

White Racial Consciousness¹ in One Midwestern City: The Case of Cincinnati, Ohio

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Introduction

In America no issue is more socially sensitive and politically charged than race. For much of American history, discussions about race have disproportionately focused on Blacks² and Whites.³ With demographic shifts along the racial fault line over the last twenty years, both Blacks and Whites are slowly becoming less conspicuous, especially in the northeastern, western, and southwestern regions of the country where, in some cases, Latinos have surpassed both Blacks and Whites in population. In Texas, California, Colorado, and New Mexico, for example, Latinos are now the largest and fastest growing minority, while Blacks and Whites are declining in population. Despite these shifts, Black-White interactions remain the focal point for many discussions about race and racism in America.

When it comes to matters of race, it is widely assumed (at least by many Blacks) that Whites are generally less enlightened than Blacks. Because Blacks have experienced a level of oppression unmatched by any other American ethnic and/or racial group, it is presumed that Blacks are more knowledgeable than Whites about race-related matters. With the use of public opinion data, this article examines the attitudes of Whites⁴ across a range of political, economic, and social issues. Moreover, we selected a region of the country where residents are not so easily stereotyped when it comes to attitudes about race. For example, northeastern residents are perceived (correctly or incorrectly) to be cosmopolitan and thus hold racially progressive views. The South, once a bastion of slavery and Jim Crow segregation and a place where old customs die hard, is viewed by the rest of the country as the “backward,” “backwater,” and “underdeveloped” region of the country, whose residents are, to this day, less tolerant of non-Whites than residents in other parts of the country. Conversely, many Americans think of the West Coast as liberal, left of center. For others, undoubtedly because of popular media images, the West Coast is often associated with the word “radical.” The Midwest is perhaps more difficult to stereotype. Simply put, Midwest residents are not so easily typecast like their northern, southern, and western counterparts. Because of the stereotypical images associated with the regions cited above, we elected to examine the attitudes of White Midwesterners.

Cincinnati as a Case Study

Cincinnati was chosen as our case study for several reasons. First, the city has a sizeable Black population (43 percent). Given the size of the African-American community, one might

¹ Racial consciousness is the ability to be cognizant of the myriad ways that race/racism manifests itself in various facets of American society, both historically and currently.

² The words Black and African American are used interchangeably throughout this article according to sound and context.

³ The words White and Caucasian are used interchangeably throughout this article.

⁴ Although this article is primarily concerned with White attitudes, there are some occasions in which White attitudes are contrasted with those of Blacks in order to illuminate the point being made. This approach allows us to contextualize properly White attitudes in a way that allows the reader to make good use of the findings presented in this article.

expect to see such dynamics as the racial threat hypothesis at work. The racial threat hypothesis posits that the larger the Black population, the more likely Whites feel threatened by Blacks' ability to compete for jobs, leverage electoral influence, and compete for goods and services (Key, 1949). Society is composed of competitive individuals and groups, all struggling to maintain or advance their positions on a wide range of issues. According to V. O. Key, Jr., the racial threat hypothesis suggests that Whites feel threatened by Blacks when their numbers reach a level at which Whites believe that Blacks have the capacity to alter the balance of power between the races (Key, 1949). Logically then, White Cincinnatians might, given the size of the Black population in their city, feel more threatened by Blacks than Whites who live in Columbus, Ohio, where the Black population is 28 percent of the total population. Similarly, Whites who live in Seattle, Washington, for example, might feel less threatened by Blacks (compared to Whites in either Columbus or Cincinnati, Ohio) because Blacks make up a mere 9 percent of Seattle's total population. This real or imagined fear of Black Power on the part of some Whites manifests itself in attitudes, even to the extent of envisioning a Black take over.

Second, there is a long history of strained police-community relations in Cincinnati as evidenced by the disparate treatment of the city's African-American residents. A local independent magazine, *City Beat*, published a study that highlighted the disparate treatment received by African-American motorists. Its researchers found that of the 141,000 traffic citations issued by Cincinnati police officers over a nearly two-year period, African-American drivers were twice as likely as Whites to be cited for driving without a license, twice as likely for not wearing a seat belt, and four times as likely for driving without proof of insurance. This widely publicized report confirmed what many Blacks had already known: disparities in policing are rampant within African-American communities. Presumably, the report also enlightened those Whites who may have been oblivious to disparities in policing or pretended not to know about police abuse of power.

Third, in 2001 the city was the site of the most devastating uprising⁵ of the twenty-first century, making it likely that residents would have strong opinions about matters of a political, social, and economic nature as they relate to race. Since the survey was conducted three years after the uprising (in 2004), we were hopeful that the feelings expressed by the respondents were carefully considered assessments about the city and the circumstances that led to the rebellion, rather than knee-jerk reactions caused by the enormity, intensity, and scope of the upheaval. Because the survey was conducted three years after the revolt, there was reason to believe that opinions would not be so emotionally charged. Admittedly, there was also the concern that the 2001 rebellion may have fomented White hostility. We were certain that if so, those sentiments would surface throughout the survey.

Given the socio-political-economic dynamics that existed in the city of Cincinnati at the time and the violent response to those conditions, we were confident that the survey results would not only be rich in content but also have public policy implications.

Theoretical Significance

⁵ Rather than use the term riot, which is a frivolous outbreak of violence that is void of political purpose, we deliberately chose to use the word uprising. An uprising occurs when a group of aggrieved persons believe that the institutional channels for redress have failed them and they are left with no choice but to rebel. To avoid redundancy, we use the words uprising, revolt, rebellion, and disorder interchangeably throughout the article.

Why is this research important? First, it provides a glimpse into how distant or close Blacks and Whites are in their thinking about matters that are inextricably tied to race. Second, it allows us to see to what extent the views of Blacks and Whites are similar or divergent on some of society's most pressing issues, generally, and some of the most important challenges facing the city of Cincinnati, specifically. Third, it is important to see how in tune Whites are with current or long-standing developments in the city in which they live. Fourth, it is equally important to know whether Whites believe things are getting better or worse. Fifth, this article enables us to gauge White Cincinnatians' level of political/social consciousness. Finally, this research serves to alert policymakers to the kinds of difficulties people face on a daily basis, which in turn may enable them to formulate and implement the kind of initiatives designed to improve peoples' lives.

Methods

The survey was administered in 2004 under the direction of Cathy McDaniels-Wilson. A total of 503 Cincinnati residents were interviewed by telephone, 180 of whom were African American, and 278 Caucasian (McDaniels-Wilson, Sykes, and Myers, 2004). Respondents were asked questions across a broad range of subjects. Respondents were asked to select from the following choices: (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) disagree, and (d) strongly disagree. The purpose of the survey was to identify attitudes and perceptions among Whites and non-Whites in Hamilton County of Cincinnati, Ohio, that speak to matters of racial and ethnic understanding. The survey was developed by the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and pretested with interviews by the Strategic Research Group (SRG) in collaboration with members of the Psychology Department at Xavier University. The sample was created using a list-assisted random digit dialing (RDD) sampling method, which reduces problems associated with the pure RDD and the Mitofsky-Waksberg method. People were randomly selected within a ten-mile radius from the center of downtown Cincinnati.

It should be noted that the list-assisted sampling design is appropriate for large-scale surveys, because it is significantly more efficient than prior RDD techniques. Once a household was identified, SRG used a random within-house sampling method, in which all adults living in the household had an equal chance of being selected for participation. All interviews were conducted at the SRG full-service facility located in Columbus, Ohio. All calls were made primarily between 5:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., with at least one call made during the day and on a weekday as well as Saturday. A computer-assisted telephone interviewing software program was used for the survey. The response rate was 46 percent.

In order to put this article in its proper context, a rich portrait of Cincinnati's history and a discussion of the resultant 2001 uprising are necessary.

A Historical and Socio-Political Portrait of Cincinnati and Its Black Residents

African Americans' history in Cincinnati predates the Civil War. The city was founded in 1788, and soon after Blacks travelled across the Ohio River to live and work there. Many had been born free, some were freed slaves, and others were enslaved fugitives who had escaped the South. Cincinnati played a prominent role in the Underground Railroad, and its ties with the abolitionists who abhorred and denounced slavery are well documented. African Americans, therefore, assumed the city to be free of the type of racial animus that existed in the South. They

soon realized, however, that the same attitudes that were prevalent down south were also present in the North (Tuttle, 1996).

For many, Cincinnati offered the prospect of work. Cradled in the southern bend of the Ohio River, Cincinnati flourished as a river town, with the bulk of its commercial and manufacturing establishments resting on the banks of the Ohio. By 1850, the city ranked fourth in the nation in manufacturing, perhaps most noted for its breweries. Cincinnati seemed like a beacon of freedom and opportunity. According to Zane Miller, the three largest nationalities to settle the area were Germans, Irish, and African Americans (Miller, 1968; Miller and Tucker, 1998). The Irish and Blacks shared the Ohio River bottoms with wholesale houses and factories, while the Germans occupied Over-the-Rhine. The biggest influx of residents occurred between 1890 and 1910. However, without the necessary resources to build fruitful and prosperous lives, some found themselves in a situation similar to that from which they had escaped. Although life in Cincinnati proved difficult for European immigrants, the hardest hit by poverty were African Americans and, to some degree, the Irish. For the most part, both worked as common laborers or in domestic service. And despite the fact that legal discrimination in many areas of the city was struck down with the repeal of the Black Code Laws⁶ in the 1880s, one local Cincinnati newspaper proclaimed in Du Boisian fashion that the “color-line is everywhere” (Miller, 1968).

Virtually all hotels, restaurants, theaters, and amusement parks were closed to African Americans, and by 1910 housing was completely segregated. Blacks responded by developing their own social and political organizations. Between 1880 and 1900, numerous civil rights groups emerged, most notably the National Progressive League, which in 1897 claimed a membership of 1,000 strong. Another group was the Douglass League, which developed a reputation for taking a hard independent line in local politics. Blacks also formed the Civil Rights League, which fought for the right to use public accommodations. Unfortunately, these organizations did not have much cachet outside of African-American circles (Taylor, 1993).

After World War II and the apex of the civil rights movement, many manifestations of socially sanctioned racism withered away, and places of public accommodation began opening up to everyone. Although employers no longer openly rejected applicants on the basis of race with the same fervor, the types of jobs available to Blacks remained an issue. For example, in 1948 half of the companies in Cincinnati employed Blacks only in menial jobs (Taylor, 1993). To be sure, the glass ceiling kept Blacks tied to the bottom rung of the economic ladder. And although the Black population increased considerably after 1950, Cincinnati’s limited voting system kept Black political representation low. By 1957, the Black population had reached an all-time high, yet the lone Black city councilperson lost his seat in 1966. Oddly enough, there were two Blacks on the city council during the early to mid-1950s, when the Black population was significantly smaller (Taylor, 1993). This was due to a proportional representational system that was later changed to an at-large electoral system.

The 1968 Kerner Commission in its study of Cincinnati pointed out that African Americans attributed the lack of Black city council representatives to “dilution of the Negro vote through abolition of the proportional representation system of electing the nine councilmen” (National Advisory Commission, 1968). Moreover, by 1967, although 40 percent of the city’s schoolchildren were African American, the school board was comprised of one Black member,

⁶ Although the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 prohibited slavery north and west of the Ohio River, the Ohio Legislature passed the Black Laws in 1803 and 1807 to restrict Blacks’ opportunities. The laws discouraged Blacks from settling in the state. Those who chose to make Cincinnati their home were cordoned off from Whites, prohibited from attending public schools, or receive public assistance.

and “of [the] more than eighty members of various city commissions, only three or four were Negroes.” Black membership in trade unions was also dismal, and picketing by Cincinnati’s NAACP chapter at city construction sites changed little.

Although segregation boundaries loosened during the 1950s and 1960s, few Blacks (due to a lack of job prospects) possessed the necessary resources to move into better neighborhoods. Still, previously majority White neighborhoods such as Avondale and Over-the-Rhine slowly started becoming less White. In the early 1960s, Avondale underwent a transition from predominantly Jewish to heavily Black. Over-the-Rhine, which covers parts of three communities—Over-the-Rhine (first settled by German immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, hence the name), West End (the epicenter of Black social and cultural life until it was devastated by urban renewal), and Mt. Auburn (an historic neighborhood to the northeast of Over-the-Rhine, overlooking and blending into it)—followed suit. In 1950 Over-the-Rhine had been home to 30,000 people, 99 percent of whom were White. During the 1960s, West End Blacks had moved into the neighborhood together with Whites who had migrated out of the Appalachian mining communities of southeast Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky.

During this period, middle-class African-American leaders began to lose some credibility, as their efforts produced few opportunities for working-class Blacks. Almost 15 percent of the city’s Black residents were unemployed, compared to 4 percent unemployment for Whites: “two of every five Negro families were living on or below the poverty level” (National Advisory Commission, 1968). The Black teenage unemployment rate was estimated to be well above 20 percent. As a result of such high unemployment among Black youth, there were various disturbances throughout the city. It was, in part, due to these conditions that Cincinnati Blacks twice erupted during the late 1960s.

Perhaps the more noteworthy of the two revolts occurred in 1967. The seeds of rebellion had been planted as early as 1965 when a Black man was believed to have murdered a White female secretary. In December 1966, Postel Laskey, an African-American musician, was arrested and charged with the murder. He was later convicted and sentenced to death. The prevailing sentiment among Blacks was that the city was too racially charged for Laskey to have received a fair trial. Blacks were further incensed when it became known that during the same time period a White man, convicted of murdering his wife, received a lesser sentence. Blacks protested, as the disparity in sentencing seemed to reflect a double standard of justice.

The protest led by Laskey’s cousin, Peter Frakes, led to his arrest and being charged with blocking traffic. Many African Americans viewed Frakes’s arrest as additional proof of disparate policing. Between January 1966 and June 1966, Blacks accounted for 70 percent of those arrested under that same ordinance (Upton and Jeffries, 2011). The selective enforcement of the ordinance was sometimes accompanied with brute force. Frakes’s arrest sparked another massive protest on June 12 at Avondale Junior High School. According to the Kerner Commission (1968):

Part of the significance of such a protest meeting lay in the context of past events. Without the city realizing what was occurring over the years, protest through political and non-violent channels had become increasingly difficult for Negroes. To young militant Negroes, especially, such protests appeared to have become almost futile.

These and other grievances surfaced at the June 12, 1967, protest. As the police mobilized, some Blacks were perhaps reminded of the long history of police abuse against

African Americans, and violence erupted. African-American leaders immediately requested an open meeting with the city council to present them with a list of demands. Among them were repeal of the anti-loitering law, the immediate release of those arrested during the disturbance, full employment for Blacks, and equal justice in the courts. Their demands were rebuffed, infuriating both law abiding, middle-class Blacks as well as well as community residents who had had enough. The following afternoon, the city council held an open session. The chamber overflowed with residents. At some point, the National Guard started dispersing those who were waiting outside the chamber for their turn to testify. When word of this spread, those inside walked out in protest, adding to the tense environment. The violence lasted until June 18, 1967, when the police and National Guard quelled it. Of the total 404 persons arrested, 388 were twenty-six years of age or younger. Of the adults arrested, 29 percent were unemployed. Within a month, violence once again flared. Twenty-seven fires occurred over two days (July 3-4), causing an estimated \$1 million in damage. The same pattern of violence occurred again in late July. Twenty-two fires occurred during those two days (July 27-28) of upheaval, resulting in an estimated \$282,000 in damage and the shooting death of a Black bystander by an overzealous police officer (National Advisory Commission, 1968).

Yet another major uprising occurred in the spring of 1968 (April 4-11). Various factors seemed to have triggered the violence: 1) the alleged murder of an African-American woman by a White police officer; 2) the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and 3) the high rate of unemployment. One Black and one White were killed during the melee, and 304 people were arrested.

More than forty years later, several of the same communities that erupted during the late 1960s figured prominently in the worst urban uprising since the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion. Worse still, some of the same challenges that Black Cincinnatians faced in the late 1960s were still present in 2001.

Black Life in Cincinnati: The New Millennium

By the year 2000, Cincinnati was considered the country's eighth most racially segregated city, typifying the disparities between Black and Whites nationally. Indeed, housing challenges mirrored that of other areas, such as education, income, and employment. In 2002, for example, the high school graduation rate was 56 percent for Black students versus 71 percent for White students ("Cincinnati in Black and White," 2006). One of the reasons for the poor graduation rate was Black students' inability to pass the tenth-grade math assessment test. Only half of them passed the test that year, compared to more than 80 percent of White students. The data suggested that Black students were performing poorly at all levels. For example, of those students who passed the fourth-grade math assessment test, 25 percent were African American, compared to 57 percent of White students ("Cincinnati in Black and White," 2006).

A look at income levels reveals a similarly troubling pattern. The average income of Cincinnatians rose 8 percent from 1986 to 2001; however, this is misleading. Those at the high end of the income bracket enjoyed increases in salary, but the income of the typical working-class resident did not keep pace. The median family income for Over-the-Rhine, one of the poorest (and Blackest) sections of town, hovered around \$8,500 annually. In contrast, those living nearby in one of the most upscale suburbs, the village of Indian Hill, had a median family income of \$194,594 (Upton, Jeffries, and McDaniels-Wilson, 2007). To make matters worse, a disproportionate amount of public and private dollars (taxes or deposits to lending institutions)

contributed by African Americans was not equitably reinvested in their neighborhoods or businesses.

Despite these inequities, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the city was being hailed as a great midwestern success story for, among other things, shedding its “rust belt” image. The city also received high marks as a tourist attraction. The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden was rated thirteenth overall by the *U. S. Family Travel Guide*. In another publication, the Cincinnati Art Museum tied for fourth, along with the renowned Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Art Institute of Chicago, as best museum by another publication. And for the first time in history *American Style* magazine rated Cincinnati as the number five arts destination in the country (*Reno Gazette-Journal*, 2004). City officials were also quick to point out that Cincinnati was doing well economically, with housing and commercial development occurring on the waterfront and a new bio-tech sector launched by the University of Cincinnati’s Medical Center. Yet amidst this tremendous growth and prosperity, the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” was vast. Despite billions of dollars spent on development projects such as professional football and baseball stadiums, new expressways, housing for middle- and upper-class families, business development, tax abatements, and proposed additional funding for downtown businesses, there continued to be a growing disparity in economic inclusion, giving rise to high Black unemployment. The unemployment rate among Blacks was twice that of Whites. Equally sobering is that of those under eighteen years of age who lived in poverty, 44.4 percent of them were Black, while only 16.1 percent were White. In fact, Cincinnati was ranked fourteenth among fifty regions nationally for income disparity between Blacks and Whites (“Cincinnati in Black and White,” 2006).

Aside from the growing income gap, Cincinnati experienced a spike in “White flight” that began decades earlier. According to Cincinnati’s City Planning Department, the total population of the city had declined by 6 percent, or 21,417 people, from 1980 to 1990 as many Whites relocated to the suburbs. Over the next ten years, more than 30,000 residents fled the city, equaling 9.1 percent of the population (*Free Press-Independent News*, 2002). Thus, Blacks comprised an increased percentage of the city’s population without a corresponding increase in the city’s governance.

In addition to White flight, in the minds of some African Americans, tensions between Blacks and the police force over the years seemed to heighten rather than subside. A 2001 exposé by *The Cincinnati Enquirer* underscored this point. The piece revealed that 90 percent of the minor complaints by citizens against police officers were dismissed, and complaints were rarely forwarded to the division’s internal investigators or reviewed by the city’s independent investigation agency (Anglen and Horn, 2001). There is little reason to believe that major complaints from Blacks were taken any more seriously, as no Cincinnati police officer had ever been convicted of killing an African American despite the blatant history of police repression (*San Jose Mercury News*, 2001).

The grim picture painted above, telling as it is, accounts for much of the animosity that had been building for years between Blacks and Whites. The plight of inner-city Black Cincinnatians was arguably as dire, if not more so, as in any other northern or midwestern city. Over time, adverse socio-economic changes can create political instability, especially when political leaders are not responsive to the needs and desires of their poor inner-city residents. In the midst of intense poverty, joblessness, severe residential segregation, and a lack of access to the levers of power, some Blacks felt compelled to contest the city’s entrenched political order via the only viable avenue open to them: rebellion. When orthodox and conventional channels

for expressing grievances are blocked, residents will sometimes use non-institutional methods to voice their concerns; such was the case in Cincinnati. For example, one community resident who was interviewed during the week of the uprising was quoted as saying that what happened was “the only way to get their attention.” Another resident responded that “the proper way doesn’t work for us. At least now people are listening to us” (Wilkinson and Prendergast, 2001).

The 2001 Uprising

The 2001 Cincinnati uprising was the most destructive since the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion. The seven days of upheaval was ignited by the police killing of a nineteen-year-old African-American male, Timothy Thomas, the fifteenth Black male killed by Cincinnati police since 1995. No police officer was ever found guilty through any civil or criminal trials as a result of these incidents, and in only one case were the police officers involved reprimanded or required to undergo extra training.

Two days after the Thomas shooting, a city council meeting was besieged by residents, and this marked the beginning of a week of violence and intense racial hostility. At 3:00 p.m. on April 9, as the city council went into session, the Cincinnati Black United Front protested before the City Council’s Law and Public Safety Committee meeting got underway. Community residents demanded an explanation for the fatal shooting of Thomas. The following day, twenty young men protested peacefully at Vine and 13th Streets, an intersection along the path on which Officer Damico pursued Thomas three nights earlier. Within a few hours, the restless crowd grew, and protestors moved north toward Findlay Market, and then on to Fountain Square. Tempers flared. Debris was tossed into the historic fountain, windows of local businesses were smashed, planters and vendor carts were overturned, and people were yanked from passing vehicles. By nightfall, the upheaval was in earnest.

Also on April 10, community leaders denounced the violence, imploring others to settle matters peacefully. Political leaders, the police chief, and the mayor all held news conferences. At 3:30 p.m. that afternoon, the New Black Panther Party held a protest at the site of the shooting. At 5:40 p.m., random violence spilled over from Over-the-Rhine into Avondale, Winton Terrace, Walnut Hills, and English Woods. Arson, assault, looting, shooting, and property destruction were rampant. Around 10:00 p.m., the police substation at Montgomery Road and Woodburn Avenue was in flames. At approximately 11:00 p.m., Police Special Agent Andrew Noguiera was shot, but not seriously wounded.

On April 12 at 10:27 a.m., Mayor Charlie Luken signed a state of emergency. City Manager John Shirley then set a city-wide curfew from 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. One hundred Ohio State Highway Patrol officers arrived in riot gear. The following day, under mounting pressure, Kent Ryan, the city’s public safety director, resigned. After Thomas’s funeral on April 14, six SWAT officers were accused of shooting beanbags into a crowd of peaceful protestors in Over-the-Rhine. A federal investigation was subsequently launched. At 4:20 p.m., former Attorney General John Ashcroft telephoned Luken to lend support. When the smoke cleared, property damage was estimated at \$13.7 million, hundreds had been injured and arrested, and seventy-eight buildings had been leveled.

It is important to note that the 2001 uprising forced a criminal trial of the police officers involved in the murder of Timothy Thomas. None of the officers was found guilty. Nevertheless, the public trial signaled that these issues could no longer be ignored. In the aftermath of the disorder, the Cincinnati Black United Front, the Coalition for a Just Cincinnati, and the Coalition

of Concerned Citizens called for a city-wide boycott. By July 2004, the boycott had cost the city over \$10 million in revenue. Moreover, financial settlements were awarded to families of shooting victims, although the city officials refused to admit any wrongdoing. Anyone living in Cincinnati during this highly combustible period was likely to have some opinions about the socio-political environment in this city. The survey provided us with a tool with which to tap into those sentiments.

Tripartite System of Oppression

As mentioned earlier, the survey contained an array of questions designed to ascertain a person's level of racial and ethnic understanding. Although the questions were wide-ranging, they can be organized into three categories: political, economic, and social.⁷ That the majority of questions posed fell within these three areas is both fortuitous and appropriate, as sociologist Aldon Morris argued in his classic work, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, that by the middle of the twentieth century, Whites had established a comprehensive system of domination whereby Blacks were controlled economically, politically, and personally. Morris refers to this development as a "tripartite system of domination" (Morris, 1984).

Economic oppression emerged as Blacks were disproportionately herded into the lowest paying and least desirable jobs. Blacks were oppressed politically because they were systematically excluded from the political process. As a general rule, there were no Black officials in city and state government, and law and order was maintained by lily-white police departments. The police system, especially in the South, was designed to keep track of Blacks, to ensure that they remained in their place.⁸ The White power structure also made the decisions about how public resources were allotted. Naturally, Blacks received far less than Whites because in practice Blacks had few citizenship rights and were not members of the polity. If Blacks tried to exert themselves, the police were there to keep them in line or in some cases put them down.

Blacks were oppressed socially as they were often cordoned off into the least desirable sections of town and forbidden from venturing into certain areas and/or public spaces. This tripartite system of domination to which Morris refers was backed by the iron fist of local governments, of which law enforcement played an integral part. The role of law enforcement in the South is well documented by, among others, the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal. In his classic *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal (1994) argued that the United States had a history of using law enforcement to keep Blacks subdued and subjugated, dating back to slavery. For generations, the formal, officially approved role of the police, both in the South and often in the northern "free" states, was that of oppressor (Myrdal, 1994). For example, from 1920 to 1932 police officers were responsible for more than half of all the murders of Blacks in the South. White police officers were also responsible for 68 percent of African Americans killed outside the South (Myrdal, 1994). A similar pattern prevailed over the next several decades.

Few can deny that the repression of Black Southerners was stifling. Morris says that all Whites had established a comprehensive system of domination over Blacks that not only

⁷ No attempt has been made to analyze all of the questions and answers. Rather in an effort to keep the article manageable, we sought to identify only those questions that spoke to Whites' level of racial consciousness.

⁸ For a contemporary discussion of this issue, see Angela Y. Davis, "Race and Criminalization," in Vernon D. Johnson and Bill Lyne (eds.), *Walkin' the Talk: An Anthology of African American Studies* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003).

protected, maintained, and advanced White privilege, but also generated tremendous human suffering on the part of Blacks. Simply put, Whites had a stake in Blacks' subjugation because they derived privileges from it (in one way or another). Although Morris's analysis is focused on the South, there are some similarities between southern Blacks and Blacks' plight in Cincinnati, not only at the turn of the century, but also in 2001.

The responses uncovered by this research are both telling and important. What follows is a discussion of those questions/statements that fit squarely within the categories mentioned earlier.

Results

Political

The following were included among the interesting findings uncovered by this survey. In response to the statement, "Government officials are less likely to take action on a request or complaint from racial minority constituents than Caucasian constituents," slightly more than two-thirds of Whites disagreed (13.5 percent strongly disagreed, 54.4 percent disagreed) compared to a third of White respondents who concurred (26.2 percent agreed, 6.0 percent strongly agreed) that government officials are less likely to take Black grievances seriously. One possible explanation for Whites believing that Black grievances are taken just as seriously as their own is that some Whites may have been so oblivious to the role that race plays in everyday life that it never occurred to them that Black grievances are less likely to gain a hearing than complaints from Whites. In other words, perhaps it was not the case that Whites genuinely disagreed with the statement, but rather the proposition was one that had never even occurred to them. Therefore, because it had never crossed their minds, it could not possibly be true. Naively, some may have even considered the statement far-fetched and answered accordingly.

Whites were less adamant about Blacks' ability to receive redress through the legal system, but it could be argued that their reactions indicated a level of confidence in the system that probably did not mirror reality. To the comment, "In America, it is more difficult for African Americans to get justice through the legal system than it is for Caucasians," nearly 47 percent of Whites agreed (37.5 percent agreed, 9.4 percent strongly agreed), versus 53 percent that did not (13.0 percent strongly disagreed, 40.1 percent disagreed). This is telling, considering that for years Blacks were not allowed to sit on juries. Consequently, due process of law was virtually non-existent, as the courts were controlled by White judges and juries, which routinely decided in favor of Whites regardless of the situation. In light of this ignominious history, it is surprising that more than 50 percent of Whites believed the legal system to be an impartial guardian of the law.

On the subject of the police, Whites' reactions were split. More than 50 percent (41.5 percent agreed, 9.8 percent strongly agreed) believed that "The actions of law enforcement officers help contribute to racial tensions in our communities." Forty-nine percent (14.0 percent strongly disagreed, 34.7 percent disagreed) of Whites disagreed with the comment. How nearly 50 percent of Whites could be of the opinion that the police played no role in fomenting racial tension in Cincinnati is puzzling. With the exception of the Chicago Police Department, no other major midwestern metropolitan police department is more known for its unbridled brutality than Cincinnati. Moreover, some of the police shootings of the fifteen Black males from 1995 to 2001 were featured prominently in the news. Additionally, a criminal trial followed the killing of Timothy Thomas that elicited both local and national media attention. It could be that many

Whites were unwilling to admit openly to law enforcement's culpability when it came to the city's racially hostile environment. For some Whites, the manhandling and or killing of Blacks is an unfortunate but necessary byproduct of keeping the streets safe. As long as the police are able to keep the criminals from victimizing Whites, Whites will continue to support the police and, in many cases, look the other way despite overwhelming evidence of misconduct.

There is reason to believe that not only are many Whites becoming increasingly more aware of police mistreatment of Blacks and police abuse of power generally, but they are willing to admit it openly and in some cases denounce it. When video footage of four Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King was broadcast internationally in 1991, many Whites were shocked and repulsed. Until then, some simply could not imagine that such a thing could occur, certainly not by those who are sworn to protect and serve. President George H. W. Bush may have been one such person. Upon viewing the footage President Bush is reported to have said, "It sickened me" (Mydans, 1992). The King video thrust the issue of police brutality into America's living rooms.

Economic

Whites were even less sympathetic when the comments turned to Blacks and the marketplace. To the comment, "Too many African Americans still lose out on jobs and promotions," the majority of Whites again seemed to be either unaware of the role that race plays in employment practices or at least unwilling to acknowledge it. Nearly 60 percent (12.5 percent strongly disagree, 46.2 percent disagree) of White respondents did not agree with the comment, compared to more than 41 percent (32.6 percent agree, 8.7 percent strongly agree) who did, indicating that some Whites understand the challenges that Blacks encounter in the labor market. We would like to believe that the latter findings also show that some Whites understand well that Blacks oftentimes have to be twice as good in order to get the job, keep it, and climb within the company ranks. Whites responded similarly when confronted with a somewhat related question. When asked to respond to the statement, "Generally speaking racial minorities have to work harder than Caucasians in order to keep their jobs and earn promotions," 40 percent (35.6 percent agree, 5.3 percent strongly agree) believed that the statement was accurate. Nearly 60 percent (12.9 percent strongly disagree, 46.2 percent disagree) of the respondents, however, disagreed with the notion that Blacks have to work harder than Whites. As one can see, these findings are consistent with Whites' opinions on an earlier question about the extent to which Blacks are passed over for promotions and the like due to race. In stark contrast to Whites, 84 percent (48.3 percent agree, 35.8 percent strongly agree) of African Americans were of the opinion that Blacks have to work harder than Whites in order to keep their jobs and/or be promoted. The wide gap in perception between Blacks and Whites in this instance is perhaps due to experience, as Blacks understand all too well that if they are to hold onto their jobs and/or position themselves for a promotion, it is imperative that they outwork and outshine their White counterparts.

When asked whether banks and other financial institutions obstruct equal access to quality housing for racial and ethnic minorities by manipulating interest rates and other fees, nearly 70 percent disagreed (6.4 percent strongly disagree, 62.7 percent disagree), while nearly a third (26.6 percent agree, 4.3 percent strongly agree) believed that there was some truth to the statement. Again, some Whites appear to be ignorant of the intricate ways that race plays itself out in certain situations. Perhaps for many, because racial restrictions on housing are no longer socially acceptable or legal, some Whites are unfamiliar with the myriad ways in which banks and other financial institutions can and have limited Blacks' access to certain neighborhoods.

Truthfully, this is not a new phenomenon, as there is a long-standing history of collusion among real estate agents, banks, and other institutions, but it appears that for some Whites these types of racist practices are a thing of the past. For other Whites, perhaps those of a younger generation, this sort of racial profiling is unfathomable. Sadly, racial profiling of this type, while prohibited by law, probably occurs more often than most people realize or are willing to admit. However, to Blacks who lived in the Jim Crow South, where it was not uncommon for banks to call in the balance on a mortgage if it was learned that the homeowner was engaged in civil rights work, the manipulation of interest rates and other fees is not unknown. In fact when Blacks were asked the same question, 74 percent (26.1 percent strongly agree, 47.9 percent agree) of them agreed, compared to 26 percent who disagreed.

Some of the more interesting collection of opinions expressed by Whites was directed at illegal immigrants. In recent years illegal immigrants have been at the center of much debate. Some believe they are a drag on society, while others believe them to be (legal or otherwise) entitled to the same rights as Americans. Interestingly, though not entirely surprisingly, nearly 60 percent (49.4 percent agree, 8.8 percent strongly agree) of White respondents blamed illegal immigrants for America's economic woes, versus 41 percent who thought otherwise. Historically, conservatives and right-wing politicians have vilified illegal immigrants and, when politically expedient, made them the scapegoats for the country's economic woes. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the reality is that "tax revenues of all types generated by immigrants—both legal and unauthorized—exceed the costs of the services they use," and "undocumented immigrants contribute \$7 billion a year in Social Security taxes even though they cannot claim benefits from this program" (Drum Major Institute, 2009).

Strangely enough, the overwhelming majority of Whites (56.7 percent disagree, 6.0 percent strongly disagree) disagreed with the notion that "it is unfair to American citizens if jobs and resources are lost to immigrants." On the one hand, many Whites believed illegal immigrants to be the cause of America's economic downturn, but on the other hand, the same percentage of Whites do not begrudge illegal immigrants for securing jobs that had historically gone to Whites and others. This seemingly contradictory position is not one that the authors of this article can easily reconcile. Logically, it makes no sense.

*Social*⁹

Turning to social issues we find Whites' responses equally intriguing on a range of topics. One of the more popularly studied topics in the fields of political science and communication involves the intersection of race, crime, and the media. Over the past fifteen years, much has been made about the disproportionate number of African Americans who appear in crime-related news stories or reality TV shows like *COPS*. In response to the statement, "Racial minorities in America are often overrepresented by the news and other media in terms of the numbers of them actually involved in crime," more than 60 percent (45.1 percent agree, 18.7 percent strongly agree) of White respondents concurred, while 36 percent (6.0 percent strongly disagree, 30.2 percent disagree) disagreed. The fact that more than two-thirds of White respondents believed that racial minorities are overrepresented in crime-related news stories suggests that this issue has moved beyond the ivy towers of the university, where scholars have debated this matter for years, and made its way into the public domain, where even members of the general public are aware of the manner in which African Americans are criminalized. This is

⁹ Some of the choices from which respondents could select vary widely in this section.

especially true of Black males, who are often shown on cop shows or on the news, oftentimes either in handcuffs, being chased, or hog tied like some form of subhuman.

When asked, “Do you think that racism toward racial minority groups still constitutes a major problem in America?” 58 percent of Whites agreed (34.8 percent strongly agreed, 23.2 percent agreed), compared to 42 percent (32.6 percent disagreed, 9.4 percent strongly disagreed) who did not. Blacks, on the other hand, overwhelmingly (87 percent) believed that racism is still a major problem in this country. In her book *Everyday Forms of Whiteness* Melanie E. L. Bush calls attention to Whites’ increasing belief that Blacks have achieved racial equality and that both races have equal opportunity (Bush, 2011).

In response to the question, “Do you think that racial minorities in your community are treated less fairly than Caucasians in dealings with the police such as in a traffic incident?” 54 percent (33.7 percent probably yes, 19.9 percent definitely yes) answered in the affirmative, compared to 46 percent who disagreed. Despite the history of police abuse of power in the city of Cincinnati, of that 46 percent, 22 percent (22.8 percent definitely not) were adamant in their belief that racial minorities were not treated any differently than Whites by the police. Conversely, nearly 80 percent of African Americans believed that police treat Blacks less fairly than Whites. The White responses here are not incongruent with those uncovered in an earlier police-related question in which respondents were asked about the police and racial tension. Still, we find the responses to both questions curious, especially since it is widely known that over a five-year period a total of fifteen Black males were shot and killed by police officers. No Whites died at the hands of police officers during the same period, signaling to some that Cincinnati police officers are allowed to kill Black males with impunity. The only logical explanation for the way Whites responded to this question is that some Whites are simply unwilling to admit publicly or to an interviewer what they know to be true. To admit to knowing that disparities in policing exist is to risk being viewed either as someone who is complicit in Black peoples’ oppression or, even worse, as a racist.

One interesting observation was Whites’ stance on whether or not racism still exists. Fortunately, it appears that Whites who believe that racism is dead appear to be in the minority. Sixty-five percent (52 percent disagree, 13.6 percent strongly disagree) of White respondents disagreed with the statement, “Most racial minorities are no longer discriminated against.” About a third (6.6 percent strongly agree, 27.8 percent agree) of the respondents, however, naively concurred. Oddly, 23 percent of Black respondents agreed. Admittedly, there will always be some Whites who believe that we have achieved racial equality in the United States, despite the fact that social and economic indices suggest otherwise. That nearly a quarter of the Black respondents believed that minorities are no longer discriminated against is perplexing. Few Blacks of any age have not experienced some level of racism during their lifetime.

Some of the more illuminating reactions by respondents were in response to the comment, “Racial integration of schools, businesses, and residences has been of benefit to African Americans.” Surprisingly, 85 percent (65.5 percent disagree, 19.8 percent strongly disagree) of Whites did not agree that racial integration benefited African Americans. Curiously, 73 percent (59.1 percent disagree, 14.0 percent strongly disagree) of African Americans also rejected the claim that racial integration benefited Blacks. It is a widely accepted axiom among students of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), of which racial integration was a major part, that the CRM is one of the most significant movements of the twentieth century. Yet, the majority of Black respondents in this survey seemed unconvinced of that fact. Although the number of Blacks who are of this opinion is extremely high, it is even more startling that more Whites than

Blacks believe that racial integration failed African Americans. This rather striking position on the part of Whites does not jibe with some of the other responses uncovered by our research. Although it is outside the purview of this article, it would be interesting to find out in what areas of life both Blacks and Whites believe the Civil Rights Movement has failed. It is true that many working-class and poor Blacks did not reap the kinds of benefits that affirmative action afforded many middle-class African Americans. Still, the idea that Blacks generally did not benefit from the movement is a bit of a stretch. Still, while the argument is not new to the authors of this article, what is remarkable is the overwhelming number of both Blacks, and Whites especially, who viewed the CRM as a failure.

Welfare, one of the most politically charged issues of the past twenty years, did not elicit the kind of reaction that we anticipated. Fifty-one percent (43.7 percent disagree, 7.6 percent strongly disagree) of White respondents disagreed with the comment that “Most of the people benefiting from welfare programs are racial minorities,” compared to 48 percent who did. Given the way that some politicians use welfare as a way to drive a wedge between Black and White voters, we expected Whites to concur overwhelmingly. Still, 48 percent (9.5 percent strongly agree, 39.2 percent agree) of White respondents agreed with the statement, suggesting that there is still a fair number of Whites who are influenced by the rhetoric of politicians and thus unaware of the fact that Whites have historically been the primary beneficiaries of welfare programs (Howard, 2008).

What is promising is that a larger number of Whites have seemingly not bought into the depictions of welfare as a “Black program.” What is unsettling, however, is that, although approximately 55 percent of African-American respondents disagreed with the comment, nearly 35 percent of African-American respondents apparently believed that minorities are in fact the primary beneficiaries of welfare programs. One possible, albeit weak, explanation could be that some of the welfare offices that Blacks frequent are located in neighborhoods with sizeable minority populations, giving the illusion that many welfare recipients are people of color. Another possible explanation is that, like some Whites, there are Blacks who may have bought into the propaganda about Blacks and welfare. In 1980, Republican Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan spoke of a “welfare queen” who had for years supported her lavish lifestyle by “ripping off” the welfare system. The woman reportedly had numerous social security numbers, countless fake IDs, and several aliases. What is more, supposedly, the woman was Black. Reagan’s tale arguably did more to racialize welfare than had been done in the previous forty years.

There is no reason to believe that Blacks are any less influenced by propaganda and media manipulation than Whites. Since many peoples’ knowledge of welfare is derived from the media, it is likely that their perception that Blacks are the welfare system’s principal clientele is shaped by newspapers, television, and other media. The works of communication scholars Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki and political scientist Martin Gilens speak to this point. In *The Black Image in the White Mind* Entman and Rojecki maintain that Whites learn about Blacks not through personal relationships but through the images the media show them. The authors reveal how television news focuses on Black poverty and crime out of proportion to the national reality of Black lives (Entman and Rojecki, 2001).

In his book *Why Americans Hate Welfare* Gilens maintains that the reason many Americans (mainly White) oppose welfare is because, in their minds, welfare is for lazy people, and when they think of laziness, they think of Blacks (Gilens, 1999). To illustrate his point, Gilens traces the media representation of the poor over a forty-five-year period in *Time*,

Newsweek, and *U. S. News & World Report* as well as television news coverage for three historical periods, 1968, 1982-1983, and 1988-1992. From 1950 through 1964, the poor people portrayed in the magazines cited above were predominantly Caucasian, but from 1967 through 1992, Blacks averaged 57 percent of the poor portrayed, almost double the proportion of Blacks in photos of poverty during the period 1972-1973. When there was a general feeling that there were problems with welfare, African Americans were represented in 70 percent of the stories indexed under poverty and in 75 percent of the stories indexed under welfare. Gilens concludes that this misrepresentation contributes significantly to Whites' erroneous perception that Blacks are the primary beneficiaries of welfare.

Whites reacted similarly to a question about affirmative action, an equally polarizing issue. When asked, "Do you generally favor or oppose affirmative action programs for racial minorities?" 48 percent of Whites indicated support for affirmative action programs compared to 51 percent who opposed them. Given the numerous misleading and provocative news stories over the years by politicians and talking heads who have carefully framed White suffering as a result of affirmative action programs, it is a wonder that the survey did not uncover greater White opposition. In his article "The White Fairness Gap," Paul Street argues that fabricated news stories about affirmative action, coupled with hearing commentators constantly refer to a growing Black middle class, have given Whites the impression that society is now equal (Street, 2001). Consequently, as far as some Whites are concerned, since equality has finally been actualized, affirmative action is no longer needed.

The truth is, like welfare, the issue of affirmative action has been used to rally White voters against both Blacks and other people of color, especially during election years. While affirmative action has been around for more than forty years, it was catapulted onto the front burner of American politics in 1990 when Republican Jesse Helms unleashed an ad against the Black Democratic hopeful Harvey Gantt during the final week of the U. S. senate race in North Carolina. The ad showed a pair of White hands protruding from a plaid shirt holding a letter as the voice-over read, "You did not get the job, because it had to go to an unqualified minority." The hands were then shown crumpling up the letter and tossing it aside. Many pundits believe that that particular ad raised latent fears among undecided White voters as well as some Whites who may have harbored reservations about voting for an African-American senator. Gantt lost the election, despite the fact that most respectable public opinion polls had Gantt leading Helms by a comfortable margin prior to the ad being aired.

It is ironic that, like welfare, affirmative action is viewed by many Whites as a "Black program." Ira Katznelson maintains in his book *When Affirmative Action Was White* that affirmative action existed long before Lyndon Baines Johnson introduced the program as we know it today. Simply put, affirmative action did not begin in the 1960s as many believe, but rather in the 1930s. Moreover, according to Katznelson, as New Deal politicians began constructing government programs to deal with welfare, work, and war during the 1930s and 1940s, they deliberately targeted Whites at the expense of African Americans. In other words, like welfare, Whites have also historically been the major beneficiaries of affirmative action. Only recently have some Blacks benefitted from this program. Katznelson maintains that when the government was giving Whites the tools to create a prosperous middle class, Blacks were being systematically isolated from the benefits of public assistance. Although many federal officials understood that African-American sharecroppers were hit the hardest by the Great Depression, 65 percent of Blacks were denied access to social security benefits, government grants, elderly assistance, and unemployment insurance (Katznelson, 2005).

Administered by local politicians, New Deal relief programs generally bypassed African Americans. Conversely, politicians skewed the natural direction of worker reform in the direction of Whites. Positioning the National Labor Relations Act (1935) and the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) as key events in America's modern labor movement, Katznelson shows how southern congressmen incorporated provisions into legislation that exempted agricultural and domestic labor (Katznelson, 2005). Consequently, White workers throughout the United States gained the means to organize and improve their standard of living; the sectors dominated by Black workers were left to languish in further poverty. Katznelson also points out that at a time when some Blacks thought fighting in World War II would gain them the respect and the rights that they so desperately sought, the federal government was rewarding White veterans by paying their mortgages, and providing certain educational benefits and the like while doing as little as possible for Black veterans. Katznelson even goes so far as to say that even White ethnics from eastern and southern Europe experienced a revolutionary transformation in their status as American citizens as a result of their participation in the war; not so for Black veterans. African Americans and Whites, undoubtedly, have a long way to go before there is a meeting of the minds when it comes to affirmative action. And as long as self-serving politicians continue to vilify affirmative action, it will remain a political lightning rod, and many Whites as well as some Blacks will continue to be misled about the goals and objectives of this important initiative.

Perhaps the most encouraging responses were those that addressed the following comment: "Caucasians should support racial minorities in their struggle against discrimination and justice." Ninety percent (61.5 percent agree, 28.5 percent strongly agree) believed that they had an important role to play in the struggle for Black liberation, compared to only 10 percent that thought otherwise. This finding is arguably the most promising, as it suggests that Whites believe it important to join forces with African Americans to eradicate long-standing racial barriers and to help bring about the kind of America that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of in his famous 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech. It should be noted that roughly the same percentage of Black respondents were supportive of the idea of White assistance in the fight for racial equality.

Discussion

This research has uncovered a robust set of opinions about an array of social, political, and economic matters as they relate to race. On some issues the gap between Black and White attitudes is small, and in a few cases negligible, but on many issues the schism is wide. What accounts for the differences in perception between Blacks and Whites? Why are there such vast misperceptions by both groups about existing levels of inequality? The gap between the perception of equality and actual inequality has far-reaching consequences. One's level of awareness about structural inequalities as they relate to race plays an integral role in everyday decisions made at work, at the polls, in schools and boardrooms, stores, and the like. If an individual believes that Blacks have achieved equality, he or she is unlikely to support measures that address inequality (Bush, 2011). To the extent that Whites are aware of inequality and/or the way in which race and inequality/equality are inextricably linked, their beliefs about the underlying causes are significant.

Distinguished African-American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois prophesied in 1903 that the central social issue in America in the twentieth century would be the problem of the "color line." Du Bois maintained that the color line racialized America's rich and ethnic-cultural

populations by creating two separate and very distinctive worlds, one White and one “colored” (Du Bois, 1903). As a result, White Americans only see blurred images and distortions of African Americans fueled by negative stereotypes and propaganda. In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, George Frederickson examines the development of intellectual racist theory and ideology as it evolved from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of World War I (Frederickson, 1987). In his work he discusses how racist ideas about Blacks were espoused and promulgated over generations, by not only intellectuals but politicians and publicists who were highly skilled at marketing images, themes, and ideas. Over time the myths created by White Americans became stronger and outweighed the realities of Black Americans. Such is the case with welfare. Not only did nearly 48 percent of White respondents believe that the welfare system was comprised mainly of Blacks, but so, too, did 35 percent of African Americans. It is one thing for Whites to stereotype Blacks but quite another for Blacks to fall prey to the same type of indoctrination. Apparently, Whites are such extraordinary mythmakers that, sadly, even some Blacks find it difficult to discern fact from fiction.

One hundred years after Du Bois’s observations, there is evidence that racial profiling is still one of the most critical social and political issue faced by people of color on a day-to-day basis. The act of racial profiling occurs when people of color are singled out (based on negative stereotypes and propaganda) for special investigation, harassment, and contempt because of their racial-phenotypic characteristics. This is the context for understanding the attitudes of White Cincinnatians as they relate to race.

One of the most important and pervasive areas of racial profiling has taken the form of abuse of police enforcement powers in urban communities. In the United States police officers are trained to view themselves as the last bastion of defense for law abiding citizens against the outcasts of society. In many instances, the outcast is defined as “the other” by class and color characteristics, i.e., non-White. African Americans often see the police as an army of occupation. This view is reinforced by the heavy patrolling of African-American neighborhoods by urban police. Contact between African Americans and police is sometimes confrontational, as some police officers view the police-citizen relationship as an asymmetrical one, whereby the police officer is the boss and the civilian is the subordinate. When Black motorists and pedestrians, especially Black males, attempt to assert their rights, their behavior is oftentimes construed as insubordinate. When police officers deem a Black motorist or pedestrian to be insubordinate, oftentimes their reactions lead to serious human rights abuses, including beatings, the use of chokeholds, and shootings. The world was given an unusual glimpse into this pattern of police misconduct with the widespread circulation of the Rodney King incident, which was captured on videotape. In truth, that incident was just the tip of the iceberg. Hardly a day goes by in America when an African American is not physically assaulted by a police officer. In the last twenty years, Malice Green in Detroit, Demetrius DuBose in San Diego, and Amadou Diallo and Abner Louima in New York are just four of the highly publicized victims of police brutality. In other words, these were incidents that, due to the media frenzy surrounding the events, came to the public’s attention. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of incidents involving African Americans that go unnoticed.

Aggressive, physical, hard policing of the African-American community is an ingrained routine and commonly accepted facet of American police work. For example, after a ten-month investigation, the Justice Department issued a report saying that New Orleans police engaged in rampant racial profiling against the city’s Black population. From January 2009 to May 2010, officers used deadly force against twenty-seven people, all African American. As Assistant

Attorney General Thomas Perez said, “The problems facing the New Orleans Police Department are serious, wide-ranging, systematic and deeply rooted in the culture of the department” (Markon, 2011). Tragically, in many ways, New Orleans is not unique. There are many departments that are home to police officers who are known for engaging in brutality rather than reason. Sometimes, violent police action in the African-American community has spawned both protests and uprisings.

In the spring of 2001 Black Cincinnatians rebelled for nearly a week in response to the killing of Timothy Thomas by Cincinnati police officers, the fifteenth such killing over a five-year period. In the past, many Whites may have turned a blind eye to the conditions that fomented riotous conditions or feigned ignorance of the forces that gave rise to such a rebellion, reasoning that the rebellion was not a rebellion at all but rather a riot by uncivilized Blacks looking for an easy way to acquire those things (television sets, microwave ovens, radios, furniture, clothing, and other items) that they were unwilling to buy. This research suggests that despite the propaganda and long-standing racial myths with which many Whites have been indoctrinated, there is a rather large population of White Cincinnatians who know better.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to gauge White attitudes about race and/or race-related matters in the city of Cincinnati. In light of the long-standing racial problems that have persisted in Cincinnati, coupled with the resultant 2001 uprising, it is not unreasonable for one to have expected widespread hardened and rigid racial attitudes on the part of Whites. This is not to say that there does not exist a population of Whites who are firm in their beliefs about matters related to race or pockets of Whites whose racial worldview is grounded in inaccurate and unflattering stereotypical notions of African Americans. There are still a fair number of Whites whose attitudes about matters such as affirmative action, the legal system, and welfare are based on myth rather than reality. There are also large numbers of Whites who believe that Blacks are faring as well or better than Whites and that African Americans have indeed achieved economic and racial parity.

This research has also revealed, however, that there are seemingly sizeable populations of Whites who have a firm grasp of the social, political, and economic realities that plague their city as well as a keen understanding of both the root causes and their consequences. Our findings, therefore, do not necessarily support the widely held belief that because many Whites are removed from the harsh day-to-day realities of the problems that many Blacks face, they are less knowledgeable than Blacks about race-related matters; but this research does show that many Whites are generally not as enlightened about the nuanced ways in which race impacts Black people’s lives on a day-to-day basis. Simply put, they are not street-wise when it comes to understanding the intricacies of race and the various ways it plays itself out when Blacks and Whites interface. At the same time, it should be noted that there are some matters on which Whites appeared as enlightened as some African Americans.

One of the most encouraging findings produced by this research is that 90 percent of Whites believed that they have an important role to play in helping Blacks eradicate racism. Some might interpret this as a kind of White paternalism, the type that some Blacks claim was prevalent during the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. At that time hundreds of young White Northerners travelled south to join the Civil Rights Movement, believing that they could make a difference. Although they were lauded for their willingness to

get involved, some were criticized for their paternalistic attitudes, ignorance of the political landscape, and lack of practical skills. The difference between those White civil rights activists and the ones discussed in this article is that White Cincinnatians were not entirely unaware of the socio-economic terrain and the challenges that Blacks faced on a regular basis.

Whether the attitudes expressed in this survey are representative of White attitudes across the country is difficult to ascertain. However, if the attitudes uncovered by this study mirror those of most other Whites in the United States, then the struggle for racial equality is still very much a work in progress.

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