables</i>	---	(.03)	(.07)	---	(-.03)	(-.03)	---	(-.15)	(-.15)
Resp. Attendance of Religious Services	---	---	.01	---	---	-.02	---	---	-.02
Resp. Level of Liberalism	---	---	(.01)	---	---	(.03)	---	---	(-.44)
	---	---	-.19*	---	---	-.04	---	---	-.10
Resp. Identifies with Democratic Party	---	---	(-.18)	---	---	(-.04)	---	---	(-.09)
	---	---	.03	---	---	-.23	---	---	.04
Constant	1.93***	3.27***	3.66***	2.05***	3.29***	3.55***	2.35***	4.49***	4.80***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.024	.066	.075	.005	.040	.033	.025	.142	.138

<sup>a</sup> Information above is based on a listwise deletion of cases.

\* p = .05

\*\* p = .01

\*\*\* p = .001

**Table 4.6. OLS Regression on Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks for Selected Years (Betas in parentheses)<sup>a</sup>**

Variables	Year 1994 (N = 128)			Year 2000 (N = 200)			Year 2006 (N = 205)		
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V	Model VI	Model VII	Model VIII	Model IX
<i>Main Independent Variable</i>									
Resp. Socio-Economic Index in 1 <sup>st</sup> Quart.									
	-0.30	-0.19	-0.07	-0.19	-0.15	-0.15	.13	-0.05	-0.08
	(.18)	(-.08)	(-.03)	(-.07)	(-.06)	(-.06)	(.05)	(-.02)	(-.03)
<i>Demographic Variables</i>									
Resp. Is Male									
		.26	.40		-.29	-.23		.37*	.47**
		(.10)	(.16)		(-.11)	(-.09)		(.15)	(.19)
Resp. Age in Years (Rescaled)									
		-.00	-.00		-.02*	-.01*		-.01	-.01
		(-.05)	(-.04)		(-.17)	(-.14)		(-.12)	(-.15)
Resp. Highest Year of School Completed									
		-.02	-.02		-.05	-.05		-.02	-.02
		(-.04)	(-.04)		(-.10)	(-.10)		(-.05)	(-.05)
Resp. Has Been Married Previously									
		.69*	.59		.52*	.41		-.44	-.46
		(.26)	(.22)		(.19)	(.15)		(-.16)	(-.17)
Resp. Is Married									
		.07	-.15		.72*	.57*		.14	.11
		(.03)	(-.06)		(.28)	(.23)		(.06)	(.05)
Resp. Total Family Income									
		.05*	.06*		.03	.03		-.03	-.03
		(.22)	(.26)		(.12)	(.12)		(-.12)	(-.15)
<i>Attitudinal Variables</i>									
Resp. Attendance of Religious Services									
			.07			.05			.05
			(.12)			(.09)			(.10)
Resp. Level of Liberalism									
			-.16*			-.04			-.07
			(-.18)			(-.05)			(-.08)
Resp. Identifies with Democratic Party									
			-.04			-.35			.11
			(-.01)			(-.13)			(.04)
Constant									
	1.41***	0.63	0.68	1.73***	1.98***	2.12***	1.68***	2.60***	2.68***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.007	.037	.068	.000	.045	.058	.000	.073	.079

<sup>a</sup> Information above is based on a listwise deletion of cases.

\* p = .05      \*\* p = .01      \*\*\* p = .001

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

This dissertation explores the relationship between specific economic, demographic, and attitudinal variables on the racial attitudes of a sample of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status versus higher socioeconomic status toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. For this dissertation, a nationally representative sample of Black Americans from the years 1994, 2000, and 2006 was drawn from the General Social Survey (GSS), which consists of a database of interviews of adult people at least 18 years of age from 1972-2010.

In order to determine whether there were differences in the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low versus higher socioeconomic status, OL regression modeling was utilized in this dissertation. This method of data analysis is important in determining which independent variables have the largest impact on the racial attitudes of Black Americans toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action.

While Chapter Four detailed the overall findings of the hierarchical regression modeling, this chapter more fully explores the specific findings of the research as they relate to the literature and theories on the topic. This chapter also explores the implications of Black Americans' racial attitudes based on their socioeconomic status as well as the implications of economic stratification among Black Americans for merit-based opportunities and affirmative action policies.

### **Economic Stratification and Racial Attitudes**

This dissertation determined that the proportion of Black Americans located in the lowest quartile socioeconomic status was: 47% in 1994; 39% in 2000; and 36% in 2006. These numbers stand out as indicators of economic stratification by demonstrating that a disproportionate number of Black Americans are located on the bottom rung of the economic ladder. While not surprising, given the consistent levels of poverty among Black Americans (27.4% in 2010 [CPS ASEC, 2010]), the numbers are nonetheless striking. They indicate that the percentage of Black Americans in the lowest quartile dropped significantly between 1994 and 2006. This could be interpreted as a positive sign for Black Americans overall. However, the fact that the poverty levels for Black Americans during this period were highest during the years of the Clinton presidential administration, and lowest during the years of George W. Bush's presidency, seems contradictory. For example, in 1994, during Clinton's first term, the country was recovering from the recession of 1991-92. Over the next six years, the country would experience unprecedented economic growth, which benefited Black Americans as a whole (lowest unemployment rate on record, increased income, and the largest poverty drop in 30 years). By the end of the Clinton administration in 2000, the United States was at its peak economically.

During the course of Bush's presidency, however, not only did the country experience an economic recession, but Bush's policies on Pell Grants, Perkin's Loans, and affirmative action in admissions actually damaged Black Americans' opportunities in higher education (JBHE, 2006). Furthermore, Bush's programs aimed at equalizing housing also proved ineffective (Walters, 2006). Overall, in fact, Black Americans were found to be worse off in 2007 than they were in 2000 (Austin, 2008). Nevertheless, the data from this dissertation indicate that the poverty levels for Black Americans during this time actually dropped.

Towards reconciling such contradictions, Robinson (1997) contended that, during particular economic periods, the Black middle class shrinks as more Blacks move into either the upper class or recede into the lower class. Therefore, as the overall number of Black Americans in the lowest socioeconomic status quartile fell between 1994 and 2006, the percentage of Black Americans at the bottom of the first quartile grew, as those at the top of the quartile moved into a higher socioeconomic status. The number of Black Americans who changed their socioeconomic positions during this period is connected to issues of home ownership, lending practices (predatory and ARM mortgages), and the artificially high values attributed to many homes at the height of the housing market. Thus, while the percentage of Black Americans in the first quartile fell, the economic stratification among Black Americans increased.

There was also a noticeable gap between the scores of Black Americans based on socioeconomic status for all three years on the dependent variable *'Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors,'* with Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status falling below the mean scores of Black Americans Overall in all three years and Black Americans of low socioeconomic status falling above the mean scores of Black Americans Overall. This indicates that, as a group, Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status scored less conservatively regarding opportunities for merit-based opportunities than did Black Americans of low socioeconomic status. It was anticipated that Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status, who are more successful in terms of income and prestige, would score more conservatively and support merit as the source of opportunities, while Black Americans of low socioeconomic status would more strongly disagree that merit is the source of opportunities for Black Americans.

As noted in the literature review, research has found that middle class Blacks, who would fit into the higher socioeconomic status category as defined by this dissertation, are more

conservative when it comes to race specific policies, and they are more critical of the stratification system (Hwang, Fitzpatrick & Helms, 1998; Shelton & Wilson, 2009; Welch & Foster, 1987). The results of the current study contradict this research, as well as the research that denies a relationship between racial attitudes and social class (Carter & Helms, 1988), or argues that racial group interest is more important than socioeconomic class in determining racial ideology (Shelton & Wilson, 2006). Instead, the results of this study indicate that socioeconomic status is a determinant of racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities, but in not in the way the literature stipulates. This begs the question: Why are Black Americans at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder more conservative regarding merit-based opportunities? The answer to this question could be that, despite their economic and social condition, Black Americans of low socioeconomic status have bought into the “American Dream” that, if they work hard enough, they can achieve economic and social mobility.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, receiving assistance goes against the tenets of this “dream.” Additionally, since a stigma is attached to Black Americans from the lowest socioeconomic status who receive public assistance, the more conservative attitudes found in this dissertation could be an attempt by this group of Black Americans to distance themselves from this stigma.

In addition to the gap in the scores, another compelling result is their directionality. For all three groups, scores consistently rose or became more conservative during the three time frames examined. This implies that Black Americans in general throughout this time became more conservative in believing that Blacks should get ahead on their own merit. These results are supported by a Pew Research Center Report in 2007 that found that, by a large percentage (53%), Blacks indicated that they believed the reason that Blacks could not get ahead was

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<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Hochschild, in her 1995 work, *Facing the American Dream*, explores how this concept of the “American Dream” functions within the context of Black Americans.

because “Blacks were responsible for their own condition” (Pew Research Center, 2007). While the Pew report seems to indicate that a large cohort of Black Americans share more conservative racial attitudes, it is hard to determine the impact of class or socioeconomic status on these findings without knowing the economic and educational breakdown of the 53% of Black Americans who held these views. However, it can be speculated that, since this group makes up more than half the Black American sample, these views might be held among all socioeconomic groups.

The fact that a majority of Black Americans shared these increasingly conservative views may be a factor of the political environments in which they lived. It appears that the doctrine of “compassionate conservatism” espoused by former President George W. Bush during his presidency began to impact Black Americans’ attitudes toward merit-based opportunities. Since then, Black Americans have increasingly believed that, despite their circumstances, personal responsibility and self-reliance are more important than structural issues or government institutions. While it is a positive sign that Black Americans as a whole are embracing personal responsibility and their own efficacy in determining their economic status, very real structural factors in our society foster inequality and discrimination that must be addressed. Some of these, including educational and political inequalities, as well as discrimination in housing, have had profound effects on the economic opportunities for Black Americans.

The scores on the Dependent Variable ‘*Favor Preference in Hiring Blacks*’ across the years 1994, 2000, and 2006 indicate that Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status scored more conservatively on the issue of affirmative action in both 1994 and 2000. Yet, between the years 2000 and 2006, Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status became more liberal on the issue of affirmative action, even scoring more liberal than their lower

socioeconomic status Black American counterparts. On the other hand, Black Americans of low socioeconomic status scored increasingly more conservative on the issue of affirmative action throughout the time periods studied.

These results illustrate the trends among Black Americans on this issue and provide a context within which to view the remaining results. Throughout the 1990s and into the early twenty-first century, opponents of affirmative action have done a good job of framing the policy in a negative light, which has had a direct impact on Black Americans based on their socioeconomic status. Therefore, for individuals of higher socioeconomic status who are working in financially comfortable and integrated spaces, this negativity around the issue of affirmative action reinforces the need for affirmative action programs to expand opportunities.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, those from the lowest socioeconomic status group buy into the negative connotations of affirmative action and feel that affirmative action will impede their chances to move ahead.

An examination of the correlations found a significant relationship between the two dependent variables for all three years. This correlation fits the trend of increasing conservatism among Black Americans in their racial attitudes when it comes to opportunities in American society. Thus, the more conservative the scores of Black Americans on the issue of affirmative action, the higher their scores on the issue of merit-based opportunities.

Another correlation of interest is the relationship between education ('Highest Year of School Completed') and attitudes toward merit-based opportunities ('Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors'). A significant negative correlation was found in all three years. This correlation supports the finding that, the more highly educated Black Americans become, the less

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<sup>17</sup> Ellis Cose, in his book, *The Rage of a Privileged Class* (1993), discusses the discrimination faced by educated, professional Black Americans that limits their mobility in corporate America.

conservatively they score on their attitudes toward merit-based opportunities. This finding also supports the research that contends that, the more educated Black Americans become, the more liberal they become (Himmelstein & McRae, 1988). On the other hand, there were no significant correlations between attitudes toward affirmative action and education. However, the trends show that the more educated the individual, the more conservative his or her views became toward affirmative action in 1994 and 2000. This is consistent with research revealing that educational levels correlate with ideological views, except for support for affirmative action in university admissions (Glaser, 2001).

Meanwhile, a consistent negative correlation was found between ideology ('Level of Liberalism') and attitudes toward merit-based opportunities ('Blacks Overcome Prejudice without Favors') for all three years studied. As a result, the more liberal Black Americans scored ideologically, the less conservatively they scored on their attitudes toward merit-based opportunities.

### **Implications for Racial Attitudes of Black Americans**

The objective of this dissertation is to determine whether the racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action differed among Black Americans of low socioeconomic status when compared to the attitudes of their higher socioeconomic status counterparts. The following analyzes the findings of the dissertation in relation to relevant theories and research, and also explores those findings within the context of the political environments of the years during which the racial attitudes of Black Americans were studied.

Overall, the relatively consistent impact of marital status was a result for which the study did not account. Specifically, Black Americans who were married previously or were currently married were more conservative in their racial attitudes. This finding begs explanation, one

which can be found in the demographic trends among Black Americans. A Pew Research Center report indicates that the marriage rates of Black Americans, which constitute 28.9% of Black American households, are far lower than for other groups (Pew Research Center, 2012). This same report found that the higher the level of education, the higher the marriage rates for Black Americans (Pew Research Center, 2012). From the above statistics, it seems reasonable to conclude that married Black Americans, a majority of whom have higher levels of education, are more conservative in their racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action.

Another consistent result from the study is that, for the year 2006, gender had a statistically significant impact on both attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and attitudes towards affirmative action. On both issues, males were found to have more conservative attitudes. The data continue to find that gender is increasingly a driving force behind economic stratification in the Black American community. Black American women are outpacing their Black American male counterparts in graduation rates at every level of education. This, in turn, has led to their achieving higher wages and lower levels of unemployment. Additionally, the vast majority of births in the Black American community (66%) were to unmarried mothers. This is true even among college educated Black American women, among whom the unmarried birth rate (28%) is seven times that of college educated White women (4%) (Pew Research Center, 2012). Since Black American women are obtaining more education and trend toward single-headed households, it is surprising that their racial attitudes would be more liberal than the racial attitudes of Black American men. It would be expected that Black American women, who disproportionately serve as heads of households and primary custodial parents, would have more conservative views towards merit-based opportunities in particular. When it comes to affirmative

action, these findings of this dissertation are consistent with the literature, which has determined that women are more liberal than men in their attitudes towards race positive policies, specifically in their attitudes towards affirmative action (Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Golden, Hinkle & Crosby, 2001; Harrison, et al., 2006; Kravitz & Plantania, 1993). Therefore, Black American women seem to have to reconcile their individual circumstances with their roles as mothers of the next generation, advocating for future policies that will ultimately aid their children.

An overall consistent finding was that education had a statistically significant impact on the racial attitudes of Black Americans. On both the issue of merit-based opportunities and affirmative action, the more education achieved, the more liberal the views on the two issues. While at first glance this may contradict the finding that more highly educated married Black Americans hold more conservative racial attitudes, a closer look negates this. The statistics demonstrate that, since a majority of Black Americans are unmarried at all levels of education, and since Black American women, who are a majority of the higher educated Black Americans, are largely unmarried, these results may indeed reflect accurately the relationship between marital status, race, and education.

Overall, a consistent pattern emerges for racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action in relationship to marital status. Black Americans who were previously married had more conservative racial attitudes in both 1994 and 2000, but by 2006 their racial attitudes became considerably more liberal. However, for Black Americans who were currently married, the racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative actions were consistently conservative. These results raise another question: What is the relationship between marriage among Black Americans and conservative racial attitudes toward merit-based

opportunities and affirmative action? It can be assumed from the data that Black Americans who hold more conservative views tend to get married.

Across the board, throughout all years, and for both groups of racial attitudes, age was found (although not always significantly) to be the demographic variable that had the most liberalizing impact. This is also true of the related attitudinal variables of ideology and identification with the Democratic Party. These findings are not surprising. Older Black Americans who had experienced more discrimination than their younger counterparts would be expected to focus on the structural challenges to opportunities for Black Americans and therefore hold more liberal views. It is also consistent that Black Americans identify with the Democratic Party, which, by a wide margin, is considered to be the more liberal of the two mainstream political parties.

An examination of the changing racial attitudes of Black Americans over the time period investigated reveals some changing trends. For gender ('Is Male'), an intriguing pattern emerges. Results show that, in 1994, the racial attitudes of Black American males toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action were more conservative in 1994, became more liberal in 2000, and then trended towards conservative again in 2006. This pattern bears noting. It also begs the question: What occurred leading up to the year 2000 that had a liberalizing effect on Black American males, or conversely, a "conservatizing" effect on Black American women? One answer is that, in the years prior to 2000, certain circumstances impacted Black Americans by gender. On the one hand, since jobs and opportunities were more plentiful during those years, Black men were in a better position financially. On the other hand, President Clinton signed into law his welfare reform act in 1996. Since almost 40% of Black American births are to single women without a college education, this latter issue would disproportionately impact Black

American women. At this juncture, then, Black American men and women had very different prospects, which could explain the differences in their racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action.

The impact of ideology on the racial attitudes of Black Americans also produced contrasting results. While the level of liberalism had the expected across the board liberalizing impact on Black Americans' racial attitudes, identification with the Democratic Party (generally accepted as the more liberal of the two major parties) produced uneven results, revealing more conservative attitudes towards merit-based opportunities in 1994, more liberal attitudes in 2000, and more conservative attitudes once again in 2006. Meanwhile, racial attitudes towards affirmative action were more liberal in 1994 and 2000, becoming more conservative in 2006. The idea that Black Americans, who disproportionately identify with the more liberal Democratic Party (the rates of identification in this study are 69% in 1994; 60% in 2000; and 64% in 2006), would hold more conservative views is not novel. Black Americans have often been found to be more conservative on family values issues while voting overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates. The increased conservatism is also consistent with having a President (George W. Bush) who identified himself as a "compassionate conservative," thus not only mobilizing Black conservatives, but also gaining support among Blacks who had not previously identified as conservative (Lewis, 2005).

Income also produced different results for the distinct racial attitudes. For merit-based opportunities, increasing income levels led to more conservative attitudes in 1994, and then more liberal attitudes in 2000 and 2006. On the other hand, for affirmative action, increasing income levels produced more conservative attitudes in 1994 and 2000, and more liberal attitudes in 2006.

Therefore, it was found that increasing income for Black Americans did not lead to consistent shifts in racial attitudes.

### **Results in Perspective**

While there were several trends and avenues of inquiry in the univariate and bivariate analysis of the data, overall the OLS regression results did not provide many robust findings. However, there were some significant findings that provide an overview of which variables impacted the racial attitudes of Black Americans.

In examining the demographic data, gender had an impact, but only in the year 2006. There the data found that Black American men scored more conservatively on both dependent variables and that the relationship was significant at the .01 level. This begs the question of what changed between 1994 and 2006 that led Black American men to be more conservative, or conversely, what led Black American women to become more liberal toward affirmative action and merit-based opportunities? Have Black American communities finally reached a point where the stratification between Black American men and women (education, prospects, prestige, etc.) has led to divergent racial attitudes? This is definitely an area moving forward that has to be researched and monitored. It is also important to note that for all three time periods, women were overrepresented in the sample (roughly 60% in each year). This may be caused by the fact that the GSS survey is conducted by households, and the literature shows that Black American women disproportionately are increasingly the heads of households in many communities of color. Could this fact also shed light into the changes in attitudes by gender?

Education also was found to have an impact, but only on attitudes toward merit-based opportunities. Here it was found that in the years 1994 and 2006, there was a statistically

significant relationship at the .01 level between higher levels of education leading to more liberal attitudes toward merit-based opportunities. While the relationship between higher levels of education and more liberal views has been documented in this dissertation both in the literature review and earlier in this chapter, the major question that arises is what happened in the year 2000 where this relationship was not consistent in the data? Since the data reflects that the mean educational level of the sample was roughly a high school diploma and less than a semester of college, what impact would it have on the results to compare those with a college degree or greater to those without?

Another variable that was found to have an impact on Black Americans' attitudes is marital status. For merit-based opportunities, Black Americans who had been married previously scored more conservatively, and this relationship was significant at the .01 level in the year 2000. For Affirmative Action, also in 2000, Black Americans who were currently married scored more conservatively than their unmarried or previously married counterparts. Once again, it appears that marital status impacts racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. However, the fact that it is only for one status and one year for each dependent variable leads to a lack of any clear pattern. This also requires further inquiry as the Black Americans remain the group with the lowest marriage rate.

On the other hand, some of the most intriguing and robust results came from the variables where there were no statistically significant relationships. There, both the variables '*Religiosity*' and '*Identifies with the Democratic Party*' did not have any statistically significant relationships on either dependent variable for any of the years. This is particularly surprising since both of these variables are commonly viewed as impacting conservative attitudes among Black Americans.

When it comes to ‘Religiosity’ and Black Americans, there is a historically strong connection to the church has long been thought to lead to more conservative attitudes on many issues that revolve around issues of morality and family values. In addition, Black American churches served to mobilize communities both socially and politically. In the same vein, Black Americans’ strong identification with the Democratic Party has a long documented history that goes back to FDR which has been believed to lead to more liberal attitudes on social programs and the role of government in individuals’ lives.

The fact the above variables were not shown to have an impact on the level of conservativeness of Black Americans’ racial attitudes is perplexing. However there was also some evidence that the above assumptions between the church and identification with the Democratic Party may be changing. For example, the mean scores for Black Americans on religiosity indicate that Black Americans in the sample attended church services about once a month. This does not reflect a high level of commitment to church attendance. There are also scholars who examine the weakening impact of the Black church in the community.

In regard to the impact of identification with the Democratic Party, there is also some evidence that this sample is not reflective of the general Black American community. In each of the three years, Black Americans in the sample population identified with the Democratic Party at the rate of approximately 65%. However, as can be seen in the results of the last three presidential elections, Black Americans voted for the Democratic candidate at almost a 90% rate.

While this research has yielded some important results regarding the impact of particular variables on the racial attitudes of Black Americans, the inconsistent nature of these results opens up avenues for future study.

### **Impact of the Political Environment**

An added and more difficult task of this dissertation was to examine whether the racial attitudes of Black Americans had changed over the time period 1994-2006. In this regard, an examination of the political environments of this time period is critical. These years span the Presidential administrations of a moderate Democrat (William Clinton) and a conservative Republican (George W. Bush), both of whom had vastly different leadership styles and relationships with Black Americans. While Clinton benefited from relative peace and prosperity, Bush was president when 9/11 occurred and is thus viewed as a “wartime” president.<sup>18</sup>

The impact of 9/11 cannot be underscored enough in a dissertation exploring changes that occurred over a period of time spanning a pre-9/11 and post 9/11 United States. 9/11 fundamentally changed the course of the country in ways that impacted all Americans, particularly Black Americans. The country transitioned from a time of economic prosperity, which greatly benefited Black Americans, to a time of major economic deficits caused largely by engagement in two expansive military operations overseas. As these changes occurred, Black Americans were the first group to feel the negative consequences of the slowing economy. These economic changes may also have impacted how Black Americans felt about opportunities in this country.

Socially, the nation experienced a period of time during which most Americans were united in their belief that security concerns overrode any internal divisions. For a period after

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<sup>18</sup> While the United States Congress never officially declared war on any country, the “War on Terror” was a new type of war in a post-9/11 world, a war based on concept as opposed to opposition to a country.

9/11, many Black Americans felt united with other racial and ethnic groups, and were less likely to report feeling discriminated against. These feelings changed when Black Americans began to identify with the ethnic and religious groups who were the focus of post 9/11 discrimination. They also changed as the country slowly returned to “business as usual” and Black Americans once again felt the impact of discrimination. These events influenced how Black Americans felt about opportunities for advancement in this country.

Politically, 9/11 changed both the landscape and agenda of the nation. In particular, the social issues that had traditionally affected Black Americans took a backseat to issues of national security. During the 2004 Presidential Elections, for example, such former hot button issues as affirmative action, abortion, and welfare were no longer at the forefront of the debate.<sup>19</sup> As Black Americans perceived issues that directly impacted their lives being relegated to the backburner, their racial attitudes toward opportunities also may have begun to change.

### **Theories Supported and Refuted**

This dissertation presents several theories explaining the effect of economic stratification on the racial attitudes of Black Americans. In Weber’s three part theory of stratification, the relationship between, and among, class, status, and party is clear, especially as it applies to Black Americans. While acknowledging the importance of class in society, Weber asserted that it is only through status groups that communal action can be initiated. Generally, Weber found that a relationship existed between status group and class because this relationship informed the “style of life” that group members enjoyed. However, for Black Americans, membership in the status group has been predicated historically on race, not class. Weber’s concept of parties added a unique twist to the theory in relation to Black Americans. For Weber, the purpose of parties was

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<sup>19</sup> Although such family values issues as same sex marriage were important determinants in the election, Black Americans tended to poll very conservatively on these issues

to gain power through political means. Black Americans, for much of their history, have either been denied political rights (in slavery) or have had their political rights violated. As Black Americans have fought for their political rights, most notably during the Civil Rights movement, the overriding basis for this fight has been race. In the context of this dissertation, as political rights have been secured and economic stratification occurs, what are the consequences for Black Americans? Weber viewed parties as differing depending on whether they were based on status or class. This study asks the question: Are Black Americans' racial attitudes, which lead to communal action, based on status, or are Black Americans separating into two different status groups based on class?

Du Bois, in his theory of the "talented tenth," believed that the leadership fostering communal action from within the Black American status group would be comprised of a small group of college educated individuals. These individuals would use their education to provide the skills and leadership to uplift the masses. According to this theory, the fight for human and civil rights for Black Americans as a group was paramount to individual goals or advancement. In analyzing Du Bois's theory, the question for this dissertation becomes: Is there any evidence that the "talented tenth" of today is leading and influencing Black American attitudes?

Dawson, while not focusing on stratification or on any particular subsection of the group, offered a theory of group interest perspective that explained the phenomenon of Black Americans who place group ahead of individual interests. According to Dawson's theory, this "black utility heuristic," in play from the time that Du Bois was writing at the turn of the twentieth century, up until the publication of Dawson's own book in 1994, would continue to dominate Black Americans' attitudes and political behaviors without major changes occurring in either American society or in the life opportunities of Black Americans themselves. Therefore,

this dissertation attempts to answer the following question: Have changes occurred to lead to more diverse attitudes among Black Americans, particularly based on their socioeconomic status, or is the “black utility heuristic” still valid?

Shelton and Wilson add to the debate by asking whether the dominant ideology theory (the individual), or the theory of group interest (the group), best explains the attitudes of Black Americans. Therefore, this dissertation seeks an answer to the following question: When examining economic stratification among Black Americans, which theory best explains the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low versus high socioeconomic status?

Chong and Kim, in comparing several racial groups, expanded upon the argument even further with their theory of opportunities and group consciousness. This theory asserts that an individual’s feeling about the relevance of group factors (group consciousness) is influenced by his or her perceptions of both opportunities (mobility) and the prevalence of discrimination in society. Chong and Kim hypothesize that Black Americans who are economically successful (of higher socioeconomic status) view group characteristics as less important, while those who are not as economically successful (of low socioeconomic status) place a greater emphasis on group characteristics. Accordingly, this dissertation seeks to answer the following question: Will economic stratification, along with increased opportunities, lead to differing racial attitudes among blacks?

After examining how these theories relate to one another and also to the focus of this dissertation, the next section will utilize the dissertation’s findings to answer the questions that each theory raises.

**Weber - With the increased economic stratification of Black Americans, will Black Americans' racial attitudes, which lead to communal action, be based on status, or will Black Americans separate into two distinct status groups based on class?**

From the results of this study, it appears that Black Americans remain a cohesive status group when it comes to their racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. While there are differences in the mean scores of Black Americans on their racial attitudes, a statistical analysis did not find them to be overall significant. These results assume a consistency in the political behaviors (or, as Weber defines it, the “communal actions”) that evolve from these attitudes. This assumption was borne out during the last presidential election cycle, during which Black Americans overwhelmingly (at least 88%) voted for the Democratic candidate. Other recent examples of this include the polling results (by race) and protest demonstrations around recent issues such as “Stop and Frisk” in New York, and the nationwide protests after the Trayvon Martin shooting case.

Some evidence, however, points to fissures in the Black American status group based on class, particularly when it comes to attitudes toward merit-based opportunities. Results indicate that, when it comes to beliefs about merit-based versus affirmative action opportunities, the views of Black Americans differ according to their socioeconomic status, level of education, and, surprisingly, marital status. As the Black American community continues to experience economic stratification, it remains to be seen whether these fissures will lead to a division of the status group into separate groups based on class. In fact, the upcoming 2012 Presidential election may provide an opportunity to gauge whether this change is occurring. Exit polls of the demographic and socio-economic indicators of Black American voters may provide some

evidence of whether or not the act of voting itself is a product of this separation by socioeconomic status.

**Du Bois - Is there any evidence that the “talented tenth” of today is leading and influencing Black American attitudes?**

There is qualified support for Du Bois’s theory of the “talented tenth.” The results indicate no clear differences in the racial attitudes of Black Americans toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action, thus implying some cohesiveness of perspective. However, a clear idea of who is “leading” Black Americans towards this perspective is impossible to ascertain from the data.

Du Bois saw the “talented tenth” as the college educated segment of the population of Black Americans, which, at the time he wrote, was small. Today, many more Black Americans have received a college education, which has caused Du Bois’s perceived ten percent to overlap in many ways with the Black American middle class (Battle & Wright, 2002). While this in itself can be seen as the success of the former tenth percent to uplift the “masses,” ample evidence showing that a disproportionate number of Black Americans still live in poverty indicates that work still needs to be done.

Another important finding that Du Bois could not have foreseen was the impact of gender on the “talented tenth.” While the “talented tenth” of Du Bois’s time was almost exclusively male, today Black American women are far outpacing Black American men in college attendance and completion. Therefore, numerically, college educated students who would make up the “talented tenth” today are predominantly female. In the immediate future, this will continue to be the case.

One other point deserves discussion regarding Du Bois's theory of "double consciousness." Clear evidence of this "double consciousness" can be found in the racial attitudes of Black Americans toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. Most surprising is the fact that Black Americans of low socioeconomic status, those who qualify for many government programs, tended to score more conservatively in their racial attitudes. It appears that, despite their socio-economic status, Black Americans, and low socioeconomic status Black Americans in particular, are conflicted regarding their economic and social realities as they pertain to individualism and the "American Dream."

**Dawson - Have changes occurred resulting in more diverse attitudes among Black Americans, particularly based on their socioeconomic status, or is the "black utility heuristic" still in play?**

In regard to Dawson, it appears that the "black utility heuristic" is still in play. Despite the prevalent and increasing economic stratification among Black Americans, no trend of statistically different racial attitudes emerged. The presidential voting trends of Black Americans serve as further proof that this heuristic still plays out in the political behaviors of Black Americans. This is somewhat surprising, considering that many of the conditions that Dawson referred to that could change this heuristic are in place today. These conditions include decreasing residential segregation, opportunities for Black American to expand their social networks (including social media and attendance at predominantly White educational institutions), and a growing conservative and multiracial constituency who identify otherwise than just Black Americans. The resilience of this "black utility heuristic" in the face of such social changes speaks to how deeply engrained this heuristic is in the Black American experience.

**Shelton and Wilson - When examining economic stratification among Black Americans, which theory best explains the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low versus high socioeconomic status?**

Absent a trend of statistically different racial attitudes, it appears that the group interests theory provides a better explanation of the racial attitudes of Black Americans. Therefore, despite the fact that individuals are achieving economic success, Black Americans tend to share attitudes regarding merit-based opportunities and affirmative action.

**Chong and Kim - Will economic stratification, along with increased opportunities, lead to differing racial attitudes among blacks?**

Chong's and Kim's theory of opportunities and group interest was not supported by the results. The economic stratification among Black Americans did not lead to statistically different racial attitudes. According to Chong and Kim, Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status, who are likely to perceive and take advantage of more opportunities and less discrimination, did not score significantly differently from their low socioeconomic status counterparts.

Overall, the fact that there was not a statistically significant relationship between the racial attitudes of Black Americans of different socioeconomic statuses toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action was surprising. Economic stratification among Black Americans continues to exist, and, in many ways, may even be worsening. Therefore, the life experiences of Black Americans are not all the same. Yet, despite this, Black Americans are relatively consistent in their racial attitudes.

**Speculation**

After examining the data and results of this dissertation, some important information is gleaned regarding the impact of socioeconomic and other variables on the racial attitudes of

Black Americans toward affirmative action and merit-based opportunities. This information also provided some useful avenues of discussion regarding the theoretical framework of the dissertation. However, because the overall trends and findings were not consistent or robust, they also open up areas of speculation regarding the data. This section will specifically address four areas of speculation that arise from the data. The first area of speculation revolves around the issue of the time span of the dissertation. The second area involves the generalizability of the research. An additional area of inquiry concerns the issue of reverse causality. Finally, the section will conclude with a discussion of the implications of the questions asked in the dissertation itself through the lens of the work of major scholars on this issue including Du Bois, Wilson, and Frazier.

### **Time Span Considerations**

One specific area of inquiry that opens up involves the time span of the dissertation. While this dissertation utilized the twelve year period (1994-2006) that covered the two most recently completed presidential administrations, the results indicate that the study may have benefited from exploring a longer time period. This could be done by exploring the implications of the history of socioeconomic stratification among Black Americans or by extrapolating forward to the present. As noted in the literature review, socioeconomic stratification among Black Americans (while always present) began to intensify in its modern incarnation around 1960 (Parent & Stekler, 1985). This stratification came largely as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the subsequent legislation that came out of this movement. In expanding the time frame, it may prove fruitful to explore whether examining a longer period of time would have yielded different results. This could also provide the answer to the question of whether the

attitudes of Black Americans of varying socioeconomic statuses have changed over time. Specifically, have these attitudes converged or diverged over this time period? When examining attitudes toward affirmative action and merit-based opportunities a historical perspective would be particularly instructive, as the economic stratification among Black Americans, the Civil Rights Movement, and the policy of affirmative action (which was initially implemented to ensure equal opportunities) all intersect during the 1960s.

Expanding the analysis to the present would incorporate events that have occurred since 2006, such as the most recent devastating economic downturn and the election of Barack Obama, the first Black American President. Such an examination could provide information that explores the relationship of these events to the racial attitudes of Black Americans. In terms of the recent recession, Black Americans were both the first and the hardest hit by this downturn. Because of this, there were many shifts in socio-economic status among Black Americans which may have impacted their attitudes.

When it comes to the historic election of President Barack Obama, there have also been some shifts. In 2008, Black American voters turned out in historic numbers and voted overwhelmingly (95%) for Barack Obama. It is clear that from both a historic perspective as well as the standpoint of opportunities, Black Americans believed that voting for the first Black American president was beneficial to them individually and as a group. In President Obama's reelection bid, Black American's once again voted in historic numbers. However, there was a shift. While the vast majority (93%) voted for President Obama, this was down from 2008. It may prove instructive to explore whether this shift, however slight, was due to disillusionment with President Obama and his performance over the past four years or with a rise in Black Americans moving to a more conservative ideology and a shift to the Republican Party.

### **Generalizability**

Another area of speculation involved the generalizability of the research. This begs the question, “how do the results of this dissertation relate to other groups?” Could it be expected that the results for African Americans compare to other groups? There is some evidence (Branton & Jones, 2005; Campbell, 1980; Chong & Kim, 2006; Hochschild, 1995; Swak, 2005) that the results for Black Americans are unique. All of the above literature explores the role that Black Americans’ history and experience with discrimination has had on their attitudes. For example, Chong & Kim (2006) directly compare Black Americans, Hispanics, and Asians of different socioeconomic statuses on their perceptions of opportunities and found that there are unique differences in the manner by which Black Americans view opportunities that separate them from the other groups. Black Americans, due to their history of exclusion and discrimination in America, tend to view their opportunities as impacted by structural impediments, despite their individual abilities and work ethic. On the other hand, Hispanics, Asians, and other immigrant groups tend to view their opportunities as a direct result of their individual merit and work ethic. While the uniqueness of Black Americans’ attitudes tends to make them less generalizable to other groups, it makes it even more imperative that these attitudes be studied and monitored as our society progresses. The notion that there is still a group of Americans that view their opportunities as tied to structural factors as much as individual effort should give cause to explore both these attitudes as well as the structures that have led to these attitudes.

### **Reverse Causality**

The results of the dissertation also lead to an examination of the issue of reverse causality. This study indicated that particular variables (gender, education, and marital status) have an impact on the racial attitudes of Black Americans. However, the inconsistent nature of these results leads to further speculation regarding the relationships of the variables. For example, the results indicate that the marital status of Black Americans impacts conservatism in racial attitudes toward affirmative action. While those who were currently or previously married scored more conservatively, could the relationship actually go in the opposite direction? Therefore more conservative Black Americans married more than less conservative Black Americans? The same argument could be made for the variables of education and gender, the other variables where statistically significant relationships were found in the attitudes of Black Americans of different socioeconomic statuses. Taking into consideration that the relationships between the variables can go in both directions encourages researchers to keep an open mind as they sort through the data. It may also point to some future avenues for study. For instance, the linkage between marriage and ideology among Black Americans is an important area of study, particularly in light of the low marriage rates and high number of single headed Black American households.

### **The Bigger Question**

Another area of speculation revolves around the question answered in the dissertation. In addressing the impact of socioeconomic and other variables on the racial attitudes of Black Americans, the results of this study have led to bigger questions. The first of these questions could be labeled “the Du Bois Dilemma”. In his earlier writings on the “talented tenth” Du Bois put forth a prescriptive idea of who this group encompassed and what their impact could be on

Black Americans overall. Du Bois saw his scholarship as intricately related to the plight of Black Americans. He felt that education could provide a group of leaders to lead the fight for the advancement of Black Americans. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while race was still a pressing issue, more Blacks had the opportunity to advance both in educational and economic status. However, in his later writings, Du Bois expressed disappointment and anger with this “talented tenth”, which he felt had largely abandoned their mission to merge into a middle class solely concerned with their own interest. Frazier (1957) concurs with this view of the Black American middle class. In a scathing indictment of the Black American middle class, Frazier views this group as having lost their identity and having bought into the values of what he called the “white bourgeois world”.

When viewing the results of this dissertation through the work of these two prominent Black American scholars, some discrepancies arise. The results of this study, coming almost half a decade after Du Bois’s later writings, indicate that there is not a significant difference in the attitudes of Black Americans by socioeconomic status, even as stratification by race has increased. This raises the issue of the role of socioeconomic status on Black American attitudes. Instead of inspiring the “masses” in work ethic, the importance of education, and the fight for civil rights (as Du Bois asserts in his original theory of the “talented tenth”), it can be speculated that what has occurred is the commodification and self-interest of the Black American middle class. This has led Black Americans of lower socioeconomic status to believe that economic success is primary and that they can achieve the material trappings that those of higher socioeconomic status have acquired, despite having less education, income, and opportunities.

A second issue that arises from this research concerns the “declining significance of race”. Wilson’s (1978, 1980) groundbreaking work posited that by the 1970’s, class was more

important to determining the life chances for Black Americans than race. As Black Americans began to move into middle class positions, particularly the younger generation, Wilson anticipated that the relative impact of class would become greater as race becomes less relevant in determining opportunities. It follows that this process would also impact the attitudes of Black Americans. While the results of this study did not support this hypothesis, the inconsistent findings, along with the increasing stratification among blacks over the past 50 years, are cause to revisit Wilson's premise. Why is it that the "black utility heuristic" that Dawson (1994) discusses remains entrenched in determining the racial and political attitudes of Black Americans despite increasing stratification that gives Black Americans, especially those of higher socioeconomic status, more opportunities than ever before? And conversely, why is it that despite these opportunities, more Black Americans than ever are languishing in poverty and at the lowest socioeconomic levels? In his theory, Dawson lays out the conditions in American society that would have to be met for Black Americans to move away from the "black utility heuristic". In today's society, all of these conditions have been met.

A major implication that comes out of this study is that there appears to be a discrepancy between the words, or professed attitudes, of Black Americans and their behaviors. According to the results of the dissertation, there is an overall consistency of attitudes among Black Americans regardless of socioeconomic status. This would seem to imply that Black Americans as a whole view issues as a homogeneous group. It would also indicate that this could lead to sustained political and economic actions led by educated Black Americans who occupy prestigious position who utilize their position for the "Black American" cause. And while there is evidence that this does happen on some level, the dominant trend among the Black American middle class is a concern with individual goals and wealth accumulation. What follows is a "black flight" of

professional middle class Black Americans from urban centers and other primarily Black communities, only to return when the areas have been gentrified or sufficiently populated by others of the same socioeconomic status. Even those who came from intercity neighborhoods and became successful tend to leave these neighborhoods. As an example, the Bedford Stuyvesant raised rapper Biggie Smalls, after rapping about living in the “same number, same hood” on a song on his first album, relocated to the upscale neighborhood of Teaneck, NJ shortly after the album became successful. And while one of the benefits of Black Americans achieving success is that they can live wherever they want, and many choose to do so for legitimate reasons (crime, privacy, and quality of education for their children), the fact that many of the most successful Black Americans choose to leave predominantly Black communities jeopardizes the mobilization of Black Americans around political behaviors on the issues that primarily concern them. While there are many Black American organizations and groups that seek to achieve the above, very rarely is there a large membership that stretches across socioeconomic statuses. Instead, many organizations are comprised largely of middle class Black Americans and advocate goals and issues that center on a middle class agenda.

The discrepancies between what Black Americans contend are their racial attitudes and what is occurring on the ground in their everyday behaviors can be explained in a couple of ways. The first explanation derives from what Du Bois calls “double consciousness” and what Frazier describes as middle class Black Americans “loss of identity”. In this view, middle class Black Americans (in fact all Black Americans) feel caught between two states, a Black state and the overall majority white state of the country as a whole. This struggle between “black consciousness” and mainstream middle class white values culminates, according to Du Bois in his later work and Frazier in his seminal work, in a battle that “black consciousness” has lost.

Therefore an explanation of the discrepancies in the results of Black Americans racial attitudes can be explained by Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status answering questions based on “black consciousness” while their actual behaviors are more consistent with mainstream white middle class values.

Another explanation for the discrepancies and lack of consistency in the results of the dissertation comes from the perspective from which Black Americans of different socioeconomic statuses answered the questions on the survey. Therefore, Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status answered the questions in a socially desirable manner that would reflect a solidarity with Black Americans overall. On the other hand, Black Americans of low socioeconomic status answered the questions from an aspirational perspective that relates how they think the situation in this country should be for Black Americans as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, while the areas of speculation in the section above provide important avenues for the research to take and important issues to be addressed, the results of this dissertation provide fresh information on the variables that impact Black Americans of different socioeconomic statuses’ racial attitudes on merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. In particular, in the words of Karyn Lacy (2007), it fills a gap in providing information on “how ...blacks conceive of their own position in American society”. This dissertation provides a step toward understanding the racial attitudes of Black Americans that provide insight into how this group perceives their position at a particular juncture.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

This dissertation found that many of the differences between the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low socioeconomic status and Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action from 1994-2006 were not statistically different. This indicates that, when it comes to attitudes toward affirmative action and merit-based opportunities, racial group membership was found to be more explanatory of racial attitudes than is socioeconomic status. However, the differences in attitudes indicate that, with continued stratification, there is the possibility that socioeconomic status could challenge racial group membership in explaining these attitudes.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The primary objective of this dissertation is to contribute to the dialogue on the impact of socioeconomic level on the racial attitudes of Black Americans over time by examining the effect of a group of demographic and attitudinal variables on a sample of Black Americans of low versus higher socioeconomic status. In support of this objective, this dissertation was successful in revealing that these racial attitudes did differ across socioeconomic status levels and across time. However, upon further analysis, these differences were not found to be statistically significant.

Some surprising findings emerged from the study. One of the most surprising findings was that marital status was consistently found to have an impact on the racial attitudes of Black Americans. Specifically, the study found that Black Americans who were married previously, or

who were currently married, were more conservative in their racial attitudes toward both merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. In the literature review, little research was found to address this independent variable. The importance of this finding to future research will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

Another surprising finding of this dissertation were the number of areas in which Black Americans of low socioeconomic status held more conservative racial attitudes than did their higher socioeconomic counterparts. While it was anticipated that there would be a difference in these racial attitudes, previous literature indicated that the results would be reversed. In other words, it was expected that Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status would be more conservative in their racial attitudes, especially when it came to merit-based opportunities, while lower socioeconomic Black Americans would be less conservative. Most of the literature, however, determined a link between economic success and more conservative views.

An additional finding that was surprising was that both the variables '*Religiosity*' and '*Identifies with the Democratic Party*' were not found to impact conservatism among Black Americans. This goes against the prevailing thinking that Black Americans connection to religious values leads them to be more conservative on issues of morality while their connection to the Democratic Party leads them to be more liberal on social and government programs.

Some of the dissertations findings were also consistent with the literature. Differences in the racial attitudes of Black Americans by gender were found in all years. Specifically, men were found to have significantly different more conservative views toward both affirmative and merit-based opportunities in 2006. Another consistent finding was that, the more education that Black Americans earned, the more liberal were their views toward affirmative action and merit-based

opportunities. Finally, another consistent finding was the relationship between ideology and racial attitudes. All of these findings concurred with the findings in the literature.

The most discouraging finding was the lack of a consistent pattern of statistical significance in the differences in racial attitudes by independent variable and across time. For example, Black Americans of lower socioeconomic status had significantly more conservative racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities in 1994 and 2006, but not in 2000. Yet, in regard to affirmative action, the attitudes of Black Americans of lower socioeconomic status were different, but not significant in any of the three years. As OLS regression models were done with more demographic and attitudinal independent variables, this lack of a pattern continued. The data therefore demonstrate that socioeconomic status has an impact on Black Americans' racial attitudes, but pinpointing the exact relationship of the variables proved elusive.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Exploring the results within the context of the theoretical framework of the dissertation also yields some illuminating information. When it comes to Weber's three part theory of stratification, it is clear that Black Americans fit the definition of a status group and that their racial attitudes, and the resulting communal actions that emerge from these attitudes, is predicated on racial group membership as opposed to class. Yet the fact that differences were found between Black Americans of different socioeconomic status levels demonstrates that, under the right conditions, class could have a larger impact than race on the racial attitudes of Black Americans. This dissertation provides some information on what variables lead Black Americans to form racial attitudes based on class as opposed to race.

The results are inconclusive in providing clear support for Du Bois's theory of the "talented tenth." Despite the differences in racial attitudes between Black Americans of low and

higher socioeconomic status, there is an overall congruence in these attitudes. However, it is impossible to determine directionality, and the role of socioeconomic status, from the data at hand. In other words, whether or not this overall congruence can be attributed to the “masses” (low socioeconomic status Black Americans) embracing the racial attitudes of Black American leadership (higher socioeconomic status Black Americans). What was evident from the results is that Black Americans, particularly those of low socioeconomic status, are still struggling with a “double consciousness,” attempting to reconcile what it means to be Black with what it means to be American. This sense of a “double consciousness” may account for the findings that Black Americans of low socioeconomic status held increasingly more conservative views toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action, despite the fact that they were the primary intended beneficiaries of these policies.<sup>20</sup>

The results of this dissertation also imply that Dawson’s “black utility heuristic” still exists today. Consequently, despite economic, educational, and social variance, Black Americans continue to make decisions based on group as opposed to individual interests. This has remained the rule even as more Black Americans live in integrated neighborhoods throughout the country, attend a wide variety of academic institutions, and enter a broad array of employment fields. Shelton’s and Wilson’s group interest theory provide an explanation for Black Americans’ racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action, despite advancements among Black Americans as a whole. Despite the widening economic stratification of Black Americans, members of the group tend to share racial attitudes. Therefore, Black Americans view most policy issues as a group, regardless of the overall state of the economy and its impact on their individual socioeconomic status.

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<sup>20</sup> Research has shown that White women and middle class Black Americans respectively benefit the most from affirmative action programs, and middle and upper class White Americans benefit the most from merit-based programs.

This dissertation did not support Chong's and Kim's theory of opportunities and group interest that purports that an individual's perception of opportunities was more important to the development of his or her racial attitudes than membership in a group. Despite the educational and economic statistics indicating that increasing numbers of Black Americans have attained academic and financial success, allowing them access to the "American Dream," significant group differences in racial attitudes by socioeconomic status are slow to follow.

The results of this study provide an opportunity to reexamine the questions asked at the onset of this dissertation. For example, as the socioeconomic gap between Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status and those living at, or near, the poverty level grows, how does socioeconomic status impact Black Americans' racial attitudes? The results of this dissertation indicate that socioeconomic status does impact the racial attitudes of Black Americans. Clear differences were observed in the scores of Black Americans of different socioeconomic levels on their racial attitudes. This was particularly marked in reference to the dependent variable that measured attitudes toward merit-based opportunities. In general, Black Americans of low socioeconomic status scored more conservatively than did their higher socioeconomic peers in their attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. Despite these trends, only some of the differences in scores by socioeconomic status were found to be statistically significant. However, because of the prevalence of these differences, it can be contended that, if economic stratification among Black Americans continues to proliferate, these differences will lead to more significant differences in racial attitudes based on socioeconomic status. Such differences can have real political implications for Black Americans.

Another question put forth at the start of this dissertation was: Given the history of Black Americans in this country, how does this group view the ideas of merit-based mobility/

opportunities and affirmative action? From the data, it appears that Black Americans are very ambivalent when it comes to their attitudes regarding racial attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. Their scores were consistently in the middle range of options in regard to these racial attitudes. When socioeconomic status was added as a variable, differences emerged between Black Americans of low and higher socioeconomic status. However, the variables that were established to have the greatest impact on these racial attitudes were gender, education, marital status, and ideology. Therefore, specific demographic and attitudinal variables were found to have a statistically significant impact on Black Americans' racial attitudes. However, because this impact was not always consistent, more research is necessary to determine the impact of these variables on racial attitudes. This will be explored more in the future research section of this chapter.

Additionally, the dissertation asked: How have the attitudes of Black Americans of different socioeconomic statuses changed over a specific period of time, in this case from 1994-2006? Clear differences in racial attitudes were found within the three time periods. In overall scores, Black Americans of low socioeconomic status scored consistently more conservatively over the three time periods on the dependent variable which measured merit-based opportunities. For the dependent variable 'affirmative action,' these differences were evident, but not in a consistent pattern. As other demographic and attitudinal variables were added through hierarchical analysis, differences were found in racial attitudes, but also not in any consistent pattern.

In continuing to explore the idea of changing racial attitudes, the dissertation posed the following question: How does political environment facilitate any changes in Black Americans' racial attitudes? It can be noted that Black Americans scored the most liberal in 1994 during the

Clinton Administration. They then scored increasingly conservative over the next two time periods. Therefore, it appears that the racial attitudes of Black Americans are impacted by the political (and by extension) economic environments in which they live. Specifically, it appears that Black Americans trusted and identified with the moderate Democrat, Clinton, in determining their prospects in 1994. On the other hand, while distrustful of Republican George W. Bush, Black Americans' scores indicate that they embraced (whether consciously or subconsciously) his "compassionate conservative" ideology.

### **Limitations of Study**

As with all studies, there are some limitations to this dissertation. One limit is the makeup and size of the sample. While the GSS has functioned since 1972 to provide one of the largest databases of information on American demographics, attitudes, and behaviors, for the purpose of this research there were some restrictions. One limitation was the total number of cases. While the numbers were respectable (N = 388 for the 1994 survey; N = 429 for the 2000 survey; and N = 634 for the 2006 survey) a larger sample would have yielded better results, especially as the above numbers also dropped during analysis due to missing data. Another issue is the fact that the GSS sampled by households, so that members of larger households were less likely than members of smaller households to have been interviewed. In particular, this may have impacted the number of low socioeconomic status Black American households, as these are the households which statistically would have been larger. Overall, a larger sample would have been more representative and would have allowed the study to more clearly identify the differences between Black Americans of low and higher socioeconomic status.

Another limitation of the research is that it utilized a completely quantitative methodology. While this offers a strong overall analysis of the data, it does not provide the full

context from which the data are drawn. Therefore the hierarchical regression modeling that was conducted describes how the independent variables impacted the racial attitudes of Black Americans of low and higher socioeconomic status, but it could not explain why the variables had this impact. Given the ongoing nature of economic stratification, and its impact on racial attitudes and political participation (or lack of participation), a qualitative approach needs to be incorporated to obtain this explanation. Why, for example, are Black Americans of low socioeconomic status more conservative than their higher socioeconomic counterparts when it comes to merit-based opportunities and affirmative action? Also, what are the racial attitudes of Black Americans who have moved from one socioeconomic level to another (whether up or down) over the time period studied? How has this changing status impacted them?

One other limitation to the study is the age of the data. While the data include some of the most recent and comprehensive statistics from the GSS, the data were collected six years ago. This plays out in two ways. First, the data come from the time periods of previous presidential administrations. We are currently nearing the end of the first term of the current president. Secondly, the data were drawn from the period of time immediately prior to the most recent economic recession. Therefore, the data do not incorporate the impact of this economic downturn on Black Americans. Finally, the data do not take into account the impact of the United States' first Black American President, and how this historic event has affected the attitudes toward opportunities in American society of Black Americans of different socioeconomic statuses.

A final limitation to the research revolves around validity issues with the dependent variables. The use of the terminology, "Favor," in the variables "Blacks Overcome Prejudice with Favors" and "Favor Preferences in Hiring Blacks" calls into question whether these

variables measured attitudes toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action, or if they measured individuals' feelings regarding favoritism in these policies. The question of validity could have led to more conservative responses to these questions. The results may have differed had the dependent variable questions been phrased in a more neutral manner.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Despite the above limitations to this study, much valuable data were gathered in this dissertation regarding the racial attitudes of Black American toward merit-based opportunities and affirmative action. However, future research on this topic would benefit both from addressing the limits to this study, as well as by following up on its results. For example, a research project utilizing a triangulated methodology that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data might garner a more holistic view of the issue. Another suggestion for future research, geared towards overcoming issues of validity regarding the dependent variables, is to create an instrument that discusses merit-based opportunities and affirmative action in a more neutral manner. One other direction for future research might be an examination of the racial attitudes of Black Americans before and after the current economic recession, and before and after President Obama's presidency.

The results of the dissertation also provide avenues for future research. One area, for example, calls for future research that examines the impact of marriage on economic stratification and racial attitudes. The impact of marriage came as a surprise in the dissertation's findings and necessitates further research on the topic. While marriage rates in the U.S. are down overall, Black Americans continue to have the lowest marriage rates.

A related area for future research is an analysis of the impact of gender on the Black American community. The research on the changing economic, educational, and marriage

prospects for Black American women focuses on the social impact of these prospects without addressing their overall impact on economic stratification and racial attitudes.

Finally, an area this dissertation does not address, but which can be inferred from the results, is the impact of sexual orientation on economic stratification and racial attitudes. There are opportunities here for further research, especially as the number of openly LGBT Black Americans continues to grow, particularly in large urban areas such as New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. Thus, a study of this population in relation to the racial attitudes of Black Americans is warranted.

### **Conclusion**

In the thirty four years since Wilson wrote his controversial book, *The Declining Significance of Race*, the economic stratification among Black Americans not only continues to exist, but as Wilson prophesied, it also continues to worsen. This dissertation seeks to address the “profound implications” of economic stratification on Black Americans to which Wilson referred.

Overall, the findings of this dissertation contribute to the knowledge of a very complex topic. This dissertation is propelled by the view that the continued economic stratification among Black Americans has profound implications for the Black community, particularly when it comes to how Black Americans view their opportunities in American society today. The goal of this dissertation is not only to examine the variables that impact the racial attitudes of Black Americans towards merit-based opportunities and affirmative action, but also to stimulate a discussion of the policies and programs that can be implemented to ensure true equality of opportunity and that can lead to the amelioration of economic stratification among Blacks. It is

hoped that this dissertation will motivate future researchers to examine these issues and to further these goals.

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