

Racial Differences in Public Confidence in Education: 1974–2002*

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Objective. This article examines the black-white gap in confidence in education in the United States and how the gap has changed over time. *Method.* The study uses ordinal logit regression on General Social Surveys (1974–2002). *Results.* Whites have less confidence in education, partly because whites tend to have higher levels of education, income, and conservatism, and are more likely to be affiliated with the Republican Party and evangelical denominations. The black-white gap is largest at lower levels of education, and disappears among college graduates. The gap shrinks during Republican control of the presidency in the United States, and widens during Democratic control. *Conclusion.* The black-white gap in confidence is not due solely to individual factors, but also to the larger political context and to the groups' different relationships to the institution of education.

It is a common refrain that primary and secondary education in the United States is in trouble. While public schools in the United States have undergone “cycles of crisis” (Walters, 1994) throughout the 20th century, since the 1983 *Nation at Risk* report, commentators, policymakers, and scholars have emphasized more often the failures than the successes of schools, identified organizational and pedagogical aspects of schools responsible for these failures, and proposed various reforms to address these deficiencies—such as decentralization, accountability measures, school choice, charter schools, vouchers, and privatization (Berliner and Biddle, 1995).

Schools serving black students have received an especially large amount of attention in the public discourse about school failures. Some argue that these schools are especially plagued with problems of poor management and

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staffing (Hanushek, 1986); others say these schools, whose students are disproportionately poor and at risk, are confronted with greater challenges than are other schools (Berliner and Biddle, 1995); and some fall in-between these two positions (Henig et al., 1999).

Despite these problems, survey data from the 1970s show that African Americans are more likely to express confidence in education (Lipset and Schneider, 1987). This is intriguing because one would expect a group that is allegedly poorly served by an institution to lack confidence in it. Indeed, some scholars have argued that the legacy of slavery, disenfranchisement, and discrimination have produced an anti-school culture among black adolescents (Ogbu, 1978).

In this article, we examine how the racial gap has changed since the 1970s and why blacks have more confidence in education than whites. Given how prominent the schools-in-crisis rhetoric is (especially with regard to schools that serve African Americans), we believe it is worthwhile to examine why the attitudes of whites reflect this rhetoric more than those of blacks. Confidence in education can also have political ramifications. Low levels of confidence lead to support for various institutional and organizational reforms that are proposed to address schools' alleged failures. In addition, low levels of confidence can also motivate individuals and groups to become involved in school affairs in their own community. This is important because some political scientists (Henig et al., 1999; Orr, 1999; Stone et al., 2001) believe that civic involvement is necessary for the success of schools in urban areas serving students from low-income families. To the extent that schools serving black students are dysfunctional, greater civic involvement—spurred by lack of confidence in schools and the people who run them—may be required for these schools to successfully reform.

Theory

Why Are Blacks More Likely to be Confident in Education than Whites?

Sociodemographic Differences. Racial differences in class, politics, and religion can potentially explain why blacks are more confident in schools than whites. Of these cleavages, the racial disparity in class is probably the most important. On average, African Americans tend to have lower levels of education and income than whites, and they are more likely to end up in poverty as well (Cameron and Heckman, 2001; McCall, 2001; White and Rogers, 2000). Since individuals with more schooling express less confidence in education (Lipset and Schneider, 1987), it is possible that the racial gap in confidence in education is reducible to differences in socioeconomic attainment.

Why would an individual's class affect his or her confidence in schools? Lareau (2003) argues that class shapes families' models of home-school

relationships. While middle-class families tend to view home and school as intertwined institutions and take a proactive role in their children's education, working-class families view home and school as separate domains and think that the responsibility for education lies with the schools. They tend to take a hands-off approach to their children's schooling so as to let schools do their job. Indeed, Lareau (2003) documents that upper-middle-class families are more likely to feel they have to confront and negotiate with school officials in order to promote their children's interests. It is not surprising, then, that Lipset and Schneider (1987) found that individuals with higher levels of education may express less confidence in schools.

There are potentially other individual factors contributing to this black-white gap in confidence in the institution of education. Black and white Americans are distinguished not only by class, but also by their political views and religious affiliations, which may also help explain why blacks express greater confidence in education. Whites tend to be more conservative and lean more toward the Republican Party than do blacks (Kinder and Winter, 2001; Manza and Brooks, 1999), and Lipset and Schneider (1987) also show that conservatives and Republicans tend to be less confident in schools than are liberals and Democrats. Racial differences in ideology and partisanship could explain racial differences in confidence in education.

Racial differences in religious affiliation may also contribute to the black-white gap. White Americans tend to dominate the ranks of conservative Protestants (Steenland et al., 2000), who tend to view public schools as threatening to their moral and spiritual values (Sikkink, 1999).

Particularistic Mobility Thesis. It is also possible that white and black Americans tend to have different relationships to education that are not reducible to individual factors such as class, political views, or religion. Given the barriers that blacks confront to achieve the American Dream, it is plausible that academic success is more crucial for blacks' chances of occupational success than it is for whites. Black families tend to have less wealth than white families (Oliver and Shapiro, 1995); owing to residential segregation in cities, blacks tend to live in more economically deteriorating areas than do whites (Massey and Denton, 1993); blacks also face discrimination by employers (Pager, 2003) and they have fewer chances to develop social ties with gatekeepers and institutional agents who could help them gain access to job opportunities (Royster, 2003). We believe that owing to these conditions, education is more of a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for success for blacks than it is for whites.

In fact, research shows that education plays a larger role in blacks' occupational success than it does in whites'. Education and other formal measures of human capital (such as work experience and job tenure) matter more for blacks' ability to obtain promotions and job authority and to enter high-status occupations than they do for whites (Wilson, 1997; Wilson,

Sakura-Lemessy, and West, 1999). In other words, education is the primary avenue of status attainment for blacks to a degree greater than it is for whites.

Since education is more or less blacks' sole route to achieving the American Dream, they arguably are more willing to express pro-school values. Indeed, research on adolescents' attitudes toward school show that black students are more likely to say that schooling is necessary for future success and praise their teachers. Black students are also less likely to endorse cheating and breaking rules than are white students (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998; Mickelson, 1990). It would not be surprising if these sentiments are carried over among adults, producing a black-white gap in confidence in education.

We test this hypothesis by using an insight from Hochschild's (1995) research on racial differences in attitudes toward the American Dream. Hochschild (1995) finds that middle-class blacks are much more pessimistic than working-class blacks about African-Americans' chances of achieving success in the United States and are more likely to believe that racial discrimination is prevalent. Hochschild (1995) argues that this is a result of middle-class blacks being close to obtaining high-status positions of power and authority, but seeing these denied to them. If middle-class blacks are skeptical of the fairness and openness of U.S. institutions, then perhaps they also realize that educational success is a far-from-sufficient guarantee of occupational success. Consequently, middle-class blacks are less confident in education than working-class blacks. We argue that the particularistic mobility thesis should be reflected in success among blacks producing greater skepticism in education. In particular, education and income have negative effects on the confidence in education, and these negative effects should be stronger for African Americans.

The Racial Politics of Education. Henig and his colleagues (1999) and Orr (1999) argue that the history of racism in the United States potentially makes school reform very contentious in urban areas with large black populations. According to Stone et al. (2001:137), schools in cities represent "bundles of material benefits—jobs, contracts, and career ladders," and school reform attempts have been read as threats to the livelihoods of black employees of school systems. Extrapolating from this argument, one could read black confidence in education as a defensive posture, a rationale for avoiding school reforms that potentially adversely affect black employees of school systems. Empirically testing this proposition is difficult; in this study we attempt to do so in two ways. First, we control for the respondent's metropolitan status and whether or not the respondent works (or has a spouse who works) in primary and secondary education; second, we test to see if the black-white gap is increased among city residents or among respondents who are employed by schools.

Could the Black-White Gap Have Changed Since the 1970s?

Developments in educational policy and law lead us to suspect that the black-white gap in the 1970s may have changed since then. The major educational policy development expected to increase African-American skepticism about education is the retrenchment of desegregation efforts. In the 1970s, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to mandate desegregation plans that crossed municipal boundaries, which stymied efforts to integrate non-southern schools. In addition, starting in the 1980s, federal courts began restoring local control to southern school districts that had been previously ordered to desegregate their schools; the result, as Orfield, Eaton, and Harvard Project on School Desegregation (1996) have documented, was an increase in racial segregation within these school districts.

Currently, black students remain highly segregated from white students, and Orfield and Lee's (2006) research shows that if anything, segregation has slightly increased over the 1990s. These trends have been coupled with greater public recognition of the existence of segregation and inequalities in school conditions, as exemplified by Kozol's (1991) book *Savage Inequalities*. Educational reformers have also highlighted inequalities in school resources, conditions, and practices—voucher advocates have recently been building their case on the premise that urban public schools are poorly serving minority students (Moe, 2001).

Assuming that blacks pay attention to these trends, their confidence in education may be adversely affected over time, much more so than that of whites. The result would be a decrease in the black-white gap in confidence in education.

It is also plausible that the black-white gap will not monotonically change over time, but will wax and wane according to developments at the national level. One key development is shifts in party control of the executive branch of the U.S. government. Research shows that Americans' trust and confidence in federal government actually reflects evaluations of the incumbents and the party in charge of the machinery of the state (Citrin, 1974; Keele, 2005). We argue, first, that while public schools are controlled and funded by localities, the federal government (in particular, the executive branch) has played an important role in educational policy, both substantively and symbolically. Second, given the important federal role in education, blacks and whites will react differently to a Democrat or Republican presidential administration, and the racial gap in confidence in education will change when party control of the White House changes.

The federal government contributes only a small fraction (around 7 percent) of the money used by primary and secondary schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005), but it has played an important role in public schools in the last half of the 20th century. In 1957, President Eisenhower sent federal troops to help black students attend a white-dominated high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. In the 1960s, the federal governments used

its educational funding to force southern school systems to comply with desegregation court orders (Orfield, Eaton, and Harvard Project on School Desegregation, 1996). Moreover, the federal government has often set the agenda for educational politics. The *Nation at Risk* report was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education and made educational excellence and standards a visible issue in the 1980s. The second Bush Administration made accountability measures a salient aspect of education reform in the 2000s.

Since the federal government has played a key role in the development of education in recent decades, white and black Americans may react differently to Democrat or Republican control of the White House. Democratic administrations more often attempt to address inequalities in educational resources and access that would likely appeal to African Americans. For example, the Clinton Administration dramatically increased funding for Head Start, increased schools' access to the Internet, and renewed Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act to target resources at poor children's schools. Republican administrations, on the other hand, often prioritize procedural and organizational reforms to make schools more efficient producers of high-achieving students. The aforementioned *Nation at Risk* report was produced during the Reagan Administration and advocated higher curricular standards to improve student achievement. This focus carried over into the administration of George Bush Sr., whose "America 2000" agenda promoted national standards and accountability measures for schools. Republican administrations have been hostile to enforcing school desegregation (e.g., the Reagan Administration cut funds for school desegregation) and transformed categorical programs directed at poor students into block grants, which were often used by state and local officials for purposes other than addressing inequalities among students and schools (Orfield, Eaton, and Harvard Project on School Desegregation, 1996; Wong, 1999). We believe this approach would likely produce more alienation among African Americans from education and thus decrease their confidence in schools.

Other research indicates that black-white differences in trust in government also grow and shrink depending on which political party has the presidency. Blacks' trust in government tends to increase, and whites' tends to decrease, when a Democrat is president, and vice-versa when the Republicans are in control of the presidency (Ulbig, 2002). Miller and Borrelli (1991) also note that while there was a widespread drop in political trust during the mid-years of the Reagan Administration, the drop was particularly strong among blacks.

If blacks' and whites' trust in government is affected by the party that controls the presidency, it is possible that their confidence in education is also affected by who occupies the White House. Therefore, we hypothesize that the black-white differences in confidence in education will become larger when a Democrat is in the White House, and smaller when a Republican is president.

Data and Methods

Measures

This study uses the General Social Surveys (GSS) from 1974–2002.¹ We list our variables and their coding schema in Table 1. Our outcome of interest is respondent's confidence in education. The GSS asks respondents to report if they have a "great deal of confidence," "some confidence," or "hardly any confidence" in the people who are running the institution of education. We treat this variable as an ordinal variable and use ordered logit regression (Long, 1997) to model the determinants of confidence in education.

We measure race as a dummy indicator, where 1 is coded as black and 0 is coded as white. Respondents from other racial groups were dropped from the sample. We dropped respondents from other racial groups because for most of the years the GSS lumped together all of the nonwhite and nonblack racial groups into one "other" category, which ignores differences between those who self-identify as Hispanic, Asian, or American Indian.

We measure religious affiliation using Steensland et al.'s (2000) scheme, which is unique for distinguishing between mainline and evangelical Protestants, as well as between Catholics, Jews, the nonaffiliated, and people of other faith traditions. To account for the change in coding religious denominations that occurred after the 1983 survey, we include interaction terms between religious affiliation and a dummy indicator for whether the survey was collected in 1984 or later.

We account for the racial politics of schools explanation by controlling for whether or not the respondent worked in primary or secondary education, or had a spouse who did so (we also have an indicator for those respondents who had no information about the industry they worked in). We also control for the respondent's metropolitan status, to account for the possibility that schools pose more valuable material benefits in cities than in suburbs or rural areas.

Because the GSS asks respondents only if they have children, and not their children's ages, we tried to approximate whether or not the respondent had school-aged children by constructing a dummy variable, with 1 indicating the respondent having children and being less than 50 years old and 0 otherwise.

Education is a continuous variable, measured in years of schooling. Income is measured as the log of family income.² Political views are measured by asking respondents to place themselves on a seven-point scale ranging from "extremely liberal" (1) to "extremely conservative" (7). We control for

¹After listwise deletion, we end up with 25,760 respondents owing to missing cases.

²For respondents with missing values on this variable, we use the impute command in Stata to impute values of logged income based on age, gender, race, education, employment status, year, and size of the respondent's firm (Schnittker, 2005).

TABLE 1
Variables in Analyses and Coding Schema

Variables	Coding Schema	Min	Max
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
Confidence in education	1 = Hardly any; 2 = Some; 3 = Great deal	1	3
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Race	1 = Black; 0 = White	0	1
Education	Years of schooling completed	0	20
Income	Log of family income	5.73	12
Religion	Reference = mainline and black Protestants		
Evangelical Protestant	1 = Evangelical Protestant; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Catholic	1 = Catholic; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Jewish	1 = Jewish; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Other	1 = Other religion; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
None	1 = No religious belief; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Political party	Reference = Democrat		
Republican	1 = Republican; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Independent	1 = Independent; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Other	1 = Other Party; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Conservatism	Level of conservatism	1	7
Education employment	Reference = Respondent or spouse not working in education		
Education employment	1 = Respondent or spouse working in education; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Education employment—missing	1 = No information on industry; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Metropolitan status	Reference = Suburb		
Urban	1 = Urban; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Rural	1 = Rural; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Gender	1 = Female; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Parent	1 = Parent and < 50 years old; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Cohort	Reference = Born in 1910s		
Cohort 1910s	1 = Born in 1910s; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Cohort 1920s	1 = Born in 1920s; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Cohort 1930s	1 = Born in 1930s; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Cohort 1940s	1 = Born in 1940s; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Cohort 1950s	1 = Born in 1950s; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Cohort 1960s	1 = Born in 1960s; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Cohort 1970s–1980s	1 = Born during or after 1970s; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Region	Reference = West		
North	1 = North; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Midwest	1 = Midwest; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
South	1 = South; 0 = Otherwise	0	1
Year indicators	Reference = 1974	0	1

age with a series of dummy variables indicating the decade the respondent was born (the reference category is the 1900s); for region with dummy variables for the North, South, and Midwest (the West is the reference category); and for party affiliation with dummy variables for being a Republican, independent, or member of an unspecified party (being a Democrat is the reference category). A dummy indicator measures gender, with 1 denoting female and 0 otherwise.³

Methods

This study proceeds in three steps. First, we graph blacks' and whites' confidence in education from 1974 to 2002. Second, we use multivariate ordered logit models (Long, 1997) to see what factors mediate the effects of race on confidence in education. Our analyses show that blacks have consistently reported more confidence in education than have whites for all but a few years in the GSS data, so we approach our analyses with the goal of explaining why blacks are more likely to be confident in education than whites. In the third step, we explore and model time trends in the white-black gap in confidence in education.

Results

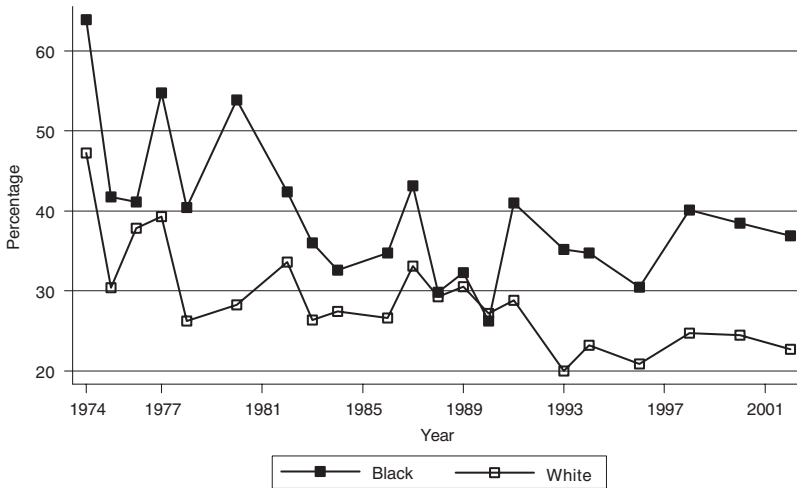
Figure 1 shows the raw percentages of black and white respondents who said they had a "great deal" of confidence in education, from 1974 to 2002. There is a lot of fluctuation, but the percentages indicate that both blacks' and whites' confidence declined over time. In most years, the percentage of blacks having a great deal of confidence is larger than the percentage of whites by a significant margin. The notable exceptions are 1976, 1988, 1989, and 1990 when blacks and whites are equally likely to say they have a great deal of confidence. There is no year where a substantially larger percentage of whites than blacks say they had a great deal of confidence. For the entire pooled sample, 40 percent of blacks say they had a great deal of confidence, compared to 29 percent of whites. These results extend Lipset and Schneider's (1987) finding that in the 1970s blacks had greater confidence in education than whites. Our analyses show that this pattern has been occurring well after the 1970s.

Table 2 shows ordered logit models for confidence in education for the pooled sample of 1974–2002 surveys. Model 1 includes a binary indicator

³It could be argued that confidence in education is a function of confidence in other governmental institutions, such as Congress and the presidency. The GSS contains measures like these, but we do not control for confidence in these other institutions because of the possibility of reverse causation. In models not presented, we did control for confidence in government and many of the results are similar to the ones presented here.

FIGURE 1A

Observed Trends in Having Great Deal of Confidence in Education
(GSS 1974–2002)

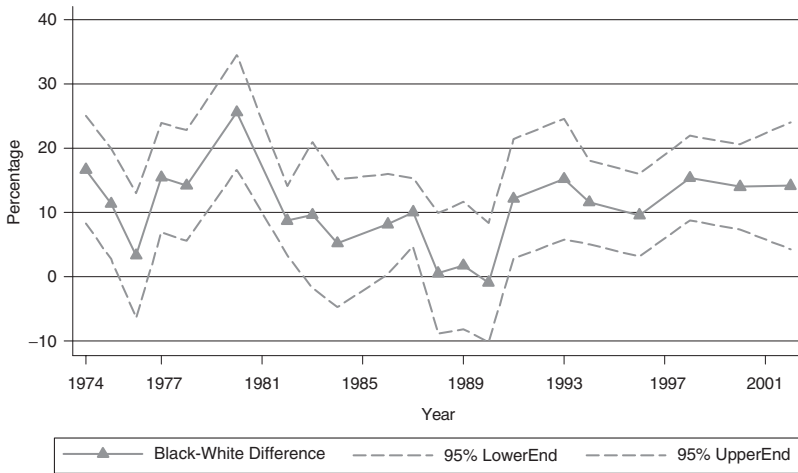


for race and dummy variables for each year of the GSS; Model 2 adds basic demographic variables, including gender, parental status, region, cohort; metropolitan location; and industry. Models 3–5 introduce the mediators separately.

The effect of race in Model 1 is the raw black-white difference for the entire pooled sample. The logit coefficient for “black” is 0.43, representing the tendency of African Americans to have higher confidence in schools than whites. Introducing control variables in Model 2 does nothing to reduce the racial gap; in fact, the logit coefficient increases to 0.46. Contrary to our expectations, city-dwellers are not any more likely to express confidence in schools than are suburban residents (in fact, rural residents express the most confidence in education). Not surprisingly, people who work in elementary/secondary schools (or have a spouse who does so) are more likely to express confidence in education. After we account for racial differences in metropolitan location and educational employment, however, the racial gap not only persists, but in fact increases.

In Model 3, we control for education and income, and the effect of race (net of controls) is reduced by 11 percent to 0.41. The results show that the highly-educated and high-income respondents are less likely to express confidence in education (although the effect of education is not significant). The reduction in the effect of race indicates that part of the racial gap in confidence can be explained by the fact that African Americans are less likely to have high levels of education and income than are whites.

FIGURE 1B
 Observed Racial Differences in Having Great Deal of Confidence
 (GSS 1974–2002)



In Model 4, we look at the effects of religion. Because the GSS used a new measure of religious denomination in 1984, we present two sets of coefficients for religious affiliation. The main effects represent religious differences in confidence for the years 1974–1983. Contrary to our expectations, we see that evangelical Protestants are no less confident in education than mainline Protestants in this time period. To see the effects of religion in the 1984–2002 period, one must add the interaction effect to the corresponding main effect. So, evangelical Protestants (surveyed after 1984) are 0.15 logits ($-0.16 + 0.01$) less likely to express confidence in education than are mainline Protestants. However, Model 4 shows that religious affiliation does not explain the racial gap in confidence in education—the effect of race in Model 2 (0.46) is decreased by only 0.03 logits in Model 4.

Accounting for political differences between whites and blacks (in Model 5 of Table 2) does reduce the racial gap in Model 2 by 15 percent. Republicans and conservatives (who are disproportionately white) are significantly less likely to express confidence in schools. Finally, in Model 6, we control for all the mediators considered here. The black-white gap decreases to 0.31, a 33 percent reduction from the racial gap in Model 2.

In Model 7, we control for all mediators and include interactions between, on the one hand, race, and on the other, income and education, to test the particularistic mobility thesis. The results show that while income has the same effects for blacks and whites, education has a significantly more negative effect for blacks than for whites (only the interaction between race

TABLE 2
Ordered Logit Model for Confidence in Education (1974–2002 GSS Surveys; $N = 25,760$)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Black	00.43*** (0.04)	0.46*** (0.04)	0.41*** (0.04)	0.43*** (0.04)	0.39*** (0.04)	0.31*** (0.05)	1.24** (0.38)	0.93* (0.41)
Metropolitan location (Reference = Suburb)								
City		-0.01 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)
Rural		0.20*** (0.03)	0.17*** (0.04)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.17*** (0.03)	0.17*** (0.03)	0.17*** (0.03)
Education employment		0.14** (0.04)	0.18*** (0.04)	0.13** (0.04)	0.13** (0.04)	0.16*** (0.04)	0.16*** (0.04)	0.17*** (0.05)
Education employment—missing		0.30*** (0.07)	0.24** (0.08)	0.30*** (0.07)	0.30*** (0.07)	0.24** (0.08)	0.24** (0.07)	0.15 (0.09)
Education			-0.01 (0.01)			-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Log income			-0.08*** (0.02)			-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)
Religion (Reference = Mainline Protestant)								
Evangelical Protestant				0.01 (0.05)		-0.01 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)
Catholic				0.05 (0.05)		0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)
Jewish				-0.44*** (0.12)		-0.47*** (0.12)	-0.48*** (0.12)	-0.47*** (0.12)

TABLE 2—continued

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Other				-0.29* (0.12)		-0.28* (0.12)	-0.27* (0.12)	-0.27* (0.12)
Nonaffiliated				-0.44*** (0.08)		-0.47*** (0.08)	-0.46*** (0.08)	-0.46*** (0.08)
Evan. Prot. × 1984–2002				-0.16* (0.07)		-0.14* (0.07)	-0.15* (0.07)	-0.15* (0.07)
Catholic × 1984–2002				-0.02 (0.07)		-0.00 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.07)
Jewish × 1984–2002				0.35* (0.16)		0.36* (0.16)	0.34* (0.16)	0.34* (0.16)
Other × 1984–2002				0.13 (0.14)		0.14 (0.14)	0.13 (0.14)	0.13 (0.14)
Nonaffiliated × 1984–2002				0.23* (0.09)		0.23* (0.09)	0.22* (0.09)	0.22* (0.09)
Political party (Reference = Democrat)								
Independent					-0.21*** (0.03)	-0.19*** (0.03)	-0.19*** (0.03)	-0.19*** (0.03)
Republican					-0.12*** (0.03)	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.11** (0.03)	-0.11** (0.03)
Other					-0.48*** (0.13)	-0.43*** (0.13)	-0.43*** (0.13)	-0.43*** (0.13)
Conservatism					-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Black × Education							-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)
Black × Income							-0.03 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)

TABLE 2—continued

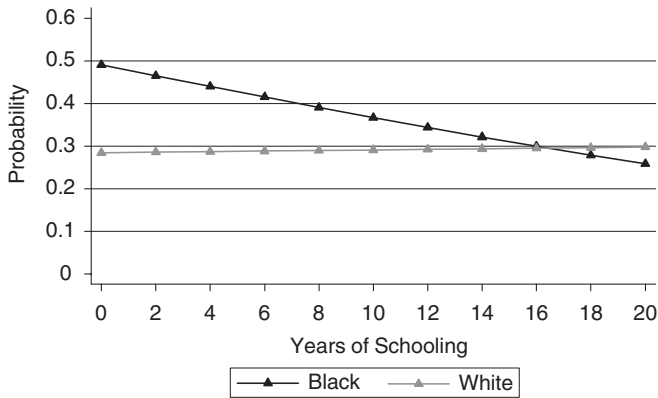
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Black × City								0.15 (0.11)
Black × Rural								0.03 (0.11)
Black × Education employment								-0.08 (0.14)
Black × Education employment—missing								0.39* (0.17)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

NOTES: Coefficients are ordered logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. Controls include gender, parental status, cohort, region, and year indicator variables.

FIGURE 2

Effect of Respondent Education on Having Great Deal of Confidence in Education
(GSS 1974–2002)



and education is significant). The main effect of education represents the effect for whites; since the effect is nonsignificant, we conclude that education has no bearing on whites' confidence in education. However, the negative interaction term with race means that a highly educated black individual tends to have less confidence in education than an African American with a lower level of education.

To make the interpretation of the race interactions more clear, we graph the effects of education for whites and blacks in Figure 2, based on a regression for all the years spanning 1974–2002. The graph shows the percent of blacks and whites who report having a “great deal” of confidence in education. Figure 2 shows that the black-white gap is nonexistent at very high levels of schooling (16 years or higher), but as education decreases the racial gap grows. Black high school graduates, for example, have around a 0.34 probability of saying one has a great deal of confidence, while white high school graduates have a 0.29 probability of doing so. This figure also shows that education has virtually no effect on confidence for whites, but has a negative effect for blacks—as education decreases, so does the probability of saying one has a great deal of confidence in education. The pattern of blacks having more confidence in education than whites is more or less confined to respondents without a college degree. Among respondents who continued their education beyond 16 years (i.e., postbaccalaureate levels of education), blacks express slightly *less* confidence in schools than whites.

One could also interpret the race and education interaction through the prism of the racial politics of school reform argument. According to this argument, less-educated blacks are more likely to express confidence in schools because they are more likely to be employed by schools (or the public sector in general) and are really just expressing defensiveness about

their schools. As noted, this could especially be the case in central cities where elementary and secondary schools are a major source of jobs. The implication is that it is not so much an interaction between race and education, but interactions between race, on the one hand, and education employment and metropolitan location on the other. In other words, the racial gap in confidence is largest among respondents who work in education (or have a spouse who does so) and among respondents who live in cities. Model 8 in Table 2 tests this possibility, and the results do not support these alternative explanations at all. The interaction effect between race and education is largely unaffected by including interactions between race, industry, and metropolitan location, and the racial gap in confidence remains the same regardless of metropolitan location or industry.

So far, we have been trying to explain why race affects confidence in education by using the pooled cross-sections of the General Social Survey. We now turn our attention to modeling how the racial disparities vary over time. We hypothesized that blacks' confidence in schools would decline over time, given the persistence of racial inequalities in schools, and result in a smaller racial gap than that existing in the 1970s. Although Figure 1 gives no evidence for a decreasing black-white gap over time, it does support our other hypothesis regarding change over time. That is, the racial gap decreases during Republican administrations, with the notable exception of the year 1974, when Nixon was in the White House and African-American confidence in education was very high. We see that the gap shrinks in 1976, when Ford was president, from 0.18 to 0.03. The gap increases from 1977 to 1980, when the Democrat Jimmy Carter occupied the White House. The gap then drops during the Reagan and Bush years, fluctuating between -0.01 and 0.11 . During the Clinton Administration, the black-white gap wavers around 0.15 and decreases slightly in 2002, the only year in our data when George W. Bush was president.

We model this pattern by measuring time as a series of indicators for presidential administration (the reference group is for the Nixon Administration). To capture the interaction between race and time, we used a dummy variable for whether or not the respondent was black and the GSS survey took place during a Republican presidency (the variable took on a value of 1 if the respondent was black and surveyed during a Republican presidency, and 0 if the respondent was either white or surveyed during a Democratic presidency).⁴ In concrete terms, we model how confidence in education changes across presidential administrations, and how the racial gap varies according to whether the president is a Republican or a Democrat. The model includes controls for race, education, income, party affiliation,

⁴In these models, we dropped the dummy indicators for each year. Model-fit statistics suggest that year indicators produce a worse model fit than indicators for presidential administration (results of alternative time specifications are available on request from the authors).

TABLE 3

Ordered Logit Model for Confidence in Education (1974–2002 GSS Surveys;
N = 25,760)

Variables	Coefficient
Black	0.47*** (0.06)
Presidential Administration (Reference = Nixon)	
Ford	– 0.64*** (0.07)
Carter	– 0.66*** (0.06)
Reagan	– 0.67*** (0.07)
Bush Senior	– 0.76*** (0.07)
Clinton	– 1.11*** (0.07)
Bush Junior	– 1.06*** (0.10)
Black × Republican administration	– 0.28*** (0.08)

*** $p < 0.001$.

NOTES: Coefficients are ordered logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. Model includes controls for gender, parental status, cohort, region, metropolitan location, education employment, education, income, conservatism, party affiliation, and religion.

political views, religion (we let the effect of religion differ between the 1974–1983 and 1984–2000 periods), gender, region, parental status, and cohort.

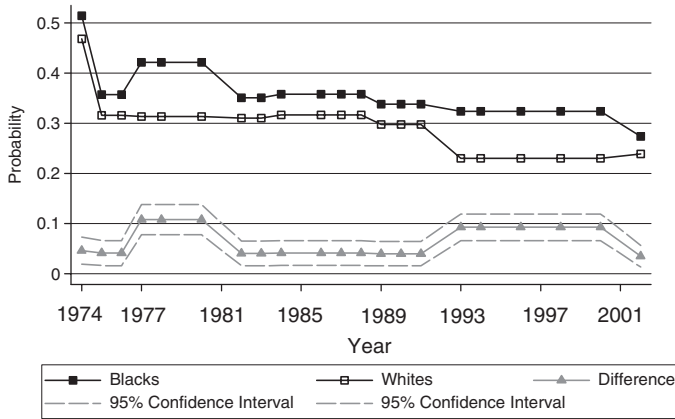
Table 3 presents the coefficients for the effects of race and time. Looking at the effects of time, the results show that confidence in education plummeted after 1974 (when Nixon was in power)—all the indicators for the post-Nixon administrations are negative and significant. After Nixon, confidence in education dropped but remained stable throughout the presidential terms of Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush Sr., and again dipped down during the Clinton Administration and remained low afterward (the negative coefficients for Clinton and Bush Jr. are much larger in magnitude than the ones for Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush Sr.).

The coefficient for black is 0.47, which represents the black-white gap during Democratic presidential administrations. The interaction term between black and Republican administration is -0.28 and statistically significant, which means that the racial difference is smaller during Republican administrations than during Democratic ones.

To make the time trend more concrete, we graphed (in Figure 3) the predicted probabilities of blacks and whites for having a great deal of confidence in education based on this model, for every year in the data.

FIGURE 3

Predicted Trends in Having Great Deal of Confidence in Education
(GSS 1974–2002)



NOTE: Trend calculated from model presented in Table 3.

We also used the delta method to construct confidence bands for the differences in the predicted probabilities (Xu and Long, 2005). It is striking that even though we controlled for a variety of factors—including conservatism and party affiliation—the black-white gap widens substantially during the presidential tenures of Democrats Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Democratic presidents appear to boost blacks' confidence in education (or prevent further drops in blacks' confidence) but also discourage whites about education.

Discussion and Conclusion

The finding that blacks have more confidence in education than whites may be counterintuitive to some observers, since research shows that blacks are more skeptical of the fairness of the U.S. society and economy (Hochschild, 1995; Kluegel and Smith, 1986) and black students tend to do worse in school than white students (Jencks and Phillips, 1998). In addition, there has been a longstanding research tradition arguing that African-American students espouse and act on anti-academic values (Ogbu, 1978). Our research attempted to explain this black-white gap and to show that it is contingent on broad, society-wide political factors.

First, we show that education, income, religion, party affiliation, and political views go some way to explaining the racial gap. White Americans tend to have higher levels of income, conservatism, and tend to be Repub-

licans and evangelical Protestants—all traits that are correlated with lower levels of confidence in education.

Second, we show that the gap diminishes at higher levels of education, and is completely nonexistent among individuals with a college education. We argue that this supports the particularistic mobility thesis, which argues that black mobility into high-paying, upper-tier jobs is dependent on education to a much greater degree than is white occupational mobility. Black confidence in education reflects the fact that education is largely a *necessary* precondition for the success of blacks. Since less-educated blacks are more likely to experience racial segregation at home, in schools, and at work than are highly-educated blacks, they may be unaware of the structural barriers that stand in the way of their success (Royster, 2003). Highly-educated blacks, who are more likely to interact with whites and observe their opportunities being blocked, realize that education is not in itself a *sufficient* precondition for success, and thus may be more skeptical of the institution of education.

An alternative point of view would argue that blacks' confidence in education reflects a sort of defensive complacency—African Americans feel compelled to defend their schools either because they are run by African-American officials or because they see these schools as a source of jobs. This interpretation could explain the finding that less-educated African Americans are more confident in schools than either (1) less-educated whites or (2) college-educated blacks if less-educated blacks are more likely to live in cities with large black populations or more likely to be employed by schools. The results of our findings lead us to be tentatively skeptical of this interpretation. Racial differences in education employment and in metropolitan location do not explain the black-white gap; the racial gap is independent of metropolitan location and educational employment. Future research could test this argument more thoroughly than we did by examining African-American attitudes toward black governance or examining the effects of the racial composition of the locales where respondents live.

Our final conclusion is that the racial gap in confidence in education is contingent on the political party in charge of the presidency. Whites' confidence in education decreases, relative to blacks', when a Democrat is in charge of the presidency. We speculate that this could be because Republican administrations have tended to focus on issues of educational efficiency rather than equity, which would probably be more appealing to whites than to blacks, and Republican administrations have de-emphasized the enforcement of desegregation orders, which would probably alienate blacks. McGuinn (2005) argues that during the Clinton Administration the educational policies of the Democrats and Republicans converged, with the former adopting accountability measures and the later moving toward equity measures such as increased federal funding targeted at schools serving poor students, a convergence that persisted into the administration of George W. Bush. Although it may be too early to detect the effects of this convergence,

our results suggest that the racial gap changed during the Clinton Administration as it had in the previous Democratic administration—it grew larger, with white confidence decreasing and black confidence remaining steady. The decline in white confidence could be due to the increased prominence of equity measures in the Clinton Administration (over the educational policies of the Reagan and Bush I Administrations) or, as one reviewer suggested, it could be due to the increased bipartisan attention to school problems.

Ironically, while our study confirms the finding that blacks tend to have greater confidence in education throughout the 1974–2002 period, research from the 1990s and 2000s shows that black Americans are more likely than whites to support efforts that would radically transform public schooling, such as vouchers, a reform often proposed by those who say schools serving black children are failing (Moe, 2001). We believe that the insights of the particularistic mobility thesis can explain this paradox. Since education is more important for a black individual's success than for a white individual, blacks will express more confidence in schools and support efforts that ostensibly improve the quality of education. In other words, we believe that our results suggest that blacks who support vouchers view them primarily as a way to improve education for children, and not necessarily as a solution to problems in schools. Moe (2001) notes that major organizations that speak on behalf of blacks, such as the NAACP, are not very enthusiastic about vouchers. We suspect that if blacks' confidence in schools decreases further, African Americans will come to view vouchers as a way to solve problems with schools (correctly or not), and pressure organizations that speak in their name to advocate on behalf of vouchers. There are signs that this already occurring, given the recent trend of a few small black groups allying with conservatives to push for vouchers (Moe, 2001).

Our results show that the black-white gap in confidence in education fluctuates, yet is also persistent, throughout the 1974–2002 time period. If the gap persists (as we believe it will), social scientists and policymakers will need to pay attention to its consequences for support for drastic school reforms as well as for the civic involvement necessary for school reforms to succeed.

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