

Author(s): Tate, Katherine

Title: Whites' Perceptions of Group Economic Differences

Date: September 25, 1987

Dataset(s): 1987 Pilot Study

Abstract

Tate discusses the 1987 Pilot Study item which measures white respondents' assessment of the size and direction of the economic gap between blacks and whites. She also compares the Pilot Study results to the results obtained when the same question was asked in a 1984 survey of black Americans. Tate finds that both blacks and whites acknowledge the presence of racial stratification in the US, though blacks tend to take a slightly more pessimistic view of economic differences. Tate's analysis also indicates that perceptions of racial inequality is somewhat class-based and devoid of strong racial effects. However, whites who support egalitarian values seem to be especially aware of the subordinate economic position of blacks, relative to whites. Tate also finds that nonracial measures of economic conditions do not, for the most part, affect whites' assessments of their economic position relative to blacks. Tate then examines the attitudinal effects of the racial inequality variable. She finds that perceptions of racial inequality appears to be irrelevant to the formation of racial policy positions among whites. White support or opposition to affirmative action programs, and other policies aimed at redressing racial discrimination, seem instead to be based on more general sentiments, such as racial prejudice. Tate concludes that the experimental item should be included in future surveys because it is, in many ways, superior to the traditional racial progress measure, which is too vague and suffers from an acquiesce bias.