The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

A Review of
Public Opinion Research
Related to Black Male
Achievement

Acknowledgments

About
The Opportunity Agenda

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2004 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds, and policy over time, the organization works with social justice groups, leaders, and movements to advance solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and corresponding solutions; uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion; and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives. To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda, go to our website at www.opportunityagenda.org.

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Public Opinion Review

Executive Summary

Without question, the last half-century has witnessed an enormous shift in public attitudes toward black-white relations, segregation, and blatant prejudice. At the same time, racial tensions, obstacles, and stereotypes persist, and Americans of different racial and ethnic backgrounds hold divergent understandings of the issues facing black men, discrimination, and the causes of racial disparities.

Besides contributing to a negative civic environment, stereotypes and fundamental disagreements in understanding issues matter because they may undermine support for policies that can help strengthen communities and address racial disparities.

The analysis that follows provides a (necessarily brief) overview of some central themes emerging from public opinion research regarding understandings of black male achievement, awareness of racial disparities, and the causes of and responsibility for addressing them. It is intended to offer communicators a synthesis of key ideas that exist in public understanding that can either derail the conversation or move it forward.

This analysis highlights the views *of* black men, and *about* black men and the issues they face. Throughout, much of the focus is on differences between black and white survey respondents, and the challenges suggested by divergent opinions.[1] It takes research findings that seem contradictory and divisive on the surface, and offers a perspective to make sense of the underlying dynamics at play.

Perceptions of and by black men

More African-American men experience significant life challenges than do white men. African-American men also have higher levels of worry, and are harsher in their judgment of black men as well. For example:

▶ Black men are more likely than white men to say they have faced a number of traumatic experiences, from murdered friends to wrongful arrest to being a victim of a violent crime.

▶ African-American men cite higher levels of worry about a range of concerns.

▶ Black men consider a number of problems facing them severe, and are harshly critical of the priorities of black men as a group. For example, they are critical of what they see as black men's insufficient emphasis on education, health, family, and work.

At the same time, more black men than white men say they are focused on achieving success in a career, or on living a religious life, and more black men say they are optimistic about a bright future. In just about every area, black men are their own harshest critics, as well as the most optimistic that things will be better.

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1   Few surveys include enough interviews to analyze responses by African-American men in isolation, though we include these findings when possible. Further, very few of the surveys in this review offered subgroup analysis among other racial and ethnic groups. Our references to views of other ethnic groups are therefore limited.

Disparities and discrimination

People of color, including African Americans, view discrimination as widespread and as leading to disparities in education, income, health, and imprisonment. White Americans recognize that discrimination still exists, and while they generally understand that disparities between the races exist, they underestimate the extent of racial disparities, downplay the prevalence of discrimination, and they do not see discrimination as an influence on disparities.

Though responses from whites and African Americans to questions about discrimination and disparities are almost always at odds, we see hope in this pattern, as it seems clear that responses diverge because white Americans and black Americans have different understandings of what racial disparities are "about" — just the kind of challenge that communications reframing is designed to overcome.

First, African Americans have a more encompassing view of how discrimination unfolds than white Americans do. For white Americans, discrimination tends to be about relationships between individuals — interpersonal relationships. Black Americans, however, have an understanding that extends beyond the personal to include the way discriminatory practices can be embedded in policies and institutions. So even if all people recognize that discrimination exists, white people tend to think it is due to personal prejudice and are less likely to see the influence of institutional racism, obscuring the role of collective action and policy solutions.

Questions in public opinion surveys almost always imply that discrimination is about personal prejudice and "race relations," as though the issue is solely about personal interactions and individual behavior. The role of institutions and systems is largely unstated and rarely explored.

Similarly, black Americans and white Americans tend to have different understandings of how disparities arise, and therefore different interpretations of who or what is responsible for addressing disparities. Analysts often point to a contrast between "individual" and "structural" explanations for disparities:

▶ Overall, roughly equal percentages choose an explanation for disparities grounded in individual responsibility (*e.g.*, do individuals have the motivation to pull themselves up) and structural obstacles (*e.g.*, will individuals have the chance for education). However, black respondents are more likely to point to structural obstacles while white respondents are more likely to point to individual responsibility.

▶ Overall, one-third point to discrimination, but far more black respondents than white respondents say discrimination leads to disparities.

▶ Few choose the blatantly prejudiced belief that black people have less ability to learn.

With these divergent understandings of discrimination and disparities in mind, communicators need to take into account whether they are implicitly sending a message that works against the notion of collective responsibility. They need to keep in mind the following frames that dominate Americans' thinking about responsibility:

▶ **"Me" and "Personal Responsibility"** — Individuals are responsible for achieving their own success; therefore, individuals have to create their own solutions.

  ✓ As a general stance, Americans overwhelmingly believe in personal empowerment and self-determination.

✓ Similarly, as an explanation for disparities and problems facing black men, people turn to the idea of individual responsibility. In this view, racial disparities exist because individuals of different races are not trying equally hard to achieve, and black people need to take more responsibility.

✓ The "me" stance is gaining ground; black respondents have shifted toward a personal responsibility perspective to explain gaps in black achievement since the mid-1990s.

This approach is unlikely to lead to collective action.

▶ **"They" and "Interpersonal Relations" are Responsible** — Discriminatory behavior by individual white Americans directed toward individual black Americans is the cause of racial disparities; prejudiced individuals are responsible for disparities and attitude change is the solution.

✓ This stance is the normative standpoint embedded in most public opinion research, and the default pattern that often results in an "us and them" confrontational conversation. In this view, the problem is defined as how individuals treat each other; therefore, the solution is attitude change and stripping culture of stereotypes.

✓ White Americans and black Americans have divergent views regarding the prevalence of discrimination and its role in creating disparities.

✓ Most Americans believe that race relations are good, that problems will be worked out, and that more dialogue will help.

▶ **"All of Us" and "Structures" are Responsible** — The choices we have collectively made, and the systems we have created, have led to disparities that hold us all back. This stance relies both on a sense of interdependence and an understanding of structural dynamics.

✓ Public understanding of the influence of structures or systems in leading to gaps in achievement is a very limited area of inquiry in public opinion surveys.

✓ The few questions that explore some aspect of systemic influences demonstrate divergent views between racial groups.

This stance creates more opportunity for collective action and policy change, compared to an individual responsibility stance.

Issue focus

There are reasons to be optimistic about developing an "All of Us" conversation that leads to broad-based support for collective action and policy change. While any number of issue areas may be advantaged by such an approach, three policies rise to the top:

▶ **Education:** Education shows potential as an issue that can cross race, engage white people in coalition with black communities, and energize black men on their own behalf and on behalf of their families. It affords the opportunity to discuss what we can do collectively to advance people's well-being, rather than allow people to simply blame lack of ambition and hard work.

✓ Education is a top priority and concern for all Americans, and one area where people readily see a collective stake and a collective responsibility.

✓ There is widespread agreement that education matters to economic mobility, and the role of education in creating opportunity is particularly valued in the black community.

✓ Importantly, Americans are willing to make low-income and minority children a priority in education efforts.

▶ **Jobs/Income:** The current weak economy has highlighted the role of broken systems in people's economic well-being, although this issue can easily lead to racial divisions and zero-sum thinking if not framed carefully.

  ✓ Jobs, income, and the economy are at the top of Americans' agendas, and are central to efforts to address racial disparities.

  ✓ In the current economy, people are more able to see the role of systems/structures in aiding or impeding individual success (though opinion continues to emphasize individual responsibility).

  ✓ However, jobs and income represent an area where the role of race seems particularly divisive and where stereotypes are persistent.

  ✓ There is widespread support for a number of policies that would improve economic mobility. However, African Americans support an active, engaged role for government, while white Americans are more likely to see government as the problem.[2]

▶ **Crime and Justice:** Black Americans rate crime as a top priority and police bias as a serious problem. Of all the issue areas, white respondents are most likely to respond that black Americans may receive different treatment in the justice system (though even here the percentages are not high and successful framing will be key).

  ✓ Crime has declined as a national priority, and yet, crime continues to be a top concern among black respondents.

  ✓ Surveys consistently show that black respondents have less confidence in police and in the justice system generally than white respondents do.

Finally, many organizations have taken up "fatherhood" as an important issue for black men and the black community generally. The public opinion research base for fatherhood initiatives is rather thin, and tends to focus narrowly on personal behaviors and involvement with children, rather than take a broader view on policy or social action.

Communications directions

In some respects, there has been a significant amount of research recommending messaging on issues of race. However, much of this research is limited in its utility either because it was designed to accomplish a narrow goal (and therefore is ineffective or even harmful for broader goals), or because its focus is so broad it can be difficult to demonstrate effectiveness in advancing specific policy objectives.

There are a number of framing choices that continue to be controversial: should advocates communicate about race or class, race or place, etc. Strategists often recommend avoiding race due to the well-known and obvious pitfalls in trying to have a frank conversation about disparities; advocates (quite rightly) are frequently dissatisfied with that recommendation, and seek research on how — not whether — to discuss race and equal opportunity.

Even researchers who have been studying and recommending strategies on this issue for some time may find it difficult to build support among communicators for a particular approach, to refine their recommendations, and to demonstrate success. While much work needs to be done, this review finds three promising directions for further consideration and development:

▶ Calling attention to effective solutions to disparities (and existing institutional bias), a color-conscious strategy that highlights proven solutions;

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2   American National Election Studies (2008); Allstate/National Journal, Heartland Monitor Poll IX (2011).

▶ Explaining the role of structures and systems in leading to disparities, thereby overcoming the "personal responsibility" barrier; and

▶ Creating a sense of interdependence and shared fate, thereby breaking down the "group competition" that is pervasive in racial attitudes.

In sum, we need to develop communications strategies that join people in common purpose and shared fate, while not erasing race in the process. This analysis points to the need for a frame flip and a unifying narrative to break through deeply entrenched views on these issues. Specifically, new framing on this issue needs to: mend the in-group/out-group cycle and establish a sense of "we" in a shared fate; look for ways to characterize the unique challenges facing black men while not inadvertently implying that other groups will have less opportunity, *e.g.*, "breaking down obstacles" instead of "addressing disparities"; and harmonize the broad overarching narrative about black male achievement with specific issue categories that most matter to African-American men — jobs and income, education, and criminal justice.

The analysis that follows is just one part of a much larger effort to understand the current context, and to create a path forward.

Introduction

This analysis provides an overview of the central themes emerging from public opinion research regarding understandings of black male achievement, awareness of racial disparities, and the causes of and responsibility for addressing them. In addition, the review includes short discussions of four issues of particular interest to advocates — jobs and the economy, education, criminal justice, and fatherhood.

Much has been written on these topics, yet many questions remain to be investigated. This review is far from comprehensive. Rather, it is designed to offer communicators a synthesis of key ideas that exist in public understanding, which can either derail or move the conversation forward. These key ideas need to be taken into account in any message strategy.

This strategic overview takes research findings that on the surface seem contradictory and divisive, and offers a perspective that makes sense of the underlying dynamics. How can people both recognize that disparities exist, and still oppose efforts designed to address these disparities? How can people believe that discrimination is widespread, yet think it has nothing to do with limiting opportunity?

Note that the analysis is *just one piece of a larger effort*. It is intended to provide communicators with a strategic overview of key public attitudes, and to inform future stages of the project — and it is those later stages that will focus more on action steps going forward.

Methodology

Public opinion research relevant to black male achievement is an area rich with investigation, and dozens of books could easily be written summarizing each of the topics identified in this review. Indeed, hundreds of studies informed this analysis. Rather than cite every study or every statistic on a particular measure, the report highlights key themes and ideas for communicators to keep in mind, illustrated by targeted statistics.

Topos reviewed original data from more than 100 public opinion surveys, as well as survey analyses published in academic journals. In addition, qualitative research studies were also examined for the very specific purpose of understanding prescriptive communications recommendations. The studies included in this review were conducted by reputable, nationally known research organizations and media outlets, and meet best practices for quality including appropriate sample size and methodologically sound design. All of the data examined are publicly available.

The analysis relies most heavily on research conducted in the past five years, though some long-term trends are included, for three reasons: 1) many historical reviews of changing perceptions of race are readily available; 2) historical trends are very useful, but limited in providing actionable insights for developing strategy in the current environment; and 3) the election of the nation's first African-American president brought significant attention to issues of race, making it prudent to emphasize recent survey findings as much as possible.

To be actionable for advocates and other lay readers, this paper is necessarily brief and strategic, and undoubtedly raises new questions for researchers. The interpretations expressed are the authors' alone.

Perceptions of and by Black Men

Since the mid-20th century, the United States has seen an enormous shift in public attitudes toward black-white relations, segregation, and blatant prejudice. At the same time, racial tensions, obstacles, and stereotypes continue, and Americans of different racial and ethnic backgrounds hold divergent understandings of discrimination and the causes of racial disparities.[3]

Besides contributing to a negative civic environment, stereotypes matter because they may undermine support for efforts to reduce racial disparities. If white people view African Americans as lazy, they are less likely to support government anti-poverty programs. Or, if it is commonly believed that black people are unintelligent or violent, it will hinder efforts for school or neighborhood integration, for example. And if black people believe these negative things about their own group, it may contribute to low self-esteem and other problems.

Public opinion research suggests that positive and negative views toward black people may be grounded in multiple arenas. In other words, while one might assume that a particular experience or aspect of a person's background would cause an individual to feel *either* positively *or* negatively toward a racial group, or to ascribe to one of two opposing views (black people are hardworking *or* lazy, etc.), research suggests that responses toward a racial group may have different antecedents and be multifaceted.

For example, in research conducted by Patchen, Davidson, Hofmann, and Brown in 1977, they found that:

> Positive behaviors toward black people are predicted by racial contact, while negative behaviors are predicted by aggressiveness and family/peer racial attitudes.

Lipset and Schneider, in their 1978 analysis of the Bakke case, and Katz and Hass in their study of "Racial Ambivalence and American Value Conflict" (1988) found that:

> Positive attitudes toward black people are based in humanitarianism (sympathy toward the disadvantaged), while negative attitudes are based in individualism (self-reliance).

The conscious attitudes about racial and ethnic groups reviewed in this section probably tell only one small part of the story, and subsequent sections (for example, discussions of personal responsibility and altruism) are highly relevant to attitudes of racial groups as well.
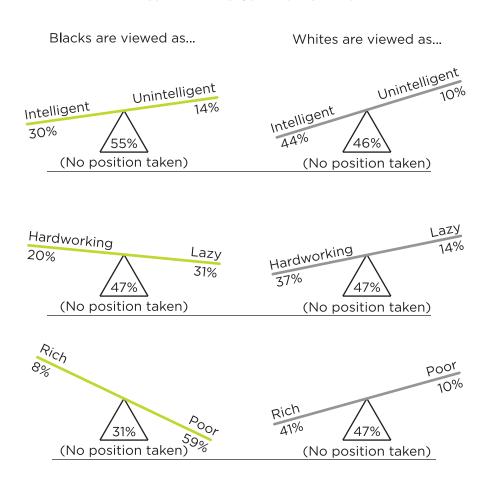
Though it has become less of a focus in recent years, public opinion research has at times measured public assessments of different racial groups, including their character traits. For example, when a Harris poll (2009) asked respondents to rate various racial and ethnic groups on a thermometer scale

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3   Researchers should have healthy skepticism about whether self-professed views of race and ethnicity tell the whole story. Several dynamics have been shown to influence survey response including social desirability, question wording and context, and perceived race of interviewer. In addition to the results reported on here, readers should look to the Topos social science literature review for The Opportunity Agenda, October 2011, *Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys*.

"with 1 meaning extremely negative and 100 meaning extremely positive," Americans overall give the highest ratings to "white Americans" (83.2) and the lowest ratings to "Hispanic/Latino Americans" (77.7). Respondents give almost identical ratings to "Black/African Americans" (79.9), "Chinese Americans" (79.9), and "Asian Americans" (79.7).

Many studies over the years have found that people are willing to assess groups on a variety of image traits with no description other than racial category. In research done by the National Opinion Research Center in 2010, people were asked to place racial groups on a 1 to 7 scale, with one end of the scale anchored by a particular trait and the other anchored by its opposite trait. Pluralities of survey respondents opted out of rating blacks or whites on intelligence, work ethic, and (to a lesser extent) wealth. However, of those who did give ratings, more said whites are intelligent than said blacks are intelligent (44 percent gave "intelligent" ratings for whites, 30 percent for blacks), and the same pattern held for "hard working" (37 percent for whites and 20 percent for blacks), and "rich" (41 percent and 7 percent, respectively) (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. RATING CONTRASTING PAIRS

Source: National Opinion Research Center, August 2010.

More black men experience significant challenges than white men, have higher levels of worry, and are harsher in their judgment of black men. Even so, more are focused on achieving success in a career, on living a religious life, and are optimistic about a bright future. In just about every area, black men are their own harshest critics, as well as the most optimistic that things will get better.

Many black men have faced traumatic experiences in their lives. In a Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard 2011 study entitled "The Race and Recession Survey," more black men than white men report having a close friend or relative who was murdered (61 percent and 29 percent, respectively), wrongfully arrested (31 percent, 16 percent), or the victim of a violent crime (25 percent, 18 percent). In only one area surveyed in this study have more white men than black men experienced a challenge — getting laid off or fired from a job (62 percent of white men, 54 percent of black men), a gap closed since the start of the recession (see Figure 2). Now, 27 percent of black people and 21 percent of white people say they have been laid off or lost a job in the past year, and more black people than white people say they are unemployed (44 percent and 40 percent, respectively) or underemployed (17 percent and 12 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 2. BLACK AND WHITE MEN'S EXPERIENCES
% WHO HAVE...

Experience	Black Men	White Men
Had a close friend or relative who was murdered	61	29
Been laid off or fired from a job	54	62
Been wrongfully arrested	31	16
Personally been a victim of a violent crime	25	18
Been arrested (only asked of those who hadn't been wrongfully arrested)	22	22
Had a problem with alcohol or drugs	19	20

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

It follows that more black men cite high levels of worry about a range of concerns. Compared with white men, more black men are worried about every problem surveyed, from access to health care to getting arrested. A note of caution: This particular set of findings is based on a survey that occurred two years prior to the economic crash in 2008. It is highly likely that the same questions today would show far higher levels of worry on most measures, but particularly on economic measures. Important dynamics would likely remain unchanged: the gap in levels of worry between white and black men, as well as the high levels of worry on multiple issues among black men (see Figure 3).
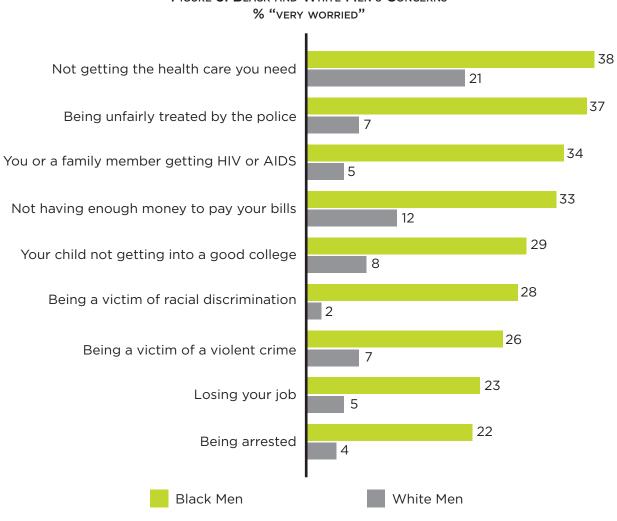
FIGURE 3. BLACK AND WHITE MEN'S CONCERNS
% "VERY WORRIED"

Concern	Black Men	White Men
Not getting the health care you need	38	21
Being unfairly treated by the police	37	7
You or a family member getting HIV or AIDS	34	5
Not having enough money to pay your bills	33	12
Your child not getting into a good college	29	8
Being a victim of racial discrimination	28	2
Being a victim of a violent crime	26	7
Losing your job	23	5
Being arrested	22	4

Black Men   White Men

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

According to the 2006 Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard study, "African American Men Survey," in rating a series of problems facing black men, black men themselves are more likely than other audiences to rate a range of problems facing them as severe, including not taking education seriously enough (91 percent), becoming involved in crime (88 percent), drug and alcohol abuse (87 percent), not being responsible fathers (85 percent), not having good jobs (85 percent), HIV/AIDS (82 percent), poverty (77 percent) and, lastly, discrimination (68 percent) (see Figure 4). Black women's ratings are similarly high, while white men and women are not as grim in their assessment of the problems facing black men. Asked to choose the single biggest problem facing black men, 31 percent of black men chose "not taking their education seriously enough."
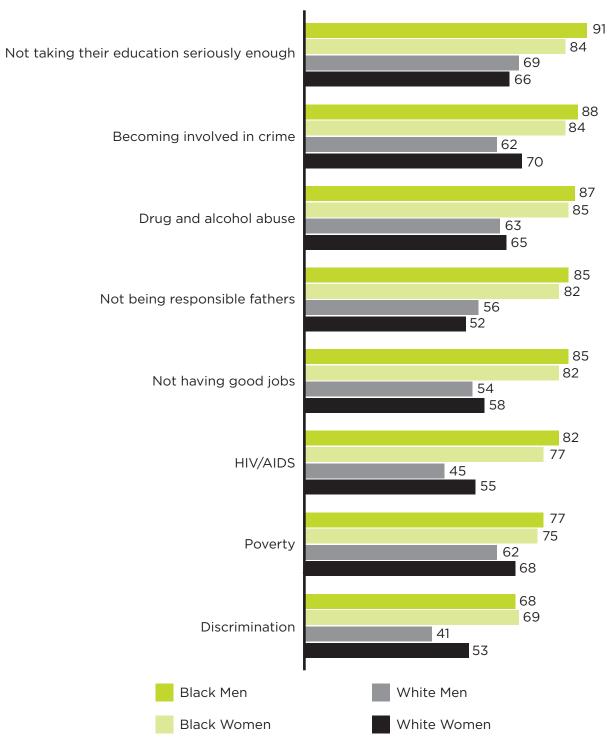
Figure 4. Problems Facing Black Men
% "big problem," by race/gender

Not taking their education seriously enough
- Black Men: 91
- Black Women: 84
- White Men: 69
- White Women: 66

Becoming involved in crime
- Black Men: 88
- Black Women: 84
- White Men: 62
- White Women: 70

Drug and alcohol abuse
- Black Men: 87
- Black Women: 85
- White Men: 63
- White Women: 65

Not being responsible fathers
- Black Men: 85
- Black Women: 82
- White Men: 56
- White Women: 52

Not having good jobs
- Black Men: 85
- Black Women: 82
- White Men: 54
- White Women: 58

HIV/AIDS
- Black Men: 82
- Black Women: 77
- White Men: 45
- White Women: 55

Poverty
- Black Men: 77
- Black Women: 75
- White Men: 62
- White Women: 68

Discrimination
- Black Men: 68
- Black Women: 69
- White Men: 41
- White Women: 53

Legend: Black Men, Black Women, White Men, White Women

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

Note that many of these "problems" — not taking their education seriously enough, not being responsible fathers, becoming involved in crime, etc. — can be read as admonishment of black men or black families. Black men are their own harshest critics in this regard.

Black men and white men report very different priorities. For example, according to the Washington Post/KFF/Harvard 2006 study, compared with white men, black men put more importance on being successful in a career (76 percent of black men, 56 percent of white men), living a religious life (70 percent, 44 percent), being respected by others (76 percent, 59 percent), and standing up for their racial or ethnic group (76 percent, 33 percent) (see Figure 5).
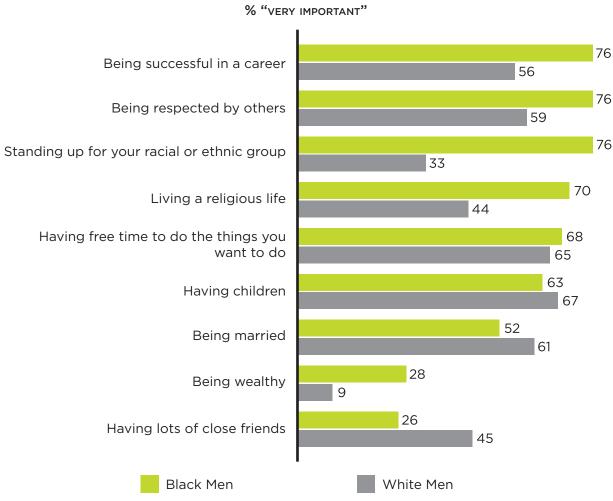
FIGURE 5. PERSONAL PRIORITIES
% "VERY IMPORTANT"

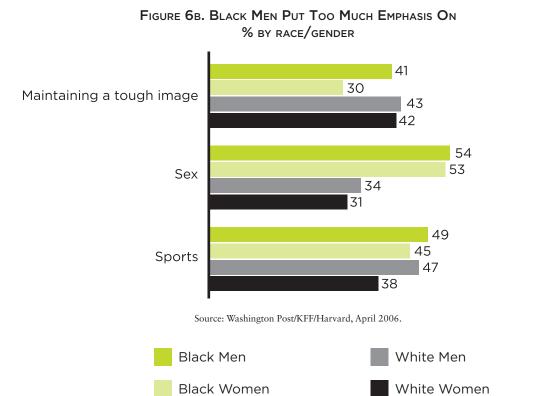|	Black Men	White Men
Being successful in a career	76	56
Being respected by others	76	59
Standing up for your racial or ethnic group	76	33
Living a religious life	70	44
Having free time to do the things you want to do	68	65
Having children	63	67
Being married	52	61
Being wealthy	28	9
Having lots of close friends	26	45

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

Black men are harshly critical of the priorities of black men generally, saying that black men put too little emphasis on education (69 percent), health (66 percent), their families (48 percent), and getting ahead at work (43 percent), and too much emphasis on sports (49 percent), maintaining a tough image (41 percent), and sex (54 percent) (see Figures 6a and 6b). Black men and black women tend to give far harsher ratings on these measures than white men and white women have of black men's priorities, except the areas of maintaining a tough image and sports, where opinions converge.

FIGURE 6A. BLACK MEN PUT TOO LITTLE EMPHASIS ON
% BY RACE/GENDER

Education
- 69
- 67
- 56
- 54

Their health
- 66
- 72
- 43
- 43

Their families
- 48
- 57
- 37
- 34

Getting ahead at work
- 43
- 42
- 29
- 19

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

FIGURE 6B. BLACK MEN PUT TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON
% BY RACE/GENDER

Maintaining a tough image
- 41
- 30
- 43
- 42

Sex
- 54
- 53
- 34
- 31

Sports
- 49
- 45
- 47
- 38

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

Black Men   White Men
Black Women   White Women

Though black respondents express significant worries and see a great number of problems facing black men, they still express great optimism about their future. Fully 85 percent of black respondents are optimistic about their future, compared with 72 percent of white respondents. A majority (59 percent) of black respondents say, "America's best times are yet to come," while a majority (53 percent) of white respondents take the alternative view, "America's best years are behind us." Overall, ratings on this measure have been surprisingly stable for the last 10 years, with just one noticeable shift shortly after the stock market crash at the end of 2008, with more people than ever (57 percent) saying that the "best times are yet to come." Sixty percent of black respondents believe their child's standard of living will be better than theirs, while just 36 percent of white respondents agree. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2011)

Finally, according to the Pew Research Center's 2009 report, "Racial Attitudes in America," people may see socioeconomic status as more relevant than race when it comes to dictating shared values. Both black and white respondents see values between the races as converging, while values between classes may be diverging. Majorities of both white (70 percent) and black (60 percent) respondents say "the values held by black people and the values held by white people have become more similar." But as black respondents consider class, a majority (53 percent) say the "values held by middle class black people and the values held by poor black people have become…more different." Only 22 percent of black respondents say, "Middle class blacks and poor blacks have a lot in common."

Disparities and Discrimination

Issues of race and race policy are understood by most Americans as being about individuals and relationships, not systems and structures, and that means the explanation for gaps in achievement are often understood as resulting from personal successes or failures rather than external influences.

Therefore, even if people recognize that disparities exist, they often blame disparities on individual failures alone, not systemic influences. Furthermore, if people recognize that discrimination exists, many think it is solely due to personal prejudice and do not see the influence of institutional racism. Overcoming this dynamic will be a central challenge for those who seek policy solutions.

Knowledge of disparities

White survey respondents recognize that disparities, such as economic disparities, exist between black and white Americans. However, research suggests that respondents, particularly white respondents, *underestimate* the size of the gaps. In an analysis by Kaplowitz, Fisher, and Broman entitled "How Accurate are Perceptions of Social Statistics about Blacks and Whites" (2003), in rating statistics, black respondents offered larger gap estimates than white respondents in three of four areas (excepting family income).[4]

Furthermore, white respondents tend to believe things are getting better for black men as a group (according to 58 percent of white men and 50 percent of white women surveyed), while black men are far more mixed in their views. Only 29 percent of black men believe things are getting better for black men as a group, while 34 percent believe things are getting worse, and 36 percent say things are staying about the same. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

But would more accurate knowledge help or hurt efforts to address disparities? If people had more accurate knowledge of the disparities that exist, would it inspire them to address them? Or would it just feed negative stereotypes?

The answer to this question depends in large part on people's reasoning for why disparities exist. Even if there is widespread agreement that there are inequities between white and black Americans, there is a fundamental disagreement about the cause of inequities. According to Nicholas Winter (2008), some attribute disparities to individual factors, such as individual effort, while others attribute disparities to structural factors.

The General Social Survey (GSS), a survey conducted periodically since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago that tracks opinions of Americans on a large

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4   Using data gathered in 1995, researchers found that white and black respondents dramatically underestimated the racial gap in "out-of-wedlock births" (actual gap in 1995 was 46.1 percent, white and black respondents averaged 16.1 percent and 23.1 percent, respectively); both groups underestimated the gap in "family income" (actual gap was $12,500, white and black respondents estimated $9,410 and $9,500, respectively); both groups underestimated the racial gap in the "average income of male college graduates" with white respondents underestimating the size of the gap more than black respondents (actual gap was $6,600, white and black respondents estimated $2,370 and $5,860, respectively); and finally, white respondents underestimated the racial gap in poverty rates while blacks who responded gave higher than the actual number. (According to Kaplowitz, the actual gap in percent in poverty was 22.3, white and black respondents estimated 17.9 and 25.3, respectively.)

range of issues, routinely asks questions designed to measure people's understanding of structural *vs.* individual influences on disparities, such as economic disparities. Asked to explain why on average blacks "have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people," respondents choose responses rooted in both individual and structural explanations. Equal percentages choose a measure grounded in individual responsibility ("motivation to pull themselves up") and structural obstacles ("have the chance for education"). Few choose the blatantly prejudiced belief that black people have less ability to learn. One-third point to discrimination, a measure that white and black people may understand very differently. (GSS, 2010, NORC; see table)

Reasons for Racial Disparities	
On the average, African Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are...	
...because most African Americans just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty	47%
...because most African Americans don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty	47%
...mainly due to discrimination	36%
...because most African Americans have less inborn ability to learn	10%

Source: General Society Survey, National Opinion Research Center, August 2010.

More accuracy in pinpointing the breadth and depth of disparities is unlikely to matter if people continue to hold onto explanations for disparities that absolve government or other structures from responsibility. The next section discusses three different types of responsibility for disparities that are addressed in survey data, and whether or not each leads to public support for collective action.

Who's responsible?

This section discusses three perspectives regarding responsibility for disparities and solutions:

Interpersonal responsibility — Disparities exist because of those who demonstrate prejudice in their interpersonal relationships; therefore, prejudiced individuals are responsible for disparities and attitude change is the solution.

Structural responsibility — We all share responsibility in creating systems that allow disparities; therefore, institutions and structures continue to perpetuate disparities, and policy change is the solution.

Personal responsibility — Responsibility for achieving their own success belongs to individuals; therefore, it is up to individuals to create their own solutions.

Before further discussion of responsibility, it is important to describe people's understanding of discrimination, and how it shapes their views of disparities and responsibility for action.

"Discrimination" is an issue that can be understood as "interpersonal" (meaning how individuals treat each other, or "individual racism") or "structural" (meaning racism that is embedded in systems and institutions, or "institutional racism"). These marked differences in understanding often go unstated in public opinion surveys. In fact, surveys frequently ask questions that imply the existence of individual racism only, and obscure the role of structures.

Discrimination — widely divergent views

While Americans of differing races agree that discrimination continues in the United States, they assess the prevalence and consequences of discrimination differently. Black respondents are far more likely than white respondents to assert there is "a lot" of discrimination, that racism is "widespread," and that it leads to a number of consequences.

Overall, 69 percent say there is "a lot" or "some" discrimination against African Americans. Black respondents are more likely to say there is discrimination (82 percent, 43 percent "a lot") than white respondents (70 percent, 13 percent "a lot") or Latino respondents (54 percent, 19 percent "a lot"). (Pew, 2009) Similarly, black respondents believe racism against blacks is widespread in the United States (72 percent), but whites are divided (49 percent widespread, 48 percent not widespread). (Gallup, October 2009)

The marked difference between black and white respondents occurs even among the youngest age groups. While 61 percent of black youth agree with the statement, "it is hard for young Black people to get ahead because they face so much discrimination," just 43 percent of white youth agree. (Black Youth Project, University of Chicago, 2005)

At the same time, the Pew Research Center found in its 2008 "Political and Economic Survey" that a majority (53 percent) of Americans believe the country is making progress in addressing discrimination against minorities. Among a number of challenges, this is the one area in which people think the country is making progress. Even so, young people are skeptical that discrimination will be eliminated — just 11 percent of black youth and 4 percent of white youth say that it is *very likely* racism will be eliminated during their lifetime. (Black Youth Project, University of Chicago, 2005)

For black respondents, discrimination matters in part because it leads to serious consequences — such as gaps in income and education (see Figure 7). Far fewer white respondents believe racial discrimination is a major factor leading to these gaps.

FIGURE 7. THE EFFECT OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BLACKS
% "MAJOR FACTOR LEADING TO…"

A higher percentage of blacks in U.S. prisons — Black Respondents 80, White Respondents 44
Lower average income levels for blacks in the U.S. — Black Respondents 71, White Respondents 35
Lower average education levels for blacks in the U.S. — Black Respondents 64, White Respondents 32
Lower average life expectancies for blacks — Black Respondents 57, White Respondents 25

Black Respondents   White Respondents

Source: Gallup, July 2008.

Responsibility — interpersonal relationships

As noted above, one way of understanding what racial bias is "about" is grounded in interpersonal relationships. In this view, the problem is seen through the lens of how individuals treat each other; therefore, the solution is attitude change and stripping culture of stereotypes on an individual level.

A main focus in public opinion research has been the investigation of "relationships" between people of different races. In these types of questions, the focus is interpersonal: do people of different races get along, have people been treated unfairly by other individuals due to race, etc. The unstated assumption is that discrimination is based on interpersonal relationships and if people would treat each other fairly, disparities would close.

Most Americans believe that race relations are good, that problems will be worked out, and that more dialogue will help.

According to a Hart/McInturff survey for NBC/Wall Street Journal (2010), majorities across races believe relationships between the races are "good," with white respondents rating race relations slightly more positively than black respondents — 72 percent of white respondents and 66 percent of black respondents say relations between whites and blacks are "very" or "fairly good." These ratings jumped in the January 2009 Hart/McInturff survey, just prior to Barack Obama's inauguration as president. In fact, at that time significant percentages of both white and black respondents believed race relations had gotten better since Barack Obama's election (46 percent and 40 percent, respectively), but numbers dropped one year later (19 percent and 22 percent, respectively, said "better").
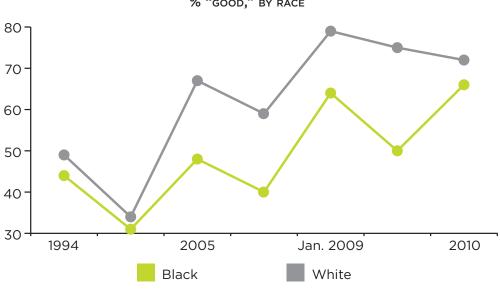
FIGURE 8. RACE RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES ARE:
% "GOOD," BY RACE

Source: Hart/McInturff survey for NBC/Wall Street Journal, 2010.

A Gallup poll from October 2009 showed that a majority (56 percent) believe relations between the races will eventually be worked out. Overall, the ratings have improved since the early 1990s, hitting a high of 67 percent in November 2008.

In looking at the issue from the "interpersonal" perspective, conversation is viewed as a valid solution. Most people believe greater dialogue about race would bring the races together (56 percent overall). Black respondents in particular believe this is true (70 percent). (Gallup, 2009)

Personal slights (being treated with less respect, receiving poor service, etc.) are often the focus of survey questions that purport to measure discrimination. Many black Americans, particularly black men, report that they have experienced this kind of behavior.
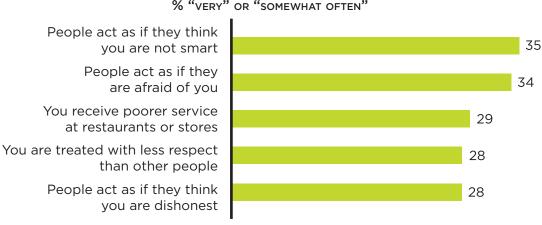
FIGURE 9. BLACK MEN SAY THEY EXPERIENCE DUE TO RACE…
% "VERY" OR "SOMEWHAT OFTEN"

People act as if they think you are not smart	35
People act as if they are afraid of you	34
You receive poorer service at restaurants or stores	29
You are treated with less respect than other people	28
People act as if they think you are dishonest	28

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

Between one-quarter and one-third of black men say they have experienced mistreatment by others due to their race very or somewhat often in their "day-to-day life" including: "people act as if they think you are not smart" (35 percent of black men experience this "very" or "somewhat often"), "people act as if they are afraid of you" (34 percent), "you receive poor service" (29 percent), "you are treated with less respect" (28 percent) and "people act as if they think you are dishonest" (28 percent) (see Figure 9). As a point of comparison, responses among white respondents are in the single digits in each category.
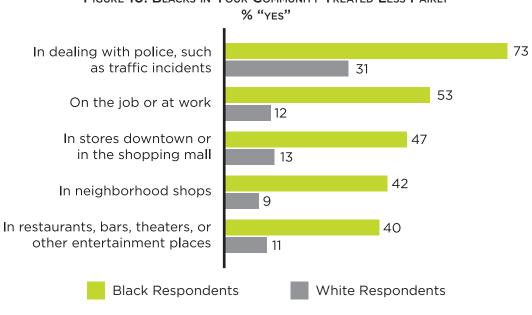
FIGURE 10. BLACKS IN YOUR COMMUNITY TREATED LESS FAIRLY
% "YES"

	Black Respondents	White Respondents
In dealing with police, such as traffic incidents	73	31
On the job or at work	53	12
In stores downtown or in the shopping mall	47	13
In neighborhood shops	42	9
In restaurants, bars, theaters, or other entertainment places	40	11

Source: Gallup, June 2007.

Perceptions of discriminatory treatment vary widely by race. Many black respondents believe that blacks in their community are treated less fairly than whites are, while far fewer white respondents have a similar perception. Note the wide discrepancy in responses between white and black respondents on every measure of discrimination tested. (Gallup, June 2007) Unfair treatment by police is the only category with a considerable percentage of white respondents seeing a problem. Fully 73 percent of black respondents say they see blacks in their community treated less fairly "in dealing with police, such as traffic incidents" while 31 percent of white respondents say blacks in their community are treated less fairly in dealing with police — a 42 percentage point gap. There are similar gaps between the races in their observation of unfair treatment on the job (53 percent and 12 percent, respectively), in downtown stores (47 percent, 13 percent), in neighborhood shops (42 percent, 9 percent) and in places of entertainment (40 percent, 11 percent). (Gallup, 2007) Note: This series of questions straddles both the "interpersonal" and "structural" understandings of the issue of discriminatory treatment, since some examples, such as treatment by police, concern institutions.

The prevalence of the "interpersonal" understanding of this issue embedded throughout public opinion research is troubling for those who care about changing culture and policy. When something as serious as discrimination is commonly trivialized in surveys as being mainly about personal interactions, it obscures the widespread, systemic obstacles and prevents people from seeing the role of collective action and policy change.

Responsibility — structural

Though experts and advocates understand the influence of institutional racism, surveys rarely explore this dynamic. Public understanding of the influence of structures or systems in leading to gaps in achievement is a very limited area of inquiry. Like the questions about relationships and unfair treatment, the few questions that explore some aspect of systemic influences demonstrate opposing views between racial groups.

For example, black Americans see the need for the country to make more changes to achieve equal rights (which implies national policy change), while white Americans disagree. A majority (54 percent) of white respondents believe "our country has made the changes needed to give Blacks equal rights with whites" while just 36 percent believe "our country needs to continue making changes to give Blacks equal rights with whites." Black respondents feel very differently, with 81 percent believing more changes need to be made. (Pew, 2009) On the economy, most black people said that the economic system is "stacked against Blacks/Black men" while white Americans said that "the system is fair to everyone."

A split sample experiment demonstrates that some groups may be more willing to see the system as "stacked against Black men" than against black people generally. A majority of black respondents believed America's economic system is stacked against black men (56 percent of black men and 62 percent of black women agree) while white respondents think the system is fair to everyone (57 percent of white men and 47 percent of white women agree). Responses by black men and white women are consistent across both versions of the question. Black women, however, are more willing to say the system is stacked against black men (62 percent) than it is against blacks as a group (49 percent), and white men become less willing to assert the system is fair to everyone when asked whether the system is stacked specifically against black men rather than blacks as a group (dropping from 69 percent to 57 percent, a 12 percentage point decline). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

Even though most white respondents believe "the system is fair," most also recognize that black men face more obstacles advancing in the workplace than white people or black women. While black

men are particularly likely to assert this is true (79 percent of black men say they face more obstacles than whites), even white men, the group least likely to acknowledge discrimination, agree black men face more obstacles than whites (59 percent). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

These limited findings may indicate a foundation on which to build. It may be possible, indeed necessary, to highlight in our conversations the structures that impede black male achievement, so that people more readily recognize the systemic causes of disparities.

Responsibility — personal

With the influence of systems and policies invisible to many, all people, including black men, look to personal responsibility to explain success or failure. In this view, racial disparities exist because individuals of different races are not trying as hard as necessary to achieve. Black respondents have shifted toward a personal responsibility perspective to explain gaps in black achievement since the mid-1990s.

As a general stance, Americans overwhelmingly believe in personal empowerment and self-determination. Given two choices, 82 percent of Americans side with the view that "everyone has it in their own power to succeed" while only 12 percent side with the view "success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside of our control." Fully 77 percent of blacks believe in self-determination, a far higher percentage than in the mid-1990s when it stood at 66 percent. (Pew, 2009)

Majorities of blacks (61 percent) and whites (58 percent) agree that "Most people who want to get ahead can make it if they're willing to work hard," while fewer choose the alternate view, "Hard work and determination are no guarantee of success for most people" (36 percent of black respondents and 41 percent of white respondents). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2011) Two thirds of all respondents (69 percent) side with the view, "people get ahead by their own hard work," while the remainder say "lucky breaks or help from other people" are equally important (20 percent) or more important (10 percent). (National Opinion Research Center, 2010)

When race is added to the consideration, most assert that people are responsible for their own fate and place little fault on discrimination.

Given two choices, most Americans side with the view, "Blacks who can't get ahead in this country are mostly responsible for their own condition" over the alternate view, "Racial discrimination is the main reason why many Black people can't get ahead these days" (67 percent and 18 percent, respectively). White respondents are particularly likely to side with individual responsibility (70 percent), but even a majority of black respondents agree (52 percent). A majority of white respondents have pointed to individual responsibility since Pew started asking this question in the mid-1990s, and this view has gained traction among black respondents in recent years. (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Sociological and Demographic Trends Project, 2009)
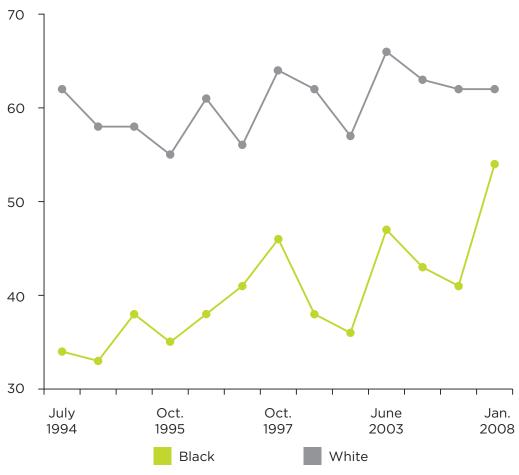
FIGURE **11.** RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONDITION
% "BLACKS WHO CAN'T GET AHEAD ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OWN CONDITION"

Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Sociological and Demographic Trends Project, November 2009.

A majority (56 percent) of Americans believe the problems facing black men are more a result "of what Black men have failed to do for themselves" than "of what white people have done to Blacks." White men are most likely to point to individual failure (63 percent), as do 59 percent of black men, 56 percent of black women, and 51 percent of white women. (Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, 2006) Finally, in a series of interviews conducted by Yankelovich/Radio One in 2007, fully 84 percent of black respondents agreed that "Blacks need to be more responsible for themselves as individuals."

What is unclear, however, is whether "be more responsible for themselves" has the same narrow interpretation across the black community as it would in American culture more broadly. For example, the last statement, "Blacks need to be more responsible for themselves as individuals" might be interpreted as a call for collective action by the black community, *for* the black community, by at least some people. The same study found 71 percent of blacks saying it is important "to stick together to achieve gains for the community" and that the black "New Middle Class"[5] segment was the "most likely to believe that problems in the Black community can best be solved by Blacks and that Blacks need to be more responsible for themselves." (Yankelovich, 2007) So it may be that in some instances and for some segments of the black community, "personal responsibility" includes collective action.

5   The "Black New Middle Class" is defined in the study as follows: "the best educated, most employed and wealthiest segment is mostly between the ages of 25 and 44 and is the most technologically forward segment" of the survey population.

Generally, the "personal responsibility" approach undermines a role for government in addressing disparities. On a scale of 1-7, where 1 indicates "the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks" and 7 means "the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves" a plurality of black respondents side with the statement that government "should make every effort to improve" their lives (44 percent choose 1-3) over the government making no "special effort … because they should help themselves" (23 percent 5-7). White respondents answer in the reverse (12 percent government help, 54 percent help themselves). (American National Election Studies, 2008)

The rise in the perception that personal responsibility explains success or failure among black Americans has not yet replaced belief that prejudice hinders achievement.

In 2007, 82 percent of black respondents said that it was "important for parents to prepare their children for prejudice." (Yankelovich) Black men assert that black parents need to both encourage their children that anyone can be successful with hard work, and warn them that they will have to work harder to get credit and that unfairness exists. Few, however, go so far as to say that most white people aren't trustworthy (see table).

Black Parents Should Tell Their Sons (responses of black men only):	
Anyone can be successful in this country if they're willing to work hard.	94%
You will have to work harder than white people to get the same amount of credit.	64%
The police are looking for any reason to give a black man a hard time.	50%
Most white people cannot be trusted.	21%

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

As communicators consider approaches to discrimination, disparities, and stereotypes, these largely invisible tectonics of "who's responsible?" underlie public understanding and need to be taken into account. If a person believes discrimination is largely a thing of the past, or that discrimination is solely about interpersonal slights and personal racism, or that success is due solely to personal pluck, then a policy conversation seems irrelevant.

The Obama effect

The election of the nation's first black president had a beneficial effect on people's assessment of race relations. However, research suggests that Barack Obama's administration has not ushered in a new era of support for racial policies.

While Americans may have many critiques of Barack Obama, the idea that he is providing preferential treatment to the black community is not typically one of them (though there are some conflicting notions in the research). Only 12 percent overall, and only 13 percent of white respondents, believe that he is "paying too much attention" to blacks. In comparison, more people think he pays too much attention to banks and financial institutions (33 percent), business corporations (25 percent), gays and lesbians (21 percent), and labor unions (17 percent). Black respondents report satisfaction with the level of attention the President is giving to "the concerns of Blacks": 80 percent say he is giving the right amount of attention, 13 percent say "not enough," and just 1 percent say "too much." (Pew, 2009)

In "Change or More of the Same: Evaluating Racial Attitudes in the Obama Era" by Vincent Hutchings (2009), there is little proof that the election of a black president indicates increased support for policies to address racial gaps. Some research suggests that the racial divide on racial policy matters is as wide as ever.

Furthermore, recent research warns that one consequence of Barack Obama's election may be that people are less likely to believe discrimination is a problem. In pre- and post-election surveys, one researcher noted an 11-percentage point decline in the view that there is "a lot" or "some" discrimination against blacks. More than one in four, or 27 percent, of those surveyed revised their assessment of discrimination downward, and this shift occurred across a range of demographic groups. Declines in ratings of discrimination are associated with an increase in negative views of blacks and increased opposition to affirmative action and immigration. (Valentino, 2011) While it is too soon to know if this portends future obstacles in building public support for policies, advocates should be attentive.

Finally, President Obama's real influence on the electorate may be more about mood than policy — he lifted black Americans' assessment of race relations and progress. Americans overall are more likely to believe that Obama's election made race relations better rather than worse (41 percent better, 22 percent worse), and this view is even more prevalent among black Americans (53 percent better, 20 percent worse). Americans are optimistic that Obama's presidency will make race relations better (61 percent), a view that is especially held by black Americans (79 percent). (Gallup, October 2009) In fact, just prior to his inauguration, surveys showed a jump in the percentage saying relations between the races are "good." (Hart/McInturff, 2010)

Issue Focus

Policy perceptions and relationship to race

Economic concerns dominate the nation's priorities (87 percent say strengthening the economy is a top priority, 84 percent say improving the job situation is a top priority). While economic concerns are often near the top of the nation's agenda, the dramatic economic downturn pushed national security concerns even lower on the agenda: dealing with terrorism (73 percent), followed by improving education (66 percent) and stabilizing Social Security (66 percent). Notably, crime (44 percent) is far lower on the national priority agenda. (Pew, 2011; see Figure 12)

FIGURE 12. PRIORITIES FOR PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS
% "TOP PRIORITY"

Priority	%
Strengthen economy	87
Improve job situation	84
Defend from future terrorist attacks	73
Improve education	66
Make Social Security financially sound	66
Reduce budget deficit	64
Make Medicare financially sound	61
Reduce health care costs	61
Deal w/ poor and needy people	52
Deal w/ energy problem	50
Deal w/ illegal immigration	46
Reduce crime	44
Deal w/ moral breakdown	43
Strengthen the U.S. military	43
Protect the environment	40
Reduce influence of lobbyists/special interests	37
Deal w/ global trade issues	34
Deal w/ global warming	26

Source: Pew Research Center January 2011 Political Survey, January 2011.

As they consider the problems facing black families, black respondents point to some of the same priorities as the national priorities listed above. Jobs are the top priority (79 percent) and education is rated highly by a majority (56 percent). Interestingly, very high percentages of black respondents rate drugs (74 percent) and crime (67 percent) as top priorities for black families, even though crime does not rank as one of the higher national priorities in general. (Pew, 2009; see Figure 13)
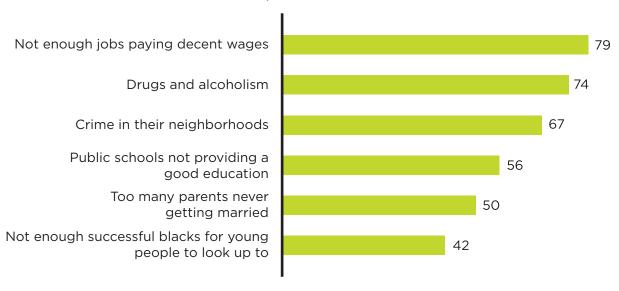
FIGURE **13.** PROBLEMS FACING BLACK FAMILIES
% "BIG PROBLEM," AMONG BLACK RESPONDENTS

Problem	%
Not enough jobs paying decent wages	79
Drugs and alcoholism	74
Crime in their neighborhoods	67
Public schools not providing a good education	56
Too many parents never getting married	50
Not enough successful blacks for young people to look up to	42

Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Sociological and Demographic Trends Project, November 2009.

When it comes to addressing racial disparities, do some issue areas offer more opportunity for gains than others? Research designed to develop messages to address disparities offers guidance in answering this question, but existing public opinion data also provide some clues.

Jobs, education, and crime, among the top three priorities for black families, should be central to any strategy designed to advance policy on their behalf. Fortunately, there are reasons to believe that each of these areas offers promising opportunities. In addition, this section includes a brief review of the limited research related to fatherhood.

Education

Education shows enormous potential as an issue that can cross race, engage white respondents in coalition with black communities, and energize black men on their own behalf.

FIGURE 14. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY
% "ESSENTIAL" OR "VERY IMPORTANT"

Factor	Black Respondents	Overall
Hard work	87	92
Having ambition	85	89
Staying healthy	89	83
Access to quality K-12 education	89	83
Having a good education yourself	87	80
Growing up in a stable family environment	75	74
The state of the economy	69	62
Growing up in a two-parent household	54	54
Access to loans	56	43
Knowing the right people	58	43
Growing up in a good neighborhood	52	41
Having well-educated parents	51	37
Coming from a wealthy family	40	28
Luck	26	21
Being born a man or woman	22	16
A person's race	26	15

Source: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Pew Economic Mobility Survey, February 2009.

According to "A Tale of Two Fathers," a study done by the Pew Research Center in May 2011, education is a top priority and concern for all Americans, and one area where people readily see

a collective stake and a collective responsibility. Though the economy is currently the top priority, education consistently ranks near the top of American concerns. Currently, 66 percent say improving education should be a "top priority."

Further, there is widespread agreement that education matters to economic mobility. In fact, of a list of factors contributing to economic mobility, education is the only factor that is widely viewed as a collective responsibility. All other popular contributors to economic mobility are grounded in personal responsibility and family values, such as hard work, ambition, staying healthy, a stable family, knowing the right people, a good neighborhood, luck, gender, and race (see Figure 14). Interestingly, unlike so many other attitudes in this review, black respondents' views are largely in line with the views of the population overall. Race is one of the few exceptions, with 26 percent of black respondents saying it is an important factor contributing to economic mobility, while just 15 percent of respondents overall agree. (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, 2009)

The role of education in creating opportunity is particularly valued in the black community. In Allstate's 2011 Heartland Monitor poll, a majority of black respondents prioritize education as the most important factor in creating opportunity, compared with just one-third of white respondents. Additionally, of a series of problems, more black men choose "young Black men not taking their education seriously enough" over any other problem (31 percent), demonstrating the black community's commitment to the issue. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006) But black youth (54 percent) are more likely than white youth (31 percent) to believe that black youth receive a poorer education on average than do white youth. (Black Youth Project, University of Chicago, 2005)
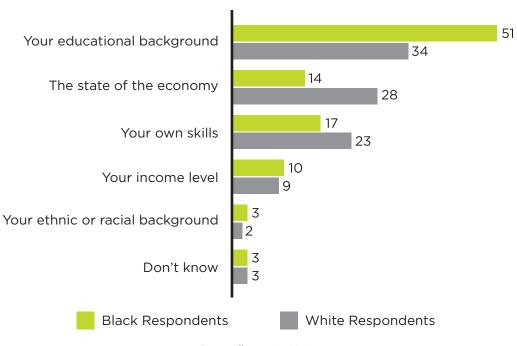
FIGURE 15. MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR FOR OPPORTUNITY (%)

Source: Allstate, May 2011.

Importantly, Americans say they are willing to make low-income and minority children a priority in education efforts: 66 percent say they would be willing to pay more taxes "for funding preschool programs for children from low-income or poverty-level households," 81 percent believe these preschool programs will help children perform better in school later, 81 percent believe it is possible

to close the achievement gap, and 88 percent say closing this gap is an important goal. However, respondents also feel the achievement gap is due to factors other than the quality of education received (77 percent), and 70 percent blame societal problems for the ills facing schools. (Gallup, 2006)

Education affords the opportunity to discuss what we can do collectively to advance people's well-being, rather than simply allowing people to blame lack of ambition and hard work. Education also allows an opening to garner support for addressing the needs of black children (and low-income children). Leading with discrimination and racial disparities may not be the strongest starting point for the conversation, however.

First, as noted above, race is the least cited factor in economic mobility, and is viewed as far less of a factor than education. Overall, 75 percent of respondents believe that black children "have as good a chance as white children in your community to get a good education." Fully 80 percent of whites agree, while just 49 percent of blacks agree. (Gallup, July 2008)

However, according to a 2008 study done by the Opinion Research Corporation for CNN and *Essence* magazine, many Americans also believe that public schools are worse in neighborhoods in which a majority of residents are black (48 percent) than public schools in which the majority of residents are white, while 33 percent think they are the same, and 11 percent think they are better. People may not link this difference to "discrimination" (which, as noted earlier, causes people to think of interpersonal relationships) even though they recognize a real disparity and a real problem exists.

Jobs, income, and the economy

Jobs, income, and the economy are at the top of Americans' agendas, and are central to efforts to address racial disparities. There are opportunities and obstacles in connecting these issues to racial disparities. On one hand, in the current economy, people are more able to see the role of systems/structures in aiding or impeding individual success (though opinion continues to emphasize individual responsibility). Logically, then, the current environment should be conducive to a conversation about policy solutions to address disparities. However, jobs and income represent areas where the role of race seems particularly divisive and where stereotypes are persistent.

Black Americans are optimistic about the future of the economy, their opportunity to get ahead, and their children's opportunity to achieve. Overall, Americans are optimistic that the economy will improve over the next year (61 percent say it will improve, though only 9 percent say it will "significantly improve"). (Allstate, 2011) A slim majority (54 percent) of white Americans are optimistic, compared with three-quarters and higher of every other racial and ethnic group: black respondents (86 percent), Asian respondents (80 percent), and Latino respondents (74 percent). (Allstate, 2011)

Similarly, among people of color, two-thirds and higher say they have more opportunity to get ahead than their parents did: black respondents (69 percent), Asian respondents (67 percent), and Hispanic respondents (62 percent) — but just 36 percent of white respondents see increased opportunity. Looking ahead, majorities of black and Hispanic respondents believe their children will have more opportunity to get ahead (57 percent and 56 percent, respectively), while fewer Asian and white respondents agree (37 percent and 24 percent, respectively). (Allstate, 2011)

Black Americans see obstacles to employment and are more supportive than white respondents of an active role for government in the economy. There is widespread support for a number of policies that would improve economic mobility.

There is some recognition that the black community faces unequal economic obstacles. Overall, a slim majority (53 percent) feel that racial minorities have equal job opportunities as whites. Only 24 percent of black respondents think there are equal job opportunities, clearly an area of serious concern for the black community. While 60 percent of white respondents believe there are equal job opportunities, this represents a lower level of response than other questions around disparities. (Gallup, July 2008)
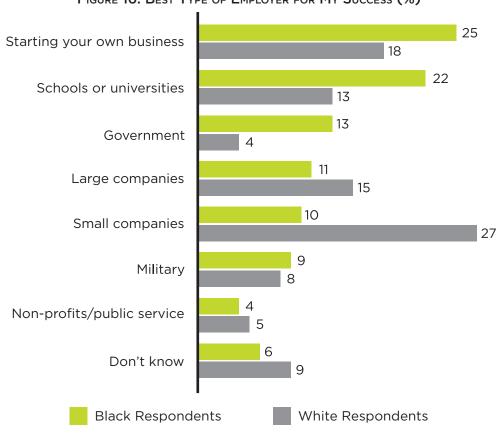
FIGURE 16. BEST TYPE OF EMPLOYER FOR MY SUCCESS (%)

Category	Black Respondents	White Respondents
Starting your own business	25	18
Schools or universities	22	13
Government	13	4
Large companies	11	15
Small companies	10	27
Military	9	8
Non-profits/public service	4	5
Don't know	6	9

Source: Allstate, May 2011.

White and black respondents also disagree about the level of employment equality. Overall, 79 percent believe "that blacks have as good a chance as white people in your community to get any kind of job for which they are qualified." Fully 82 percent of whites believe this to be true, while just 43 percent of blacks agree. (Gallup, October 2009)
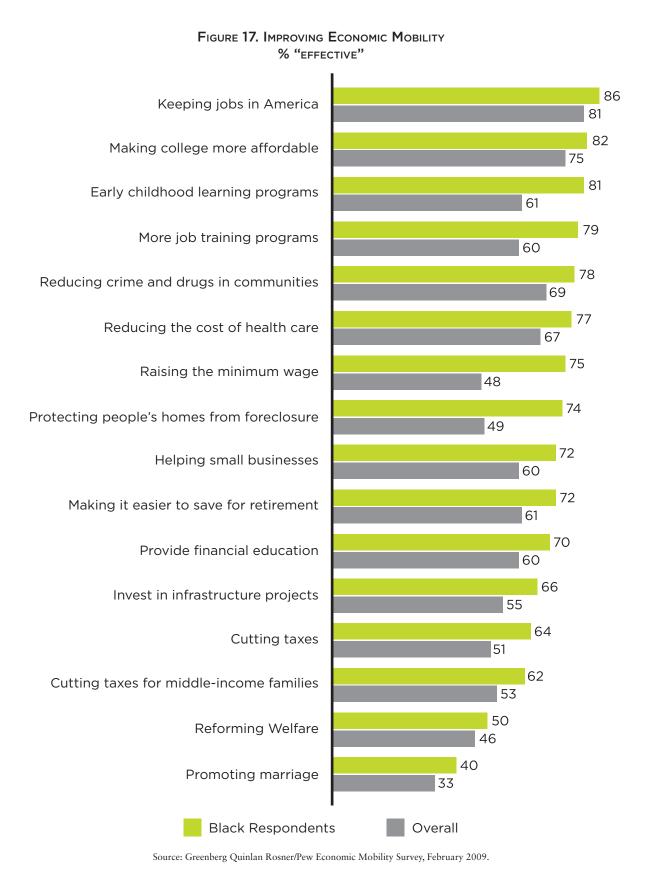
Interestingly, fewer black respondents see corporate America as best for the kind of career opportunity they seek. Of a variety of choices for "Best Type of Employer," black respondents most often select starting their own business (25 percent), followed by employment at an educational institution (22 percent) or government (13 percent). In contrast, a plurality of white respondents think small companies offer the best route (27 percent). (Allstate, 2011)

More generally, black Americans support an active, engaged government role, while white Americans are more likely to see government as a problem. A plurality of black Americans want an active role for government in ensuring that the economy works for all (42 percent), while just as many white respondents see government as the problem (42 percent). (Allstate, 2011)

Proper Role of Government in the Economy		
	Black Reponsdents	White Respondents
In the current economic environment, government is not the solution to our economic problems; **government is the problem**.	**17%**	**42%**
I would like to see government play an active role in the economy to ensure it benefits people like me, but I am not sure that I can trust government to do this effectively.	38%	33%
In the current economic environment, the **government must play an active role** in regulating the marketplace and ensuring that the economy benefits people like me.	**42%**	**23%**
Don't know	4%	2%

Source: Allstate, May 2011.

In fact, black Americans are skeptical about the consequences of the free market. Asked to choose, 49 percent of black respondents side with the view: "Left to itself the free market economy creates more opportunities than problems because it provides the most effective way to create economic growth and allow people to rise as far as their talents and hard work will take them," while slightly fewer (43 percent) choose the alternate view: "Left to itself the free market economy creates more problems than opportunities because it creates too much inequality and leaves too many people in poverty." This support for the free market view is the lowest of any racial group, with every other group choosing the free market by 61 percent or more. (Allstate, 2011)

FIGURE 17. IMPROVING ECONOMIC MOBILITY
% "EFFECTIVE"

Category	Black Respondents	Overall
Keeping jobs in America	86	81
Making college more affordable	82	75
Early childhood learning programs	81	61
More job training programs	79	60
Reducing crime and drugs in communities	78	69
Reducing the cost of health care	77	67
Raising the minimum wage	75	48
Protecting people's homes from foreclosure	74	49
Helping small businesses	72	60
Making it easier to save for retirement	72	61
Provide financial education	70	60
Invest in infrastructure projects	66	55
Cutting taxes	64	51
Cutting taxes for middle-income families	62	53
Reforming Welfare	50	46
Promoting marriage	40	33

Source: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Pew Economic Mobility Survey, February 2009.

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In fact, there is significant support for a range of policy priorities that would result in improved economic standing and reduced racial disparities (though none of these priorities is explicitly about race). Black respondents generally prioritize the same solutions as Americans overall, though support among black respondents for each given solution is higher than it is among the overall population. The most effective ways to improve economic mobility, according to respondents, are keeping jobs in America (86 percent of black respondents say that would be effective in improving economic mobility, and 81 percent of respondents overall say it would be effective), and making college more affordable (82 percent, 75 percent). While black respondents tend to share the same priorities as the population overall, there are a few notable exceptions where black respondents rate a solution much more highly than Americans overall: protecting homes from foreclosure (74 percent of black respondents say it would be effective in improving economic mobility, 49 percent of respondents overall say it would be effective), raising the minimum wage (75 percent, 48 percent), more job training (79 percent, 60 percent), and early childhood learning programs (81 percent, 61 percent). (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Pew Economic Mobility Survey, February 2009; see Figure 17)

Black Americans want federal government intervention to deal with unfair treatment of black people in their jobs. At the same time, no group, including black respondents, wants race or past racial discrimination to be a factor in developing programs to address economic inequality.

Overall, few Americans are interested in or supportive of federal government intervention in dealing with unfair treatment in employment, but a majority of black respondents support intervention. Of all Americans, 28 percent side with the view, "Some people feel that if black people are not getting fair treatment in jobs, the government in Washington ought to see to it that they do," while 25 percent choose the alternative view, "Others feel that this is not the federal government's business," and 47 percent say they have no interest in this topic. A majority of black respondents (59 percent) say government should see to fair treatment, while only 22 percent of white respondents feel the same. (American National Election Studies, 2008)
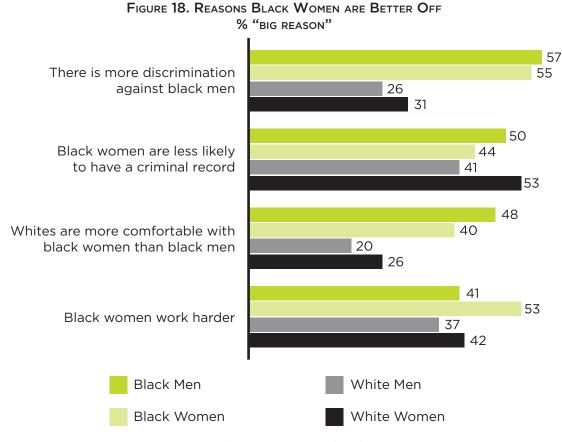
Neither black respondents nor any other group necessarily want *race* to be a primary factor in developing economic policy solutions. For example, all races agree that "government programs to address economic inequality" should "only take into account a person's economic situation" (87 percent overall, 90 percent among white respondents, 78 percent among black respondents), while far fewer side with the alternative that government should "give special consideration to blacks because of past racial discrimination" (9 percent overall, 7 percent among white respondents, 18 percent among black respondents). (Gallup, July 2008) Given two choices, more white respondents would emphasize ensuring that "everyone has a fair chance of improving their economic standing" (71 percent) over reducing "inequality in America" (21 percent). African American respondents respond similarly (74 percent, 20 percent). (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Pew Economic Mobility Survey, February 2009)

Two dynamics can undermine efforts to build broad-based support for policies to address racial disparities in jobs and income. Persistent negative stereotypes of black people have been shown to undercut support for government policies. In addition, there is a growing tendency to see individual factors, rather than the role of systems, as leading to outcomes.

Even more troubling, lack of support for welfare was driven by an image of the undeserving poor as black, lazy, and lacking in work ethics, according to *Why Americans Hate Welfare* by Martin Gilens (1999). The racialization of welfare is persistent. Even following significant welfare reform in the mid-1990s (which included work requirements and addressed aspects of welfare that Americans most dislike), positive public reviews of reform efforts, an improved media environment, and improved support for welfare spending, opposition to welfare continued to be conflated with stereotypes of black people's work ethic. In 2008, *Public Opinion Quarterly* published Joshua Dyck and Laura Hussey's

article entitled "The End of Welfare As We Know It," in which they wrote: "Salience, racialization, and negative tone [of public discourse surrounding welfare policy] have all decreased substantially … [but] we find that stereotypes about blacks' work ethic continue to predict opposition to welfare spending just as strongly as they did prior to the passage of welfare reform."

There is a growing question among the black community about black women's role in the economics of their community. While there is not a lot of existing public opinion data in this area, some research suggests the role of personal responsibility seen in other areas related to success or failure also applies here. When asked why black women tend to be better educated and make more money than black men, white men and women point to individual factors: black women are less likely to have criminal records, and they work harder. Black men, however, are most likely to point to discrimination and are less likely to see hard work as the distinguishing factor. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

FIGURE 18. REASONS BLACK WOMEN ARE BETTER OFF
% "BIG REASON"

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

The justice system

Of all the issue areas, white respondents are somewhat more likely to see discriminatory treatment against black Americans in the justice system. It may be that frequent news coverage of mistreatment, including video evidence, has influenced public opinion on this measure.

Crime has declined as a national priority. In 2001, 76 percent of Americans said that "reducing crime should be a top priority" but in a recent study that figure stands at just 44 percent. (Pew, 2011) And yet, as noted earlier in this report, crime continues to be a top concern among black respondents. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2011)

Also, as noted earlier, when people consider the role of discrimination in leading to different kinds of disparities, white Americans are most likely to say racial discrimination is a major factor in explaining why there is a "Higher percentage of Blacks in US prisons" (44 percent) over any other reason. (Gallup, July 2008)

However, when offered other reasons for imprisonment, the role of discrimination quickly fades for white respondents, especially white men. While black respondents readily point to a range of influences accounting for racial disparities in crime, white respondents do not typically see the same influences. Black men point to a number of reasons for higher levels of imprisonment among black men. The gap between views is largest on discrimination as a factor, such as "Police are more likely to target Black men than whites" (71 percent of black men say this is a big reason black men are more likely to be imprisoned, 29 percent of white men say this is a big reason black men are more likely to be imprisoned), and "courts are more likely to convict Black men than whites" (67 percent and 21 percent, respectively). White women are more likely to recognize the role of police targeting (40 percent cite it as a "big reason"), but not court bias (28 percent). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)
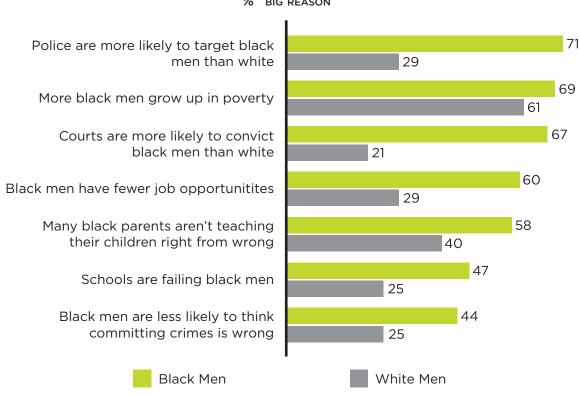
FIGURE 19. REASONS BLACK MEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE IMPRISONED % "BIG REASON"

	Black Men	White Men
Police are more likely to target black men than white	71	29
More black men grow up in poverty	69	61
Courts are more likely to convict black men than white	67	21
Black men have fewer job opportunitites	60	29
Many black parents aren't teaching their children right from wrong	58	40
Schools are failing black men	47	25
Black men are less likely to think committing crimes is wrong	44	25

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

Opinion is closest on the idea that more black men grow up in poverty (69 percent of black men, and 61 percent of white men). Other systemic factors show a divergence in opinions, such as black men having fewer job opportunities (60 percent and 29 percent, respectively) and schools are failing black men (47 percent, 25 percent). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

Black men rate every reason higher than other demographic groups do, including reasons that seem to blame blacks overall and black men specifically, such as being less likely to think crime is wrong (44 percent of black men, 25 percent of white men) and black parents not teaching their children right from wrong (58 percent, 40 percent). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

Surveys consistently show that black respondents have less confidence in police and in the justice system than white respondents do. While across all respondents 73 percent have confidence (37 percent a great deal of confidence) in the local police to treat blacks and whites equally, among white respondents there is far more confidence (81 percent in total, 42 percent "a great deal" of confidence) than among black respondents (45 percent and 12 percent, respectively). (Gallup, July 2008)

Furthermore, white respondents are far less likely than black respondents to raise concerns about police bias. White respondents have confidence that police in their community will "do a good job enforcing the law" (78 percent), "not use excessive force on suspects" (71 percent), and "treat Blacks and whites equally" (69 percent). Black respondents are less sure of any measure (54 percent, 41 percent, and 38 percent, respectively). (Pew, 2009) In addition, 67 percent of black respondents believe the American justice system is biased against blacks, while just 32 percent of white respondents believe that. (Gallup, July 2008)

Interestingly, young people may be more open to this conversation. Across race, youth believe police discriminate *much more* against black youth than they do against white youth (79 percent of black youth, 63 percent of white youth). (Black Youth Project, University of Chicago, 2005)

Fatherhood

The public opinion research base on fatherhood initiatives is rather thin, and tends to focus narrowly on personal behaviors and involvement with children, rather than take a broader view on policy or social action.

Clearly there has been a shift in the last half century: more children live apart from their fathers, but those who live with their fathers are getting more care and attention from them.

In 2010, 27 percent of minor children lived apart from their fathers, up from 11 percent in 1960. Black fathers are twice as likely as white fathers to live apart from their children (44 percent and 21 percent, respectively). (Pew, 2011)

At the same time, fathers who live with their children are spending far more time with them than in past generations. In the mid-1960s, fathers spent an average of 2.6 hours per week caring for their children. By 2000, that number had increased to 6.5 hours per week. (Pew, 2011)

Americans value the role of fathers in raising children, and give today's fathers mixed reviews in the job they are doing.

Americans agree that a child needs a father in the home to grow up happily (69 percent), and even higher percentages agree that a child needs a mother in the home to grow up happily (74 percent). (Pew, 2011)

Americans are mixed on whether fathers today play a greater role (46 percent) or lesser role (45 percent) in raising their children compared with 20 or 30 years ago. Survey respondents do not think

fathers compare well with their own fathers — 40 percent say today's fathers are doing about the same job as the last generation, while 34 percent say they are doing a worse job, and just 24 percent say "better job." Fathers, however, tend to say they are doing about the same job as their fathers did (47 percent) or are doing a better job (47 percent). (Pew, 2011)

A large majority (57 percent) believe it is more difficult to be a father today than 20 or 30 years ago. (Pew, 2011)

When they consider the problems facing black families today, far fewer black respondents point to unmarried parents as a big problem, compared to other problems. As noted earlier, they are far more likely to emphasize the lack of good jobs, and the prevalence of drugs, alcohol, and crime, as shown in the table below. (Pew, 2009)

Big Problem for Black Families Today (black respondents only)	
Not enough jobs paying decent wages	79%
Drugs and alcoholism	74%
Crime in their neighborhoods	67%
Public schools not providing a good education	56%
Too many parents never getting married	50%
Not enough successful blacks for young people to look up to	42%

Source: Pew, November 2009.

Communications Directions

In some respects, there has been a significant amount of research recommending message directions on issues of race. However, much of this research is limited in its utility, either because it was designed to accomplish a narrow goal (and therefore is ineffective or even harmful for broader goals), or because its focus is so broad it can be difficult to demonstrate effectiveness in advancing specific policy objectives. Most important, even those who have studied and recommended framing directions on these issues for some time are struggling to refine their recommendations and prove they can have an impact in policy debates. Much work still needs to be done.

A consistent question in communications strategies to build support for policies that will address racial disparities is whether to deliver messages that are explicitly "about" race, knowing that some explicit racial messages reduce support for equitable policies. Should advocates focus on race or class, or on race or place?

Highlighting or avoiding race

In a paper prepared for Ohio State University's Kirwin Institute, "The Dangers of Not Speaking About Race," Philip Mazzocco (2006) suggests that highlighting race, a color-conscious approach, can be effective in reducing discrimination and lead to support for racial policies. Though this particular research is limited to college students and should be viewed with caution, the general perspective is shared among some social scientists who suggest race consciousness is a necessary precursor to problem solving. (For more on this see *Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys* by Topos for The Opportunity Agenda, October 2011.)

From a communications perspective, much of the research sponsored by the FrameWorks Institute has cautioned about framing the conversation as being about "race" or "racism." Strategists often promote messages that avoid race and instead focus on a broader value or connection (*e.g.*, opportunity for all; disparities in place, not race). Using a series of frame experiments, some explicitly referring to race, some not, Gilliam and Manuel (in *The Illogic of Literalness: Narrative Lessons in the Presentation of Race Policies*, 2009) conclude that communicators should start with core values, not race:

> …while it is true that racism as a value did have some positive effects, they were, in the main, about half as effective as exposing people to core American values that did not cite historical discrimination as an explanation for disparities in society. The fact that more generalized treatments were able to elevate support for policies that were specifically targeted to racial and ethnic minorities makes these effects even more compelling. It suggests a kind of disjunctive irony – in order to garner support for race-based policies, advocates need to begin the conversation by invoking broader core American values. Being literal about racism in the public dialogue about race is not the most effective way to build public will for progressive race policy reforms.

While starting the conversation in a different place may have utility, avoiding race completely is unlikely to achieve targeted racial equity policies. For example, based on research designed to develop effective communications for affirmative action, Westen Strategies, in "Neutralizing the Affirmative

Action Debate" (2009), recommends the following as the top-performing message against the opposition message in dial testing. This message avoids a focus on race (instead highlighting gender and age discrimination), denounces discrimination in all its forms, and positions the issue as being about "flexibility to ensure fair treatment" rather than "quotas." It is easy to see how the following text would score well on a dial test — it is hard to disagree with. But it is unclear whether it builds support for affirmative action more broadly.

> In this country, we don't believe in discriminating against people, regardless of their color, ethnic background, sex, or age, and government shouldn't tie the hands of employers or colleges with inflexible rules that prevent them from making sure every qualified candidate gets a fair chance. We all know that women don't get hired or promoted in a lot of companies the same way as men, particularly if they took time off to raise their kids, [and all of us should care about that] whether we're women, fathers, or husbands. We all know that employers look differently at older workers than younger ones, and we shouldn't be telling a 55-year-old guy, ["Sorry, there's no place for you here,"] when he got laid off from a job. And we all know that underfunded rural or urban schools with crumbling walls and 1980s textbooks put kids at a disadvantage, whether they're black, white, or brown. We need to let business and educational leaders act responsibly and flexibly to make sure everyone is treated fairly, without resorting to quotas or one-size-fits-all programs that don't do right by anyone.

Avoiding race may be an attractive short-term strategy, but over the long term it may also avoid the central issues and lead to no significant change in public understanding or culture.

Two other promising directions that have received some limited attention are: begin with structures/systems first and then connect to race; and emphasize positive connections and interdependence among racial groups rather than differences.

Structures/Systems

One promising approach is to highlight a broken or flawed system of which all Americans are part, and then bridge to the dynamics of race. For example, Americans value education, want to improve the education system, and recognize that urban, black communities often have the weakest schools. Problematically, without careful framing, this approach can lead to blaming the individual (thinking that parents are at fault) or toward highlighting another problematic dynamic (such as "class" or "poor people"), rather than focusing on weaknesses in the system.

One tool that has been identified that keeps attention focused on systems and resources rather than individuals is the "Prosperity Grid" simplifying model. The basic idea is to communicate a metaphorical grid that underscores the role of resources and institutions in creating opportunity and prosperity. Communities, including the black community, for example, can be characterized as having more or less access to the resources afforded by the Prosperity Grid. Aubrun, Brown, and Grady, in their 2006 work, *Moving Beyond Entrenched Thinking About Race: The Homeowner/Stakeholder Effect*, note that:

> Experts say the most prosperous communities have thriving institutions that provide opportunity, like quality schools, community banks and so on. Think of it as a Prosperity Grid, where everyone, all parts of the community, can plug into and benefit from these institutions of opportunity...

Another approach that keeps attention focused on systems and resources, while advocating the value of opportunity, demonstrates an ability to lift support for policies:

Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that African-American communities still face many barriers to opportunity. They have more declining school budgets, restrictive lending practices, and fewer health professionals. The American Dream has always relied on creating an environment where everyone has an opportunity to achieve — including African Americans. According to this view, we need to devote more attention to ensuring that every community — including African American communities — provides an opportunity to succeed for all its residents. This will result in a better quality of life and future prosperity for the nation as a whole. Please tell us if you have heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to improving conditions in African American communities. (Gilliam & Manuel, 2009)

It should be noted that while Gilliam and the FrameWorks Institute have recommended a number of frames to address issues of race, in their survey research, the message listed above was the only one of several messages tested that lifted policy support while also bridging to a conversation about race. Other messages that didn't test well in the survey should still be considered promising approaches, but ones that need further development.

Connections and interdependence

A dynamic that hinders broad-based support for change is people's inability to see their connections to others. Sixty percent of white respondents reject the idea that what happens generally to black men in this country will have something to do with what happens in their own life. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006) Cueing zero-sum thinking increases the sense that members of other racial groups are competitive threats and is likely to undermine support for policies to address disparities. In "Perceptions of Racial Group Competition," Bobo and Hutchings (1996) wrote:

> Perceptions of competitive group threat thus involve genuinely social-psycho-logical processes that are not reducible to a single cause nor to purely individual-level psychological dynamics… We find that perceptions of competition and threat from other racial groups can be reliably measured. Such perceptions, while not acute in our data, are fairly common. Substantial percentages (though typically less than 50 percent), of Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians perceive members of other groups as zero-sum competitive threats for social resources… Perceptions of group competition tend to be based on a mix of racial alienation, prejudice, stratification beliefs, and self-interest. (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996)

Instead, can communications create a sense of shared fate, a sense that what happens to one segment of society affects all of society? Individualistic thinking leads to competition between the races:

> However, rather than decreasing perceptions of threat, individualistic thinking tends to encourage Whites to view Asian Americans and Latinos as competitive threats, to encourage Asians to view Latinos as competitive threats, and to encourage Blacks and Latinos to view Asians as competitive threats. (*Ibid.*)

So can creating a sense of interdependence alleviate competition between the races? Survey experiments with affirmative action policy suggest that redefining the issue as one that affects society more broadly helps build support even for subgroups.

For example, with no priming, 63 percent support affirmative action programs for women and just 50 percent support affirmative action programs for racial minorities. When primed with a question about affirmative action for women first, support for affirmative action for minorities increased by 7 points. This occurs because people respond based on criteria for the first question they hear, then end up using the same lens to judge the subsequent question:

> The theoretical explanation for this shift in views is what Schuman and Presser (1981, p. 28; also see Moore 2002, pp. 82–3, for an operational definition) term "consistency" effects. When asked first about either type of AA [affirmative action] program before being asked about the other type (what Moore termed a "non-comparative context"), people make their evaluations based on whatever criteria they bring to mind. But when asked about the second type of AA program after having been asked about the first type (a "comparative context"), many people will make their evaluation of the second type of AA program in comparison with their evaluation of the first. Thus, many respondents who first said they support AA programs for women then feel obligated (when asked the second question) to express support for AA programs targeted to racial minorities. Similarly, people who first said they oppose AA for racial minorities are then less inclined to turn around and support it for women (when the latter question is asked second). The comparative context thus elicits a "norm of reciprocity" (Schuman and Presser 1981, p. 28) leading to more consistent expressions of support for each type of AA program than are found in the noncomparative context. (Wilson, 2010)

Some suggest that people view gender inequality through a lens of shared interest (we are all affected by gender inequality), while racial inequality is not typically viewed through an interdependent lens (Winter, 2008), so perhaps the prime puts people in an interdependent mindset rather than a competitive mindset.

In addition, qualitative testing of an interconnectedness approach shows promise in helping people see that addressing racial disparities benefits all of society. In quantitative research that followed the qualitative study, however, analysis demonstrated that the following prime had effects on support for child and youth development policy, but not other policies:

> Lately there has been a lot of talk about how we are all connected in our country. Some people believe that we will only succeed when all parts of the nation are in good shape. Problems of poor health and education that happen in one part of the nation end up affecting us all. For this reason, moving ahead as a country requires promoting programs and improving services everywhere so that we all benefit from our interconnection. According to this view, all communities must be able to realize their potential and contribute to the country. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to recognize the connections among communities? (Gilliam & Manuel, 2009)

Note also that this prime included no racial cues, so it is unclear how it would perform in the context of a conversation about racial disparities. Interconnectedness is core to the progressive narrative and will be an important element of conversations on race. However, it is a direction that needs more development and testing before communicators can use it with confidence.

Communicators should be cautious about how they deploy a connectedness message. Sometimes strategists recommend messages that cue negative connections using fear, failure, or prevention (*e.g.*, educate now or pay for prison later). Using racial problems as a threat to meet our short-term policy goals is likely to exacerbate the long-term problems in perception. Note the following examples from a series of framing experiments. The general prevention prime was effective in lifting policy support, but when it was translated to a prevention prime emphasizing race (with negative connections) it lost effectiveness:

> Lately there has been a lot of talk about prevention in our country. Some people believe that we should prevent health and education problems before they occur. When we don't address them, they eventually become worse and cost more to fix. For this reason, it is important to promote programs and improve services that keep problems from occurring in the first place. According to this view, we can save lives and money if we make good prevention programs

easier for everyone to access. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to prevention?

Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that preventing problems in African American communities is important because they will eventually become everyone's problems. Preventing declining school budgets, restrictive lending practices, and a scarcity of health professionals in African American communities will prevent worse problems in the future. According to this view, we can prevent further damage to our nation by devoting more resources to addressing these problems in African American communities before they become more serious. Please tell us if you have heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to preventing problems affecting African American communities. (Gilliam & Manuel, 2009)

Solutions orientation

Finally, a "best practice" that is often overlooked by communicators is the importance of highlighting solutions. Advocates can easily assume that if people just know how terrible a problem is, how much of a crisis is on the horizon, they will rise up to fix it. Instead, people can easily become paralyzed with inaction because they become overwhelmed by seemingly intractable problems. They cannot imagine what the solutions could be. Lynn Davey offered this idea in her 2009 FrameWorks Institute message brief, "Strategies for Framing Racial Disparities":

> One of the common mistakes made by advocates in all fields is the tendency to bury solutions messages deep in their communications material, while routinely according inordinate attention to defining the problem. … When people are presented with effective solutions, they are able to more clearly understand where the system breaks down and how we might fix it.

Reorienting communications around solutions, rather than problems, will go a long way toward building support for public policies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a significant body of work exploring public opinion of race relations, experiences with discrimination, differences between races in how they understand this issue, and so on. Yet most research largely seeks to understand the "snapshot" of public opinion — where opinion currently stands and the variables that influence a particular view — rather than how to change opinion.

Still, this overview provides important insights about how people understand the nature of the problem. Implicitly, discrimination is often viewed as being about relationships and personal interactions, not systemic bias or policy. Disparities can easily be blamed on lack of personal ambition or hard work. The role of systems and structures has to become more apparent if we hope to spark broad-based support for policy change.

Importantly, issue conversations often trigger competition between races, as though success is zero-sum and what is "given" to one group is "taken" from another. Instead, we need to find communications strategies that join people in common purpose and shared fate, while not erasing race in the process.

Specifically, communicators should consider the following recommendations.

Conduct new research and message testing, designed with precise, short-, mid-, and long-term goals in mind. The limited message development that has been done on these issues tends to lie at either end of a continuum. Either it is done in service of a narrow goal (*e.g.*, pass "bill X") or a vague, ill-defined goal (*e.g.*, talk about race). Or, it has not yet proven its ability to create change. We need to define specific goals relevant to improving the achievement of black males to which we can hold our strategy accountable.

Sharpen objectives and strategies for different audiences. Clearly this research suggests different starting points for the conversation with different racial groups. Black Americans are far more likely to see the systemic flaws that lead to disparities and support government action (though the personal responsibility perspective is gaining ground), while few white Americans even recognize the breadth and severity of traditional discrimination, let alone institutional racism. What is the call to action for core, mobilizable audiences within communities of color? What call to action makes sense for opinion influencers in white communities? These and similar questions must be asked and focused on.

Develop frame flips and unifying narratives. The old storylines have limited ability to gain traction. This analysis points to the need for a frame flip and a unifying narrative to break through deeply entrenched views on these issues. Specifically, new framing on this issue needs to:

▶ Mend the in-group/out-group cycle and establish a sense of "us."

▶ Reinforce shared fate and interdependence.

▶ Avoid the competitive and zero-sum assumptions that are so prevalent in public perceptions of these issues.

▶ Look for ways to characterize the unique challenges facing black men and solutions to the challenges without inadvertently implying that other groups will have less opportunity, *e.g.*, "breaking down obstacles" instead of "addressing disparities."

► Emphasize effective solutions. Focus on structures, systems, and policies, not personal offenses.

► Do not lose sight of or avoid race and racial disparities in the conversation.

Engage audiences around specific issue categories. Harmonize the broad overarching narrative about black male achievement with specific issue categories that most matter to black men – jobs and income, education, and criminal justice. Gains in image and perceptions matter most when they lead to real gains in closing disparities in these areas.

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