

# Racial Stereotypes From the Days of American Slavery: A Continuing Legacy<sup>1</sup>

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During the days of American slavery, many whites held stereotypes of blacks as inferior, unevolved, and apelike. The present study was designed to see whether such stereotypes persist in contemporary American society. A random-digit telephone survey was conducted of 1,490 Connecticut residents, resulting in completed interviews with 686 respondents. Our findings suggest that negative stereotypes concerning the physical and mental endowments of blacks are more common than previously estimated. Most respondents endorsed at least one stereotypical difference in inborn ability (e.g., whites have greater abstract thinking ability than blacks), and nearly half endorsed at least one stereotypical difference in anatomy (e.g., blacks have thicker skulls than whites). Logistic regression analyses indicated that the best predictor of stereotyping was education level. Respondents without a high school degree were roughly twice as likely to endorse racial stereotypes as were respondents with a graduate degree. The consequences of racial stereotyping are discussed.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, many prominent whites in Europe and the U.S. regarded black people as mentally inferior, physically and culturally unevolved, and apelike in appearance (Ariel, 1867; Burmeister, 1853; Haeckel, 1876; Hunt, 1863; Lawrence, 1819; Parker, 1878; Vogt, 1864; White, 1799). In fact, this view of blacks was so widely accepted that the entry for "Negro" in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1884, p. 316) stated authoritatively that the African race occupied "the lowest position of the evolutionary scale, thus affording the best material for the comparative study of the highest anthropoids and the human species." According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, these anthropoid features included, among others: (a) "the abnormal length of the arm, which in the erect position sometimes reaches the knee-pan"; (b) "weight of brain, as indicating cranial capacity, 35 ounces (highest gorilla

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20, average European 45)"; (c) "short flat snub nose"; (d) "thick protruding lips"; (e) "exceedingly thick cranium"; (f) "short, black hair, eccentrically elliptical or almost flat in section, and distinctly woolly"; and (g) "thick epidermis" (pp. 316-317).

Not only were blacks thought to have thicker skin and thicker skulls than whites, but partly as a consequence of these presumed anatomical differences, they were thought to be less sensitive to physical pain and less able to think abstractly (characteristics which, it was argued, naturally suited them to slavery). For example, one 18th-century treatise declared: "What would be the cause of insupportable pain to a white man a Negro would almost disregard" (cited in Winchell, 1880, p. 178). Similarly, an 1817 report in the *London Medical and Chirurgical Review* stated that "Negresses ... will bear cutting with nearly, if not quite, as much impunity as dogs and rabbits" (Pernick, 1985, p. 156). Compared with white women, black women were also thought to experience relatively little pain in childbirth (e.g., Dye, 1912; White, 1799).

As for early public opinion on the mental aptitude of blacks, the words of Thomas Jefferson (1787/1972) spoke for many: "Blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind" (p. 143) .... "Never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture" (p. 140). Andrew Johnson likewise spoke of a "great difference between the two races in physical, mental, and moral characteristics" (Richardson, 1899, p. 566), and Theodore Roosevelt stated categorically that, "As a race and in the mass [the Negroes] are altogether inferior to the whites" (Morison, 1952, p. 226). Abraham Lincoln expressed a similar position in the Lincoln-Douglas debates when he declared:

There is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will for ever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race (Angle, 1958, p. 235; for additional examples of early opinions on the mental and physical inferiority of blacks, see Bilotta, 1992; Stanton, 1960).

Thus, while it is impossible to know precisely how common such opinions were, it appears that many early white Americans viewed blacks as unevolved,

inferior beings; that is, as less than human, physically impervious to pain, and mentally unfit for abstract or creative thought. The central question of the present study is whether such views died with the people who held them, or whether they persist in modern-day American society. To answer this question, we will briefly review findings from relevant public opinion research, after which we will describe the results of a random-digit telephone survey we conducted on the topic.

### *Public-Opinion Research*

In their comprehensive review of survey data on racial attitudes in America, Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo (1985) noted that trend data on white beliefs about blacks are extremely limited. As Sniderman and Piazza (1993) put it, "what is conspicuous in national public opinion surveys is not the measurement of racial stereotypes but its absence" (p. 36). Consequently, we supplemented our literature search with a computer-assisted archival search by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. In keeping with our interest in the stereotype of blacks as unevolved, we focused our search specifically on beliefs about racial differences in physical characteristics and innate ability.

Much to our surprise, we found no research on the perception of physical differences between blacks and whites, and only two lines of research on perceived differences in innate ability. The most common topic concerning differences in ability—and the only topic for which longterm trend data exist—is the question of perceived racial differences in intelligence. As shown in Figure 1, this research suggests there has been a steady decline in the belief that blacks have less inborn intelligence than whites. By the early 1990s, only one respondent in 10 openly subscribed to such a view.

The other line of research relates to racial differences in general ability. A representative example of this research was reported in 1993 by Sniderman and Piazza (see also Apostle, Glock, Piazza, & Suelzle, 1983). In this study, nonblack respondents were asked the following question:

Most people—blacks and whites alike—agree that the average white person in America is more likely to have a good income, get a good education, and to have a regular job than the average black is. Here are some of the reasons that have been given as to why the average black American is not as well off as the average white American. As I read each one, please tell me whether you basically agree or disagree .... The reason most black people are not as well off as most whites is that blacks are born with less ability. (p. 194)

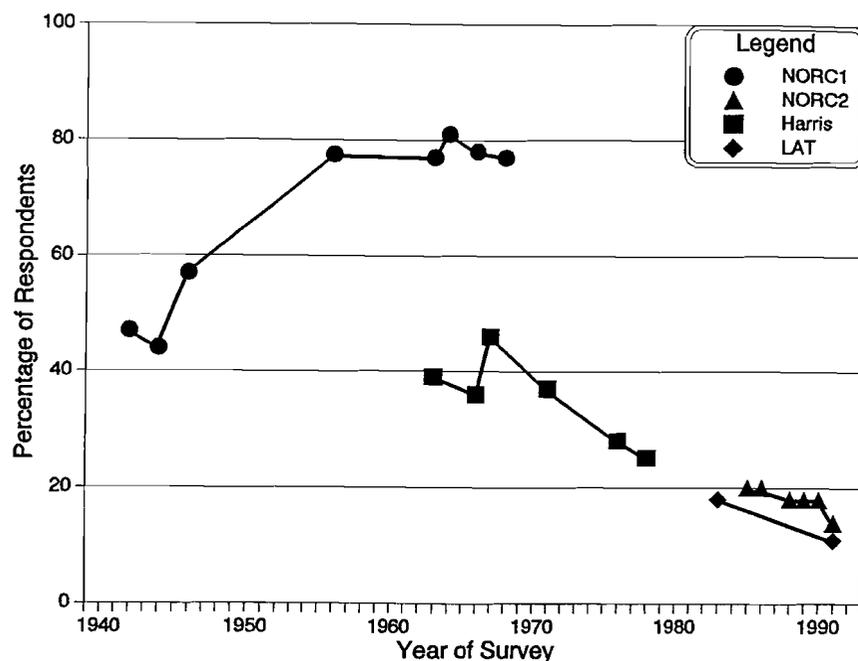


Figure 1. Public opinion trends on perceived racial differences in inborn intelligence.

**NORC1.** Percentage answering "yes" to the question: "In general, do you think Negroes are as intelligent as white people—that is, can they learn things just as well if they are given the same education and training?" (Asked of white respondents only, except in 1964; "things" and "and training" were omitted from the question in 1944, 1946, and 1956.)

**NORC2.** Percentage answering "yes" to the question: "On the average (negroes/blacks) have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are ... because most (negroes/blacks) have less inborn ability to learn?"

**Harris.** Percentage answering "agree" to the question: "Here are some statements people sometimes make about black people. For each statement, please tell me whether you personally tend to agree or disagree with that statement ... blacks have less native intelligence than whites."

**Los Angeles Times (LAT).** Percentage answering "yes" to the question: "On the average, blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are because most blacks have less inborn ability to learn?" (Variant: in 1991, "or not" was added to the end of the question.)

Sniderman and Piazza (1993) found that only 6% of their respondents agreed with this statement.

Based on these results, it is tempting to conclude that racial stereotypes concerning physical differences and innate ability are rare in contemporary America. Yet there is reason to doubt this conclusion. First, in both cases cited above, respondents may have discerned the "politically correct" response and answered accordingly. Second, with the exception of the Harris question shown in Figure 1, all recent items have asked respondents whether socioeconomic inequalities between blacks and whites are due to inborn differences in intelligence/ability, *not* whether such differences exist. Thus, respondents may have believed in the existence of inborn differences without feeling that such differences are responsible for socioeconomic inequalities. Finally, only two racial differences have been explored—intelligence and general ability—leaving open the possibility that respondents harbor other negative stereotypes concerning physical differences or innate abilities.

To assess this possibility, we designed a survey that covered a range of stereotypical racial differences in anatomy and innate ability, and we took special precautions to minimize social desirability biases. One of these precautions was to include early survey items on "positive" stereotypes of blacks (e.g., superior athletic ability), so that respondents would not feel that the very endorsement of an inborn difference was tantamount to an endorsement of black inferiority. Another precaution was to include several true anatomical differences (e.g., the tendency for blacks to have curlier hair) amid the questions on physical differences between blacks and whites. These items helped mask the direction of socially desirable answers, and they provided an indirect measure of "politically correct" response tendencies (i.e., tendencies to deny all physical differences). We hypothesized that with these survey design features, a substantial number of respondents would exhibit racial stereotypes similar to those prevalent during the days of American slavery.

## Method

### Sample

Between August 2 and October 21, 1993, a random-digit dialing approach with three callbacks was used to contact 1,490 households in central Connecticut. To minimize respondent selection biases, the project was introduced simply as "a survey of Connecticut residents on their opinions concerning differences among various groups in American society, such as blacks and whites, men and women, and so forth." Two telephone interviewers were used, in order to control for potential race-of-interviewer effects arising through

voice recognition: one African-American male and one white female (though no significant interviewer effects were found beyond those expected by chance). Of the people who were called, 686 (46.0%) completed the interview, 777 (52.1%) declined to be interviewed, and 27 (1.8%) terminated the interview at some point after it had begun. Only respondents 18 years of age or older were interviewed, and a within-household quota system was used to match the gender ratio of the sample to the gender ratio of the general calling area (52.5% of the respondents were female, compared with a 1990 Census figure of 53.1% for the general calling area). The sample was also within 1% of the general public across all age categories except respondents over 64 (13.6% of the sample, compared with 19.2% of the public) and respondents 25-44 years old (47.3% of the sample, compared with 42.2% of the public).

In terms of race and education, the correspondence with Census figures was not as close; compared with the general public, respondents in our survey were more likely to be white and well-educated. In our sample, 84.3% of the respondents were white (vs. 79.6% of the public), 9.7% were African-American (versus 11.8% of the public), and 6.0% were of another race (versus 8.6% of the public). Only 7.2% of our respondents had not completed high school (vs. 23.0% of the public), 41.1% had completed high school or some college (vs. 42.7% of the public), 31.9% had earned an associate or bachelor's degree (vs. 22.9% of the public), and 19.8% had earned a graduate degree (vs. 11.4% of the public). Some of these discrepancies may be due to differences between our demographic questions and those used by the Census Bureau, demographic shifts between the 1990 Census and our 1993 survey, or differences in geographic coverage between ZIP codes (used in generating Census figures) and telephone prefixes (used in generating random numbers for our survey). Nonetheless, they indicate that care should be exercised in generalizing from our sample to the general public.

#### *Survey Questions*

The telephone interview contained one set of questions focusing mainly on inborn abilities (Table 1), one set focusing mainly on physical differences (Table 2), and a concluding section on demographics. In the first set of questions, respondents were asked about two stereotypically "black" abilities (athletic ability and rhythmic ability) and two stereotypically "white" abilities (artistic ability and abstract thinking ability). These stereotypes were chosen because of their prevalence in American popular culture, and because there is no conclusive evidence that they are true (on athletics, see Sailes, 1991; Sokolove, 1988; on rhythmic ability, see Dawkins & Snyder, 1972; Sung & Dawis, 1981; Wilcox, 1969; on the debate over the genetic determinants of

Table 1

#### *Survey Questions on Racial Differences in Inborn Ability*

*[INTRODUCTION:] The first questions have to do with differences between African Americans and white Americans. Again, let me remind you that all your responses will be confidential, so please be as frank as possible in reporting your true opinions.*

1. Overall, who would you say has greater inborn athletic ability—blacks, whites, or is there no difference?
2. Who would you say has greater inborn artistic ability when it comes to activities such as painting and writing—blacks, whites, or is there no difference?
3. Who would you say has greater inborn rhythmic ability—blacks, whites, or is there no difference?
4. On the whole, who do you think has more variety when it comes to personality types—blacks, whites, or is there no difference?
5. Who has a greater inborn ability to perform the kind of abstract thinking needed in science and philosophy—blacks, whites, or is there no difference?
6. Who tends to be more hardworking—blacks, whites, or is there no difference?
7. In general, do you think that black people are just as intelligent as white people—that is, can they learn things just as well if they are given the same education and training? [Adapted from NORC]

intelligence, see Loehlin, Lindzey, & Spuhler, 1975; and on racial differences in artistic ability, see Duffy, 1978). The opening set of questions also included an item on intelligence adapted from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) for purposes of normative comparison, and two nonability items not considered in the present report (Questions 4 and 6 in Table 1).

The second set of questions dealt with physical stereotypes of blacks as unevolved or apelike. As seen in Table 2, respondents were asked a series of true-false questions on topics such as skull thickness and pain sensitivity. Most

Table 2

*Survey Questions on Physical Differences Between Blacks and Whites*

[INTRODUCTION:] Next, I want to ask you about physical differences between African Americans and white Americans. I will read you nine statements, and I want you to tell me whether the statements are true or false.

1. Black people tend to have curlier hair than white people—true or false?
2. White skin tends to be thinner than black skin—true or false?
3. Blacks tend to have broader noses than whites—true or false?
4. Whites tend to be more sensitive than blacks when it comes to physical pain—true or false?
5. Black women tend to experience less pain in childbirth than white women—true or false?
6. Blacks tend to have thicker lips than whites—true or false?
7. On the average, blacks tend to have longer arms than whites—true or false?
8. Whites tend to have less body hair than blacks—true or false?
9. The cranium, or skull bone, is usually thicker in blacks than whites—true or false?

*Note.* “Not sure” was accepted as a valid answer when volunteered by respondents.

of these stereotypes have no factual basis. For example, there is no reliable evidence that whites have less body hair than blacks (Malina, 1973; Setty, 1966, 1968), that whites have thinner skin than blacks (La Ruche & Cesarini, 1992), that whites are more sensitive to physical pain (Lipton & Marbach, 1984; Weinsenberg, Kreindler, Schachat, & Werboff, 1975; Zatzick & Dimsdale, 1990), that black women experience less pain in childbirth (Winsberg & Greenlick, 1967), or that whites and blacks differ in overall skull thickness (Adeloye, Kattan, & Silverman, 1975; Bass, 1979; Pensler & McCarthy, 1985). As for arm length, blacks do tend to have somewhat longer

arms than whites (Malina, 1973), although the difference is so slight that a belief in this stereotype is unlikely to have developed from direct observation.

In contrast, the remaining items described physical differences that are widely known and readily observable; it is well established that blacks tend to have curlier hair, broader noses, and thicker lips than whites (Olivier, 1969). These items served a dual purpose. First, they obscured the direction of socially desirable answers by legitimizing “true” as a response option. Second, they provided an indirect measure of “political correctness” (i.e., a reluctance to endorse any physical differences whatsoever). In sum, then, the survey contained four questions on inborn abilities (athletic ability, rhythmic ability, artistic ability, and thinking ability), one question on intelligence (adapted from NORC), six questions on unfounded or obscure physical differences (body hair, skin thickness, pain sensitivity, childbirth pain, skull thickness, and arm length), three questions on readily observable physical differences (blacks having curlier hair, broader noses, and thicker lips), and a concluding set of demographic questions.

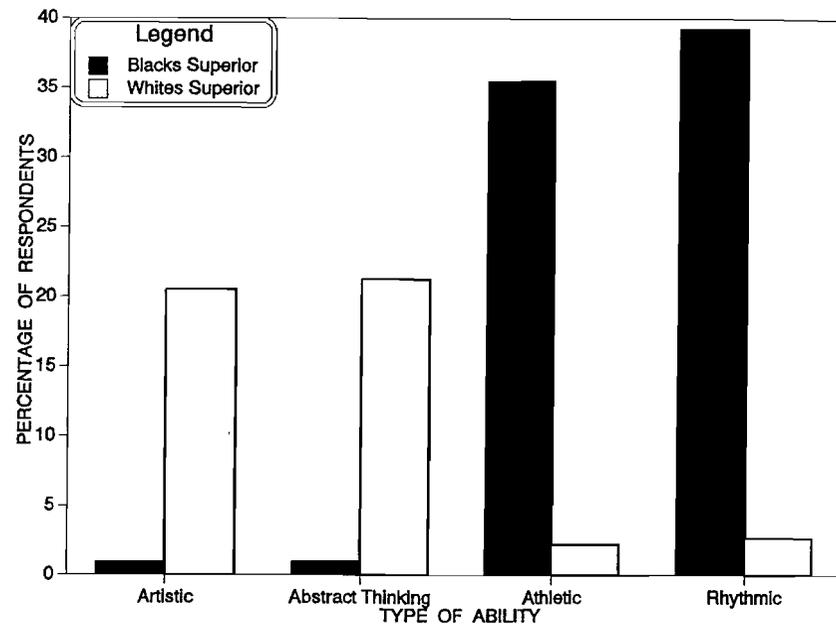
## Results

*Preliminary Analyses*

Thus far, we have discussed stereotypes about innate abilities and stereotypes about physical differences as two distinct domains of judgment. To test this distinction formally, we conducted a maximum likelihood factor analysis of the four ability questions and six physical difference questions described above. For purposes of analysis, each question was dichotomized so that a dummy value of “1” indicated the endorsement of a racial stereotype and a dummy value of “0” indicated otherwise. A factor analysis with varimax rotation was then performed, using eigenvalues greater than 1. As predicted, two factors emerged: an *Ability* dimension (in which the four ability questions loaded .34-.66, and the six physical difference questions loaded only .13-.25), and a *Physical Difference* dimension (in which the physical difference questions loaded .37-.58, and the ability questions loaded only .12-.22). These results suggest that it is appropriate to consider beliefs about inborn abilities as distinct from beliefs about physical differences.

*Beliefs About Inborn Abilities*

The majority of respondents (58.9%) endorsed at least one stereotypical difference in inborn ability. As seen in Figure 2, whites were roughly 10 times more likely than blacks to be seen as superior in artistic ability or abstract



*Figure 2.* Stereotypes of inborn ability. Whites are more likely than blacks to be viewed as superior in inborn artistic and abstract thinking ability, and blacks are more likely than whites to be viewed as superior in athletic and rhythmic ability. (Note: Respondents answering “neither” or “not sure” do not appear in this figure.)

thinking ability, and blacks were roughly 10 times more likely than whites to be seen as superior in athletic ability or rhythmic ability. Although none of the four stereotypes in Figure 2 were endorsed by an absolute majority of respondents, each view was held by a sizable minority of our sample.

To examine whether these findings were the result of having drawn a sample with particularly negative opinions concerning black intelligence, we looked at respondents' answers to the intelligence question adapted from NORC: “In general, do you think that black people are just as intelligent as white people—that is, can they learn things just as well if they are given the same education and training?” As mentioned earlier, approximately 9 out of 10 American adults answer such questions affirmatively. In our sample, 95.4% of the respondents answered affirmatively, 3.1% answered negatively, and 1.5% were not sure or indicated other answers. Thus, our findings do not seem

attributable to having drawn a sample with unusually negative views about the intelligence of blacks (at least, as benchmarked by the NORC item).

#### *Beliefs About Physical Differences*

Nearly half (49.0%) of all respondents endorsed at least one stereotypical physical difference between blacks and whites: 31.4% believed that white skin tends to be thinner than black skin, 19.9% believed that the cranium is usually thicker in blacks than whites, 13.9% believed that whites tend to be more sensitive than blacks when it comes to physical pain, 6.0% believed that black women tend to experience less pain in childbirth, 23.5% believed that blacks tend to have longer arms than whites, and 13.6% believed that whites tend to have less body hair than blacks (with “not sure” running 5-12% on all questions). Thus, as with stereotypes concerning inborn ability, none of these items were endorsed by an absolute majority of respondents, although several were endorsed by a sizable minority.

#### *Who Holds These Beliefs?*

To see which members of the public were most likely to hold these stereotypes, we conducted a series of maximum likelihood logistic regression analyses. Logistic regression is similar to other forms of regression, except that it is designed for use with dichotomous dependent variables (the dependent variable is transformed into the logarithm of the odds, or “logit,” of giving a particular response). Separate analyses were conducted for two dichotomous dependent variables: (a) whether or not respondents endorsed at least one inborn ability difference, and (b) whether or not respondents endorsed at least one stereotypical physical difference. Four demographic variables were used as predictors: (a) gender, (b) age, (c) education level, and (d) race.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Only 41 respondents identified their race as other than white or African-American, and the survey answers of these individuals were more similar to those of white respondents than African-American respondents. Consequently, race was coded as a dummy variable in which a “1” indicated African-American and a “0” indicated all other races. Also, to equalize categorical frequencies, all respondents with less than a high school education were grouped together. Due to the curvilinear relationship between age and each dependent variable, the age term was entered into both equations as a quadratic factor (and age ranges above 64 were combined, again to equalize frequencies). Finally, it should be noted that regression analyses were conducted not only on the dichotomous dependent variables described above, but on dependent variables concerning the number of stereotypes respondents endorsed (even though these distributions were highly skewed). Results from these analyses were similar to the results based on logistic regression, and are omitted to avoid redundancy.

Table 3

*Logistic Regression of Gender, Age, Education Level, and Race on the Likelihood of Stereotyping*

Predictor Terms	$\beta$	SE	df	Improvement $\chi^2$	p value	Goodness-of-fit $\chi^2$	p value
Dependent variable: Inborn abilities							
Y intercept	-0.930	0.258				163.758	0.000
Education level	0.297	0.053	1	40.050	0.000	123.708	0.054
Sex	-0.532	0.164	1	10.156	0.001	113.553	0.150
Age	-0.018	0.008	1	4.469	0.035	109.084	0.209
Race	-0.723	0.314	1	5.690	0.017	103.394	0.310
Dependent variable: Physical differences							
Y intercept	-0.855	0.243				199.074	0.000
Education level	0.361	0.053	1	65.019	0.000	134.054	0.013
Race	-1.376	0.327	1	16.263	0.000	117.791	0.096
Age	-0.024	0.007	1	10.545	0.001	107.246	0.246

Note. Gender was not a significant predictor of stereotypes concerning physical differences. Goodness-of-fit  $\chi^2$  represents the fit for hierarchical models that include all preceding predictor terms.

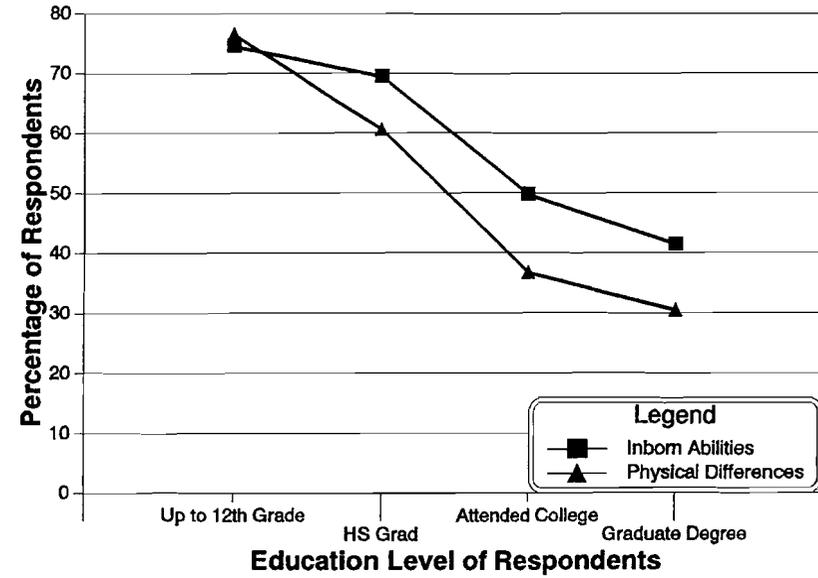


Figure 3. The relationship between education level and the tendency to endorse racial stereotypes. This figure shows that the percentage of respondents who endorse at least one stereotypical racial difference (either in inborn abilities or physical differences) declines monotonically with education level.

As shown in Table 3, education level was the strongest predictor for both dependent variables. Respondents without a high school degree were roughly twice as likely as respondents with a graduate degree to endorse racial stereotypes of either kind (Figure 3). These results parallel the findings of Sniderman and Piazza (1993), who found an inverse relationship between education level and the number of negative stereotypes respondents held about blacks (see also Schuman et al., 1985). In fact, for both dependent variables, a logit-linear model with education level as the sole predictor was the most parsimonious model that adequately fit the data (i.e., both one-variable models had goodness-of-fit chi-squares that exceeded an alpha level of .01).

Parsimony aside, however, several other demographic variables were significantly associated with stereotyping (see Columns 5 and 6 of Table 3 for the incremental contributions of these variables). For example, age showed a curvilinear relationship with stereotyping such that the youngest and oldest respondents were roughly 50% more likely to endorse racial stereotypes than were respondents between 35 and 54 years of age (Figure 4). Among respondents under 25 or over 64, approximately three-fourths held at least one

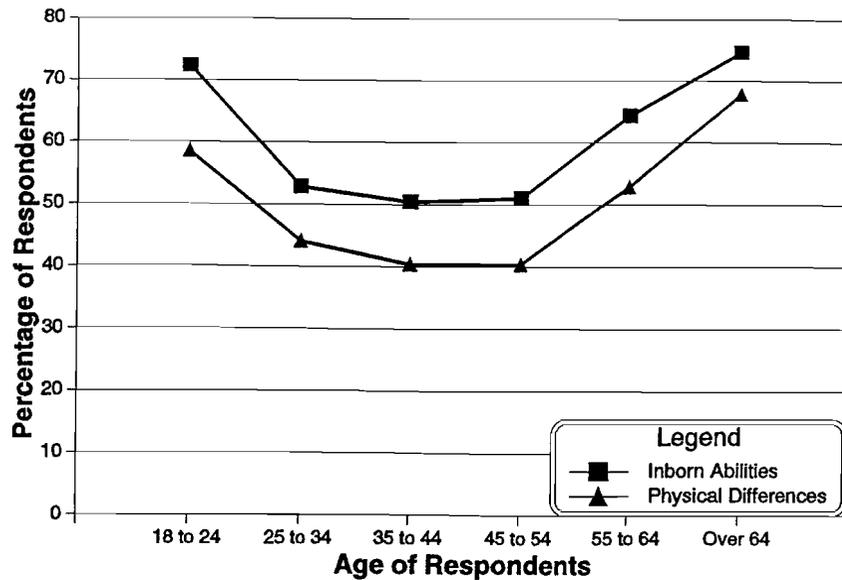


Figure 4. The relationship between age level and the tendency to endorse racial stereotypes. This figure shows that the percentage of respondents who endorse at least one stereotypical racial difference (either in inborn abilities or physical differences) bears a curvilinear relationship with the age level of respondents.

stereotype concerning inborn ability, and approximately two-thirds held at least one stereotype concerning physical differences.

Gender differences in stereotyping tended to be small, with one exception: males were more likely than females to see blacks as innately superior in athletics, 41.9% versus 29.7%,  $\chi^2(1) = 10.78, p < .002$ . Mainly as a function of this difference, men were also more likely to have endorsed at least one ability stereotype of any kind, 64.9% versus 53.8%,  $\chi^2(1) = 8.79, p < .003$  (see Table 3 for the incremental improvement in model fit due to gender). There were no overall gender differences in stereotyping with respect to the physical characteristics of whites and blacks—49.6% of female respondents endorsed at least one physical stereotype, compared with 48.3% of male respondents,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.11, ns$ . These results suggest that gender is only selectively related to racial stereotyping.

More substantial differences were found with respect to the race of respondents. Contrary to what might be expected, however, African-American respondents were more likely than others to endorse racial stereotypes

Table 4

A Comparison of White and African-American Respondents

Survey item	Whites (% agreeing)	African Americans (% agreeing)	Significance of difference (p value)
Whites have more inborn artistic ability	19.9	23.8	ns
Whites have more inborn abstract thinking ability	20.3	32.3	.025
Blacks have more inborn athletic ability	33.5	54.0	.001
Blacks have more inborn rhythmic ability	39.3	52.4	.045
White skin tends to be thinner than black skin	28.5	56.9	.001
The cranium, or skull bone, is usually thicker in blacks than whites	17.9	35.9	.001
Whites tend to be more sensitive than blacks when it comes to physical pain	10.5	40.0	.001
Black women tend to experience less pain in childbirth than white women	4.2	18.8	.001
On the average, blacks tend to have longer arms than whites	24.7	18.5	ns
Whites tend to have less body hair than blacks	11.9	26.6	.001

Note. For purposes of presentation, survey items on inborn ability have been reworded in the direction of racial stereotypes. All significance tests are based on  $\chi^2$  with  $df = 1$ .  $N = 572$  for white respondents and  $N = 65$  for African-American respondents.

(Table 4).<sup>4</sup> Although these findings are based on a sample of only 65 African Americans—and must therefore be regarded as highly tentative, the pattern is quite consistent. Overall, African-American respondents were more likely than white respondents to hold at least one ability stereotype, 75.8% versus 57.0%,  $\chi^2(1) = 8.62, p < .004$ , and more likely to hold at least one stereotype concerning physical differences, 77.3% versus 45.7%,  $\chi^2(1) = 23.78, p < .001$ . These findings agree closely with those of Sniderman and Piazza (1993), who found that blacks endorsed racial stereotypes more often than did whites. Thus, the stereotypes reported here should not be thought of as white beliefs about blacks, but rather, as racial stereotypes that pervade American society.

### *Political Correctness*

In any study of socially sensitive issues, the question naturally arises as to whether respondents are being fully candid. Perhaps white respondents harbor racial stereotypes as often as African Americans, but are more reluctant to express them. Perhaps relatively young or old respondents are simply more forthright than are middle-aged respondents. Perhaps women are more diplomatic than men, or college graduates strive harder than less educated respondents to be politically correct. All of these possibilities are plausible, and all offer at least some explanation for the demographic trends noted above.

Although there is no way of knowing definitively whether respondents felt pressured to appear politically correct, several lines of evidence suggest such pressures were minimal. First, many of the items lacked politically correct answers; for instance, physical differences in skin thickness or arm length are not normally thought of in terms of superiority or inferiority. Indeed, African-American respondents may have endorsed several stereotypes because of their *positive* associations (e.g., athletic prowess, rhythmic precision, ability to withstand pain, and so forth). Second, young respondents, who presumably feel the keenest pressure to be politically correct, were actually *less* likely than others to reject racial differences in inborn ability. Only 29.1% of respondents under age 25 rejected all four ability stereotypes, compared with 40.9% of other respondents,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.68, p < .01$ . Third, response sets of “no difference” were rare on items relating to physical differences between blacks and whites. For example, on each of the items concerning well-known physical differences, the majority of respondents acknowledged a racial difference: 87.6% said

blacks tend to have curlier hair than whites, 78.2% said blacks tend to have broader noses, and 76.7% said that blacks tend to have thicker lips. Only 16 respondents, or 2.3% of the total sample, categorically denied all physical differences. While such results do not rule out the presence of social desirability biases, they do suggest that most respondents saw the endorsement of racial differences as a viable response alternative. Also, it should be noted that pressures to appear politically correct would *inhibit* the display of racial stereotypes, thereby rendering the present results conservative.

### Discussion

If interracial conflict is to be understood, it is important to accurately gauge the level of prejudice and stereotyping in contemporary society. Otherwise, tragedies such as the 1992 race riots in Los Angeles will seem like isolated and unpredictable events. Our portrait of racial stereotyping in America differs markedly from the picture drawn by other researchers. Previously, only 5-10% of the public was thought to hold racial stereotypes concerning inborn intelligence or general ability. Our findings indicate that when social desirability biases are minimized, some 20% of the public expresses a belief that blacks are innately inferior in thinking ability, and a majority endorses at least one racial stereotype concerning inborn ability. In addition, roughly 50% of the public endorses at least one stereotypical difference in anatomy between blacks and whites.

Of course, one possible explanation for this discrepancy in findings is that Connecticut residents are more inclined to hold racial stereotypes than are other residents of the U.S. While we have no reason to believe this is the case, our findings should certainly be followed up with surveys at the national level. A more troubling limitation of the present results is that they are based on only 46% of targeted households, with an oversample of white, well-educated respondents. We should point out, however, that white, well-educated respondents were *less* likely than others to endorse racial stereotypes. Hence, as with pressures to appear politically correct, this sampling bias probably means that our results are conservative.

Although stereotypes of blacks as primitive or apelike need not directly influence behavior, in some cases they undoubtedly do. For example, in 1906, the New York Zoological Park (now the Bronx Zoo) set up a monkey exhibit that included a young man from Africa and a chimpanzee (Bradford & Blume, 1992). Several years later, the Ringling Brothers Circus created a similar display called “The Monkey Man.” In this instance, a male African American was caged with a female chimpanzee who had been taught to wash clothes and hang them on a line (Bradna & Spence, 1952).

<sup>4</sup>This finding cannot be explained by a general propensity for African Americans to endorse racial differences of any kind. African-American respondents did *not* exceed whites in their endorsement of well-known physical differences (e.g., differences in hair curliness).

More recent incidents include the following:

- 1990: A black FBI agent won a harassment case filed after someone sneaked into his office and pasted an ape's head over a photograph of his son (Shenon, 1990).
- 1991: It was learned that the Los Angeles police officers who beat motorist Rodney King had earlier that day referred to a domestic dispute between blacks as "right out of *Gorillas in the Mist*" ("Judge says," 1991).
- 1992: The director of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration resigned after likening inner-city youths to male monkeys in the jungle (Leary, 1992).
- 1993: A Teaneck, New Jersey, man was charged with violating anti-bias laws after paying for a "gorilla-gram" in which someone in a gorilla suit presented the township's only black councilman with bananas and a toy monkey ("Man apologizes," 1993; see Figure 5 for another 1993 incident).
- 1994: A New York Yankees executive resigned after allegedly saying that black youths are "like monkeys" when they play basketball (Hevesi, 1994).

Attitude research has also linked racial stereotypes with prejudice (Brigham, 1972). For example, negative beliefs about black intelligence are related to an unwillingness to send children to an integrated school (Smith, 1990), and beliefs in the innate inferiority of blacks are associated with opposition to government programs that assist blacks (Apostle et al., 1983). At times, the effects of such stereotypes can be quite subtle. For instance, Devine (1989) found that subjects who were subliminally exposed to words such as *jazz*, *blues*, *musical*, *rhythm*, *athletic*, *basketball*, and *slavery* (under the guise of an experiment on "perceptual vigilance") later evaluated the actions of an unknown person as relatively more hostile, in keeping with the general activation of a stereotype concerning blacks. What makes this latter result particularly disturbing is the prevalence of music- and sports-related racial stereotypes in the media. According to content analyses of television commercials, magazine covers, and print advertisements, blacks are overrepresented as sports figures and are more likely than whites to be featured against a background of beat music (Branthwaite & Peirce, 1990; Dodd, Foerch, & Anderson, 1988; Humphrey & Schuman, 1984).

In closing, our report contains both good news and bad news. The bad news is that racial stereotypes from the days of slavery are still present in American society, even among the young, and even among African Americans. What

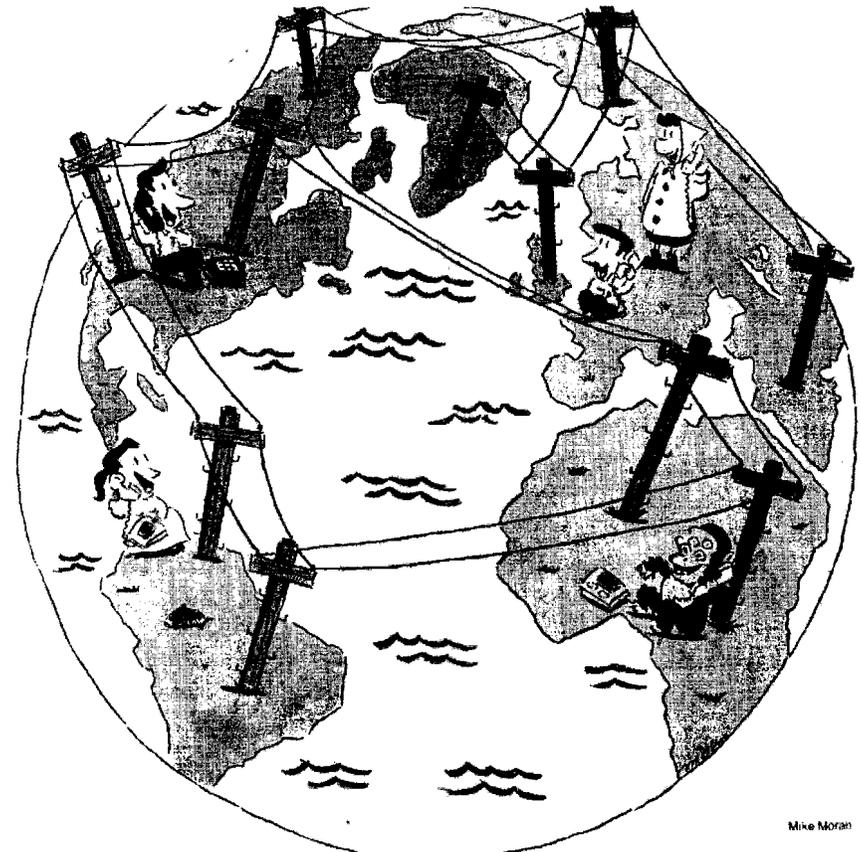


Figure 5. An incident from 1993. In this illustration, from a now-defunct AT&T employee magazine called *Focus*, the caller from Africa is depicted as a gorilla. When AT&T executives learned that this illustration had been published in *Focus*, they swiftly condemned the drawing as racist, issued an apology, and terminated their relationship with the illustrator. Figure reprinted by permission of AT&T.

presumably began as white stereotypes of blacks have now been embraced by members of the black community itself, and there is little hope of amelioration in the present generation. The good news, however, is that many of these stereotypes are no longer held by a majority of the public and that their acceptance appears to diminish with formal education. Although an inverse correlation between education level and stereotyping cannot be taken as

conclusive evidence that education reduces stereotyping, the relationship is certainly promising enough to warrant further investigation.

The present findings also raise a number of other questions that might be investigated in future research. For example, how do stereotypes concerning inborn ability and physical differences relate to one another? How do each of these stereotypes relate to beliefs about affirmative action, welfare reform, and other public policies? Are the intercorrelations that exist similar for black and white respondents? And what are we to make of the upsurge in racial stereotyping found among young respondents? As researchers seek to understand the sources of continuing tension between blacks and whites, these are questions that merit further attention.

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