Looking Through the Lens of the Undergraduate: The Belief in a Just World and Its Effects on Perceptions of Racial Equality

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ABSTRACT

Lerner (1977, 1980) claimed individuals are motivated to believe the world is a "just place" where "people get what they deserve." The Belief in a Just World, he argued, served as a "protective function" to its adherents, defending the individual psychologically against unsettling negative outcomes over which they have no control. Individuals are motivated to protect this belief set to avoid being complicit in injustices both at their root and in present day. This study attempts to measure the presence of the "Belief in a Just World" attitude set among undergraduates, and seeks to determine whether this worldview is correlated with beliefs in racial equality. First, the subjects completed the Belief in a Just World Scale (Rubin and Peplau, 1975); then, they answered 30 policy questions over a variety of topics well as racially charged policy questions sprinkled throughout. The variety was provided both to obscure the racially-charged questions and to examine whether the BJW attitude set drives other policy areas. The data revealed strong correlations between higher BJW scores and beliefs in racial equality—but no other clusters of questions—suggesting many undergraduates are developing a perceptual lens that identifies gains in racial equality that simply are not there. Those in higher education have to consider how to awaken undergraduates to the persistent scars of history and current uncomfortable truths.

Keywords: Belief in a Just World; Racial Inequality; Attitudes; United States; Defense Mechanism

It is undeniable the United States' checkered racial history has left an indelible mark. A nation that implements two centuries of state sanctioned race-based slavery, followed by nearly another century of race-based segregation and economic and physical violence, would naturally still bear the scars of this prejudice and inequality. A glance at basic, contemporary data reveals racial disparity in unemployment rates, household wealth, and incarceration (see, for example, Martinovich, 2017; Walker, Spohn, &Delone, 2012; Alexander, 2012). News accounts and viral YouTube videos reveal blacks being profiled and harassed by white citizens and police. Interactions with police frequently devolve into fatal encounters despite the absence of a clear threat posed by the black citizen or motorist.

Surprisingly, despite this protracted and ongoing practice of oppression (tagged the "New Jim Crow" by Alexander (2012)), many white Americans "…view racism as a social problem that has essentially been solved already and…typically believe that racist disparities are confined to the distant historical past" (Boatright-Horiwitz et al., 2013, p. 698; Boatright-Horiwitz et al., 2005; Bischoping et al., 2001). In fact, Norton et al. (2011) found that given this perception of an even terrain, a preponderance of whites now view themselves as the primary *victims* of discrimination and are apt to view racial policies "as a zero-sum game that they are now losing" (p. 215). As Boatright et al. (2013, p. 701) reported, "…whites in modern society are socialized to unconsciously view the world through the lens of racism, without awareness of the privileges associated with being white."

Even many college students—so-called Post-Millennials and Generation Z--who hold progressive attitudes in other social spheres (e.g. sexuality, climate change), view racism as something that occurred in the past, not recognizing the persistent problems present all around them. Jackson and Heckman (2002, pg. 434) commented that white students in modern society "wear rose colored glasses" regarding racism and many whites these days want non-whites to have rose colored glasses, too…". While some of these white undergrad attitudes are based on an upbeat appraisal that inequality has diminished as blacks prosper, other whites hold a color-blind "we all got problems" point of view. Pederson et al. (2011)

found that white college students who did not perceive themselves as "privileged" were less apt to recognize racism and respond to anti-racism teaching; they "share" the experience of hardship and challenges.

Indeed, what is striking about some white student responses to racial issues is their consistency and rigidity; beliefs appear to be something not gleaned through observation and learning, but rather an ingrained, immovable part of their basic personality and world-view. Generally, there appears to be a perceptual screen that life is fair, America has moved beyond the taint of its racist past, and, regardless of color, all people face similar impediments and the same chance of success. Boatright et al. (2013) explicitly exposed 214 white students in an intro psych class to a list of white privileges. Even though the authors reported a slight effect on racial attitudes (e.g. the mean response for "In general, Whites in US society can be viewed as racist" moved from a mean of 4.79 to 5.19—on a *10 point scale*). There was no significant change in white student agreement that "racism is still a major problem in the US today" (pre-test mean 6.35; post-test mean 6.35, again, on a *10-point scale*).

Clearly, some psychological forces are pushing white Americans, including undergraduates, from viewing racial problems as they are. There may be an underlying belief set, or world view, that directs many whites, regardless of age and class, to perceive a "post-racial" America. This study draws upon established theory within social psychology—the "belief in a just world" (BJW)—to investigate whether there is a linkage between the specific, expressed policy opinions of undergraduates and an emerging, undergirding, general set of interconnected attitudes, or world view. This comes from a long line of research which has sought to find an underlying belief system that is a factor in how individuals view social justice. It is thought those who score higher on the BJW index will be reticent to perceive the need for remedial measures for African Americans and blind to the lasting effects of racial oppression. They may also be likely to resist government interventions in other policy groupings (e,g, non-racial social or economic issues, and issues in criminal justice and legal rights).

It is thought there will be a potent correlation between the undergraduates' embracing of the belief in a just world and perceptions of racial equality. Other issues may also reveal the BJW belief set is a factor in shaping attitudes—for example raising the minimum wage, releasing non-violent drug offenders, urine testing welfare recipients, or workplace protections against sexual harassment. Society is just, structures sound—individuals are to blame.

Belief in a Just World

In his path-breaking work, Lerner (1977, 1980) claimed individuals are motivated to believe the world is a "just place" where "people get what they deserve"—an orientation permitting persons to see the world as a fair and predictable place where people determine their own fates. Originally, he conducted a study in which participants had to watch other people receiving painful shocks. Participants were initially disturbed while watching, but as time passed and observers could do nothing, they "derogated the victim" (Lerner& Simmons, 1966). The belief in a just world, he argued, served as a "protective function" to its adherents, defending the individual psychologically against unsettling, undeserved negative outcomes over which they have no control. Thus, individuals are motivated to protect this belief that the world is a just place to avoid being complicit in the injustice both at its root and present day (Dalbert, 1997, 1998; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Mohiyeddini & Montada, 1998). The motivation to view the world as fair and just leads to feelings of safety (Hafer& Sutton, 2016). Further, this feeling is strengthened through reframing events that appear to be unjust as the victim deserves their fate.

Researchers identify the "belief in a just world" as a key factor in shaping people's orientations toward social inequalities and related public policies (Kluegal & Smith, 1986). Specifically, the belief that (1) people receive what they deserve based on actions or moral qualities, and (2) people can reduce the likelihood of negative events befalling them by simply behaving properly and responsibly. However, Hafer and Sutton (2015) argue that BJW is distinct from simple ideology. Those who carry the BJW world view do not feel responsibility for others' failure. Thus, as stated, they "derogate the victims" in their specific policy stands (Lerner, 1980, Wyer, Modenhousen, & Gorman, 1985). Such policy views include a belief that the poor deserve their fate (Furnham & Gunter, 1984, Wagstaff, 1984), the individual bears responsibility for poverty (Applebaum, 2006), opposition to affirmative action (Wilkins & Wenger, 2014), and a belief that inequalities are just not that extensive (Benson, 1993). Previous research has found a relationship between BJW conservativism (Christopher, Zabel, Jones & Marek, 2008) and more conservative social and policy beliefs (Lodewijkx, Kersten & Van Zomeran, 2008).

> Belief in a just world has been separated into a general BJW and a personal BJW (Hutton & Sutton, 2016). Individuals with a high general BJW appear to support the idea that the world is a just place in general and people are treated fairly. Further, a belief exists that

> those treated unjustly will eventually be taken care of and repaid. The personal BJW is focused on oneself as the recipient of justice and fairness (Dalbert, 2009; Safer & Hutton, 2016). The two aspects of BJW are correlated but appear to lead to different reactions. The personal BJW relates to feelings of positive well-being while general is more strongly related to judgements of others. Both types of BJW are connected as they are related to the idea that generally justice prevails in most situations (Wenzel, Schlinder& Reinhard, 2017).

A belief in in a just world was initially viewed as a personality characteristic (Dalbert, 2001). Its roots were seen within Western society and its values. Much of the focus was on individual rewards and punishment and their relationship to good or bad behavior.

Myths, fairy tales, and love and hero stories socialized the belief that good will always follow good behavior. A second idea about the origin is related to psychological function. Coping strategies are part of the belief that immediate gratification might not be possible, but good behavior will be rewarded later. Lastly, it has been suggested that the belief set is connected moral and cognitive development. In children, a belief that bad behavior will always be followed by justice is pervasive. Maturity enables individuals to understand this may not always happen but the childhood belief remains in some form and can be resurrected by circumstances (Nudelman, 2013). This belief that world is predictable and orderly allows for better coping with reality. It is adaptive and supports long-term goals (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Further, Dalbert (1999) suggest that this "positive illusion" allows for better psychological adjustment.

In order to examine the connection between BJW and personality, Nudleman (2013) conducted a meta-analysis to determine the relationship between the Five Factor Model (FFM) and a belief in a just world. In the general sample (n = 2579), neuroticism was negatively correlated with BJW while positively correlated with extraversion and agreeableness. Generally, the greater one's emotional stability, the stronger a belief in a just world. The causal direction of this is difficult to ascertain. Did this stability give rise to the belief justice, or does the belief promote emotional stability? (Fuhrman, 2003). The notion that the BJW attitude set is a defensive mechanism to cope with a chaotic world strongly suggests the former, but the process may be circular—the attitudes shape perceptions, which in turn harden attitudes. However, previous research has shown that BJW predicts behavior beyond personality (Dette, Stober & Dalbert, 2004).

Belief in a just world has been examined in terms of disadvantaged versus advantage groups (Hunt, 2000). As a result, "belief in a just world" is not omnipresent among all demographic groups due to the heterogeneity of religion, culture and education. Measuring an individual's direct experience with injustice is a better indicator of the presence of a BJW orientation (Fischer & Holz, 2010).A common assertion of existing research is the "underdog thesis" (Robinson & Bell, 1978) which suggests members of low status groups will see the status quo as less reasonable that those at the top. Smith and Green (1984) found that blacks and lower income individuals are not as likely to see the world as fair as high status individuals. Hunt (2000) found that blacks were the least likely to support just world beliefs. In addition, it has been argued women are generally less likely to perceive a just world than men (Umberson, 1993; Hunt, 2000).

It would appear more advantaged groups are motivated to explain their successes as just compared to the less fortunate, and the BJW provides comfort and a rationale when those in higher strata are confronted with conflicting realities. In the context of race, whites could use BJW to either explain away perceived inequalities or carry the belief in a just world further—whites and blacks must be enjoying rough equality in education and employment, with those suffering doing so due to circumstances of their own making,

The "New Racism"

There is a related line of literature within political science that asserts components of the American ethos contribute to policy perceptions, both racial and non-racial in nature. A part of this literature has been dubbed the "new racism." The new racism thesis proposes that "prejudice is expressed in the language of American individualism" (Kinder & Sanders, 1996, p. 106). Rather than being based on overt racism, this literature suggests whites' opposition to race-conscious policy is based on the "conjunction of racism and a belief in the principle of hard work and self-reliance embedded in the American creed" (Gainous, 2012, p. 252). In these scholars' view, it is much more comfortable to express opposition to policies favorable to blacks if they are couched in the wording of the American Dream.

These studies tend to harvest questions from existing aggregate data sets (e.g. the American National Election Studies, or ANES) and look for correlations between groupings of general value-related questions and specific attitudes about policy. Sniderman and Piazza (1993), for example, suggested underlying authoritarian attitudes predominantly shape whites' attitudes about race conscious policies. Others (Sniderman et al., 1991; Feldman &Huddy, 2005) found those who express support for individualism and self-reliance are more likely to oppose general social welfare policies and racial remedies. Kinder and Sanders (1996) found through national survey indicators that whites' opinion of" blacks'

"lack of effort" is the culprit for racial inequality and fueled opposition to remedial measures. Their theory contends this perceived lack of effort represents a violation of individualistic values that is undergirded by lingering racism.

The "new racism" literature and the "belief in a just world" work collided in the work of Wilkins and Wenger (2014). The authors argued that the belief in a just world and "conceptions of desert drive our assessments of desert." They continued, "…we adapt Lerner's (1980) belief in a just world theory (BJW) and how it influences views on public policies designed to improve labor market outcomes for women and African-Americans" (Wilkins & Wenger, 2014, p. 326).

Their methodological approach mirrored the new racism literature. They extracted a question from the General Social Survey and Census (GSSC), and tested "whether an individual's BJW predicts attitudes toward affirmative action for women and African Americans in the workplace." They found "a generalized BJW correlates negatively with attitudes about preferential hiring for women and African Americans" (Wilkins & Wenger, 2014, p. 326).

Curiously, the authors based their entire application of the BJW theory and attitude set on one question from the GSSC: "Some people say people get ahead by their own hard work; others say that lucky breaks or help from other people are more important. Which do you think is more important?" The respondents could choose from among: hard work is most important, hard work and luck are equally important, or luck is the most important. The authors asserted, "individuals responding that hard work is the most important factor in getting ahead are likely to believe that people get what they deserve, and therefore *would* score high on the BJW scale" (Wilkins & Wenger, p. 333, emphasis added).

Not surprisingly, Wilkens and Wenger found that those who believe luck is the predominant factor in getting ahead support affirmative action programs for African Americans and women; those who reply hard work are opposed to affirmative action. While an interesting finding, the study seems nominally different than earlier "new racism" studies that used similar questions as a proxy for "individualism" or "hard work." There was no comprehensive measurement of the subjects' actual adherence to the belief in a just world attitude set.

Research Question

This study takes an exhaustive and targeted approach to investigate the presence of the BJW among college students and investigate any connection to racial attitudes. First, to determine the individuals' adherence to a BJW world view, the subjects answered Belief in a Just World Scale(Rubin & Peplau,1975); then, they answered 30 policy questions over a variety of topics constructed by the authors (economic, social, and environmental policy) as well as racially charged policy questions sprinkled throughout (e.g. voting restrictions, police/community relationships, discrimination in the workplace, etc.). The variety is provided both to obscure the racially-charged questions and to examine whether the BJW attitude set drives attitudes in other policy areas. Some of our primary points of interest: Is the BJW attitude set more prevalent among white undergraduate respondents? Is there a tangible effect on policy positions—especially race-related policy and questions—suggesting BJW is a factor in misperceiving racial realities? Is the BJW personality type among undergraduates also strongly correlated with other types of policy and questions of fairness?

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from various social science classes from three local colleges, Centenary College of Louisiana (CC), Louisiana State University-Shreveport (LSU-S), and the Bossier Parish Community College (BPCC). Some participants received extra credit in return for their participation. Participants were 205 students, 81 men and 124 women, and 94 freshman, 67 sophomores, 27 juniors and 17 seniors. The average age for students in the sample was 21. The two racial groups mainly represented were Caucasians, comprising 54% of the sample, and African-Americans, who constituted 33%. The rest of the sample socioeconomic status reflected 42% middle class, 32% lower middle to working class, and 25% upper middle to upper class. With regards to party affiliation, 29% of the sample was Democrat, 34% Republican and 24% Independent. Political ideology was 32% liberal, 34% conservative and 33% other. Thus, generally the sample consisted of white and black participants, predominately Christian (68%), middle class, lower level students with ideology represented almost equally. Participants were treated in accordance with American Psychological Association (APA) ethical principles.

Materials and Procedure

Participants completed the Belief in a Just World Scale (Rubin & Peplau,1975; sample items: "Basically, the world is a just place," "Men who keep in shape have little chance of suffering a heart attack," "Good deeds often go unnoticed and unrewarded". "By and large, people get what they deserve." "Careful drivers are just as likely to get hurt in traffic accidents as careless ones").The items on this measure consisted of 20 questions scored on a scale from one to five, with

lower numbers indicating stronger belief in a just world. This scale is still the most widely used measure of individual differences in BJW even though new scales have been developed (Lucas, Alexander, Firestone & LeBreton, 2007). For this measure, a Cronbach's α of .74 has been obtained (Appelbaum, Lennon & Aber, 2006) which indicates good reliability.

Next, participants completed a 30-item US Public Policy Attitudinal Questionnaire developed by the authors which included a range of items on policy issues. This questionnaire is divided into three subscales including, a Race subscale with 6 questions associated with racially charged policy stands (e.g. voting restrictions, police/community relationships, fairness in education and on the job, perceptions of racial quality and equality of opportunity); a Social/Economic subscale (13 questions)including policy questions based on environmental issues (e.g. climate change, off-shore drilling) and social issues (e.g. attitudes about illegal immigration, same sex marriage, legalizing marijuana), economic issues (e.g. minimum wage, out-sourcing). Finally, a Crime/Legal Rights subscale (5 questions) was assembled. Sample questions include, "Cities with high murderrates should be able to ban handgun possession.";

States should require voters to produce photo identification" and "States should provide for parole and treatment for non-violent drug offenders to prevent prison overcrowding. "One distractor question, based on foreign policy, was also included. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1, "Strongly disagree" to 5 "Strongly agree".

The last five policy questions, "Illegal immigrants take valuable jobs from Americans", "Confederate statues should be removed from government-owned property," "In the United States, Christianity is under attack," "We need more leaders in government who are not "politically correct," and "We need to ensure due process for men accused of sexual harassment in the workplace" was only answered by a second wave of subjects (N= 121). The questions were added after reviewing the survey instrument to better investigate whether Trump-era positions protecting perceived persecution of whites correlated with BJW personalities. Lastly, demographic information requested included age, race, gender, political party, religion and political ideology.

Results

The range of composite scores on the Belief in the Just World (BJW) questionnaire was 36 to 79 with lower scores indicating more of a belief in a just world. The average score on the BJW was 60.6 (SD = 7.02) for the whole sample. Multiple regression analysis was used to test if demographic variables significantly predicted participants' BJW composite scores. The results of the regression indicated the two predictors explained 9% of the variance (R^2=.09, F(6, 204)= 2.90, p<.01). It was found that race significantly predicted belief in a just world (β = -.220, p, <.01), as did ideology (β = -.12, p<.05). Sex (β = .05, ns), SES (β = -0.4, ns), political party (β = .06, ns), and religion (β = -.02, ns), were not significant predictors of a belief in a just world.

The Racially charged policy questions subscale—the six that had explicitly racial references—were significantly related to a belief in a just world, (r =-.43, p >.01).The policy question, "Black children have as good as chance as white children to get a good education," *r(205) = -.364, p > .01);"*Blacks have as good a chance as whites to get any kind of job for they qualified," *r (205) = -.372, p < .001*; "Recent deadly encounters between police and black motorists are largely caused by the motorists posing a danger or refusing to comply with law enforcement," *r(205) = -.235, p < .05; "*Our country has made the changes needed to give blacks equal rights with whites," *r(205) = -.272, p < .013; "*Thinking about the US, would you say blacks are treated less fairly in the workplace," *r(205) = .233, p < .05; "*Whites and Blacks, regardless of race, face the same sorts of problems in life," *r(205) = -.332, p <.01.* Although not a part of the subscale, it is worthy of note the Trump era race-related question was also strongly correlated: "Confederate-statues should be removed from government owned property," *r(121) = .310, p <.01.*

The Social/Economic subscale was not significantly related to a belief in a just world, (r = .12, ns). However, individual questions (4/13) such as "Congress should maintain the core of the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") in order to continue coverage of the previously uninsured," *r(205) =.230, p < .05,* were related. One could argue the question carried racial undertones due to the inclusion of "Obamacare." Also, "States should be allowed to legalize marijuana, r*(205) = .21*, *p <.01;* "The U.S. Supreme Court was correct in protecting the ability of homosexuals to marry"**,** *r(205) = .17, p <.01; "*Those who receive public assistance should be required to take a drug test before they receive benefits, *r(205) = - .20, p <.01*were significant.

The Crime/Legal rights subscale was also not related to a belief in a just world, r(205) = .03, ns). However, the following questions were significant: "States should provide parole for and treatment for non-violent drug offenders to prevent

prison overcrowding, *r(205) = .19, p <.01;*"States should require voters to produce photo identification, *r(205) = -.15, p <.05;* and "Those convicted of first-degree murder should be executed*, r(205) = -.17, p <.05.*

Interestingly, race was *not* significantly related to any of the Trump-era policy questions except for "Confederate statues should be removed from government-owned property," *r(121) =-.191, p < .01*, black (M =3.3) and white (2.0). However, sex differences occurred on "Women need stronger protection against sexual harassment in the workplace," men (M = 3.4) and women (M = 4.5), *r(205) =.159 p < .01;* "Congress should protect Obamacare," men (M = 2.9) and women (M = 3.4), *r(205) = .178, p < .01*, "Our country has made the changes needed to give blacks equal rights and white," men (M = 3.4) and women (M = 3.0), *r(205) = -.157, p < .05* and "Confederate statues should be removed from government owned property" men (M = 2.3) and women (M = 2.8), *r(121) = .196, p <.05.* This suggests that women have strong opinions when certain social and political rights are questioned—particularly regarding the historically oppressed and vulnerable.

Ideology was significantly related to six policy questions. "Black children have as good as chance as white children to get a good education," liberals (M = 1.84) and conservatives (M =3.33), *r(205) = -.378, p > .001;*
*"*Blacks have as good a chance as whites to get any kind of job for they are qualified," liberals (M = 1.93) and conservatives (M = 3.30), *r(205) = .313, p < .001;*"Congress should maintain the core of the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") in order to continue coverage of the previously uninsured," liberals (M = 4.06) and conservatives (M = 2.42), *r(205) =-.384, p < .01;* **"**Whites and Blacks, regardless of race, face the same sorts of problems of life," liberals (M = 2.18) and conservatives (M = 3.55), *r(205) = .360, p <.01*. "Affirmative action, programs that provide jobs and access to education for African Americans, should be continued," liberals (M =4.31) and conservatives (M = 3.69), *r(205) = -.227*, *p <.05;*"Confederate statues should be removed from government owned property," liberals (M = 2.3) and conservatives (M = 2.8), *r(121) = -.213, p <.01.*

Party affiliation influenced only two questions. "Affirmative action, programs that provide jobs and access to education for African Americans, should be continued," Democrats (M =4.31) and Republicans (M = 2.23), *r(205) = -.234*, *p <.05*,and *"*Illegal immigrants who have lived and worked in the United States for eight years or more without committing a crime should be placed on a path to citizenship, Democrats (M =4.57) and Republicans (M = 3.42), *r(205) = .253, p < .05.*

Discussion

There is a strong, clear, and consistent connection between the BJW world view among undergrads and stances on racial issues. The stronger the belief in a just world, the greater the chance the respondent agreed with these propositions:

- In general, do you think black children have as good a chance as white children to get a good education?
- In general, do you feel that blacks have as good a chance as whites to get any job for which they are qualified?
- Recent deadly encounters between police and black motorists are largely caused by the motorists posing a danger or refusing to comply with law enforcement.
- Our country has made the changes needed to give blacks equal rights with whites.
- Whites and blacks, regardless of race, face the same sorts of problems in life.

And, these questions generated significant disagreement correlated with the BJW personality:

- Thinking about the United States, would you say blacks are treated less fairly in the workplace?
- Confederate statues should be removed from government owned property.

It is striking every question in the racial subgroup elicited strong correlations, whereas only
7/18 questions in the other two subgroups revealed a relationship with a BJW world view. For example, in the Social/Economic subgroup, the lesser the development of BJW attitudes, the greater the desire to legalize marijuana, allow for gay marriage, and prevent drug tests for those who receive welfare (the first two issues, pot and LGBTQ issues, have become notably salient to the 18-24 demographic). Interestingly, there was also a significant correlation between the BJW personality, and the notion Congress should maintain Obamacare—the higher the score on the BJW scale, the lower the support for Obamacare. One is left to wonder whether the cue "Obama" created racial undertones that generated the negative relationship with BJW personalities.

In the Crime/Legal Issues subgroup, those with BJW attitudes were correlated with executing murderers, and negatively correlated with providing parole and counseling for non-violent offenders from prison. There was also a significant

correlation between BJW types, and he need for voter ID for elections—again suggesting the issues with racial undertones attract the attention of BJW personalities, perhaps prompting a defensive posture.

There were some interesting—and some predictable—correlations between demographic variables and policy questions. College-aged women were already keenly aware of the need for protection in the workplace from sexual harassment compared to their male classmates. Young Republicans were much more resistant to allowing illegals a path to citizenship than young Democrats. And, although not as consistent as BJW, ideology was tied to liberals perceiving less opportunity for blacks in education, the workplace, and life, generally.

Frequencies are not the most sophisticated method, but still provide insight into racial differences regarding perceptions of equality. In Table 3, some frequencies are shared from the race-based questions, controlling for race. When asked if white and black children enjoy equal opportunities in education, white respondents much more likely to respond "yes" (68% white, 40% black answered in the affirmative). The same was true for job opportunities—whites were far more apt to perceive opportunities as equal (67% white, 34% black). A strong plurality of whites blamed noncompliance among black motorists for deadly encounters with police—a plurality blaming the motorist for not following commands (47% of whites agreeing, with only 19% of black subjects blaming the motorist). On the subject of removal of confederate monuments, a scant 6% of whites agreed with this action (compared to 38% black), with a solid 65% of whites opposing removal (22% black). 40% of black respondents offered no opinion.

Most intriguing, perhaps, are the responses to the questions "our country has made the changes needed to give blacks equal rights with whites," and "white and blacks, regardless of race, face the same problems in life." These questions reflect the belief that there is a just world – both races have come to enjoy the same privileges and suffer the same challenges. 72%of white respondents agreed the changes have been made to provide equal rights, compared to a 30% of African Americans. In regard to sharing the same problems in life, again, 73% of white subjects agreed, with 34% of black subjects responding in the affirmative.

Conclusion

It seems, after a careful examination of the data, some college-aged young adults are developing a set of attitudes (BJW) that significantly effect perceptions of racial equality and diminish the ability to discern the less pretty realities of race in America. The more one develops a BJW attitude set, the stronger the perceptual screen that filters out hard truths. It was striking the racial questions, more than the myriad other policy questions posed, were strongly correlated with BJW personalities. As Lerner suggested, the BJW attitudes serve to soothe those who do not wish to perceive and share blame for societal ills, and "derogate the victim."

The regression analysis revealed race as "significant" in contributing to BJW attitudes, but obviously, there is much more at work shaping young minds. Future research should look to exhume other sources of the creation of BJW views, and, extend the question beyond the location of this study's subjects (the deep south).

Generally, in the absence of any real movement toward racial equality, more research is needed to understand the development and impact of the BJW world view with the hope opinions can be changed, and policies created to begin to remedy the persistent racial divide. But more importantly, professors need to understand many of their students are developing a set of attitudes, a world view, that deflects the harsh realities of racial inequality in the United States. Developing strategies in higher education to awaken our nation's college students to recognize facts and believe our racist past and troubled present is an urgent need of attention.

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Table 1. Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting
Belief in a Just World (N = 204)

Belief in a Just World			
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
Sex	.71	.99	.05
Race	-3.09	.99**	-.220
SES	-.11	.21	-.04
Party	.18	.21	.06
Religion	-.31	1.01	-.02
Ideology	-1.12	.64*	-.12
R^2		.09	
F		2.90	

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

Table 2. Correlations of policy questions to Belief in a Just World

	Pearson's r
Race subscale	**-.43****
Black children education	**-.35****
Good jobs for blacks	**-.32****
Same problems	**-.29****
Black Equal rights	**-.34****
Black motorists	**-.38****
Blacks in workplace	**.32****
Social/Economic subscale	.12
Legalize pot	**.21****
Gay marriage	**.17****
Obamacare	**.30****
Drug test	**-.20****
Global Warming	-.11
Land for oil	-.12
Minimum Wage	.10
Path to citizenship	.08
Immigrants take jobs	-.08
Overseas jobs	.06
Women harass	.04
Affirmative Action	.02
Immigrant wages	.13
Crime/Legal subscale	.03
Photo Identification	**-.15***
Parole for drug use	**.19****
Execute murderers	**-.17***
Ban guns	.09
Burn flag	-.10
Trump era policies subscale	.16
Confederate statues	**.31****
Business can deny	-.10
Christianity attacked	-.14

Politically correct	-.14
Due process for men	.03

* significant at .05 level, ** significant at .01 level

Table 3. Responses to Racially Infused Questions

1. In general, do you think black children have as good a chance as white children to get a good education?

   White Respondents: 68% agree 20% disagree
   Black Respondents: 40% agree 47% disagree

2. In general, do you fell blacks have as good a chance as whites to get any kind of job for which they are qualified?

   White Respondents: 67% agree 20% disagree
   Black Respondents 34% agree 52% disagree

3. Recent deadly encounters between police and black motorists are largely caused by the motorists posing a danger or refusing to comply with law enforcement.

   White Respondents 46% agree 21% disagree (33% no opinion)
   Black Respondents 19% agree 50% disagree (31% no opinion)

4. Our country has made the changes needed to give blacks equal rights with whites.

   White Respondents: 72% agree 18% disagree
   Black Respondents: 30% agree 52% disagree

5. Affirmative action, programs that provide jobs and access to education for African Americans, should be continued.

   White Respondents: 67% agree 7% disagree
   Black Respondents: 79% agree 6% disagree

6. Confederate statues should be removed from government-owned property.

   White Respondents: 6% agree 65% disagree (29% no opinion)
   Black Respondents: 38% agree 22% disagree (40% no opinion)

7. Whites and blacks, regardless of race, face the same problems in life.

   White Respondents: 73% agree 27% disagree
   Black Respondents: 34% agree 56% disagree