

## White Americans' Racial Attitudes Revisited: The Role of Cognitive Engagement

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*This article introduces the studies on racial attitudes of white Americans and critically reviews them. Drawing on information processing perspective, I point out that literature on white racial attitudes is barely successful in accounting for the reasons why white citizens who are committed to the principle of racial equality oppose race-targeted public policies. I argue that racial policy preferences are driven not only by political and racial predispositions, but also by the different levels of cognitive engagement in issues: individuals use different amount of relevant information in forming policy preferences, which in turn leads individuals to arrive at different understandings of racial matters.*

**Key Words:** *Race, Racial Predispositions, Policy Preferences, Cognitive Engagement, American Politics*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on racial attitudes of white Americans on race-targeted public policies, which is ample and in many respects, illuminating. Needless to say, race is critical in understanding not only American politics but also America as a whole. Furthermore, racial attitudes were, and are, on the center of extensive scholarly efforts to understand formation and change of policy preference and political communication between political elites and ordinary citizens (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Mendelberg 2001). As Dawson (2000) claims, "racial considerations remain critical for shaping Americans' attitudes and policy preferences" (344) while political parties and ideologies matter as well. Indeed, many Americans tend to understand contemporary politics in racial terms, both explicitly and at a more subtle, symbolic level (Edsall and Edsall 1991; Kinder and Sanders 1996; McConahay 1986; McConahay and Hough 1976; see also Mendelberg 2001; Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002).<sup>1</sup>

The association of many policies (e.g., crime, capital punishment, welfare, spending on the poor, food stamps, family values, child care, gay rights, and immigration) with race—in

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, the racial divide is substantial in American public opinion even on nonracial policies, such as general government spending on social services, education, and assistance for the poor (Tate 1993; Dawson 1994; Smith and Seltzer 2000; Kinder and Winter 2001) and on values, such as egalitarianism, the optimal size of government, and the general fairness of the American political system (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Kinder and Winter 2001).

political discourse and among white Americans as well as black Americans—is pervasive (Winter 2006; Federico 2004; Glaser 2002; Kinder and Winter 2001; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Gilens 1995, 1999, 2005; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997; Peffley and Hurwitz 2002; Hurwitz, Peffley, and Sniderman 1997; Gilens, Sniderman, and Kuklinski 1998; Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997; Frymer 1999). Accordingly, understanding how racial considerations operate among Americans is critical to explaining their policy judgments on a host of policy issues.

In this paper, I first introduce the current theories on the roles of white racial attitudes on the formation of their policy preferences. Then, I put the theories of racial attitudes on a broader context of information processing by which individual's policy judgments about racial matters as well as other policy issues can be better understood not only by one's predispositions but also by the extent, and the way, of acquiring and processing incoming information. In this exercise, I put emphasis on the concept of cognitive engagement. On this account, I contend that the effects of racial attitudes on policy judgments will be either moderated or reinforced to the extent, and by the way, that individuals utilize new information in making policy judgments.

## 2. THEORIES OF WHITES' RACIAL POLICY PREFERENCES

“Racism” has been considered to be the primary ingredient in whites' opinions on race issues, although the idea of biological racism is largely a thing of the past and norms of racial equality are established far beyond doubt (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Schuman et al. 1997). Jim Crow racism no longer exists (or is waning but does not disappear), yet new forms of racism lie behind much of whites' contemporary opposition to race-targeted public policies. Racial resentment, prejudices, and stereotypes, along with the values intermingled with them, such as individual effort, self-reliance, and achievement, create the opposition to public efforts to help black Americans (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Schuman et al. 1997; Sears et al. 1997; Sear, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000).

Meanwhile, although many ordinary Americans are incapable of ideological thought and are often oblivious even to ideological cues, they still think about racial issues in terms of political ideology (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997). Since racial issues are inherently linked to the issue of the proper role of government in terms of spending tax money and regulating public policies, political ideology, especially conservative ideology, they are as responsible for white racial policy preferences as their policy preferences in other issue areas (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; see also Kuklinski et al. 1997).

Roughly speaking, then, whites' opposition to racial policy is an amalgam of racial resentment, prejudices, stereotypes and traditional American values centered on individualism and conservative political ideology. In other words, white citizens' racial policy preferences are determined by racial predispositions, which interplay with the values such as “individualism” (defined as self-reliance and autonomy of all persons), and conservative political ideology (in terms of the legitimacy of governmental intervention to protect core rights, provide equal opportunity, and ensure individual autonomy). I now provide a deeper explanation of these theories.

## 2.1. New Forms of Racism

Despite substantial disagreement among scholars about to what extent racism is appropriately applied to contemporary whites' attitudes, racial predispositions has been at the center of research on race matters.

Several conceptualizations exist about new forms of racism. According to the "symbolic" or "modern" racism perspective, contemporary racism is the conjunction of affective responses to blacks and cherished American values, yet non-racial values, like work ethic, self-reliance, impulse control, and obedience of authority (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Sears 1988; Sears et al. 1997, 2000). Whites do not oppose equal opportunity, but oppose a "free ride" of blacks who are seen as not leading lives consistent with the ethic of individual responsibility. Negative feelings toward blacks are acquired early in life in (white) American culture and persist into adulthood. Whites express their negative, stereotyped resentment indirectly and symbolically in terms of resistance to preferential treatment and support for individual responsibility, rather than through overt support for segregation (Sears 1988; Mendelberg 2001). In short, Kinder and Sanders (1996) claim that:

Animosity toward blacks is expressed today less in the language of inherent, permanent, biological difference, and more in the language of American individualism, which depicts blacks as unwilling to try and too willing to take what have not earned (124)...Racial resentment remains a very popular and exceedingly potent force in white opinion. ...Views on politics and society are still powerfully shaped by the black image in the white mind (127).

The "aversive" racism perspective (see Dovidio, Evans, and Tyler 1986; Kovel 1970), which is the version in social psychology for symbolic or modern racism, highlights the distinction between "implicit" and "explicit" attitudes. Aversive racism is another form of prejudice of many whites, who endorse egalitarian values and regard themselves as nonprejudiced, but discriminate blacks in subtle, rationalizable ways. According to this perspective, many whites, who "consciously" or "sincerely" support egalitarian principles and believe themselves to be nonprejudiced, harbor negative feelings and beliefs about blacks "unconsciously." The "unconscious negative feelings and beliefs" are implicit whereas the "conscious, self-reported egalitarian attitudes" are explicit. Aversive racism theorists believe that the decline of old-fashioned racism is genuine and that most whites are now genuinely committed to the principles of racial equality. But, whites continue to have lingering negative feelings toward blacks. And "this conflict between egalitarian values and anti-black affect causes anxiety and discomfort, especially in the presence of black people" (Sears et al. 2000, 17).

With a little different emphasis on racial resentment of whites, Entman and Rojecki (2000) hold that subtle forms of racial thinking, which have evolved over the past half-century, have left most whites with a complex amalgam of ideas and feelings better labeled as "ambivalence" or "animosity" than "racism." These authors claim that "the majority of white Americans experience ambivalent thoughts and feelings about African Americans, a complex mixture of animosity and yearning for racial harmony" (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 3). They contend that:

Opposition, say, to busing for school integration or to affirmative action in itself does not indicate racial animosity. People might and do oppose such policies for other reasons. But animosity tends to be associated with whites' rejection of open-minded deliberation or racial inequality as a high priority public policy problem (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 22).

What matters here is "whites' rejection of open-minded deliberation" and "the black image in the white mind." This thesis suggests that whites' opposition to race-targeted public policies is driven by the absence of open-minded, conscious effort to control the black image in their mind and unwillingness to recognize the race matters as an important public policy problem.

## 2.2. Principled Conservatism

The politics-centered approach is the most powerful counter argument to racism theories. This approach arose primarily out of skepticism about the causal role of racism in determining opposition to contemporary racial politics as proposed in the new forms of racism models mentioned above. In politics-centered perspective, a central question is whether or not race and racism have major influences over whites' attitudes toward racial policy: Race matters, but it is more of a question of principle rather than racism and racism also matters most among the less educated (Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; see also Sears et al. 2000 for review). Sniderman and colleagues (2000, 1999, 1993, 1986) claim that "racial prejudice is no longer the paramount factor dominating the positions that white Americans take on issues of race" (Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell 2000, 268-9).

Rather, Americans' disagreement about the politics of race stems from "clash between competing conceptions of the obligations of government and the responsibilities of citizens. Sniderman and Carmines (1997) argue that:

It is not possible to understand either without understanding that the contemporary debate over racial policy is driven primarily by conflict over what government should try to do, and only secondly over what it should try to do for blacks... [The questions] of whether racial policies are good has come to center on whether blacks will be better off as a result of them and of whether the means by which policies are to make blacks better off are fair matter. And both questions are associated with politics in general centered on proper roles of government rather than politics of race.

...

Ascribing opposition to racial policies only to racial resentment leads us to center on a normative/societal conformity of white citizens between racial norms and racial policy preferences and thus to overlook the fact that there are multiple agendas in racial politics. A normative/societal conformity must be considered as a major factor in the agenda like open housing and desegregation. But in the agenda like affirmative action and government setasides programs not only race but also politics (in terms of political ideology) matter (127).

The politics of race has evolved into a variety of distinct "policy agendas," such as equal treatment, social welfare for blacks, and race-conscious policies (e.g., affirmative action). Whites' attitudes vary considerably across these areas in three ways. Their policy attitudes cluster within each area rather than reflecting consistent support or opposition to all racial

policies across agendas. And opposition to each set of policies is determined more by its unique politics than by racial animus or group interests (Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Therefore, “political” considerations are integral part of white Americans’ racial policy preferences, especially for affirmative action. Race is defined by the clash of competing ideological commitments, rather than race defining the ideological clash, and current racism, whatever its forms, is not as dominant as it was.

Therefore, political and ideological considerations are much more significant in citizens’ mind than in the 1960s and 1970s, and whites’ attitudes toward blacks are just one of a number of factors needed to understand white opposition to affirmative action. In short, whites who dislike blacks may support affirmative action and whites who like blacks may oppose it (see Sniderman and Carmines 1997).<sup>2</sup> Not all individuals who oppose affirmative action are racially prejudiced. Not all individuals who support affirmative action like blacks.

### 2.3. Social Structural Theories

Social structural theories posit that race matters, but primarily as an expression of other forces, such as realistic conflicts of group interest or the desire to maintain the ingroup’s position in the social hierarchy (Bobo 1983; Bobo and Kluegel 1993). From this perspective, whites’ political responses to racial issues should be driven by zero-sum competition with blacks for jobs, promotions, admission slots to colleges, government contracts, or other goods. Thus, their opposition to racially ameliorative policies—and their antipathy toward the civil rights movement, its leaders, and even blacks themselves—can be explained by the threat blacks pose to whites’ privileges. Racial conflicts of interest may be sufficient to cause negative inter-group attitudes, but they may not be necessary. According to social identity theory, the tendency to give favored outcomes to fellow ingroup members and discriminate against outgroup members occur even in experimentally formed groups that lack any history of conflict or competition over limited resources. Indeed no prior interaction or relationship with their other ingroup members is needed to develop antipathy to an outgroup.

Social dominance theory begins with the assumption of a social stratification system that distinguishes dominant and subordinate groups: human societies tend to be structured as group-based social hierarchies (Sidanius 1993; Sidanius and Pratto 1993, 2001). Dominant groups enjoy a disproportionate amount of power, status, and economic privilege relative to subordinate groups. Within social dominance theory, then, “the American dilemma” is simply a special case of more general forces that tend to maintain the relative hegemony of some social groups over others.

## 3. INFORMATION, PREDISPOSITIONS, AND POLICY PREFERENCES

An extensive body of research has examined the question of how individuals make political judgments (Simon 1985; Chaiken and Trope 1999; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Fiske and Taylor 1991; Lodge and McGraw 1995; Zaller and Feldman 1992; Lau and Redlawsk 1994, 1997, 2001a, 2001b). Great progress has been made in our understanding of the mental

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<sup>2</sup> According to Sniderman and Carmines (1997), “Looking at only at the 25 percent of the public whose attitudes toward blacks is most favorable, we discovered that opposition to affirmative action in this group is overwhelming, with between 7 and 8 out of every 10 objecting it” (144).

mechanisms and processes that underlie individuals' formulation of political judgments. Three major arguments regarding opinion formation stand out. First, individuals typically do not reason about their political judgments in a rational and calculating manner (Converse 1964; Kinder 1983).<sup>3</sup> Second, many individuals lack not only relevant political knowledge but also the motivation and ability to thoroughly consider new information (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Zaller 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Carmines and Stimson 1989). Third, many individuals almost always rely on simple, easy-to-execute decision rules, rather than spending the time and effort to examine and acquire "encyclopedic" information (Simon 1985; Lupia 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Lupia, McCubbins, and Popkin 2000).<sup>4</sup>

I do not dispute the importance and validity of these arguments. Rather, I contend that the scholarly obsession with the nature of opinion formation has underestimated another aspect of opinion formation: individuals' use of new information available from the environment. Along the lines of my argument, an increasing number of studies in social and political psychology have attempted to take a closer look at the role of cognitive engagement with new information when individuals make political judgments (Chaiken and Trope 1999; Bargh 1994, 1999; see Lodge and McGraw 1995; Lau 1995; Lau and Redlawsk 2001b; Taber, Lodge, and Glathar 2001). These studies find that the extent to which individuals acquire and process new information, and the way they do so, make a substantial difference in political judgments. The underlying assumption of this approach is that some individuals are responsive to information available in the environment, and that, for those who are, political judgments will be driven not only by preexisting values, beliefs, and attitudes (i.e., priors or predispositions), but also by the extent and manner of information acquisition (Lau 1995; Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2001a, 2001b; see also Chaiken and Trope 1999; Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Some individuals, under certain conditions, are more likely to process and acquire new information, and thereby are more likely to improve their understanding of the issues, hold more considered understandings, and justify their policy judgments with a better reasoning (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1992; Mansbridge 1983; Iyengar, Luskin, and Fishkin 2003; Druckman 2004; Druckman and Nelson 2003).

This does not mean prior attitudes play an insignificant role in policy judgments. Rather, taking the extent and mode of information acquisition and processing into account, yields a more precise understanding of the nature of opinion formation. In other words, it is critical for scholars to take a more comprehensive account of the roles that mental constructs (i.e., predispositional factors) and procedural factors (i.e., information processing) play together in producing individuals' political judgments. Doing so will improve our understanding of how individuals make political judgments. As Taber, Lodge, and Glathar (2001) contend, "We have focused too heavily on the content and structure of beliefs and have paid too little attention to cognitive process" (198). In other words, we have exclusively focused on "chronically accessible political constructs" (e.g., political predispositions or schemas, such as party identification, political ideology, belief systems, and knowledge structures like political awareness, sophistication, and political ideology in Conversian terms). And the way

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<sup>3</sup> It is known that most individuals tend to be "muddled incompetents," instead of "adroit practitioners" of information processing, anchoring their political judgments on preexisting beliefs, values, and attitudes.

<sup>4</sup> By encyclopedic information, I follow the term by Lupia (1994), referring to objective, factual information.

that the new information is actually gathered and transformed into political judgments has been relatively neglected.

In what follows, I address the scholarly discussions about the causal mechanism among information, predispositions, and policy preferences. To begin with, I discuss on-line (OL) and memory-based (MB) processes of political judgments. Next, I present dual-process models and theories of automatic and controlled process, both of which have been at the center of research in social psychology to examine social judgments. I highlight critical functions of cognitive engagement as a determinant of political judgments about race matters, drawing on dual-process models and theories of automatic and controlled processing. I argue that different levels of cognitive engagement with incoming information and different types of information that individuals process make a significant difference in policy judgments on matters concerning race.

### **3.1. On-line versus Memory-based Models: Information Acquisition and Processing**

Studies on political judgments can be sorted into two broad categories: those concerned with the structure and mental representation of political objects, such as candidates or issues and those concerned with the dynamics and mechanisms of cognitive processes underlying political judgments (Lodge and McGraw 1995; Lau 1995; Lodge and Taber 2001; Wyer and Ottati 1993; Wyer and Srull 1989).

On the one hand, research focusing on chronically accessible political constructs (e.g., belief system, attitude, and stereotype) is concerned with estimating their consistent and reliable effects on political judgments and behavior (Campbell et al. 1964; Krosnick 2002; Kinder and Sanders 1996). An extensive body of research on political memory (e.g., political sophistication, awareness, and knowledge) has developed measures of cognitive structure of the information stored in memory and examined consequences of it in policy judgments (Converse 1964; Luskin 1987; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Zaller 1992). According to these studies, new information is encountered, and some of it is stored in long-term memory. When a judgment is needed, individuals search long-term memory for information and use the retrieved information to make a judgment.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, scholars, taking a closer look at the dynamics of cognitive processes, posit that political judgments and decision-making are formed on-line, in which individual's affective tally is continuously updated with new information. This approach is concerned with identifying the processes and dynamics by which individuals use new information to form political judgments. Thus, the way in which new information is acquired and processed is considered a fundamental building block in this approach. According to Lodge and colleagues, individuals integrate the evaluative implications of new information by

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<sup>5</sup> In the process of computing judgments, the accessibility of a concept in memory is determined in part by the frequency with which the concept has been used in the past. Life goals, values, and past experiences can influence the frequency with which certain concepts have been used and thus can produce differences in the chronic accessibility of these concepts. Also, events that one experiences a short time before information is received also can activate concepts that are used to interpret this information and, as a result, can influence judgments of the object to which the information refers (Wyer and Srull 1989; Zaller 1992). Another determinant of the concepts a person is likely to bring to bear on information is the already acquired knowledge about the person or object to which the information pertains or, alternatively, about a group or category to which the target belongs.

continuously updating an “on-line running tally” when new information is encountered (Lodge and McGraw 1995; Lodge and Taber 2001; Taber, Lodge, and Glathar 2001; Lau 1995; Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2001a, 2001b).

Whether an individual adopts an on-line or memory-based information processing depends on individual and contextual differences. For instance, more sophisticated individuals are more likely to be habitually adept at on-line processing, whereas unsophisticated individuals are more likely to rely on memory-based strategies (McGraw, Lodge, and Stroh 1990). And opinions about the issues that are of great importance to an individual are formed on-line, whereas the issues that are unimportant are more likely to produce memory-based opinions (McGraw, Lodge, and Stroh 1990). As another example, contextual parameters, such as information structure and task complexity, are also considered important regulating conditions for individuals to take on-line or memory-based process to make political judgments (Lau and Redlawsk 2001a). More precisely, memory plays an important role in making a decision when judgmental tasks are complex and information is given in an uncontrolled way; otherwise, the on-line information search is responsible for decision-making.

One of the questions that the two approaches address is about the role of new information in making policy judgments. That is, how much of what kind of new information will enter into the decision calculus? How will individuals look at all, some, little, or none of the available information, and, if attended to, how does this heeded information produce judgments and choice? I turn now to discussing these questions within the framework of dual-process models.

### **3.2. Dual-Process Models**

The idea that there exist two distinct kinds of information processing has been around for as long as philosophers and psychologists have written about the nature of human thought (see Chaiken and Trope 1999). Only in recent years, however, have cognitive scientists proposed the striking and strong claim that there are two quite separate cognitive systems underlying judgments and decision-making (see Chaiken and Trope 1999; Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Presently, dual-process theories are ubiquitous. There are dual-process theories of attribution (Trope 1986; Uleman, Newman, and Moskowitz 1996), perception (Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Gilbert 1989; Zárate, Sanders, and Garza 2000), stereotyping and prejudice (Devine 1989), persuasion (Chaiken 1980; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Chaiken and Trope 1999; Chaiken and Eagly 1993), mental control (Wegner 1994; Wenzlaff and Wegner 2000), self-regulation (Metcalf and Mischel 1999; Bargh 1994, 1997), emotion (Teasdale 1999; van Reekum and Scherer 1997), and personality (Epstein 1998).

Despite diverse versions and focuses of dual-process models, they commonly posit that: (1) when individuals are sufficiently motivated and have enough cognitive resources available, they engage in conscious, elaborated, and effortful information seeking and processing; (2) individuals' different levels of cognitive engagement with the incoming information make a difference in policy judgments; and, more precisely, (3) as cognitive engagement with the incoming information increases, its relative influence on policy judgments becomes stronger. Individuals who have their own motivation for correct or optimal judgments are likely to take their judgmental tasks more seriously, invest more effort, and bear more of the responsibility of decision-making (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, 1990; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Chaiken and Trope 1999; see Kuklinski et al. 2001). Among other



dual-process models, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) have become increasingly popular with researchers over the past decade. Here, I briefly present these two models.

In HSM, heuristic processing is said to involve use of simple, well-learned, and readily accessible decision rules like “experts are always right,” “the majority is correct,” or “statistics don’t lie.” Heuristic processing is the default processing mode; individuals will use decision shortcuts unless special circumstances intervene. Individuals will perform systematic processing when circumstances (1) make them feel an unusually great need to be accurate, defend an attitude, or create a positive impression; and (2) offer enough time and cognitive capacity to permit more effortful processing. This processing involves the active, effortful scrutiny of all relevant information and therefore demands considerable cognitive capacity (Chaiken, Liberman and Eagly 1989; Chen and Chaiken 1999).

Similarly, in ELM (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), elaboration likelihood is the extent to which the impact of a persuasive message is caused by the arguments contained in the message (high elaboration) versus peripheral aspects of the message (i.e., message source and the persuasion situation) (low elaboration). As in the heuristic-systematic processing model, it is assumed that when people are low in ability or motivation, they will not engage in high elaboration. Then, judgments will be based mostly on highly salient peripheral cues. When people possess both capacity and motivation, they perform a detailed analysis of the message. They consider argument strength as well as grasp an opportunity to correct for effects of any potentially biasing peripheral cues (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Petty and Wegener 1999).

In short, dual-process models assume that individuals have the cognitive flexibility of choosing either path of high or low elaboration and/or heuristic or systematic information processing to make political judgments, depending on their motivation and cognitive ability (Chaiken and Trope 1999; Eagly and Chaiken 1993).

### **3.3. Automatic and Controlled Processes**

Of late, researchers in social cognition have documented that most individuals are unintentional or unconscious in their judgmental tasks, and that much of information processing occurs automatically—that is, spontaneously, unconsciously, uncontrollably, and effortlessly (Bargh 1994, 1997; Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996; Fazio and Williams 1986). Certain attitudes become activated automatically by the mere presence of external stimuli and then affect judgments and behaviors (Bargh, Chaiken, Gendler, and Pratto 1992; Bargh, Chaiken, Raymond, and Hymes 1996). Automatic processing involves the unintentional or spontaneous activation of some well-learned set of associations or responses (e.g., racial prejudice and stereotypes) that have been developed through repeated activation in one’s life time. Automatic processing likely occurs when less information is available and information recently accessed is affectively congruent with the priors (Bargh 1994, 1997; Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996).

In contrast, controlled processing is intentional and requires individuals’ active attention to the information object. Studies show that the ultimate judgments are mediated by conscious processing of information (Dovidio et al. 1997; Devine 1989; Monteith and Devine 1993; Monteith, Sherman, and Devine 1998; Fazio and Dunton 1997). Devine (1989), for example, argues for a two-stage model of prejudice in which the perceptual phase is automatic (i.e., activation of stereotypes by the target individual’s features), whereas the

second phase is a matter of conscious choice, driven by one's relevant values. She demonstrates that "controlled process can inhibit the effects of automatic processing when the implications of such processing compete with goals to establish or maintain a nonprejudiced identity" (Devine 1989, 15). And, in situations in which controlled process is precluded or interfered with, automatic processing effects may exert the greatest influence on responses.

At present, there is considerable debate concerning the efficacy of efforts to control stereotype activation and application (see Monteith, Sherman, and Devine 1998). Some research suggests that intentional control over activation and use of stereotypes is possible even if difficult. Other research suggests that efforts at control may backfire, producing unintended heightened activation and use of stereotypes. Taking automatic and controlled processes of information together, the question is how often, and under what conditions, the automatic process is overridden by the controlled process. Control over automatic activation of preconscious attitudes requires three things: (1) awareness of the influence, or at least the possibility of influence, by preconscious attitudes; (2) motivation to exert the control of it; and (3) enough attentive capacity (or lack of distractions) at the time to engage in processing information (see Wegner 1994). Awareness of the automatic effect is necessary for the motivation to be engaged, and for the motivation to operate to control the automatic impulse, it must be supported by sufficient processing capacity. Given that the controlled process requires all three of these features to be in place, it is difficult to see that there are many real-world circumstances in which all three are present. Even with the best of cognitive engagement, one cannot control an influence if one is not aware of its operation, or at least its potential for operating (Devine 1989).

To put it similarly yet simply, Fazio (1990; and Fazio and Dunton 1997) posits that motivation and opportunity to engage in the issues determine whether individuals follow a relatively spontaneous process driven by the influence of automatically activated attitudes or a more deliberative process characterized by effortful and conscious analysis. In the case of race-related judgments, the relevant motivation involves a desire to control seemingly prejudiced reactions and to think and learn about the issue at hand.

To summarize, the distinction between automatic and controlled processes basically lies in the extent to which individuals exert cognitive effort to involve in the issue at hand by acquiring and processing the incoming, relevant information. The more time and effort one expends in acquiring and processing relevant information, the more likely he or she is to take controlled process than automatic process.

#### 4. RACE MATTERS AND COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT

Race has been, and is, not only an important social and political issue that has a great deal of implications for American life, but also an excellent case that allows scholars to build and test their theories about the mass public's social and political cognition, perception, and judgments (see Mendelberg 2005). Progress in our understanding in this highly packed sub-field of public opinion study is noticeable (for a review, see Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Mendelberg 2005; Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000). But the progress is centered on certain aspect of the problems: as Sniderman and Carmines (1997) put it, "the problem of race, now as ever, is defined...as a problem in the *hearts and minds* of white Americans" (5, italics in original). Major studies on white racial attitudes have been based on the proposition that

white citizens rely heavily on anti-black attitudes that are principally affective and negative toward black Americans when they are asked to make policy judgments on race matters and race-related matters (Winter 2006; Federico 2004; Glaser 2002; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997; Peffley and Hurwitz 2002; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Valentino 1999). These attitudes are learned at some earlier point in their life time, and thus immutable (Sears 1986, 1988; Schuman et al. 1997).

It follows that scholarly focus on anti-black attitudes in accounting for the formation of racial policy preferences is likely to underestimate the role that cognitive elements might play, thus undermining attempts to observe its subsequent effects. Thus, for instance, cognitive elements, such as general political knowledge and race-specific knowledge, are considered to matter little in determining whites' policy judgments on race issues (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Sears et al. 2000; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Federico and Sidanius 2002; Bobo and Hutchings 1996). In the same vein, white citizens are not engaged in seeking new information about race matters; they do not need to try to reconcile newly acquire information with their global attitudes toward blacks. Rather, they simply base their policy judgments on race matters on their global attitudes toward blacks. Therefore, as the argument goes, individual differences in seeking and acquiring new information about race matters among white citizens warrant no successful explanation about one's racial policy preferences.

Nonetheless, in another respect, evidence shows that white citizens' policy judgments on race matters are fragile (Nelson 2004; Kuklinski and Hurley 1994; Stoker 1998; Hochschild 2000). We do not have any *ex ante* reason or indisputable evidence that leads us to think that white citizens have exceptionally well-developed true opinions on race issues. Instead, many white citizens are ambivalent about their issue position on race. They are vulnerable to the ways that issues are framed (Entman and Rojecki 2000; Nelson 2004; Druckman 2004; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Kuklinski and Hurley 1994; Stoker 1998) and the ways that that racial cues prime anti-black predispositions (Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002; Huber and Lapinski 2006; Winter 2006). Issue frames can unconsciously associate policies with white citizens' anti-black attitudes, and racial cues can unconsciously activate white citizens' anti-black attitudes (Gilens 2005; Winter 2006). As Valentino, Hutchings, and White (2002) claim,

stereotype-inconsistent cues may...suppress priming by *making people spend time thinking about how to reconcile the new information with prior beliefs*...when campaigns emphasize policies that have been linked previously to blacks, they boost the impact of racial attitudes on candidate evaluations...when they [campaigns] violate those stereotypes by presenting blacks in a favorable light, or present images of nonstereotyped groups in these negative roles, that impact declines. When citizens are *aware* of the racial cues in a particular message, they seem to suppress racial thinking (88, emphasis added).

Similarly, as Mendelberg (2001) implies, conscious processing of verbal racial cues (i.e., explicit racial cues) allows those viewing an explicit appeal to identify racial content and reject it in favor of widespread egalitarian norms. Thus judgmental tasks on race issues normally demand less conscious thought, but certain messages boost conscious thought when doing judgmental tasks on race issues.

These implications are perfectly compatible with dual-process models and theories of automatic and controlled information processing. That is, the power of racial attitudes depends on levels of cognitive engagement with the information available from the

environment that drive racial attitudes to be either automatic or controlled. Regarding this, the social psychology literature provides plenty of evidence (Devine 1989; Devine and Monteith 1993; Fazio and Dunton 1997; Wegener and Petty 1995). For instance, individuals for whom racial attitudes are significant are more likely to respond quickly and easily to the race-targeted public policies without expending much cognitive effort to seek and process the relevant information. Individuals for whom race is emotion-evoking are likely to weight race more heavily in judging race-based public policies. In contrast, individuals who are well aware of their racial attitudes are likely to expend relatively more cognitive effort to seek and process the relevant information and thus correct their initial considerations driven by negative racial feelings toward blacks. Individuals motivated to control their seemingly race-based, prejudiced reaction are less likely to use race in judging and expressing their policy judgments (Devine 1989; Monteith, Sherman, and Devine 1998; Fazio and Dunton 1997; Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996).

Race may be somewhat idiosyncratic or anomalous in the minds and hearts of white Americans in a sense that anti-black attitudes are a powerful predictor of white opinions on a host of issues. Yet it is still possible for white Americans to apply their global political beliefs or the social norms of racial equality to implanted racial policy issues if they consciously control their anti-black attitudes. Critical to accounting for white Americans' policy judgments on race matters, as well as other policy matters, is to examine who is more or less cognitively involved in the given information about race matters, under what conditions.

## 5. CLOSING REMARKS

A large body of research under the dominant research program<sup>6</sup> is based on the assumption that the role of cognition in the formation of racial policy preferences is redundant or nil, as racial issues are “emotionally charged” and “cognitively unchallenging” (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Carmines and Stimson 1989). Instead, political and racial predispositions dominate factors that determine racial policy preferences (Kinder and Sears 1981; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears et al. 1997, 2000; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Hurwitz and Peffley 1998).

This conclusion is not surprising at all because the studies of white racial policy preferences in the discipline of political science have focused exclusively on political and racial “predispositions,” which is fixed after some time point of one’s life, rather than ongoing “cognitive” and “procedural” components. However, evidence from social psychology supports the opposite idea—cognitive and procedural factors play a significant role in the opinion formation of race-targeted public policies (Chaiken and Troppe 1999; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Fiske and Taylor 1991; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Bargh 1994, 1997; Levine, Borgida, and Sullivan 2000; Fazio and Williams 1986; Lavine et al. 1996).

I argue that we need to incorporate an additional element of cognitive engagement into the analyses of the formation of racial policy preferences, assuming that to the extent that individuals use relevant information, they would arrive at different understandings of race matters. Racial policy preferences are driven not only by political and racial predispositions,

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<sup>6</sup> By the dominant research program, I refer to the studies that have examined white attitudes regarding race-targeted public policies focusing on white racial prejudices/stereotypes/resentment.

but also by the different levels of cognitive engagement in issues (Singer 2002; Goyder 1987; Bargh 1994, 1997). I do not argue that the roles of personal traits and individual predispositions on racial matters are invalid if we take cognitive factors into account. Rather, the effects of political and racial predispositions on racial policy preferences are moderated if individuals expend considerable time and effort and if they can consciously control automatically activated negative feelings toward blacks and regulate stereotypical opinions.

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