Marginalization Matters:
Rethinking Race in the Analysis of State Politics and Policy

Joe Soss
University of Minnesota
jbsoss@umn.edu

Sarah K. Bruch
University of Wisconsin-Madison
bruch@wisc.edu

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Race relations in the United States have changed dramatically since the 1960s. For African Americans, in particular, the transition has been momentous. Centuries of slavery, followed by a century of Jim Crow and deep ghettoization, once confined blacks to a sharply delineated subordinate status. In the mid-twentieth century, however, insurgent political action ruptured the racial regime (McAdam 1982). Meaningful citizenship rights were extended to racial minorities through landmark victories such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Branch 1998; Quadagno 1994). In the decades that followed, levels of anti-black prejudice declined and Americans increasingly endorsed norms of racial equality and opportunity (Schuman et al. 1997). As *de jure* discrimination faded, African Americans entered dominant societal institutions in larger numbers and a substantial black middle class emerged (Cohen 1999; Patillo-McCoy 1999; Patillo 2007).

In the post-civil-rights era, however, race has continued to function as a mainspring of U.S. politics and a powerful source of social inequality. Racial disparities today are no mere remnant of the past. They reflect ongoing logics of classification and practice. Old-fashioned racism, rooted in overt discrimination and images of innate inferiority, has been supplanted by more subtle processes of racial implication, cultural contrast, and social stigma (Mendelberg 2001; Loury 2002). Race in America has become a more complex terrain, reshaped by immigration and growing diversity (Stokes, Melendez, and Rhodes-Reed 2001; Harris and Lin 2008). Yet the status of African Americans has remained distinctive, even as the hopeful story of the black middle class has taken a share of the public spotlight away from the intense compounds of disadvantage and disorder found in low-income black communities (Wacquant 2008).

In the U.S. today, blacks and whites experience strikingly different treatment in a wide range of societal domains, such as retail transactions (Ayres 2003), the mortgage loan industry
(Munnell et al. 1996), the insurance industry (Wissoker et al. 1998), the healthcare sector (Schulman et al. 1999), housing markets (Yinger 1995), and labor markets (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003; Pager 2007). As an official matter of public policy, de jure discrimination is illegal and discredited. Yet the black-white divide continues to underwrite disparities in policy domains as diverse as education (Orfield and Lee 2007), housing (Fischer 2003), criminal justice (Western 2006), welfare provision (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008), healthcare (Barr 2008), transportation (Bullard, Torres, and Johnson 2004), and environmental protection (Cutter 1995).

Against this backdrop, social scientists have returned to the study of race, politics, and public policy in large numbers. A major strand of this literature has explored how race may help explain differences in policy choice and implementation across state and local jurisdictions. Racial effects have emerged as a standard hypothesis in this literature and, in the process, have become closely linked to a specific operational measure: the relative frequency of racial minorities in policy-relevant populations. Diverse policy outcomes are analyzed, in this approach, via multivariate models that capture the impact of race by including the minority percent of a jurisdiction’s residential population, policy target group, or public officials.

The roots of this approach can be traced most directly to models of racial threat (Key 1949; Blalock 1967), although minority-percentage measures are also justified in many studies through appeals to models of racial contact (Allport 1954) and group-based political representation (Mansbridge 1999). These theoretical traditions offer a rich basis for hypothesis testing and interpretation. Yet as the field has progressed, matters of theory have often seemed to take a backseat to – or to serve as a mere backdrop for – empirical demonstrations of the relationship between minority frequency and policy variation. Racial-percentage measures have achieved something akin to a taken-for-granted status. They are expected elements of a well-
specified model of policy choice, and are often treated as a sufficient basis for capturing racial effects. Racial percentage measures are easy to obtain and, having been used many times before, offer advantages of comparability and replication across studies. Thus, a researcher who sets out to “include race” in a study of policy variation seems well-advised to reach for the tried and true measure of racial-group composition.

There is a significant risk in this dynamic for a field that is producing important insights into policy dynamics and racial politics. As researchers follow well-worn grooves, the traditional relationship between theorizing and measure selection can be turned on its head. Rather than digging into theoretical texts (or theorizing anew) to identify appropriate measures, researchers may simply adopt the prevailing measures and rely on conventional theoretical frames to interpret results. Finding that the minority percentage has a significant effect, the researcher may turn to a ready stock of narratives, one of which is sure to fit the observed relationship. As the minority percent rises, perhaps whites experience greater threat and respond with policies that are less beneficent and more focused on control; or perhaps positive interracial contact becomes more likely and whites respond with policies that are more beneficent and less focused on control; or perhaps white responses become less decisive as minority numbers pass some threshold needed for meaningful minority representation and policy influence.

One way to avoid this analytic impasse is to return to the more basic task of theorizing race itself. Having built an important body of findings based on composition measures, perhaps it is time to reflect on what different theoretical traditions can tell us and how they might move the field forward. In this paper, we do so by returning to the core questions of how race should be conceptualized and how race relations should matter for policy design and implementation. Drawing on constructivist theories, we suggest that greater attention should be paid to the
organized field of race relations and the ways that racial groups are positioned vis-à-vis one another and dominant societal institutions. Four observations motivate this analytic turn.

First, minority-percentage measures are usually justified by models of racial threat and contact. Yet a careful reading of the seminal works that established these hypotheses does not support a narrow focus on group composition. To the contrary, as we argue below, the key works in question present conditional and relational accounts of racial composition and its effects. Indeed, they emphasize the very ideas that animate our call to expand the measures used in the field – i.e., the terms of race relations and the nature of group positions. Thus, the theories most widely embraced in this field of study actually encourage us to contextualize group composition measures with indicators more closely tied to relational and positional modes of analysis.

Second, as researchers have focused on racial threat and contact, a growing divide has emerged between empirical studies of policy choice and contemporary developments in social theory. Among students of state policy and politics, race is widely conceptualized as a social construction. Yet the measures we use to capture racial effects reflect little concern for race as a constructed field of social classifications, positions, and practices. Our measures focus on state-level differences in the relative frequency of racial groups without attending to state-level differences in the organization of race relations. By contrast, a major tradition of social theory – running from Max Weber through Herbert Blumer to more contemporary theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Rogers Brubaker, Claire Jean Kim, Lawrence Bobo, Loïc Wacquant, and Cathy Cohen – encourages us to explicate race in just this manner. By engaging the insights of these scholars more directly, researchers can bridge an important divide between theory and empirical research and develop research strategies with great potential to advance the field.
Third, the historical developments sketched in our opening paragraphs suggest that a complex “field of racial positions” has emerged in the U.S. (Kim 1999), defined by diverse racial categories and by the division of racial populations into subgroups that occupy strikingly different positions in relation to dominant institutions. If racial disparities today are more than a mere remnant of the past, then our theoretical assumptions must reflect this uneven landscape of racial incorporation. Models of racial threat and contact are poorly equipped for this task because they are at root “white-centric” accounts: their explanations focus on white-majority responses to a single subordinate racial minority (typically African Americans). In an era of increasing diversity and immigration, however, “the relative locations of [multiple racial/ethnic groups] are in flux and the economic or political threat that any one group may pose to another is not self-evident” (Oliver and Wong 2003: 568; Bobo 1999). Moreover, in an era of “advanced marginalization” (Cohen 1999; Wacquant 2008), advantaged subgroups of racial minorities are often incorporated in dominant societal institutions and, hence, must be addressed as agents within – not just objects of – hierarchical relations and policy processes.

Fourth, a variety of scholars in recent years have sought to reconnect the study of public policy to the study of citizenship (Ingram and Smith 1993; Mettler and Soss 2004). In the United States, few topics have been more central to this relationship than race (Lieberman 2005). Yet percentage measures of racial composition limit the potential for studies of state policy choice to speak to theories of citizenship. Citizenship is a fundamentally positional concept. In leading theoretical accounts, it is conceptualized as an evolving status in relation to others (Marshall 1964), a matter of “standing” in the civic order (Shklar 1991), and a boundary that specifies positions of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of social roles (Turner 2001). By pursuing a
more positional and relational approach to race, students of state policy choice can pave the way for a more fruitful and direct dialogue with theories of citizenship and democratic incorporation.

The concerns raised by these four observations are partly addressed by recent studies that analyze racial minorities as political actors and legislative representatives (Fording 1997, 2001, 2003; Yates and Fording 2005; King-Meadows and Schaller 2006). By extending group-composition measures to voters and state legislators, such studies acknowledge the importance of positioning in institutions that convey status and facilitate political agency. Theories of racial position and advanced marginalization, however, suggest that we are likely to develop a misleading view of race relations, incorporation, and agency if we focus solely on minority entry into explicitly political institutions. The racial positions that matter for politics and policy choice are likely to emerge from a broader field of societal relations and institutions (Piven 2007).

The challenge, then, is to develop a constructivist account of how racial classifications and positions matter in state policy processes today. To be compelling, such an account must explicate (a) the meaning and operation of race as a basis for classification, positioning, and practice in specific fields of societal relations and (b) the operation of race, so understood, as a basis for choice in settings where actors are authorized to design and implement public policy.

The latter half of this task has recently been addressed by Soss, Fording, and Schram (2008), who develop and test a Racial Classification Model (RCM) of policy choice.1 In this paper, we complement the RCM by addressing the other half of the constructivist charge. The fit

1 The RCM is a cognitive model of policy choice consisting of three propositions. (1) To be effective in designing policies and applying policy tools to specific target groups, policy actors must rely on salient social classifications and group reputations; without such classifications, they would be unable to bring coherence to a complex social world or determine appropriate action. (2) When racial minorities are salient in a policy context, race will be more likely to provide a salient basis for social classification of targets and, hence, to signify target differences perceived as relevant to the accomplishment of policy goals. (3) The likelihood of racially patterned policy outcomes will be positively associated with the degree of policy-relevant contrast in policy actors’ perceptions of racial groups. The degree of contrast, in turn, will be a function of (a) the prevailing cultural stereotypes of racial groups, (b) the extent to which policy actors hold relevant group stereotypes, and (c) the presence or absence of stereotype-consistent cues.
between our approach and the RCM is facilitated by a number of shared premises. Both assume that race is “fundamentally a form of social classification: it arises from social practices of categorization and is deployed as a means of organizing the social world” (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008: 540). Both treat race as a construct that varies across locales, periods, and policy-relevant communities. Both reject white-centrism – and related assumptions of ingroup favoritism, animus toward outgroups, and group threat – in favor of the idea that racial classifications shape the agency of diverse actors within a given field of relations, albeit in potentially different ways. The RCM specifies how racial classifications and understandings guide policy choices. In this paper, we focus on the positional dynamics that stand behind such choice processes – i.e., the configurations of race relations that frame racial understandings, define identities and interests, delimit participants, and organize power and political agency.

We begin by revisiting the origins of the racial threat and contact hypotheses to recover their lost emphasis on the terms of race relations and the nature of group positions. We then turn to constructivist theories to explicate a positional approach to race relations and to identify a set of criteria for measuring locations in the field of racial positions. Turning to the empirical side of our project, we then present a new set of measures designed to capture state-level differences in racial positions of marginality and incorporation. Finally, in our last section, we explain how racial positions should influence policy outcomes, specify a set of hypotheses, and test these hypotheses in the context of contemporary welfare reform. Our analysis shows how explanations based on measures of group composition can be strengthened and given greater precision by combining them with measures of group positioning within race relations.

Revisiting the Classics: From Percentages to Positions
The racial threat hypothesis states that as the relative size of a minority group increases, members of the majority group experience and/or perceive a greater threat to their economic and political dominance; majority-group members respond with more negative attitudes toward the minority group as well as actions to control the minority group and diminish the threat it poses. Empirical evidence for this hypothesis has not always been consistent, but a positive correlation between higher black percentages and more stringent social control has proved to be a remarkably robust finding in the study of welfare provision (Soss et al. 2001; Fording 2003; Fellows and Rowe 2004; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008) and criminal justice policy (Liska and Chamlin 1984; Jackson 1989; Jacobs and Helms 1999; Jacobs and Carmichael 2002). Racial-threat interpretations have, in turn, been bolstered by studies showing that whites express more negative attitudes toward blacks and stronger perceptions of threat in areas with larger minority populations (Taylor 1998; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Fossett and Kiecolt 1989).

The racial threat hypothesis is typically traced to two landmark works of social science: V.O. Key, Jr.’s Southern Politics (1949) and Hubert M. Blalock, Jr.’s Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations (1967). Key and Blalock both devote serious attention to the minority percentages of populations, and both emphasize the mechanism of real or imagined threats to white interests. A closer look at each, however, reveals a more nuanced story in which minority percentages are less than decisive and the broader context of racial positioning matters greatly.

In Southern Politics (1949), V.O. Key set out to explain the distinctive character of politics in the American South and the sources of political differences across southern states and localities. His answers to the two questions were intimately linked. “The hard core of the political South – and the backbone of southern political unity – is made up of those counties and sections of the southern states in which Negroes constitute a substantial proportion of the
population” (1949: 5). White southerners in the “black belt” areas embraced racist beliefs to a greater degree, supported the Democratic Party more strongly, and opposed racially egalitarian agendas with greater ferocity. Southern political unity did not reflect shared interests or bonds of loyalty. Rather, it arose from the “political prowess of the black belts” which “impressed on an entire region a philosophy agreeable to its [distinctive] necessities and succeeded for many decades in maintaining a regional unity in national politics to defend those necessities” (1949: 9).

It is not hard to see why scholars cite Key when using minority-percentage measures to test the racial threat hypothesis. Southern Politics, however, placed little weight on the black percentage of local residents per se. According to Key, the distinctive “necessities” of the black belt did not arise directly from the presence of larger numbers of African Americans. Rather, they arose from the reason that blacks were more prevalent in some locales than others. African Americans were more numerous in the black belt counties because they were brought there as slaves and kept their as sharecroppers working the agricultural fields to generate profits for landed white elites. The root of the matter, for Key, was not the number of African Americans; it was the position that African Americans occupied in deeply exploitative economic and social relations that were integral to local power structures and life patterns. The “racial threat” for black-belt whites had little to do with the kinds of dynamics one might observe in the American states today. Rather, it was the possibility that a whole system of social relations, premised on near-absolute white domination and racial exploitation, might be overturned.

Thus, Key states that black-belt distinctiveness “was not, of course, governed solely by the distribution of Negroes; the areas of heavy Negro concentrations have tended to possess a peculiar economic structure based on large-scale agricultural operations” (1949: 666). In these areas, “the plantation system of agriculture is most highly developed, that the economic system is
most dependent upon black workers, and the white-black socioeconomic system, commonly thought to be characteristic of the entire South, is most highly developed" (1949: 315).

In the black belt counties, white southerners occupied the unstable position of a dominant numerical minority in a system of racial oppression. Emphasizing the importance of positioning, Key observed that “the situation resembles fundamentally that of the Dutch in the East Indies or the former position of the British in India. Here, in the southern black belts, the problem of governance is similarly one of control by a small white minority” (1949: 5). Thus, while African Americans were equally numerous in the black belts of North Carolina and Alabama, the two regions produced sharply different political dynamics because only the latter was characterized by large land operations organized around the exploitation of black labor (Key 1949: 217). Local differences in white political behavior reflected, in Key’s analysis, differences in the racial logics of local social and economic relations.

In contrast to Key’s historical specificity, Hubert Blalock’s *Toward a Theory of Minority Group Relations* (1967) was a landmark effort to produce theory of a general scope in the variable-centered, positivist tradition. Thus, Blalock more than Key provides a clear rationale for focusing on minority-percentage measures in contemporary studies of state policy choice. The most influential chapter of the book is titled “Minority Percentage and Discrimination,” and it advances a large number of propositions asserting a positive relationship between the former and the latter. Here again, however, a closer look suggests more conditional expectations and underscores the mediating effects of relational and positional factors.

*Toward a Theory of Minority Group Relations* is a complex work of empirical theory. In 197 pages, Blalock develops 97 separate propositions about interracial relations, most of which include detailed sub-hypotheses. Blalock did not aim to explain political or policy outcomes per
Rather, he sought to explain variations in the attitudes and behaviors that whites adopt in the context of interracial relations. To gain leverage on his task, Blalock focused on the question of how white motivations combine with aspects of race relations to produce behavioral patterns of disparagement, discrimination, avoidance, and so on.

To organize his answers to this question, Blalock drew on Max Weber’s classic tripartite scheme of status, class, and party (Weber 1947). White responses to racial minorities, he argued, do not follow a single logic. They follow different logics depending on whether whites in a given situation are motivated by status considerations (Chapter 2, 21 propositions), economic considerations (Chapter 3, 31 propositions), or political considerations (Chapter 4, 25 propositions). It is only after his separate analyses of these logics that Blalock turns in Chapter 5 to the question of how whites respond to changes in the minority percentage. As one would expect based on the earlier chapters, his answers are highly conditional.

To the extent that whites are motivated primarily by status concerns, Blalock (1967: 147) suggests that their behaviors should bear little or no relationship to minority percentages. Likewise, Blalock is quick to point out that “not all kinds of discrimination, or measures of inequality, will be correlated with the relative size of the minority” (1967: 145).² A positive linear relationship between minority percentage and white discrimination should be expected only in specific domains of race relations, and only then when political and economic motivations are in relative parity. To the extent that political considerations of power prevail, the positive relationship should exhibit an increasing slope. To the extent that considerations related to economic competition prevail, it should exhibit a decreasing slope.

² Following Gunnar Myrdal (1944), for example, he suggests that whites will approach aspects of race relations that have a plausible connection to matters of intimacy in a uniformly discriminatory way, with little regard for the minority percentage of the population (Blalock 1967: 146).
In each case, Blalock’s predictions are accompanied by a retinue of auxiliary conditions that may dampen or strengthen the predicted relationship. Most concern features of the surrounding economic and political landscape. Two merit special note, however, because they highlight Blalock’s sensitivity to the terms of race relations and the positioning of racial groups.

First, Blalock suggests that the effects of minority percentage should vary depending on whether “color differences have been defined along a continuum [or] as involving two or more distinct sociological groups” (1967: 171). “If identifying characteristics are defined along a continuum… [the positive prediction of the power-threat hypothesis] is not likely” (Proposition 84). Thus, differences in the ways that racial classifications are conceived, Blalock argues, help to explain why larger numbers of racial minorities produce white responses in South Africa and the U.S. that differ from white responses in Brazil and the Caribbean (1967: 143-44, 170-71). The meanings of minority percentages depend on the construction of racial categories.

Second, the degree of threat conveyed by minority numbers also depends, for Blalock, on the relative positions occupied by racial groups. To pose a viable threat to white interests, racial minorities must be in a position to compete. “The greater the average gap between the dominant and minority groups, the less is the perceived threat to the former group, and the less is the need for additional discriminatory practices in order to limit the competitive position of the minority” (1967: 148). Thus, the predictions of the racial threat hypothesis become uncertain when percentage measures are tested in the absence of measures that capture relative group position.

In the literature on racial context and social politics, the racial contact hypothesis usually provides the optimistic counterpart to the racial threat hypothesis.3 Generally traced to Gordon

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3Branton and Jones (2005: 359-60) illustrate the usual opposition: “There are two perspectives on the relationship between racial composition and attitudes. Both perspectives hold that attitudes toward racially based public policies are associated with the racial composition of the area in which individuals reside; however, the nature of the relationship differs between these two perspectives. The intergroup contact literature argues increased interracial
Allport’s classic *the Nature of Prejudice* (1954), the contact hypothesis is usually presented as follows: as the minority percentage rises, interracial contact becomes more common; prejudices grounded in unfamiliarity recede; and more positive racial attitudes, political preferences, and policies emerge. Here again, however, a narrow focus on minority percentages stands at odds with the relational analysis advanced in the original work. Allport embraced a constructivist social psychology in which individual subjectivities emerge from experiences of social relations and practices. “As [the individual] does something, he becomes something” (1954: 470). As a result, Allport was deeply pessimistic about white responses to rising minority numbers under the conditions of existing racial relations. In the absence of significant repositioning, he actually embraced the racial *threat* hypothesis, discerning a “sociocultural law” in the observation that “anti-Negro feeling is most intense where Negro density is greatest” (1954: 220-21).4

Thus, while *The Nature of Prejudice* strongly endorses racial integration as a strategy for reducing prejudice, Allport’s optimism is conditional on efforts to restructure the terms of race relations and the positions of groups within them. Rather than focusing on the minority percentage of a group, Allport’s conception of “contact” emphasizes the importance of personal interactions that are cooperative, oriented toward common goals, legitimated by mutually respected authorities, and organized to equalize participants. Here again, then, a close look at the classic text suggests a need to contextualize indicators of group composition with additional information about how racial groups are positioned in social and political relations.

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4 “A single Japanese or Mexican child in a classroom is likely to be a pet. But let a score move in, and they will certainly be set off from the remainder of the children, and in all probability be regarded as a threat” (Allport 1954: 220).
In sum, contemporary research on race and state policy choice has tended to draw on classic arguments about group percentages without paying close attention to their conditional claims regarding group relations and positions. A key task, then, is to complement this approach with theories that are general in scope, focus explicitly on racial relations and positions, and conceptualize race as a constructed system of social classification. By doing so, researchers can clarify social processes of classification and specify “the field of racial positions” (Kim 1999: 106) relevant to the policy process. In the following section, we take steps toward this goal by engaging constructivist theories of race as a process of classification, positioning, and practice.

Relations and Positions in Social Theories of Race

Constructivist theories suggest that “race has no fixed meaning, but is constructed and transformed sociohistorically” (Omi and Winant 1994: 71). Racial classifications are collective phenomena that emerge from ongoing social processes and patterns of practice. Thus, as one looks across social locales, it is not just the salience and importance of race, or the numerical frequency of racial groups, that varies; it is also the meaning and practice of race itself. Racial categories function as potent “principles of vision and division” that situate actors in social relations and define their meanings for others (Bourdieu 1990). A “group” delineated by a racial category may not be bound together by any active or highly-valued communal relations, and its “members” may share few social experiences in common (Brubaker 2004). Nevertheless, racial categories give rise to meaningful group positions to the extent that they underwrite practices of “social closure” that restrict actors’ abilities to enter into or benefit from particular societal institutions and relations (Weber 1922).

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5 The distinction between group position and “groupness” is well illustrated by E.P. Thompson’s classic The Making of the English Working Class (1963). As Thompson shows in detail, categories of individuals who share related positions in economic and social relations do not, in and of themselves, suffice to constitute “the working class” as a meaningful and coherent group. Rather, the emergence of the working class as a group should be considered
Processes of social closure generate differences in the objective positions occupied by actors as well as the subjective “senses of position” that actors take as natural in their relations with others (Blumer 1958). Indeed, the subjective and objective aspects are deeply entwined: they emerge together from social interaction, and they operate jointly to define the experienced reality of social relations (Bourdieu 1990; Goffman 1974). From this perspective, the key variables in racial analysis are not differences in individual dispositions; they are differences in the logics of social transactions and the positions of actors within them (Tilly 2008).

These insights form the core of an alternative to theories of race and politics that emphasize group-based stereotypes, prejudices, loyalties, and perceptions of threat found among white individuals. The theories we draw on in this paper are diverse but share three key characteristics. They are constructivist in the sense that they treat racial categories and meanings as socially and historically produced (Omi and Winant 1994; Brubaker 2004). They are relational in the sense that they focus on persistent features of ongoing transactions as well as the mechanisms that reproduce or transform them (Emirbayer 1998; Tilly 2008). And they are positional in the sense that they seek to locate actors in social space – vis-à-vis one another, the boundaries of institutions, and the resources relevant to specific fields of interaction (Bourdieu 1990; Blumer 1958). In the discussion that follows, we use these terms, not to denote different theories, but to highlight aspects of theories that share all three properties.

The distinctiveness of this theoretical approach is well-captured by Herbert Blumer’s (1958) rejection of prevailing efforts to conceptualize racial prejudice as an individual attitude that reflects either irrational animus or rational self-interest. Prejudice, he argued, “is fundamentally a matter of relationships between racial groups” (1958: 3). Understood as a “sense

something that “happens” through political and social action. For further discussions of ethnic/racial groupness as an event and ethnic/racial group-making as a project, see Rogers Brubaker (2004).
of group position,” it entails a “feeling of proprietary claim or first rights to scarce and socially
valued goods and resources” – including tangible material goods as well as “such relatively
intangible things as positions of prestige and access to areas of intimacy and privacy” (Bobo and
Tuan 2006: 33). By position, then, Blumer meant one’s rightful position – in the sense conveyed
when a superior complains that a subordinate does not know his or her “place.” Prejudice, in this
rendering, is not an individual emotion; it is a normative force regulating social interaction.6

The sense of group position, Blumer writes, is a “norm and an imperative” that “incites,
cows, and coerces” actors in social relations; it constrains and guides because it “stands for what
ought to be [and] where the two racial groups belong” (1958: 5). “Racial threats,” in this view,
may entail threats to material interests. At a more fundamental level, however, they represent
challenges to the group boundaries that guide social interaction; they imperil the normative order
of things as actors unreflectively assume they should be. Similarly, “the color line” in American
race relations, in this view, may be expressed through the dictates of law or through behaviors of
segregation and discrimination. But these outward manifestations should not to be confused with
the underlying regulator of social conduct and position that is the color line itself.

[The color line] defines the approach of each group to the other, it limits the
degree of access to the other, and it outlines respective modes of conduct toward
each other. … The color line expresses and sustains the social position of the two
groups along two fundamental dimensions – an axis of dominance and
subordination, and an axis of inclusion and exclusion (Blumer 1965: 322).

The two axes identified by Blumer in this quotation help to specify differences in group
position in a way that makes them more tractable for research. Echoing Weber’s concept of

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6 The key point here concerns, not prejudice per se, but rather the ways that social relations are structured and
regulated by social classifications. Thus, Blumer’s conception of prejudice as a “sense of group position” is echoed
by Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990: 131) statement that “the habitus implies a sense of one’s place but also a sense of the
other’s place.” Likewise, just as Blumer argues that prejudice guides the production and normative evaluation of
behavior, Bourdieu (1990: 131) suggests that “the habitus is at once a system of models for the production of
practices and a system of models for the perception and appreciation of practices.” Glenn Loury’s (2002) treatment
of racial stigma parallels Blumer and Bourdieu in both respects.
social closure, Blumer suggests that we must assess a group’s position vis-à-vis the boundaries of particular societal institutions and social relations – i.e., the extent of group inclusion or exclusion. At the same time, we must assess positioning in particular institutions and social relations – i.e., the locations of actors in specific fields of subordination and dominance.

Indeed, these two axes are not unique to Blumer; they recur in a wide variety of efforts to theorize social positioning and category-based relations of inequality. Thus, from Erving Goffman (1963) to Glenn Loury (2002), one finds a consistent emphasis on the dual functions of stigmatizing markers: they establish boundaries for the exclusion of discredited actors, and they define terms and subject positions for social interaction. Similarly, Claire Jean Kim (1999) argues that the “field of racial positions” in American culture can be specified by attending to the dual dimensions of “civic ostracism” (inclusion/exclusion) and “relative valorization” (superior/inferior). Charles Tilly (1998) adopts a related stance in claiming that all category-based inequalities can be traced to four underlying social mechanisms: exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. These mechanisms are grounded, on one side, in Weber’s concept of exclusion through social closure and, on the other, in Marxian ideas about how inequalities of position are reproduced through self-reinforcing logics in social relations.7

Empirical research based on these concepts has usually taken the form of process-oriented historical analysis. Because they can explore the unfolding of social relations over time (Abbott 2001), such studies offer significant advantages for explaining processes of boundary making (Loveman 1999; Loveman and Muniz 2007), evolving norms of racial classification.

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7 Our examples in this paragraph all seek to clarify the nature and operation of category-based inequalities. The same two dimensions, however, are equally central to relational accounts of how such inequalities are disrupted and transformed. Frances Fox Piven (2006), for example, emphasizes that the capacity to exercise disruptive power is weakened to the extent that a group is denied access to interdependent social relations. At the same time, the disruptive capacity of actors within such relations is determined by the degree to which (and the form in which) their positioning renders others dependent on their compliance.
(Ignatiev 1995; Hochschild and Weaver 2007), the construction of relative group positions (Kim 1999), and the reproduction and contestation of categorical inequalities (Tilly 1998; Piven 2006). The more vexing question, for many, is how one might use such relational concepts as a basis for quantitative empirical research. Indeed, relational analysis is often explained through a contrast with quantitative measurement and statistical analysis, and the logics of the two approaches differ in significant ways (Emirbayer 1998; Tilly 2008). Researchers who hope to capture racial effects with quantitative variables are understandably given pause when they encounter constructivist claims that racial meanings and norms proliferate and that race must be studied in “relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms” (Brubaker 2004: 11).

The difficulty of bridging this divide, however, is easy to overestimate. Processes of racial construction and positioning are, indeed, illuminated most effectively by historically-grounded relational analysis. Theories of racial construction and positioning, however, offer a fertile basis for quantitative analysis, and quantitative analysis, in turn, can generate instructive evidence of racial constructions and positions. To see this distinction, one need only look as far as the study of public opinion. In this subfield, constructivist theories of race and meaning-making underlie a large body of quantitative research on framing, symbol and schema activation, and the dynamics of racial attitudes and policy preferences (Winter 2008; Mendelberg 2001; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Within this literature, Lawrence Bobo and his colleagues have carved out a distinctive and influential quantitative research program that is based explicitly on Herbert Blumer’s positional approach to racial prejudice (see e.g., Bobo 1999; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bobo and Tuan 2006). Indeed, Bobo and Tuan (2006: 14-22) preface their most ambitious study with a lengthy defense of using quantitative survey measures to test and build on Blumer’s relational theory of group position.
The question then, as we see it, is not whether positional theories can be combined with quantitative analysis; it is how one should do so in the study of state politics and policy choice. In this regard, the scholarship of Pierre Bourdieu suggests a promising path forward. According to Bourdieu (1984, 1993), social space can be thought as a diverse collection of relational fields, each of which operates according to its own logic and each of which is structured by the relative positioning of social agents. (Thus, a change in group positions may alter the structure of a field without changing the underlying terms of relations.) In this manner, Bourdieu distinguishes among the economic field, the cultural field, the political field, the educational field, and so on. Although the relational logic of a given field is impossible to measure in quantitative terms, Bourdieu argues that group positions within a field are closely aligned with – and hence, can be measured effectively by – the amounts and types of relevant capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) that actors possess.

Indeed, this is precisely what Bourdieu does in some of his most influential works, including his landmark study, *Distinction* (1984). By harvesting indicators of capital from survey and administrative datasets, Bourdieu constructs a variety of quantitative measures to specify relative group positions in specific fields of social relations. Thus, while Bourdieu’s theoretical apparatus in *Distinction* is deeply relational, his analysis makes extensive use of quantitative measures to produce snapshots of relative group positions. In addition to identifying the forms and magnitudes of group difference, Bourdieu uses these measures to construct detailed spatial maps of social positions (see e.g., 1984: 126-31, 260-67).

One need not embrace Bourdieu’s specific theory of capital to build on what he demonstrates. The key point, for our purposes, is that group differences in the possession of key resources can be used to identify the positions that groups occupy in specific social and political
relations. In the following section, we draw on constructivist and positional theories to specify criteria for measuring the ways that racial-group positions vary across the American states.

**From Theory to Measurement Criteria**

The American states are, of course, political jurisdictions, not discrete, bounded domains of race relations. For this reason, state-level measures of racial positioning should not be viewed as indicating contrasts among truly independent “cases” of race relations. Nevertheless, differences of degree in the positions occupied by racial groups can be measured across the states in ways that have great potential to illuminate state political and policy processes. Under American federalism, states have long held primary policy authority in a variety of issue areas, and this pattern has been strengthened in recent years through a broad pattern of policy devolution (Gray and Hanson 2007; Conlan 1998). Indeed, state politics and policy have played an especially central role in the regulation of race relations and the civic incorporation of racial minorities (Lieberman 1998, 2005; Soss and Schram 2008).

How then should one measure interstate differences in the field of racial positions? By drawing on constructivist theories of race, it is possible to identify five guiding criteria for the development of state-level measures.

First, although such measures cannot be truly relational, in the dynamic processual sense suggested by transactional analysis (Emirbayer 1998), they should reflect the emphasis on *relative* group positions found in relational theories of race. This criterion can be contrasted with efforts to measure the shared socioeconomic context that surrounds race relations, such as one finds in recent studies of racial threat and mass attitudes (Branton and Jones 2005; Oliver and Wong 2003; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000). It can also be contrasted with efforts to measure the absolute level of resources possessed by a racially-defined group.
Instead, measures should be developed to capture the distances between positions that racial groups occupy in social and political space. As Bourdieu (1990: 127) explains, the social space “is constructed in such a way that [actors] have more properties in common the closer they are to each other in this space; and fewer common properties, the further they are away from each other.” To capture the degree to which groups share a similar position in social relations, researchers should construct ratio measures based on “the distributions of resources which are or may become active, effective, like the trumps in a game of cards” (Bourdieu 1990: 128).

Second, measures that capture the positions of groups vis-à-vis one another should be complemented by measures that indicate how groups are positioned vis-à-vis the boundaries of societal institutions and relations. This criterion is clearly suggested by Weber’s (1922) concept of social closure as well as Blumer’s (1965) distinction between subordination and exclusion. Practices of social closure at the boundaries of social activities are central to the meanings that attach to racial groups as well as the positions that groups occupy as social and political actors (Barth 1969; Brubaker 2004). Thus, when Mara Loveman (1997: 892) writes that “racial politics entail struggles over boundaries,” her meaning can be taken in a double sense. Racial politics centers, not only on the boundaries that define racial categories, but also on the boundaries of institutions and relations, which may be erected, penetrated, or policed on the basis of race.

Indeed, according to theories of advanced marginalization, analyses of contemporary race relations in the U.S. must reflect the emergence of norms and practices favoring the inclusion of a stratum of racial minorities in dominant institutions (Cohen 1999). From this perspective, measures of racial position should aim to reveal the degree to which different groups have been able to enter relevant social and institutional fields. Such measures might look directly at the composition of institutional actors, such as legislators or administrators, or work indirectly by
examining patterns of official certification that permit or prevent access, such as educational degrees or felony criminal records. In this manner, measures of racial position can be designed along two axes: the regulation of entry into institutions and the distribution of positions that actors occupy vis-à-vis one another.

Third, indicators of racial position should be developed along multiple dimensions – such as education, housing, income, and residential location – and then combined in theory-relevant ways to produce more precise estimates of group location. As Bourdieu (1985: 724) explains, “The social field can be described as a multi-dimensional space of positions… [E]very actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables.” By building measures along separate dimensions, researchers avoid the assumption that racial marginalization occurs to the same degree, or in the same way, in different fields of social relations. In addition, dimension-specific measures allow researchers to explore, as an empirical question, the degree to which marginalization in one field aligns with (or contributes to) marginalization in another.

With dimensional measures in hand, two strategies may be pursued to obtain more precise overall estimates of group position. First, as Bourdieu demonstrates in Distinction (1984), correlations among the dimensions may be used to construct maps of social spaces, with groups and forms of capital arrayed to indicate proximity. In this manner, a detailed visual account of the field of racial positions can be presented. Second, through simple additive measures or more complex techniques, researchers can capture the ways that positional advantages and disadvantages compound in particular locales. In this manner, one can distinguish cases where groups occupy positions of deep marginality, defined by the
convergence of exclusion and inferiority along multiple dimensions, from cases where groups experience uneven patterns of incorporation and exclusion as well as parity and inferiority.

Fourth, researchers should attempt to measure both objective and subjective aspects of group position. Relational theories of race argue against approaches that favor the ideational over the material, or vice versa. As noted earlier, Blumer (1958) and others suggest that the two emerge together from social interaction and operate jointly to define the experienced reality of social relations. Thus, Bobo and Tuan (2006: 44) state that a positional approach renders “the now conventional dichotomous opposition of ‘realistic group conflict versus prejudice’ – or, in Brubaker’s terms, “instrumentalist versus identitarian’ approaches – empirically nonsensical.” Neither side can be reduced to the other. As Bourdieu (1990: 126) explains, “the two moments, objectivist and subjectivist, stand in dialectical relation.” That is, “objective structures… are the basis of subjective representations [while subjective] representations [are at the root of] struggles which aim at transforming or preserving these structures” (Bourdieu 1990: 126).

Based on this line theorizing, researchers should develop state-level measures to capture both the subjective and objective aspects of racial group position. Subjective measures might identify state-level differences in the degree to which racial groups are seen as possessing policy-relevant traits. Or they might capture interstate differences in the “sense of group position” by measuring the ways actors perceive and explain differences in standing across racial categories.

Fifth and finally, measures should be designed to capture inequalities of position within racial groups. Constructivist theories emphasize that systems of racial classification often fail to produce racial groups in which members share a single coherent social position (Brubaker 2004). Theories of intersectionality underscore this point by highlighting how a single racial category may generate divergent social positions depending on how it intersects with other dimensions of
stratification such as class, gender, and sexual orientation (Strolovitch 2007; Hancock 2007). Indeed, from Blumer (1958) onward, theorists of group position have argued that distinctions between elite and lower subclasses of racial groups are essential for understanding how “senses” of group position operate and how they are likely to matter in politics (Bobo and Tuan 2006: 43).

In recent years, this theme has figured prominently in studies of advanced marginalization (Cohen 1999; Wacquant 2008). As dominant institutions shift toward norms of racial inclusion, elite minority strata are likely to emerge with interests and identities that diverge significantly from those of more disadvantaged group members (Cohen 1999). Adolph Reed (2004: 133-34) argues that this elite stratum will often adopt a “generic politics of racial advancement” that pursues “petit bourgeois” interests in racial access and promotion as if they were “the organic and transparent sensibility of the group as a whole.” Cathy Cohen (1999) goes further in suggesting that such elites may feel pressures to engage in “internal policing” and to suppress issues that might matter greatly to disadvantaged group members but also threaten to reinforce negative images of the minority group as a whole. Against this backdrop, attempts to measure group position should attend, not only to differences between racial categories, but also to patterns of inequality and diversity within racial categories.

In the following section, we draw on these criteria to develop empirical measures of state-level differences in racial group positioning. In the subsequent section, we turn to the policy process itself. We explain the general mechanisms that should link patterns of racial position to policy outcomes; we derive a set of hypotheses from these expectations; and we test these hypotheses against state policy choices under contemporary welfare reform.

State-Level Measures of Racial Positioning
The criteria laid out in the preceding section establish an ambitious agenda for measurement. In this section, we take preliminary steps toward the pursuit of that agenda. The measures we develop in this initial effort should be seen as imperfect in several ways. Ideally, the field of racial positions should be specified by locating multiple groups in relation to one another (Kim 1999). As a first step, however, we focus here on positions associated only with the black-white divide. In addition to making our data project more tractable, this focus is helpful because it allows us to address the racial distinction that has been most central to research on racial threat, racial context, and policy choice. In addition, the four additive measures presented in this section are not entirely parallel and are based on different numbers of contributing variables. In one case, we are forced to employ a measure that offers a weak approximation of the phenomenon of interest. Moreover, because our analysis in the following section predicts state policy choices after 1996, we construct our measures based on data from prior to 1996 rather than more recent years. Finally, perhaps the greatest weakness of these measures is that, at this point, none include an explicit measure of subjective orientations toward race relations.8

With these caveats noted, we develop four additive measures of black-white positioning, each of which is designed to capture the accumulation of group positions along multiple dimensions. The first two measures reflect Blumer’s distinction between subordination and exclusion. The first, *Disparity*, indicates the positions that blacks and whites occupy vis-à-vis one another along multiple socioeconomic dimensions. The second, *Marginality*, indicates the relative degree to which blacks and whites find themselves excluded from important statuses in multiple socioeconomic domains. Our third measure, *Political Exclusion*, allows for a separate analysis of the positions that blacks and whites occupy in formal political processes. And our

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8 We are constructing state-level subjective measures by aggregating data from multiple years of the General Social Survey. In this paper, we omit these measures because our estimates remain unreliable for a number of states.
fourth measure, *Dispersion*, uses multiple dimensions to capture the socioeconomic inequalities that separate relatively advantaged and disadvantaged African Americans. In each case, we initially specify group positions along separate dimensions and then produce a simple additive measure to capture how positions along these dimensions concatenate in individual states.

Our measure of group *Disparity* is based on three dimensions of positioning within socioeconomic relations. Based on data from the 1990 U.S. Census, we calculate separately for blacks and whites (a) mean levels of wage and salary income, (b) median values of homes, and (c) rates of high school graduation.\(^9\) We then calculate the white-to-black ratio of values for each dimension. To capture the concatenation of these three dimensions, and give equal weight to each, we standardize each variable and then add them together to form an index. The values of *Disparity* increase when black state residents occupy socioeconomic positions that are more subordinate relative to those of whites. To facilitate comparisons across measures, we divide *Disparity* by the number of constituent variables (3) and center it at a mean of zero.

Our second measure, *Marginality*, is also based on black-white ratios calculated along multiple socioeconomic dimensions. In this case, however, we seek to gauge the degree to which blacks and whites find themselves located outside the socioeconomic institutions and statuses that signify a high degree of social inclusion. Using 1990 Census data, we calculate the rates at which whites and blacks in each state (a) attained the status of home owner, (b) gained access to full-time employment, and (c) achieved entry to post-secondary educational institutions.\(^{10}\) Two additional dimensions of socioeconomic exclusion are also employed. First, we estimate the degree to which blacks are spatially isolated from whites in each state by calculating the Index of

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\(^9\) For descriptions of all variables and their distributions, see Appendix A.

\(^{10}\) The three relative measures described in this sentence are white-to-black ratios calculated as (white % with status/white % of state population)/(black % with status/black % of state population). The relative measure for prison entry described below is a black-to-white ratio calculated in the reverse fashion.
Dissimilarity based on the racial composition of residents in each county. Second, to measure entry into a negative institutional status that promotes marginality in socioeconomic relations (Western 2006), we calculate the ratio of the proportions of blacks and whites admitted to prison in 1990 in each state.

To construct our *Marginality* measure, we again standardize each variable and add them together to form an index. The values of *Marginality* increase as black state residents become spatially isolated from whites, access positive socioeconomic statuses less often than whites, and incur negative socioeconomic statuses more often than whites. To facilitate comparisons with our other measures, we divide *Marginality* by the number of its constituent variables (5) and center it at a mean of zero.

Our third measure, *Political Exclusion*, is designed to capture racial positioning in formal political processes. To do so, it draws on indicators of both political participation and political representation. Based on data from the 1990 Census, we calculate voting participation rates for whites and blacks in each state and then take the white-to-black ratio of these values. Unfortunately, in assessing descriptive political representation, we are forced to rely on a legislator-to-population ratio rather than a between-group measure. 

Specifically, we measure the relative exclusion of blacks from state legislatures by taking the non-black proportion of each state’s legislators and dividing it by the non-black proportion of each state’s population. (Higher values indicate that African Americans have fewer legislative seats relative to their numbers in the state population.)

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11 The most appropriate measure here would be calculated as (white % of legislators/white % of population)/(black % of legislators/black % of population). Thus far, however, we have been unable to obtain reliable data for the white percentage of each state’s legislature.
As with our other measures, *Political Exclusion* is constructed by standardizing the constituent variables and adding the resulting values together. Thus, higher values indicate that African Americans are less fully incorporated as participants in electoral processes (relative to whites) and as representatives in legislative institutions (relative to their frequency in the population). The additive index for *Political Exclusion*, like our other measures, is divided by the number of its constituent variables (2) and centered at a mean of zero.

Our fourth measure of racial positioning, *Dispersion*, provides an indicator of within-group socioeconomic disparities among African Americans. As noted earlier, this measure is motivated by theories of intersectionality and advanced marginalization, which emphasize the political importance of heterogeneity within racial groups. Based on 1990 Census data, we construct three indicators designed to capture the size of the socioeconomic “gulf” separating advantaged from disadvantaged African Americans. We measure the degree of income polarization among African Americans by taking the ratio of (a) the percentage of blacks located in the top and bottom quartiles of a state’s income distribution to (b) the percentage of blacks located in the middle two quartiles of this income distribution. Similarly, our measure of educational polarization is calculated as the ratio of (a) the percentage of blacks with less than a high school degree or with a college degree or higher to (b) the percentage of blacks with levels of educational attainment between these two poles. Finally, we measure the housing gap that separates African Americans of higher and lower socioeconomic status by calculating the ratio of median home values for blacks located in the top and bottom quartiles of the state’s household income distribution.

Our index of *Dispersion* is constructed by standardizing the constituent variables and adding the resulting values together. Higher values indicate a larger gap between the
socioeconomic positions occupied by relatively advantaged and disadvantaged African Americans in a state. Like our other measures, the index for Dispersion is divided by the number of its constituent variables (3) and centered at a mean of zero.

Although each measure has limitations, the four indexes as a whole fit well with the ideal criteria laid out in the preceding section. They measure relative group positions between and within racial categories; they indicate the positions of blacks and whites vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis bounded statuses; they capture the concatenation of positions along multiple dimensions; and they incorporate indicators of positioning in spatial, social, economic, and political relations. Based on the above procedures, we are able to calculate our measures of Marginality, Disparity, and Political Exclusion for 48 states. Our measure of Dispersion is calculated for 45 states because of unreliable estimates of housing values for black homeowners in the lowest income quartile of three states. To identify these missing states as well as the ordering of states along our four dimensions, Table 1 presents state rankings based on each measure. A ranking of 1 indicates, respectively, the highest level of black-white socioeconomic Disparity, the greatest degree of black socioeconomic Marginality relative to whites, the highest degree of black Political Exclusion, and the highest level of Dispersion in the socioeconomic positions of African Americans.

[Table 1 here]

Ideally, the four measures of group position should provide information about different aspects of race relations in each state and, hence, should not exhibit exceptionally highly correlations with one another. In addition, each should have some independence from the black percentages of state populations and relevant policy target groups (participants in state AFDC/TANF programs in the analyses we conduct in the following section). Table 2 presents
bivariate correlations for these variables. The average inter-item correlation for our four measures is a modest $r=.27$. Five of the six bivariate correlations among our measures do not reach statistical significance, leaving only one discernible relationship, *Dispersion* and *Disparity* ($r=.65$). This suggests that states with high levels of socioeconomic disparity between blacks and whites also tend to be states with lower socioeconomic inequalities among blacks. Our measures of *Disparity* and *Dispersion* also have significant correlations with the black percentage of state populations and the black percentage of state welfare caseloads, with the *Disparity* measure exhibiting quite strong relationships to these composition measures. *Political Exclusion* has a significant bivariate relationship to the black percentage of the population but shows no discernible relationship to the black percentage of welfare caseloads.

[Table 2 here]

Figure 3 offers a final descriptive look at our measures by presenting a visual mapping of the states along the axes defined by socioeconomic *Disparity* and *Marginality*. The absence of a strong correlation between these axes is nicely illustrated by the scatterplot, and lends empirical support to our conceptual argument that group inferiority/superiority (measured by *Disparity*) is related to but not entirely the same as group exclusion/inclusion (measured by *Marginality*). In addition, Figure 3 shows a considerable amount of variation along these axes, suggesting that the positions of racial groups vary substantially across the states in ways that might have significant implications for politics and policy.

Because *Disparity* and *Marginality* are centered at their means, we can use their intersection to define four quadrants of racial positioning in the states. A majority of states fall into either the high marginality/high disparity quadrant (14) or the low marginality/low disparity quadrant (16), with smaller but substantial numbers falling into the high marginality/low
disparity quadrant (10) and the low marginality/high disparity quadrant (8). It is also worth noting that, relative to the other quadrants, states in the upper-left quadrant (high disparity/low marginality) are positioned fairly close to the midpoint boundaries.

[Figure 1 here]

**From Positioning to Policy Choice: Expectations and Evidence**

With these measures in hand, we can turn to the question of how differences in the field of racial positions should affect policy choice in the American states. We begin by specifying the mechanisms that should produce policy effects and the hypotheses that flow from these mechanisms. We then present empirical tests in the context of contemporary welfare reform.

Two processes should link patterns of racial position to state policy outcomes. First, because the meanings that attach to racial categories and identities emerge from patterns of social interaction, we should expect such meanings to vary across locales depending on the ways that groups are positioned in relation to one another. When the positions occupied by groups are less distant and distinctive, we should expect the clarity of contrasts between them to diminish (Blumer 1958). Indeed, racial boundaries themselves may soften as categorical contrasts are tempered by the emergence of shared activities and multiracial identities (Hochschild and Weaver 2007). By contrast, concentrated minority disadvantages and positions of isolation should “amplify perceived group differences” (Parker, Stults, and Rice 2005: 1116).  

In this regard, a positional approach dovetails nicely with the logic of the Racial Classification Model (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008). According to the RCM, racial

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12 Indeed, the relationship is likely to be reciprocal and, hence, produce vicious or virtuous cycles. The sharing of proximate social positions should diminish the clarity of categorical boundaries and contrasts between races. Conversely, when racial sets are fuzzy rather than crisp, social proximity and interaction should be more likely. We emphasize the first of these two dynamics here because our analysis does not focus on the construction of racial positions. Rather, our measures provide a snapshot of racial positions that we then treat as “political givens” for the analysis of policy outcomes.
classifications should have larger policy effects when contrasts between group reputations are clearer and larger. Following this logic, we should expect larger distances between group positions to increase the probability that states will adopt race-coded punitive or regulatory policies. Conversely, when minority groups are salient in the policy process but occupy more proximate positions, such policy outcomes should become less likely. In addition, because the presence of racial minorities tends to cue racial cognitions (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008), the salience of racial positions should be weaker when minorities are less prevalent (in social space or in a policy-relevant group). Thus, the effects of racial positioning should rise as the minority percent of the state population and/or target group increases. Similarly, we should expect the effects of minority composition to diminish as racial positions become more proximate.

Second, racial positions should also affect policy outcomes because of the ways they condition the exercise of power and agency. Power in the policy process can be conceptualized in both instrumental and structural terms (Hacker and Pierson 2002). As minority groups attain greater socioeconomic parity vis-à-vis the white majority, they achieve more comparable control over resources that facilitate the exercise of instrumental power. In Bourdieu’s terms (1990:128), they improve their position in “the distributions of resources which are or may become active, effective, like the trumps in a game of cards.” At the same time, as minority groups gain greater access to dominant institutions through a logic of advanced marginalization (Cohen 1999), they enter structural positions that make others more dependent on them and, thus, enhance their capacities to act as effective agents in the policy process (Piven 2006).

In these respects, power and agency are intimately tied to the dynamics of civic incorporation and role access emphasized by theories of citizenship (Marshall 1964; Turner 2001). Incorporation entails superior “standing” for the exercise of political voice and stronger
leverage in processes of bargaining and conflict. Such standing and leverage flow partly from positioning in the overtly political institutions of government. But the roles that generate standing and leverage in the policy process are equally tied to social and economic positioning as homeowners, as workers, as carriers of educational credentials, as integrated community members, and so on. In states where blacks are far more likely to be excluded from such roles than whites, we should expect a corresponding decrease in the effectiveness of African Americans as agents in the policy process.

Consistent with the RCM, we do not assume that racial-group “members” are consistently motivated by ingroup favoritism, outgroup animus, or intergroup threat. There is no automatic conversion of “blackness” or “whiteness” into political behaviors and policy choices that benefit one group or another. Such instances of group solidarity and favoritism are constructed features of the political landscape that may or may not emerge in particular settings. In many cases, minority group members may perceive group reputations in ways that mirror the majority, and may also have strong incentives and rationales for aligning themselves with majority-group norms and privileges (Cohen 1999). Nevertheless, from a constructivist perspective, we should expect experiences in racialized social relations to produce racial differences in political orientations. Indeed, as an empirical matter, white-black differences in political orientations and policy preferences have been rightly described as a “divide without peer” in American politics (Kinder and Sanders 1996).

Accordingly, we expect that as African Americans become less disadvantaged by socioeconomic disparities and gain greater access to dominant institutions, policy outcomes will become less closely tied to the white side of this preference divide. Moreover, this effect should be stronger (a) when African Americans make up a larger proportion of the population and,
hence, are in a stronger position to act as effective agents in collective choice processes and/or (b) when African Americans make up a higher percentage of the relevant target population and, hence, racial classifications become a more relevant cue for political action.

To test these expectations, it is useful to select a policy choice that has been linked to minority percentage measures in past research. Likewise, to demonstrate the value added by a positional approach, it is helpful to select a case that falls squarely into the purview of the racial threat hypothesis – i.e., a disciplinary or regulatory policy in a raced-coded issue domain. By doing so, we seek evidence for the effects of racial positioning in a case where existing scholarship would lead one to expect that minority-percentage measures and racial-threat explanations are sufficient.

Based on these criteria, we analyze state choices regarding sanction policies under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program created by federal welfare reform in 1996. Welfare, of course, is a highly racialized policy domain where questions of self-discipline and behavioral regulation are paramount (Gilens 1999; Schram 2005). Sanctions are penalties that reduce or terminate benefits in cases where TANF clients are deemed to be out of compliance with behavioral rules and expectations. Since 1996, sanctions have emerged as the primary disciplinary tool used in welfare programs (Schram et al. forthcoming) and have been widely identified as a key determinant of TANF program outcomes (Pavetti et al. 2003). Moreover, previous research has shown that, in the wake of federal reform, state decisions to adopt more stringent sanctions had a strong positive relationship to the black percent of state welfare caseloads (Soss et al. 2001). For all these reasons, welfare sanctions offer something close to an ideal case for examining whether a positional analysis can improve our understandings of the relationship between race and state policy choice.
Based on the discussion above, a positional approach suggests three initial hypotheses regarding sanction policy adoption in the states.

**H1:** As blacks experience higher socioeconomic *Disparity* relative to whites, states should become more likely to adopt highly punitive TANF sanctions.

**H2:** As blacks become more subject to socioeconomic *Marginality* relative to whites, states should become more likely to adopt highly punitive TANF sanctions.

**H3:** As blacks experience higher levels of *Political Exclusion* relative to whites, states should become more likely to adopt highly punitive TANF sanctions.

Because TANF policies target a highly disadvantaged subgroup of African Americans rather than the racial category as a whole, theories of advanced marginalization suggest greater dispersion among blacks should be positively associated with the adoption of stricter sanctions. In addition, to the extent that socioeconomic polarization produces a sharper contrast between images of the “successful” black middle-class and images of highly disadvantaged blacks, one would expect perceptions of black welfare recipients to grow more negative. Thus, the RCM similarly predicts that the adoption of strict sanctions will be more likely in states with greater socioeconomic dispersion among African Americans. Accordingly, our fourth hypothesis is:

**H4:** As socioeconomic *Dispersion* among blacks grows larger, states should become more likely to adopt highly punitive TANF sanctions.

The mechanisms discussed above combine with the RCM to suggest that all four of the preceding relationships should be stronger when the black percentage of relevant populations is higher. Indeed, it may be reasonable to expect the policy effects of racial position to emerge only once the minority percentage passes some threshold. To test this expectation, one can employ a percentage measure of either state populations or state welfare caseloads. The two measures are highly correlated in our data ($r=.76$, $p<.001$) and, thus, each is likely to capture some dynamics related to the other. In the analysis that follows, we rely on the measure that has a more precise
relationship to the policy under analysis: the black percent of welfare caseloads in 1996 (the same measure used in Soss et al. 2001). Thus, our fifth hypothesis is:

H5: The relationships specified in H1-H4 should increase significantly as the black percent of state welfare caseloads increases.

Finally, although the novel hypotheses for our analysis all focus on measures of racial position, we do not expect the addition of these measures to eliminate all policy effects associated with the black percent of welfare caseloads. Racial-group reputations and racial understandings in the United States are partly national phenomena. Negative images of black welfare recipients, for example, partly reflect national events, political communications, policy actions, and media portrayals (Gilens 1999; Mendelberg 2001). As the black percentage of the welfare caseload rises, we should expect these broad understandings to be cued in ways that make disciplinary policy choices more likely (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008). At the same time, however, state differences in racial positioning should affect racial understandings and patterns of agency in ways that mediate this effect. Thus, while the adoption of strict sanctions should track with the black percentage of welfare caseloads, this effect should be weaker in states where blacks and whites occupy more proximate positions and in states where poor blacks are less isolated from more advantaged blacks.

H6: As the black percentage of the state welfare caseload rises, states should become more likely to adopt highly punitive TANF sanctions, but this relationship should be significantly weaker when levels of Marginality, Disparity, Political Exclusion, and Dispersion are low.

To test these six hypotheses, we begin with the data and model specification employed by Soss et al. (2001). We employ a trichotomous dependent variable where the highest value indicates “immediate full-family sanctions” that remove an entire family from the TANF rolls at the first instance of noncompliance; the middle value indicates “gradual full-family sanctions,”
which potentially have the same effect but only after moving up incrementally based on repeated infractions; and the lowest value indicates “partial sanctions,” which reduce only a portion of the TANF grant, typically the portion awarded to the adult head. The control variables for our analysis include for each state: the unmarried birthrate (1996), the caseload-to-population ratio (1996), government ideology (1996), party competition (1996), class bias in electoral turnout (1996), the unemployment rate (1996), increase in incarceration (1990-96), state history of welfare innovation (1977-96), and the Hispanic and black percentages of the welfare caseloads (1996).13 We then extend this basic model by sequentially introducing our four measures of racial position and their interactions with the black percent of the welfare caseload.

Table 3 presents the results of our analysis. Model 1 confirms that, as expected, state sanction choices after 1996 were influenced by a variety of factors beyond race. More stringent sanctions tended to be adopted in states with higher unmarried birth rates, lower per capita welfare caseloads, more politically conservative government officials, lower levels of party competition, and stronger histories of welfare innovation. Consistent with our expectations, as well as prior research (Avery and Peffley 2005; Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Fording 2003; Soss et al. 2001), we also find that more stringent policy choices were significantly more likely in states where African Americans made up a higher percentage of the welfare caseload.

[Table 3 here]

Model 2 extends this analysis by adding our measure of socioeconomic Disparity as well as its interaction with the black percent of the welfare caseload.14 Because our race-related

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13 See Appendix A for variable descriptions. See Soss et al. (2001) for theoretical justifications supporting the inclusion of each measure. Readers should also note that we employ the superior measure of class bias in turnout developed by Avery and Peffley (2005) rather than the original measure of low-income turnout employed by Soss et al. (2001).

14 Because Dispersion and (especially) Disparity are significantly correlated with the black percentages of welfare caseloads, we ran collinearity diagnostics for all models presented in Table 3. In all cases, VIF scores indicate no
variables are centered at their means, the coefficient for each measure can be interpreted as the
effect when the other measure is set at its mean value. As predicted, we find that states were
significantly more likely to adopt stringent sanction policies when black residents occupied a
socioeconomic position more inferior to white residents. Moreover, the addition of our Disparity
measure reduces the coefficient for percent black to statistical insignificance (when Disparity is
at its mean). The interaction term for socioeconomic Disparity and the black percent of welfare
caseloads points in the expected direction but falls well short of statistical significance.

Model 3 presents results for our measure of racial differences in socioeconomic
Marginality. The coefficient for the black percent of welfare caseloads is significant and positive
and, as expected, the interaction term for this measure and Marginality is also significant and
positive. Together, then, these coefficients suggest that stringent sanction policies were more
likely to be adopted in states where blacks made up a higher percent of the welfare caseload, and
this relationship was significantly stronger in states where blacks were more marginalized from
mainstream socioeconomic roles. With the black percent of the welfare caseload is at its mean,
the coefficient for Marginality is statistically insignificant. However, because of the positive
interaction term, this variable may have the expected effect when the black proportion of the
welfare caseload rises above its mean. Indeed, this is the case. A separate empirical test confirms
that when the black percent of the caseload is one standard deviation above its mean, the
coefficient for socioeconomic Marginality becomes statistically significant in the expected
direction (b=3.58, se=1.69, p=.017).

Model 4 tests whether sanction policy choices are significantly related to racialized
patterns of Political Exclusion from electoral participation and representation in state

problems of collinearity associated with the variables in our models. The lone exceptions are the interaction terms
which, by definition, covary with their constituent variables.
legislatures. Here, we find no significant relationships. Consistent with the analysis of King-Meadows and Schaller (2006), we find that policy choices under welfare reform were not discernibly different in states with lower levels of black political incorporation (but cf. Fording 2003). Moreover, we find no significant interaction between black Political Exclusion and the black percent of welfare recipients.

Finally, Model 5 tests the hypothesis suggested by theories of advanced marginalization. The results are largely consistent with our expectations. The coefficient for within-group Dispersion is statistically significant and suggests that more stringent sanctions tended to be adopted in states where larger socioeconomic gaps separated advantaged and disadvantaged African Americans. The black percent of the welfare caseload has the expected positive effect as well. Although the interaction term is positive in this model, the estimate falls well short of statistical significance.

Interactions among continuous variables are notoriously difficult to interpret given the ways that slopes and significance levels for one variable shift as values of the second variable move up or down. The use of ordered logistic regression poses further challenges by placing these complex results on an unfamiliar metric. To make our findings easier to interpret, we estimate the predicted probability that a hypothetical “typical state” would adopt immediate full-family sanctions under different race-related conditions. We construct this hypothetical state by setting all control variables at their means, thereby equalizing many of the factors that scholars suggest should affect state welfare policy choices. We then shift the values for each of our race-specific measures and calculate predicted probabilities of strict sanction adoption based on the relevant models in Table 3. Figures 2-4 present the predicted probabilities generated when the
values for our racial variables are set at one standard deviation below the mean (Low), at the mean itself, and at one standard deviation above the mean (High).\(^{15}\)

Figure 2 presents the results for our measure of socioeconomic *Marginality*. At the right of figure, one can see that when blacks are marginalized at higher levels relative to whites (*Marginality* +1SD), the probability of strong sanctions rises dramatically as the black percent of welfare recipients goes up. At the left of the figure, however, we find that this relationship is erased entirely when blacks enter significant socioeconomic statuses on terms more comparable to whites (*Marginality* -1SD). Moreover, if we follow the darkest bars from left to right, we find that when the black percent of welfare recipients is high (+1SD), the probability of a state adopting strong sanctions increases sharply as the marginality of blacks increases relative to whites. When either the black percent of the welfare caseload is low or the level of *Marginality* is low, the predicted probability of strong sanctions remains consistently low, never rising out of the single digits. By contrast, the adoption of immediate full-family sanctions is, far and away, most likely when blacks are prevalent on the welfare rolls and occupy a highly marginal position in socioeconomic relations.

The results for our *Disparity* measure, shown in Figure 3, follow a similar but more gradual pattern. The black percent of the welfare caseload has a strong positive relationship to stringent sanction adoption when blacks occupy an inferior position relative to whites (*Disparity* +1SD). When blacks and whites are closer to socioeconomic parity (*Disparity* -1SD), this relationship evaporates and the adoption of stringent sanctions become extremely unlikely (probabilities below .03 in all cases). As one looks from left to right in Figure 3, moving from relative parity to greater disparity, a comparison of similarly colored bars shows that stringent

\(^{15}\) Because we find no statistically significant results for *Political Exclusion*, we do not present the predicted probabilities generated by that model.
sanction adoption becomes more likely in each case. When blacks make up a lower percentage of the welfare caseload, the probability of full-family sanctions rises modestly and remains fairly low. When the black percent of the caseload is at its mean, the increase is considerably steeper. And when blacks prevail in the caseload (+1SD), the probability of stringent sanction adoption rises more than tenfold (from .024 to .273) as blacks come to occupy a more inferior socioeconomic position relative to whites.

Figure 4 presents evidence regarding the policy effects of socioeconomic inequalities among African Americans. The pattern is consistent with our expectations. Immediate full-family sanctions are unlikely to be adopted (probabilities in the single digits) when either (a) blacks make up a small proportion of the welfare caseload (-1SD) or (b) *Dispersion* in the socioeconomic positions occupied by African Americans is low (-1SD). When blacks make up a higher proportion of the welfare caseload (+1SD), however, the predicted probability of stringent sanctions rises to eight times its initial value as one moves from a low level of within-group dispersion (.057) to a case where disadvantaged African Americans occupy a position that is quite distant from more advantaged African Americans (.455).

**Conclusion: Marginalization Matters**

As the first decade of the 21st century nears its end, the problem of the color line remains central to social politics in the United States. But what is the nature of this problem, and how does it operate in social politics? For decades, prevailing approaches have focused on the racial attitudes that white Americans hold and the ways that whites respond to racial minorities as political or economic threats. This emphasis has been especially strong in quantitative studies of American politics, and has held particular sway in studies of policy choice that use minority composition measures to capture racial effects.
Although much has been learned from this approach, a variety of contemporary developments call it into question. In the polity, the problem of the color line is being transformed by dramatic demographic changes, the growing prevalence of multiracial identities, the softening of overt prejudices, and the incorporation of racial minorities into influential institutions. These and related developments should lead scholars to question the assumption that a neatly delineated group of whites holds policy control and, acting on group loyalties and interests, uses this policy control to combat the threat posed by minority groups. At the same time, developments in the academy have also raised questions about this analytic approach. Among social theorists, leading accounts of race have become sharply critical of studies that treat group coherence as natural and focus narrowly on the attitudes and behaviors of dominant groups (Brubaker 2004). Rather than starting with the orientations of individual group members, these theories urge scholars to analyze the broader field of race relations that diverse actors construct and find themselves within. Thus, while research on state politics and policy has continued to emphasize white responses to minority threats, this focus has become increasingly distant from important societal and intellectual developments.

In this paper, we have sought to advance the study of state politics and policy by adopting a more constructivist, relational, and positional conception of “the problem of the color line.” Our approach builds directly on recent developments in social theories of race (Loveman 1997) as well as recent calls to analyze the “field of racial positions” as a whole (Kim 1999) and specify the ways that “racial orders” vary across social and political contexts (Hochschild and Powell 2008). Yet as we have shown, these themes are far from intellectual newcomers. They figured prominently in some of the most influential writings on race that social scientists produced in the mid-20th century. Elements of relational and positional analysis suggested crucial
limiting conditions for the effects of minority composition in the seminal works of Key (1949), Blalock (1967), and Allport (1954). The distinctive contribution of their contemporary, Herbert Blumer (1958), was to pull these themes out of the conditional background and place them at the center of an explicitly positional and relational approach to race. The “problem of the color line,” for Blumer, was not the classification of people into racial groups, nor was it the attitudes that individuals adopted toward occupants of specific racial categories. The problem inhered in the ways that racial classifications organized social relations to produce patterns of inclusion and exclusion, dominance and subordination (Blumer 1965).

By drawing Blumer’s analysis into dialogue with contemporary efforts to theorize the structuring of social space and the ways actors are positioned in fields of social relations (Bourdieu 1984; 1993), we have advanced a novel approach to measuring racial differences across the American states and testing their effects on state policy choices. Our positional approach dovetails nicely with the RCM (Soss, Fording and Schram 2008), and we believe that the two together provide scholars with a fuller and more precise constructivist account of how and when race can be expected to influence state policy choices.

We are also drawn to a positional approach because of its strong resonance with theories of citizenship that emphasize status and standing as well as patterns of incorporation and exclusion. In American politics today, racial minorities are more than just objects of policy action or threats to the interests of white actors. They are incorporated in complex ways as citizens and institutional actors, and they are divided in important ways by these same developments (Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2007). To understand the sources and consequences of public policy in the U.S., we must draw race and citizenship into a common frame of analysis that attends to the positioning of actors vis-à-vis institutions and one another.
The root of our empirical argument is that racial categories position actors in ways that vary across the states; these differences can be measured in theoretically appropriate ways; and the use of such measures can advance the analysis of state policy choice. Our key findings are neatly summarized by our title: marginalization matters. Under welfare reform, the adoption of tough sanction policies has been more likely in states where socioeconomic disparities between blacks and whites are larger, where important socioeconomic institutions and statuses are less accessible to blacks relative to whites, and where black populations are more polarized into isolated groups at the socioeconomic top and bottom. Strong sanctions are also more likely to be adopted when blacks make up a higher percentage of the welfare caseload. Yet this effect is diminished considerably when black state residents achieve socioeconomic incorporation on terms closer to white state residents. Across diverse measures of racial position, we consistently find that states are most likely to adopt punitive sanction policies when blacks are prevalent in welfare caseloads and level of racial marginalization are high (as measured by Disparity, Marginality, or Dispersion).

Only one of our positional measures fails to produce significant results in this analysis. As students of politics, it is a bit unsettling that this measure is Political Exclusion, but we also see good reasons to question the null results. Of the four measures presented in this paper, Political Exclusion is by far the least satisfying. In addition to being based on only two indicators, it is also limited by a measure of representation that fails to capture the relative institutional positions of blacks and whites. Prior research has suggested that black representation in state legislatures can matter greatly for policy choices related to welfare and criminal justice (Fording 2003; Fording and Yates 2005). Group biases in political participation have also emerged as a significant predictor of welfare policy choice in some research (Avery
and Peffley 2005). Against this backdrop, it seems best to deem our present results for *Political Exclusion* inconclusive.

Race is a social construction that has powerful and real consequences for politics. These consequences are not reducible to the racial attitudes that individuals hold or the potential for minorities to threaten the interests of majorities. They flow more fundamentally from the ways that racial classifications organize social relations, define social positions, and frame social understandings in particular political locales. In the United States today, race continues to shape the political landscape in ways that matter greatly for policy design and implementation. Yet it does not do so in a uniform way as one looks across various dimensions of social relations and jurisdictions for policymaking. Students of politics have rich theoretical resources at their disposal that can do much to clarify differences in the field of racial positions and specify how these differences affect policy processes. By pursuing such questions more vigorously, we will be in a better position to understand the disheartening political dynamics that so often arise from race, and perhaps even to change them.
Appendix A: Sources and Measures

Measures of Socioeconomic Marginality

Racial Segregation by State, 1990: Dissimilarity Index computed by county, then standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range = -2.5 to 2.0 with higher values indicating more segregation. Source: Minnesota Population Center. National Historical Geographic Information System: Pre-release Version 0.1. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota 2004.

Ratio of Black-to-White Prison Entries by State, 1990: Proportion of the Black Population Entering Prison (all Black prison entries in the state divided by the total Black population of the state) divided by the Proportion of the White Population Entering Prison (all White prison entries in the state divided by the total White population of the state), standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range = -1.7 to 3.1 with higher values indicating either that Blacks enter prison at higher rates than Whites. Source: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. NATIONAL CORRECTIONS REPORTING PROGRAM, 1990 [Computer file]. Conducted by U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. ICPSR ed. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [producer and distributor], 1997.

Ratio of White-to-Black Accessing College by State, 1990: Proportion of the White Population aged 15-64 with at least some college divided by the Proportion of the Black Population 15-64 with at least some college, standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range = -1.6 to 2.2 with higher values indicating that Whites access college at higher rates than Blacks. Source: Minnesota Population Center. National Historical Geographic Information System: Pre-release Version 0.1. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota 2004.


Ratio of White-to-Black Home Ownership by State, 1990: Proportion of the White Population aged 25-64 Living in Owner Occupied Housing divided by the Proportion of the Black Population aged 25-64 Living in Owner Occupied Housing, standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range = -.93 to 4.94 with higher values indicating that Whites own homes at higher rates than Blacks. Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990, Census of Population and Housing, Published Table H009: Tenure by Race of Householder – Occupied Housing Units.

Measures of Socioeconomic Disparity

Ratio of White-to-Black Median Housing Value by State, 1990: White median housing value of owned homes divided by the Black median housing value of owned homes, standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range= -2.4 to 2.0 with higher values indicating that the Median Housing Value of Whites is greater than that of Blacks. Source: Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.
Ratio of White-to-Black Mean Household Income from Wages and Salary by State, 1990: White mean household income from wages and salary divided by the Black mean household income from wages and salary, standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range = -2.1 to 2.1 with higher values indicating that the mean household income from wages and salary of Whites is greater than that of Blacks. Source: Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.


**Measures of Political Exclusion**

Ratio of White-to-Black Voting by State, 1990: Proportion of Whites Voting in the 1990 Election divided by the Proportion of Blacks Voting in the 1990 Election, standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range = - .7 to 3.4 with higher values indicating that Whites vote at a greater rate than Blacks. Source: November Supplement to the 1990 Current Population Survey.


**Measures of Socioeconomic Dispersion**

Ratio of Top-to-Bottom Quartile Median Housing Value for Blacks by State, 1990: Black median housing value of owned homes in the top quartile divided by the Black median housing value of owned homes in the bottom quartile, standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range = -2.20 to 1.95 with higher values indicating a larger gap between the median home values for Blacks at the top and bottom of the distribution. Source: Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

Ratio of Income Polarization for Blacks by State, 1990: Percent of Blacks in the top and bottom quartiles of the personal income distribution divided by the percent of Blacks in the middle two quartiles, standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range = -2.5 to 2.43 with higher values indicating a larger proportion of the Black population in the poles of the personal income distribution. Source: Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.
Ratio of Educational Polarization for Blacks by State, 1990: Percent of Blacks with less than a high school diploma or a bachelor’s degree or higher divided by the percent of Blacks with between a high school diploma and less than a bachelor’s degree, standardized to mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. Range=-2.06 to 2.98 with higher values indicating a larger proportion of the Black population at the poles of educational attainment. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1980 to 2000. Census 2000 PHC-T-41. A Half-Century of Learning: Historical Statistics on Educational Attainment in the United States, 1940 to 2000, Tables 9a and 11a.

Measures for Multivariate Analysis

Sanction Policy by State, 1997: Range=1 to 3, where 1 is weak sanctions (delayed and not applied to the entire family’s benefit), 2 is moderate sanctions (delayed but applied to the full family), and 3 is strong sanctions (full-family immediate sanctions). The frequency distribution is 31.3 percent (weak); 43.8 percent (moderate); and 25.0 percent (strong). Source: Vee Burke and Melinda Gish. 1998. Welfare Reform: Work Trigger, Time Limits, Exemptions and Sanctions Under TANF. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 98-697, EPW. August 6.


Interparty Competition, 1996: Based on the difference of proportions for seats controlled by each major party (Democrat and Republican) in each state’s lower and upper house. Range =.31 to .97, on a 0 to 1.00 scale, with higher values indicating greater party competition. Mean=.75; standard deviation=.17. Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 1998. Statistical Abstract of the United States. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Class Bias in Voting Turnout, 1996: Based on the ratio of the turnout of upper-income (individuals from families with incomes of $75,000 or more) citizens to that of lower-income (individuals from families below the poverty level) citizens in the 1996 election. Specifically, the measure is the percentage of upper class that voted divided by the percentage of the lower class that voted, multiplied by 100. Range =129.1 to 216.9, with values greater than 100 indicating a turnout bias favoring the wealthy. Mean=172.7; standard deviation=20.3. Source: James M. Avery and Mark Peffley. 2005. “Voter Registration Requirements, Voter Turnout, and Welfare Eligibility Policy: Class Bias Matters.” State Politics and Policy Quarterly 5(1): 47-67.


Percentage of Welfare Caseload African American, 1996: Based on the proportion of each state’s AFDC caseload in 1996 that was classified by the government as African American. Range =.3 to 86.2, with higher values indicating that African Americans made up a higher proportion of the caseload. Mean=32.7; standard deviation=26.4. Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Office of Family Assistance.
Percentage of Welfare Caseload Latina, 1996: Based on the proportion of each state’s AFDC caseload in 1996 that was classified by the government as Hispanic. Range = .01 to 57.4, with higher values indicating that Latino/as made up a higher proportion of the caseload. Mean=11.0; standard deviation=14.9. Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Office of Family Assistance.

Unemployment Rate, 1996: Official unemployment rate for each state. Range = 3.1 to 8.1 with higher values indicating a higher percentage of the labor force was unemployed. Mean=5.2; standard deviation=1.1. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: Local Area Unemployment 1996.


Change in Incarceration Rate, 1990-1996: Based on the percentage change in the state prison population from 1990 to 1996. Range = -4.2 percent to 164.5 percent, with higher values indicating larger increases in incarceration. Mean = 44.3; standard deviation = 24.8. Source: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.
References


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Table 2. Bivariate Correlations among Racial Position and Percentage Measures

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<th>Socioeconomic Disparity</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Marginality</th>
<th>Political Exclusion</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Dispersion</th>
<th>Black % of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marginality</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. Exclusion</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersion</td>
<td>.653*</td>
<td>.254</td>
<td>.150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black % Pop.</td>
<td>.832*</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.470*</td>
<td>.573*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black % Welfare</td>
<td>.702*</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>.358*</td>
<td>.760*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05
Table 3: State-Level Predictors of Welfare Sanction Choices (Ordered Logit Models)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Model 1: Relative Frequency</th>
<th>Model 2: Socioeconomic Disparity</th>
<th>Model 3: Socioeconomic Marginality</th>
<th>Model 4: Political Exclusion</th>
<th>Model 5: Socioeconomic Dispersion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried Birth Rate</td>
<td>0.251* (0.112)</td>
<td>0.253* (0.116)</td>
<td>0.309* (0.127)</td>
<td>0.251* (0.114)</td>
<td>0.232** (0.124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caseload-to-Pop. Ratio</td>
<td>-1.342** (0.453)</td>
<td>-1.519** (0.481)</td>
<td>-1.806** (0.570)</td>
<td>-1.350** (0.456)</td>
<td>-1.833** (0.571)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Ideology</td>
<td>-0.042** (0.016)</td>
<td>-0.040** (0.016)</td>
<td>-0.050** (0.018)</td>
<td>-0.046** (0.017)</td>
<td>-0.046** (0.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-party Competition</td>
<td>-4.409* (2.505)</td>
<td>-5.533* (2.707)</td>
<td>-8.021* (3.152)</td>
<td>-4.397* (2.5117)</td>
<td>-5.765* (2.900)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Vote Bias</td>
<td>0.012 (0.017)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.018)</td>
<td>0.023 (0.018)</td>
<td>0.011 (0.017)</td>
<td>0.006 (0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>0.246 (0.457)</td>
<td>0.201 (0.467)</td>
<td>0.160 (0.548)</td>
<td>0.227 (0.462)</td>
<td>0.565 (0.558)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Incarceration</td>
<td>0.014 (0.015)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.016)</td>
<td>0.024 (0.017)</td>
<td>0.012 (0.015)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Innovation</td>
<td>-0.226** (0.077)</td>
<td>-0.243** (0.080)</td>
<td>-0.235** (0.084)</td>
<td>-0.229** (0.080)</td>
<td>-0.272** (0.088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Latino</td>
<td>-0.022 (0.029)</td>
<td>-0.028 (0.033)</td>
<td>-0.033 (0.031)</td>
<td>-0.021 (0.029)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>0.034* (0.018)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.023)</td>
<td>0.048** (0.020)</td>
<td>0.031 (0.019)</td>
<td>0.035* (0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparity</td>
<td>1.267* (0.756)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disparity*Percent Black</td>
<td>0.014 (0.018)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalization</td>
<td>0.277 (0.955)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal* Percent Black</td>
<td>0.125** (0.049)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Exclusion</td>
<td>0.026 (0.685)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. Excl.* Percent Black</td>
<td>0.016 (0.023)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersion</td>
<td>1.512* (0.722)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersion* Percent Black</td>
<td>0.015 (0.019)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept 2</td>
<td>-16.087 (7.025)</td>
<td>-19.949 (7.721)</td>
<td>-17.559 (7.667)</td>
<td>-16.652 (7.370)</td>
<td>-23.380 (8.658)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Model</td>
<td>38.12 (10df) 41.28 (12df)</td>
<td>45.66 (12df) 48.63 (12df)</td>
<td>38.63 (12df) 40.54 (12df)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR $\chi^2$ N</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01

Notes: Significance tests for the caseload-to-population ratio are two-tailed. Significance tests for all other coefficients are one-tailed.
Figure 1. Scatterplot of States by Black-White Socioeconomic Disparity and Marginality
Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Immediate Full-Family Sanction Adoption by Black-White Socioeconomic Marginality and Percent Black

Notes: Predicted probabilities are based on coefficients from Model 3, Table 3, with all control variables set at their means. The effects of socioeconomic marginality are statistically significant when the black percent of the welfare caseload is set at one standard deviation above the mean. The baseline predicted probability with all variables set at their means is indicated by the center bar, .065.
Figure 3: Predicted Probability of Immediate Full-Family Sanction Adoption by Black-White Socioeconomic Disparity and Percent Black

Notes: Predicted probabilities are based on coefficients from Model 2, Table 3, with all control variables set at their means. The effects of socioeconomic disparity are statistically significant when the black percent of the welfare caseload is set at its mean and at one standard deviation above the mean. The baseline predicted probability with all variables set at their means is indicated by the center bar, .072.
Figure 4: Predicted Probability of Immediate Full-Family Sanction Adoption by Black Socioeconomic Dispersion and Percent Black

Notes: Predicted probabilities are based on coefficients from Model 5, Table 3, with all control variables set at their means. The effects of socioeconomic dispersion are statistically significant when the black percent of the welfare caseload is set at its mean and at one standard deviation above the mean. The baseline predicted probability with all variables set at their means is indicated by the center bar, 0.081.