EMMITT Y. RILEY

Depauw University

CLARISSA PETERSON

Depauw University

I Can't Breathe

Assessing the Role of Racial Resentment and Racial Prejudice in Whites' Feelings toward Black Lives Matter

ABSTRACT   Since 2014, public opinion data suggests that whites have become more supportive of the Black Lives Movement. The recent murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor have prompted a national debate about the need to address systemic racism in policing within the United States. Recent studies have shown how racial resentment has spilled over into a wide range of political issues that are not associated with race; however, no current research examines how racial resentment might shape whites' views toward Black Lives Matter. Employing the racial reaction theory and the 2016 American Election Study Survey, we hypothesize and confirm that whites with high levels of racial resentment, conservative ideology, and those who indicated support for Donald Trump hold negative attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement. Our results also show that Asians and Hispanics hold negative attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement, but that whites have the highest racial resentment levels. The results raise doubts about whether the recent shift in white public opinion is sustainable. Given that racial resentment is a predictor of support for Black Lives Matter, scholars and activists should approach white support for Black Lives Matter with caution because it is likely that increased racial resentment may lead to sustained white opposition to the movement.   KEYWORDS   Black Lives Matter, racial resentment, racialization, Black politics, racial attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Breonna Taylor, Rashard Brooks, and so many other unarmed African Americans have been murdered with lethal force by law enforcement officers. In many cases prosecutors have been unable to secure an indictment by grand juries. In cases that are adjudicated, jurors have failed to render guilty verdicts. In a recent article published in the *Washington Post*, since the start of 2020, 1,019 people have been shot and killed by law enforcement officers.[1]

Protests have always been an essential component of American democracy. The use of excessive force employed disproportionately on African Americans and communities of color has ignited a new social movement known as Black Lives Matter. What started as a Twitter hashtag has now emerged as a diverse, intersectional social movement that comprises people of different races, genders, age groups, religions, and nationalities. These activists have taken to the streets with protests, blocked major interstates, and forced US

presidential candidates to address systemic racism in the criminal justice system as part of their platform.

The immediate response to Black Lives Matter by some whites has been "all lives matter" and "blue lives matter." Data on white attitudes toward Black Lives Matter and race have previously suggested that Blacks and whites were divided on how these groups see racial inequality and systemic racism. The murder of George Floyd, whose death by strangulation at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin and his colleagues went viral, prompted massive uprisings in the United States that led to protests in the nation's largest cities as well as in rural pockets of the country. After weeks of protest and demonstrations from around the world amid the COVID-19 global pandemic, public opinion data suggested that for the first time, a majority of whites in the United States believed systemic racism to be a serious problem. Across six different measures from 2014 to 2020, white attitudes increased drastically in a more positive direction on race. For example, a majority of whites now believe that Blacks face a lot of discrimination, white people have a better chance of getting ahead, there has not been much progress on racial discrimination in the United States since the 1960s, police officers are more likely to use excessive force against Blacks, and police are more likely to use deadly force against Blacks (Tesler 2020). Even on direct measures of attitudes toward Black Lives Matter, there has been a substantial increase in support, with 52 percent of registered voters indicating they support Black Lives Matter compared to 42 percent who indicated support before the death of George Floyd (Tesler 2020).

Although the shift in public opinion on race and Black Lives Matter among whites is indeed noticeable, we should approach these changes with caution for several reasons. For one, an overwhelming majority of whites still do not support reparations for Blacks. Secondly, although "defunding the police" is not a campaign to reduce the police budget to zero, a majority of white Americans oppose defunding the police. Thirdly, history has shown time and time again that white support for the Civil Rights Movement did not lead to more whites supporting race-targeted policies. Finally, at the same time that whites were expressing more liberal attitudes on race in 2014, scholars also noticed the political environment was primed for increased levels of racial resentment, suggesting that increased levels of liberal political attitudes may lead to new manifestations of racism. Recent studies have shown that racial attitudes have spilled over into how whites evaluate political candidates (Tesler 2015a), support for Donald Trump (Riley and Peterson 2019a), and public policy preferences (Tesler 2012). Considering this evidence, it is perplexing that scholars have not examined whether racial resentment impacts how whites feel about the Black Lives Matter movement.

Prior studies on social movements have typically investigated if protest works. Many of these studies have sought to uncover if there is a link between protest and institutional reform (Andrews 1997; McAdam and Su 2002; Gillion 2012; Branton et al. 2014). Historically, it was pressure from civil rights activists such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Most recently, there has been a growing body of empirical evidence that moves

the scholarly debate beyond examining whether protest impacts changes in social and political attitudes (Collinwood, Lajevardi, and Oskooii 2018; Mazumder 2018).

Given this new focus on the relationship between protest and political attitudes, scholars need to investigate if there is a link between racial attitudes as measured by racial resentment and attitudes toward Black Lives Matter. The failure of scholars to investigate this relationship has created a significant void in the academic literature at a time when political pundits and analysts alike are suggesting that white Americans have had some sort of racial epiphany and are ready to dismantle four hundred years of white supremacy. Filling this void holds profound implications for the scholarly community and policymakers because it might provide answers as to why it is so hard to convince jurors of guilt. Most importantly, it holds theoretical implications for understanding the role of racism and prejudice in attitudes toward racialized social movements. At the center of the Black Lives Matter movement is the pervasive issue of systemic racism, which is often difficult to identify for whites. Understanding the links between racial resentment and support for Black Lives Matter amid recent assertions that there has been a shift in public opinion may provide important insights into whether these changes are sustainable over the long term. If racial resentment is a predictor with respect to white support for Black Lives Matter, increased racial resentment levels may likely lead to sustained white opposition to Black Lives Matter rather than the short-term attitudinal change associated with an event like the George Floyd murder. Furthermore, if racial resentment explains opposition to Black Lives Matter, then it suggests that these attitudes are likely rooted in anti-blackness.

Americans are part of the larger society that has become ripened for racial resentment in this post-Obama era, and the forty-fifth president Donald J. Trump's rise to political power has been primarily based on divisive racial rhetoric both during and after the campaign. Trump's framing of majority-Black cities such as Chicago as crime-infested can negatively prime American attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement. This impact is likely to have major differences when examined by race. The Black Lives Matter movement's salience, accompanied by what scholars know about white reactions to racialized policies and movements, suggests that the Black Lives Matter movement will elicit negative responses from white Americans. But exactly which segment of whites are most likely to have negative reactions toward the Black Lives Matter movement, and how might racial resentment and ideological orientations impact these views?

In a recent study, Riley and Peterson (2019a) find that white support for Donald Trump was significantly influenced by racial resentment and that Trump supporters were more likely to describe Blacks, Hispanics, and Muslims as violent and lazy. Furthermore, this work shows that Trump supporters did not believe that Blacks, Hispanics, Muslims, and gays experienced significant discrimination in today's society. This research demonstrates that racial resentment, not economic anxiety, was the driving force behind white support for Donald Trump. While this study empirically evaluates the influence of racial resentment and stereotypes in the 2016 presidential election, it does not lend itself to evaluating how racial resentment impacts attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement.

Building on previous work, we test this article's theoretical reach by providing the first empirical analysis about whether racial resentment influences attitudes toward the Black

Lives Matter movement. In this article we develop the racial reaction theory. The racial reaction theory posits that social movements directly linked to racial justice for Black people are likely to elicit strong negative reactions from the public and that white people are likely to have the strongest negative reaction toward such a movement because it centers blackness. This theory contends that at its core, racialized elements have the potential to cause a negative reaction even when ideology is considered. Using ANES (2016) data, we find that whites, Asians, and Hispanics, on average, held negative attitudes toward Black Lives Matter and that whites held the highest levels of racial resentment. Our analysis further shows that white respondents with high racial resentment levels and conservative ideology are associated with negative attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement. While ideology is statistically significant, it is important to note that the issues being protested by the Black Lives Matter movement are not tied to liberal or conservative ideology. Our analysis further indicates that Trump supporters are also more likely to have negative feelings toward the Black Lives Matter movement.

   This article unfolds in the following manner. First, we review the relevant academic literature concerning racial resentment, racial prejudice, and social movements while highlighting the literature gaps. Second, we present our data and research methodology. Third, we report and discuss our findings. Finally, we present our major conclusions and contribution to the academic literature.

ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Both political scientists and sociologists have made significant contributions to scholarly understandings of social movements. While political scientists have focused on the size, sociologists have instead focused on the organization, structure, issues, and level of contention brought about by the particular movement (Gamson 1975; Lipsky 1968; McAdam 1982; Piven and Cloward 1977; Andrews 1997; McAdam and Su 2002). Most recently, scholars have begun to investigate if protests are effective in bringing about reforms to political and social institutions (Gillion 2012; Biggs and Andrews 2015; Mazumder 2018, 2019). The findings of many of these studies suggest that political protest can bring about institutional reforms and social change, yet other studies have shown that protests are ineffective in bringing about changes in public policy outcomes (Burstein 1998).

   The extant literature on Black politics, however, provides both theoretical and empirical conjectures that suggest social movements that center racial justice may elicit a negative response from whites. In recent years, scholars have noticed an increase in protest activity within the United States, prompting researchers to move the debate from one that addresses whether protest works to questions that examine the impact of protest on changes in attitudes within different contexts (Collinwood et al. 2018; Mazumder 2019). Although there has been relatively little research on how racial attitudes might influence how whites view the Black Lives Matter movement, there is sufficient evidence from the racial resentment and Black politics literature to suggest that whites who are racially resentful might have an increased propensity to express negative feelings toward the Black

Lives Matter movement. While some studies (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000; Levendusky 2018) suggest there is ample evidence to support the claim that protest positively changes white attitudes toward social movements, it is important to note that many of these empirical analyses focus on eras such as the Civil Rights Movement. Even though the desire to focus on the Civil Rights Movement is attractive, it might not be the best test case to examine white attitudes (Mazumder 2019). After all, many whites now indicate their agreement with the Civil Rights Movement's goals, and those who do not will likely not express their disapproval out of fear of being labeled racists and will instead give what they perceive as a socially desirable answer.

A second concern is the theoretical underpinning of these studies, which asserts that the demonstrations must be peaceful in order for a protest to impact white attitudes (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Wasow 2017). How protests are covered by the media and interpreted by white audiences are out of the protesters' hands. Even when protests are peaceful, media outlets have been found to frame and prime these protests in a racially charged manner. Scholars such as Schuman et al. (1998) remind us that white support for racial equality does not always translate into white support for race-targeted policies such as affirmative action.

On the basis of the available scholarship, we believe that focusing on determinants of attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement is of profound value to Black politics in an effort to see if and how these views are a function of anti-blackness, as well as the consequences of such linkages. If we find that attitudes toward Black Lives Matter are linked to ideology and racial resentment, then this empirical investigation will raise serious questions about the racial linkages of political ideology that are independent of racial attitudes in an era when partisan attachments have become increasingly linked to race (Tesler 2016). In a political environment where the consequence is that law enforcement officers are killing unarmed African Americans, it is essential to examine this phenomenon's contours and how anti-blackness has spilled over into other political and attitudinal assessments.

Although there is a rapidly growing literature on this subject, these studies overlook the importance of racial attitudes at a time when racial attitudes have come to influence vote choice, policy preferences, candidate evaluations, and job approval (Tesler 2012; Riley and Peterson 2019b). Consider, for example, Collingwood et al. (2018), who investigate whether support for Donald Trump's executive order banning travel from Muslim counties changed mass public opinion because of the protests it caused. Collingwood et al. (2018) contend that political action can generate backlash when protested action is at odds with inclusive elements of American identity. The researchers acknowledge Tesler's (2016) assertion that "political communication can prime citizens' underlying predispositions and change policy positions on less crystalized attitudes" (Collingwood et al. 2018, 1037); however, they still exclude any measures of racial attitudes in their analysis. Collingwood et al. (2018) essentially find that while support for the travel ban was high before Donald Trump signed the executive order, by the time he signed the executive order, support for it had decreased and Americans with high American identities were less likely to oppose the ban.

In one of the most recent studies examining social movements and political attitudes, Mazumder (2019) finds social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement do impact white attitudes; however, Mazumder's findings are limited by the fact that he fails to control for several important variables. Specifically, Mazumder uncovers that whites in counties with a history of civil rights protests were more likely to identify as Democrats, more likely to support affirmative action policies, and less likely to hold racially resentful attitudes. Using an OLS regression analysis, Mazumder does not control for ideology, class, income, gender, or education. In a research note that examines if whites' proximity to Black Lives Matter protests decreased whites' racial prejudice, Mazumder confirms the finding of much of the experimental work in this area, which finds that it does. Because his research focuses exclusively on the two counties where both Eric Garner and Michael Brown were murdered, he is unable to assert that these patterns are generalizable, leaving scholars to speculate whether his findings are bound to New York City and Ferguson, Missouri. Even if Mazumdar's (2019) findings are accurate, it is important to understand that a vast majority of whites in the United States do not live close to African American communities and are exposed to the same media coverage of Black Lives Matter protests.

A legitimate question emerges from this literature: Do these findings accurately capture reality at a time when scholars have noted unprecedented racial divides in the United States? For example, multiple scholars have pointed out that race and racial attitudes have come to influence a host of political issues, and some of the issues that these attitudes have come to influence are not related to race (Maxwell, Ford Dowe, and Shields 2013; Knuckey and Myunghee 2016). In his seminal work, *Post-Racial or Most-Racial,* Tesler (2016, 3) argues:

> Mass politics had become more polarized by racial attitudes since Barack Obama's rise to prominence. That is, the election of President Obama helped usher in a "most racial" political era where racially liberal and racially conservative Americans were more divided over a whole host of political positions than they had been in modern times.

Even after the end of the Obama presidency, scholars have found that racial attitudes continue to exert a significant influence on the political behavior of white Americans. In examining white support for Donald Trump, Riley and Peterson (2019a) find that racial resentment was a strong predictor of white support for Donald Trump even when controlling for economic anxiety. Another set of scholars note:

> Trump's unusually explicit appeals to racial and ethnic resentment attracted strong support from white working-class voters while repelling many college-educated whites along with the overwhelming majority of nonwhite voters. However, Trump's campaign exploited divisions that have been growing within the electorate for decades because of demographic and cultural changes in American society (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019, 137).

America's reaction to the Obama presidency and whites' support for the Trump presidency are important linkages to understand the impact of racialization on white Americans' evaluations of a host of political matters. These responses are also likely to influence how whites see and evaluate movements such as Black Lives Matter.

On the basis of the current evidence available, it is fair to assert that even prior to the Obama and Trump eras, scholars have long observed the influence of racial resentment on candidate preferences, evaluations, and support for race-targeted public policies. In fact, scholars have argued that the mere presence of a Black candidate is enough to activate strong racial attitudes among whites. Sniderman and Piazza (1993) note that the mere mention of race can elicit a negative reaction from whites. Even aggregate-level analyses have observed negative reactions from white voters in biracial elections using the racial threat thesis. For example, Orey (2001, 246) finds that "in areas where there are high concentrations of Blacks, the white intended vote choice is conditioned by the hostility that whites direct toward African-Americans." Giles and Hertz (1994, 608) find that "the larger the percentage of blacks in the voting-age population in a parish, the larger the increase in the percentage of whites registering as Republican." Although prior works during this time had only explored aggregate-level analysis, Feldman and Huddy (2005) moved the conversation by arguing that the new racial threat is grounded in white racial resentment—a form of new racial prejudice associated with opposition to a broad range of racial policies.

The racial resentment model posits that Blacks' economic and social conditions are due to their own failures and not to any systematic treatment by the government. First introduced in 1981 by Kinder and Sears, the racial resentment model is often identified as new racism or symbolic racism. Kinder and Sears argue that after the 1960s, it was no longer socially acceptable for whites to display or express overt racism in attitudes about Blacks being morally inferior to whites. This move toward less overt racist attitudes such as racial resentment captured a new animosity held by whites that could be masked by ideology and partisanship. Scholars studying racial resentment have used four themes to captures these attitudes: Blacks should try harder, Blacks are no longer the subject of discrimination, Blacks should work their way up without any special favors, and Blacks have already received undeserved advantages.

CRITICS OF RACIAL RESENTMENT

Although the racial resentment model is found to be a strong predictor of white political behavior, and most recently, the political attitudes of a small segment of Blacks, this model has not been without criticism. While many of these critiques have been put to rest, scholars have questioned if racial resentment is different from old-fashioned racism, whether or not it is independent of ideology or partisanship, or even if it has been measured consistently over time (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell 2000).[2] Despite this criticisms, many of the studies challenging the racial resentment model have been rebutted, and scholars have found the conceptualization of racial resentment to be empirically valid. The work of Tarman and Sears (2005) has led the way in defending the use of racial resentment as an empirically sound measure.[3] Racial resentment has also been criticized by scholars who cite that it has a strong association with white racial policy preferences only because the items used to capture both concepts are similar in content. In short, the overall concern with racial resentment can be

summarized in a single question: Is racial resentment a distinctive and independent belief system or is it merely redundant with older concepts that have traditionally been used to explain racial attitudes, such as political conservatism, old-fashioned racism, individualism, or anti-egalitarianism? The empirical tests do not support this critique; in fact, Tarman and Sears (2005) find that in both the 1986 and 2000 ANES data, the items used to measure racial resentment are due to factors other than ideology and party identification.

THE RACIAL REACTION THEORY OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

Given the Black Lives Matter movement's inherent racialization in the United States and the considerable amount of theoretical and empirical evidence among scholars, it is not unreasonable to expect negative reactions from whites in their attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement. Unlike healthcare and welfare policies, the Black Lives Matter movement centers racial justice specifically for Blacks. Media coverage of Black Lives Matter protesters blocking major intersections, interrupting campaign speeches, shouting in the streets, and other assertive demands can heighten levels of racial resentment, therefore causing some whites to have negative feelings toward this group. This impact is even more likely given that scholars such as Tesler (2016) have noted that the Obama presidency, followed by the Trump presidency, has created conditions that have ripened the political environment for racialization.

But how exactly does racialization work when it comes to assessments of the Black Lives Matter movement? Much of the work on racialization has focused on race-neutral policies (Bobo 1983). Sears (1993) contends that race-conscious policies can evoke a negative racial reaction because they are associated with the group they are intended to benefit. If this assessment is compelling, then the same should also be accurate for social movements such as Black Lives Matter. The natural associative link with blackness should be enough to cause white respondents to have cooler feelings toward this movement. It is likely that many whites see the Black Lives Matter movement as calling for special treatment for Blacks, when in fact the movement is centered on dismantling systemic racism in police practices in the face of the horrifying violence that has been inflicted on Blacks by law enforcement officers in the United States. One explanation by scholars regarding whites' opposition to busing policies has been the realistic group conflict theory (Bobo 1983). According to Brief et al. (2005, 803), realistic group conflict theory contends that "competition between groups for valuable but limited materials and resources breeds hostility." Under this theory, whites oppose certain policies because they see Black advancement as a threat to their dominant status. What is interesting about the Black Lives Matter movement is that while the movement centers blackness, its policy goals are likely to benefit all people by improving how policymakers address poverty, crime, mental health, and policing. In short, this movement aims to protect the basic rights and liberties afforded to Blacks. Just as race-conscious policies have elicited whites' negative reactions, we believe that any movement that centers race will likely be linked to racial resentment. This is primarily because

opposition to Black Lives Matter is rooted in anti-blackness and fear of Black advancement. Simply put, whites' disdain, disregard, and degradation of black bodies and whites' perpetual fear of Black liberation help explain how constructs such as racial resentment and racial prejudice predict whites' opposition to Black Lives Matter.

We argue that because of how the Black Lives Matter movement is naturally associated with racial equality for Blacks, it will be assessed based on how people feel about the group as a whole. This is certainly not a new phenomenon; Hurwitz and Peffley (1998, 109) find that "when messages are framed in such a way to reinforce the particular relationship between a particular policy and a particular group, it becomes far more likely that individuals will evaluate the policy on the basis of their evaluation of the group." As such, racial predispositions should predict how whites feel about the movement. In this particular case, the name Black Lives Matter is a direct link to Black people, and the name alone may serve as an "in your face" racial cue, therefore setting up the movement to be evaluated based on racial predispositions. Our racial reaction theory posits that social movements directly linked to racial justice for Black people are likely to elicit strong negative reactions from the public and that whites are likely to have negative reactions toward such a movement because it centers blackness. Whites' reaction to the Obama presidency and Trump's rise to power create the perfect storm for whites' opposition to Black Lives Matter. Because many whites are reluctant to express overt forms of racial prejudice openly, we contend that racial resentment should be a stronger predictor of whites' opposition to Black Lives Matter than racial prejudice. Several studies show that while race still matters when it comes to whites' political considerations, whites' exposure to the Obama presidency decreased racial prejudice among some segments of whites (Goldman 2012; Columb and Plant 2011).

HYPOTHESES

To empirically investigate our research question, we evaluate the following hypotheses:

H_1 Whites who have racial resentment are more likely to have negative attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement.

H_2 Racial resentment has a stronger impact on attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement than racial prejudice.

H_3 White Trump supporters are more likely to have cooler feelings toward the Black Lives Matter movement than whites who do not support Trump.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this article comes from the 2016 American National Election Study, which is collected by the ICPSR (Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research) at the University of Michigan. Several surveys have been collected by the ICPSR since 1948. The 2016 Time Series sample is made up of two waves that include 1,180 face-to-face interviews and 3,090 surveys collected on the internet for a total of 4,270

Bar chart with y-axis from 0 to 90 in increments of 10. Categories on x-axis: Whites (N=2597) ≈ 42, Asians (N=110) ≈ 52, Hispanics (N=361) ≈ 58, Blacks (N=336) ≈ 80, White Trump Supporters (N=1077) ≈ 24.
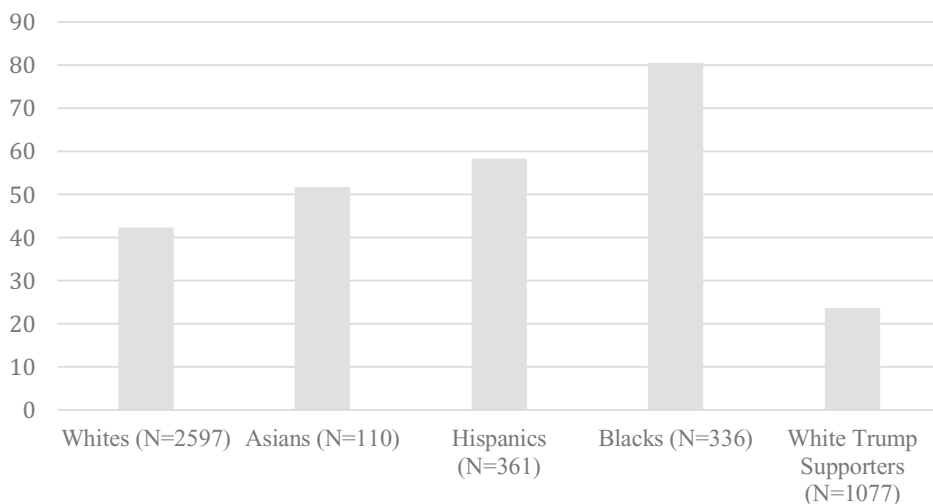
FIGURE 1. Feelings Toward Black Lives Matter

respondents. The participants in the pre-election wave were interviewed between September 7 and November 7, 2016, and then followed up in the post-election wave between November 9, 2016, and January 8, 2017. Attitudes used for this research are measured using the post-election wave. We use ordinary least squares regression to investigate the hypotheses above. The dependent variable for this investigation is attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement, measured by a feeling thermometer asking respondents to rate their feelings toward the Black Lives Matter movement on a scale from 0–100, with 0 being cold and 100 being warm.[4] A total of 2,597 white respondents answered this question with a mean thermometer rating of 42.22 (see Figure 1). This rating is considered cold toward the movement because it is below 50.

As noted in Figure 1, respondents' attitudes about the Black Lives Matter movement vary across groups. As one might expect, Black people have the warmest feelings toward the group with a rating of 80.43. Whites, on the other hand, tend to be cooler toward the Black Lives Matter movement than every other group. In fact, whites are the only group with a mean rating below 50. Asian Americans have the second coolest rating for the Black Lives Matter movement with a thermometer rating of 51.69, but this is still almost 10 points higher than the ratings given by whites. Respondents who consider themselves Hispanic give an average rating of 58.20. White respondents undoubtedly have the coolest feelings toward Black Lives Matter among all groups of respondents.

Not only are whites cooler toward Black Lives Matter, white Trump supporters specifically have a cool feeling toward the Black Lives Matter movement. Many Trump supporters racialized the 2016 election (see Riley and Peterson 2019a), and we expect that same racialization in this research—that Trump supporters will see the Black Lives Matter movement as racial and have cool feelings toward it. Descriptive data suggests that this is an important variable. Whites who supported Trump in 2016 had a mean feeling thermometer rating of 23.7 to the Black Lives Matter movement, while the mean for whites who did not vote for Donald Trump is 59.85. This is a difference of over 36
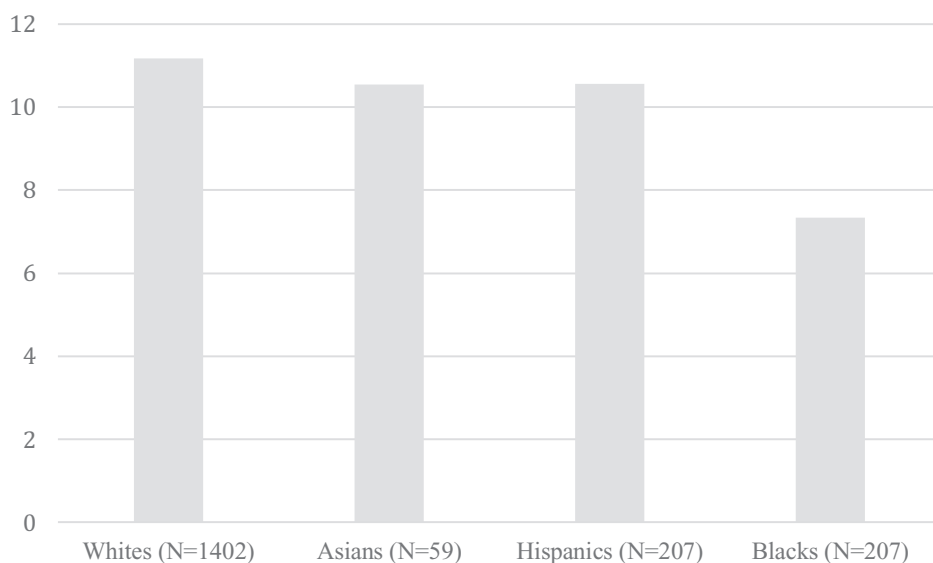
FIGURE 2. Race and Racial Resentment

points! Clearly, Trump supporters have a different evaluation of the Black Lives Matter movement. Support for Trump is our first independent variable in explaining feelings toward Black Lives Matter.

A second independent variable of concern is racial resentment. Our measure of racial resentment relies on the four questions typically used by various scholars to measure racial resentment (see Kinder and Sanders 1996; Tuch and Hughes 2011; Tesler 2012; Peterson and Riley 2017; Kam and Burge 2019). The individual questions ask about Black people's willingness to work their way up, to try harder, to overcome prejudice, and whether Black people have gotten less than they deserve.[5] The respondent's answers for each question are recoded from 1 to 4 with a response of 1 or 2 indicating no racial resentment, but a response of 3 or 4 indicating racial resentment on the individual question. For example, a respondent strongly agreeing with the statement that Black people need to try harder would be coded as 4, but a respondent who agrees somewhat would be coded as 3. Alternatively, a respondent strongly disagreeing with the same statement would be coded as 1, while somewhat disagreeing would be coded as 2. The four questions are added to create a scale ranging from 4 to 16, with higher numbers meaning the respondent has more racial resentment. Like the feeling thermometer attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement, whites have the highest racial resentment with a score of 11.18 on the racial resentment scale (see Figure 2). This means that, on average, whites give a racially resentful response on at least two of the four questions. Surprisingly, other groups are not far behind whites with Hispanics 10.56 and Asians 10.54, indicating at least two racially resentful responses as well. We expect that racial resentment will have a significant impact on the Black Lives Matter movement, similar to the effect it has had on so many other issues, including support for Trump (Riley and

Peterson 2019a), evaluations of Obama (Peterson and Riley 2017), health care attitudes (Tesler 2012), and attitudes toward paying college athletes (Wallsten et al. 2017). The track record of racial resentment suggests that this variable will have the greatest impact on attitudes toward Black Lives Matter.

We also expect racial prejudice to have an influence, albeit weaker, on attitudes toward Black Lives Matter. Scholars such as Spencer Piston (2010) persuasively argue that prejudice influences voting and that the nature of that influence varies across Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. Like Piston, Highton's (2011) research finds that prejudice decreased Obama's share of the vote in 2008. Although racial prejudice still exists today, it is likely that it has become less influential in American politics and arguably replaced with racial resentment. Like previous research (see Tesler 2012; Tuch and Hughes 2011; Piston 2010), our measure of racial prejudice relies on two questions that are measured on a 7-point scale, one of which asks whether Black people are lazy. The second question typically asks the respondent whether they believe Black people are intelligent. We depart from the previous scholarship by instead asking whether Blacks are violent. This measure is more appropriate and better able to capture the prejudicial attitudes at this time in history, especially as it relates to the Black Lives Matter movement. The two questions measuring prejudice in this research ask whether the respondents believe Black people are lazy and whether they believe Black people are violent. Each question is measured on a 7-point scale with extremes at 1 and 7. Higher numbers indicate a belief that Blacks are lazy or violent. The results from these two questions are then computed to create a prejudice scale that ranges from 2 to 14. Higher numbers on this new scale also indicate more prejudiced attitudes. Any score above 8 would indicate that the respondent harbored prejudicial attitudes on at least one of the measures.

Figure 3 shows that most groups of respondents have a low level of racial prejudice. Interestingly, whites do not have the most prejudice toward Black people—they have the least (other than Black people). Asian respondents have the highest racial prejudice score at 8.74, and Hispanic respondents are a close second at 8.34. This is indicative of the reality that racial prejudice may be disappearing, but also unveils a somewhat disturbing discovery that Asians have the highest level of prejudice.[6] We will not make too much of the finding that Asians have the most prejudice toward African Americans because of the small sample size. There is a statistically significant difference between whites and Asians, but we simply do not have enough Asians in the sample to make claims about the Asian population. According to Figure 3 racial prejudice still exists, but we expect it to have less of an influence on these specific attitudes.

Various controls are used in the model in Table 1 (discussed in the next section): gender, ideology, age, and income. Gender is measured as male and female, with higher numbers indicating the respondent self-identifies as female. Ideology is measured on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 representing extremely liberal and 7 representing extremely conservative. Age measures the age of the respondent and ranges from 18 to 90 in this sample of the 2016 American National Election Study, while income measures the total family household income.
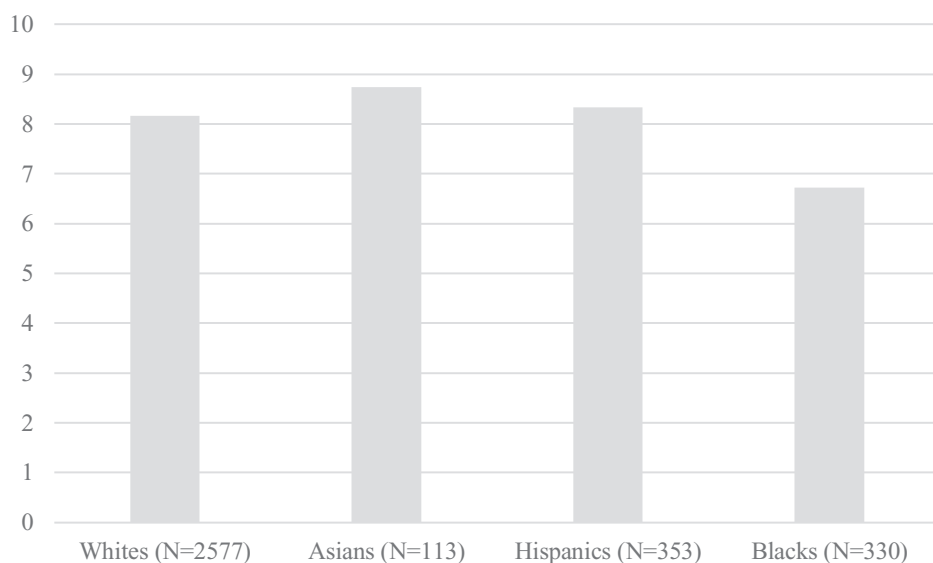
FIGURE 3. Race and Racial Prejudice

TABLE 1. Determinants of Whites' Feelings Toward Black Lives Matter

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient (S.E.)	Standardized Coefficient	Multicollinearity Statistics (VIF)
Racial Resentment	–3.53*** (.25)	–.423	2.60
Racial Prejudice	–1.48*** (.30)	–.105	1.28
Support for Trump	–10.46*** (2.09)	–.153	2.62
Ideology	–4.73*** (.62)	–.244	2.87
Income	–.17* (.09)	–.037	1.04
Gender	5.28*** (.077)	.077	1.02
Age	.08* (.038)	.038	1.06
Constant	118.22** (4.45)		
Adjusted R-squared	.63		
N	1038		

Note: *p<=.10., ***p<=.01. Standard errors are in parentheses. Coefficients are estimated using ordinary least squares. VIF refers to variation inflation index. Values less than 5 indicate that multicollinearity is not severe enough to require corrective measures (see Cohen 1977, 79–80). The descriptive statistics for the variables can be found in the Appendix.

We use ordinary least squares regression to capture the impact of each of the independent and control variables on white attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement in Table 1. Looking at Table 1 from left to right, the first column includes the unstandardized coefficient. Since the unstandardized coefficient does not allow for easy comparisons of the impacts of the explanatory variables, we include the standardized coefficient in the next column. The final column includes the variance inflation factor, our test for multicollinearity. According to the regression table, our model is quite rigorous with each of the independent and control variables significant at the .10 level, and most of the variables significant at the .000 level. Moreover, with an adjusted R^2 of .63, almost two-thirds of the variance in attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement can be explained by the variables in our model.

The first hypothesis—that whites who have racial resentment are more likely to have negative attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement—is supported by the data. As indicated earlier, higher numbers for racial resentment mean the respondent has racially resentful attitudes, while higher numbers for the Black Lives Matter variable mean the respondent has more positive (warm) attitudes toward Black Lives Matter. The negative coefficient of –3.53 indicates that higher racial resentment is associated with cooler attitudes toward Black Lives Matter. Not only are whites who have racial resentment more likely to have cooler attitudes toward Black Lives Matter; according to the standardized coefficient of –.423, this variable has the greatest impact on the attitudes toward the movement. This finding is consistent with other research that highlights the importance of racial resentment in recent elections and issues, even when these issues are not immediately seen as racial. Having "Black" in the name may signal to whites that this group is not to be supported. Those who are already suspicious of Black behavior are especially positioned to be less accepting of an organization that one might think was created for the explicit benefit of that group.

Moving on to the second hypothesized relationship—that racial resentment has a greater impact on attitudes toward Black Lives Matter than racial prejudice—we find confirmation from the data. It is clear that racial resentment has the expected influence on attitudes toward Black Lives Matter, but racial prejudice also has an impact on these attitudes according to Table 1. Because higher numbers for racial prejudice denote more prejudicial attitudes, the unstandardized coefficient of –1.48 indicates that those with more prejudice are more likely to feel cool toward Black Lives Matter. This is the expected relationship; whites who have more racial prejudice also have more negative feelings toward the movement. The standardized coefficients of racial prejudice and racial resentment make it easier to interpret the relevance of these two variables. These different scores are standardized coefficients, which have been calculated on the same scale so that they can be compared to each other. Racial resentment's coefficient of –.423 indicates it is a stronger predictor of attitudes than racial prejudice with a coefficient of –.105. As mentioned above, racial resentment is the strongest predictor in the model, followed by ideology (–.244). Prejudice is relevant and important, but its impact is not as strong as racial resentment, ideology, or support for Trump. As many who study racial resentment have suggested (see

Kinder and Sanders 1996; Tesler 2012; Wilson, Owens, and Davis 2015; Riley and Peterson 2019a; Wallsten et al. 2017), people are likely moving away from the overt forms of racial prejudice to more complicated and more easily masked racial resentment.

The last hypothesis puts the current president front and center in the conversation about Black Lives Matter. Donald Trump has been unwavering in his willingness to exploit racial tensions. As a result, we expect that his politics have created an environment where people who support him also have negative attitudes toward Black and brown people and hypothesize that support for Trump will have a negative impact on attitudes toward Black Lives Matter. The unstandardized coefficient of −10.46 suggests this is indeed the case: Trump supporters are more likely to have negative feelings toward this movement. Additionally, the standardized coefficient (−.153) indicates that this variable has the third greatest impact on these attitudes. Although support for Trump is an important and significant variable, we must remember that the election of Donald Trump is an event in history and should be discussed as such. The impact is important, but its importance must be put into context. Unlike other variables such as racial resentment, the election was a one-time event in history. Although it was a very important event and will undoubtedly have an impact on the political future, we do not believe Trump's election has had the necessary time to have an overwhelming influence on American political attitudes. The shock that the electorate felt when Trump won the election was only the beginning of the impact of his presidency. The variables with the most explanatory power remain those that have been mainstays of American society, such as attitudes toward race. Support for Trump is driven by these attitudes (Riley and Peterson 2019a).

The control variables are all significant and perform as expected. The negative coefficient values for ideology and income indicate that people who are conservative and people who have a lower income are more likely to feel cool toward the Black Lives Matter movement. Similarly, men and younger people are more likely to feel cool toward the movement.

CONCLUSION

The results help us to make sense not only of racial resentment's influence on vote choice, candidates' evaluations, and policy preferences but also its influence on feelings about Black Lives Matter. A question left unaddressed by the academic literature has been, How might racial attitudes among whites impact feelings toward Black Lives Matter? Until this study, we knew very little about the influence of racial resentment on feelings toward the Black Lives Matter movement. Employing an ordinary least squares model with data from the 2016 American National Election Survey, we find that white respondents with high levels of racial resentment are associated with negative feelings toward Black Lives Matter. We also find that while racial resentment and racial prejudice are both associated with negative feelings toward Black Lives Matter, racial resentment is the stronger predictor. Finally, we find that respondents who indicated they voted for Trump were also associated with an increase in negative feelings toward the Black Lives Matter movement.

This article's major contribution to the literature is that it moves the conversation beyond whether protest is effective and instead focuses on the role and influence of racial

attitudes in determining evaluations of what is considered to be the most important social movement of our time. Drawing from the literature on Black politics and sociology, this article merges the spillover effects of racialization with social movements in order to make sense of how whites respond to "in your face" racialized cues. While the central focus of this work is white respondents, we uncover some interesting findings among other racial groups. For example, Asians who are in the sample were more likely to exemplify old-fashioned racism when compared to whites, Hispanics, and Blacks. Even though racial resentment was higher among white respondents, others also held a high level of racial resentment. We believe that future research must investigate how group membership influences these attitudes.

This research is also powerful in that it suggests that the mere act of naming a movement "Black" creates a hurdle for white support at a time when attitudes have become so subtle. While we do not make the case that Black people should be less inclined to name movements and organizations as they please, we are suggesting that Black people recognize the limits of white support and be willing to act without it. Just as Black people are discriminated in employment because their parents give them "Black" sounding names (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004), Black groups face discriminatory reactions from whites when they have names that exude blackness. Because of this reality, Black people must understand that the possibility for alliances is limited and must be prepared to act without such support.

Our findings hold important implications for scholars examining Black politics and social movements. Scholars examining Black politics have long observed that periods of Black advancement and attempts by Blacks to gain full equality are likely to be followed by periods of extreme backlash. We saw this during the Reconstruction Era with the rise of Jim Crow laws. We witnessed this during the period immediately following the Civil Rights Movement with the war on drugs that decimated Black communities. We witnessed this during the Obama era with a significant increase in lethal force deployed on Black men by law enforcement officers. Walters (2003) and Anderson (2016) have both observed these patterns. From a normative perspective, we believe that understanding how white Americans feel about the Black Lives Matter movement is important to understanding the many ways Black people are victimized by systemic injustice. At the minimum, Black people are victimized by whites when they believe Black people do not belong in white spaces (neighborhoods, coffee shops, apartment buildings, parks, etc.), are jailed at alarming rates, are dying early deaths because of faulty healthcare, and are murdered by police officers who subsequently are not convicted of murder. Many of these Americans who merely react to race will end up serving on juries in which cases involving the killing of an unarmed Black person will be heard. They will be the doctors who fail to listen to their Black clients, the police officers who stand behind the trigger, the Karens who call the police on their Black neighbor, and the judges who sentence Black people to long sentences behind bars. Because we live in a political environment that is rife with racial resentment, it is important to expand the racialization literature to cases where race is front and center. Like Obama's race, it is impossible to ignore the Black Lives Matter movement's central focus—Black people.

The recent protests in the major cities in the United States and abroad indicate a willingness for others, whites in particular, to express their support of the Black Lives Matter movement. We are concerned, however, that these protests will not lead to real systemic change. It is easy for people to nod in agreement after the brutal death of George Floyd was captured on camera. It is even relatively easy for whites and other allies to attend marches. But what about the changes necessary to make the world the allies are claiming they want? How will they react when they are told their high salary is in part due to systemic racism, and they must now take a salary cut or forgo future pay raises? How will they react when they find out that their land was stolen from Black families generations ago? What about when they find out their elite school education was based on their white privilege, and others were left out because they did not have that privilege? Will whites be willing to stop judging Black people and institutions as unworthy and take drastic actions to make sure Blacks have what they need to be successful? These are the difficult questions left unanswered as many jump on the bandwagon to support holidays like Juneteenth. If there is an underlying issue with anti-blackness that activates the racial reaction theory, it is that these attitudes are as entrenched as they were in previous generations and place a ceiling on the support whites are willing to give. Like a chameleon, racism keeps changing its colors to fit the currents of the day, but true change rarely happens.

As with any research, our study is limited by the availability of data and the types of questions asked in the 2016 ANES data. In order to more rigorously evaluate this subject, data is needed that tracks Americans' attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement over time and that includes larger samples of the various groups. There is also a need for better data that asks more in-depth questions regarding this movement's evaluations. For example, in this article we gauge respondents' attitudes about Black Lives Matter by using the feeling thermometer, which asks respondents to rate how warm or cold they are to Black Lives Matter from 0–100. While we believe this is an empirically valid proxy, questions that ask respondents to indicate their approval or whether they see groups like Black Lives Matter as a terrorist organization might be more fruitful in uncovering views toward Black Lives Matter. ◼

NOTES

1. Fatal Force, sponsored by the *Washington Post*, tracks the number of fatal police shootings in the United States. As of March 29, 2019, 1,004 people have been killed by law enforcement. www. washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/national/police-shootings-2019/

2. "Old-fashioned racism" refers to the belief that Blacks are morally inferior.

3. Tarman and Sears (2005) make a compelling case in addressing critiques of racial resentment.

4. The feeling thermometer for Black Lives Matter in the 2016 ANES data provides the best possible proxy variable to capture how warm or cold respondents are toward Black Lives Matter. We are aware of the Cooperative Multiracial Survey, which contains more detailed questions on Black Lives Matter; however, we do not have access to this data.

5. There are four statements used to measure racial resentment:
     (1) Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

(2) It is really just a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites.

(3) Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.

(4) Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve.

Respondents are asked to strongly agree/disagree or somewhat agree/disagree with the statements. Answers that were neutral were not included in the scale.

6. A t-test was analyzed to determine whether the means for the different groups are statistically different from each other. The probability that the mean for Asians is statistically the same as the mean for whites is less than .01.

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APPENDIX

Descriptive Statistics for Variables in the Model

Variable Name	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Black Lives Matter FT	1038	41.48	34.20
Racial Resentment Scale	1038	10.82	4.10
Racial Prejudice Scale	1038	8.19	2.42
Support for Trump	1038	1.51	.50
Ideology	1038	4.15	1.76
Income	1038	17.67	7.49
Gender	1038	1.51	.50
Age	1038	52.05	17.04