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Melissa Harris-Lacewell and Bethany Albertson

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GOOD TIMES? Understanding African American Misperceptions of Racial Economic Fortunes

MELISSA HARRIS-LACEWELL
BETHANY ALBERTSON
University of Chicago

In the year 2000, nearly 30% of African American respondents to a national survey expressed the belief that Blacks are doing better economically than Whites. There is no evidence to suggest that African Americans are in a better economic position than Whites. Striking gaps in income, employment, and wealth continue to distinguish Black economic reality. Why, then, did some African Americans misperceive racial economic fortunes in the late 90s? This article explores the possibility that the answer lies, in part, with Black attitudes toward Bill Clinton. This study uses measures of Black public opinion toward economic issues in five different surveys from 1984 to 2000. Using data drawn from these five surveys, we explore African American perceptions of personal economic situation, racial economic well-being, national economic improvement, and the comparison in economic position of the racial groups and ask why some African Americans misperceive these realities.

Keywords: economic attitudes; President Clinton; race and politics

A hopeful African American electoral coalition was at the core of Bill Clinton's successful bids for the presidency in both 1992 and 1996. Clinton's first victory was only the second time in three decades that the presidential candidate overwhelmingly supported by African Americans secured the White House. It marked the end of the Reagan/Bush era, an epoch when African Americans had endured bitter political defeats and harsh economic times. Clinton's inaugural song encouraged citizens, "Don't stop thinking about

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tomorrow,” and the inaugural verse, penned by renowned African American poet Maya Angelou, reinforced a message of fervent anticipation (Carnoy, 1994; Farley, 1984). In many ways, the scandal-marred, deeply partisan years of the Clinton administration proved disappointing in the face of such early optimism. In other ways, the 90s delivered on the promise of a better future, most dramatically in terms of the national economy. Clinton’s campaign war room reminded workers that “it’s the economy stupid” and by the close of his first term, economic indicators, expert analysts, and lay observers agreed that the national economy was experiencing a robust period of recovery and expansion. African Americans were among Clinton’s strongest supporters throughout his two terms in office and were among those who believed that his administration ushered in economic good times. This faith in the economic buoyancy of the Clinton era is reflected in the economic attitudes expressed by African Americans in public opinion surveys during the 90s (“Blacks Give President Clinton Most Credit,” 1998).

This article assesses a striking trend in the Black public opinion studies of the past two decades: An increasing percentage of African Americans believe that Blacks are doing better economically than Whites. From the mid-80s to the turn of the new century, African Americans increasingly believed that their personal economic situation, that of the race, and that of the nation had improved. A larger percentage of African Americans also believed that Blacks are not just doing better economically but that they are doing better than Whites. In the 80s, barely 5% of Blacks believed Blacks were economically better off than Whites. In the year 2000, nearly 30% of African American respondents to a national public opinion survey expressed the belief that, on the whole, Blacks are doing better economically than Whites. There is no empirical evidence to suggest that African Americans are in a better economic position than Whites at any time in American history, including at present. In fact, striking gaps in income, employment, and wealth continue to distinguish Black economic reality in the United States. Why, then, did some African Americans misperceive racial economic fortunes so radically in the late 90s? This article explores the possibility that the answer lies, in part, with Black attitudes toward Clinton.

Among the most important contemporary trends marking African American public opinion is the persistent gulf in attitudes between Blacks and Whites and the shift from significant animosity toward Presidents Reagan and Bush to the popularity of and electoral support for President Clinton. Perhaps the most comprehensive study of change in U.S. racial attitudes, Schuman, Steeth, and Bobo's (1985) *Racial Attitudes in America* uncovers a significant and persistent gap in contemporary attitudes of White and Black Americans. They find

large differences in the perspectives of blacks and whites about the causes of black disadvantage. Blacks emphasize continuing discrimination; whites stress low motivation on the part of blacks. This disagreement in perceptions of causality sets the stage for many other differences. (Schuman, Steeth, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997, p. 275)

Blacks continue to support affirmative action, school integration, preferential hiring, open housing laws, and a number of other racial policies at levels far exceeding that of Whites. An increase in White support for certain race-targeted government policies and a slight attenuation in Black support for these same policies has led to a marginal narrowing of the gap between Black and White attitudes in the 90s; however, the racial gulf in public opinion persists (Bobo & Kluegel, 1997; Shipler, 1997; Sigelman & Welch, 1991).

The racial gap in public opinion is equally deep around attitudes toward the presidents. African American animosity toward Presidents Reagan and Bush, who were well liked by most Whites, was a salient feature of Black public opinion throughout the 80s (Barker, 1989; Dawson, 1994; Dawson, Brown, & Cohen, 1990; Tate, 1994; Walters, 1989). Black respondents to national surveys in the 80s reported very cool affect toward Presidents Reagan and Bush. When asked to rate their warmth toward Reagan on a scale from 0 to 100, Black respondents averaged a rating of 29 points toward Reagan in 1984. Michael Dawson's 1994 text on contemporary Black politics finds that "having consistently bypassed and denounced the recognized leadership of the black community, [Reagan] was viewed as extraordinarily hostile to black aspirations" (p. 117). In a 1984 volume on Blacks in America, Pinkney

went as far as to argue that “the Reagan administration has given increased impetus to the conservative movement in the United States, ranging from such neofascist groups as the Ku Klux Klan to the Moral majority” (p. 178). Although initially somewhat more warmly received than Reagan, Bush ultimately fared poorly within Black public opinion. In 1988, Bush averaged a feeling thermometer score of only 37 points among African Americans.

Black attitudes toward Clinton were quite different. In 1993, Black respondents averaged a 67 feeling thermometer rating toward Clinton. By 1996, the average warmth climbed to 76 points. The 1996 rating is the first time in national Black public opinion studies that the mean feeling thermometer score for the sitting president (76) eclipsed the average feeling thermometer score for Jesse Jackson (70). In 2000, Black respondents reported an average warmth toward Clinton of 79 points. African Americans in the 80s existed in a political environment dominated by despised presidential figures. In the 90s, the political landscape changed for African Americans in this regard.

How are these trends related to changes in Black economic attitudes? The analysis below demonstrates that as African Americans celebrated the victory of having a friend in the White House, their perception of economic fortunes changed radically. Those who felt most optimistic about economic and political fortunes are those most likely to misperceive the relative economic position of African Americans compared to Whites.

Over the past two decades, several national surveys have asked African Americans to assess the relative economic position of Blacks and Whites. This study uses measures of Black public opinion toward economic issues in five different surveys from 1984 to 2000. The five studies used in the analysis are the 1984 and 1988 National Black Election Studies,¹ the 1993-1994 National Black Politics Study,² the 1996 National Black Election Study,³ and the 2000 DuBois Institute/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture (CSRPC) Study.⁴ Using data drawn from these five surveys, we explore African American perceptions of personal economic situation, racial economic well-being, national economic improvement, and most important, the comparison in economic

position of the racial groups, and we ask why some African Americans misperceive these realities.

TRENDS IN ECONOMIC ATTITUDES

Much political science scholarship has focused on the role of economic indicators and attitudes in candidate preferences and voting in American elections. This work has been largely concerned with linking economic attitudes to aggregate election outcomes or presidential approval. Kinder and Kiewiet (1979), Fiorina (1978, 1981), Lewis-Beck (1988), and MacKuen et al. (1992) are all concerned with the ways that economic judgments shape citizens' electoral preferences. Kinder and Kiewiet (1979) uncovered the power of retrospective, sociotropic, economic assessments in guiding congressional voting behavior. Fiorina (1981) found that voters can use their personal economic situation to make reasonable predictions about their potential well-being under competing candidates. MacKuen et al. (1992) demonstrate that, in the aggregate, standard economic indicators and perceptions of national economic health are central to assessments of presidential job performance only as they are mediated by citizens' economic expectations. Other researchers are interested in assessing the accuracy of economic attitudes and determining what forces influence correct or erroneous perceptions of the economy. Haller and Norpoth (1994) discuss the role of economic expectations in determining voting behavior. They demonstrate that "boom times correspond with rosy outlooks, recessions with gloomy ones" (p. 631). They also find evidence supporting the public's ability to predict with some sophistication the general economic conditions of the country. Duch, Palmer, and Anderson (2000) make a strong case that variation in citizens' evaluations of the national economy are systematically related to information, personal financial experiences, and partisan attachments.

Most closely linked to the concerns of this article is the work by Hibbs (1979) demonstrating the importance of rate of change in macroeconomic conditions to citizen aversion to inflation and

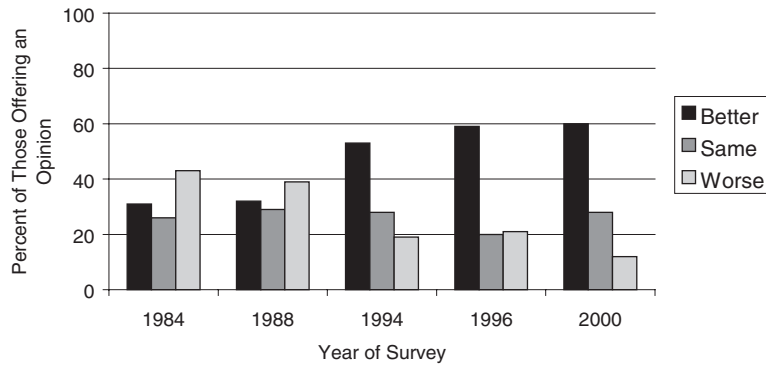


FIGURE 1 Assessment of African American Household Economic Positions

unemployment. The dynamics Hibbs reveals in public opinion are related to subjective and psychological factors rather than to objective realities. In discussing the pattern of attitudes about unemployment and inflation, Hibbs concludes that “there is considerable confusion in the mass public about the relative costs of inflation” (p. 715). This confusion concerns Hibbs because an overemphasis on inflation could negatively affect support for expansionist policies necessary to address unemployment, which exacts more real costs on consumers. Hibbs is interested in the mistakes that the public sometimes makes in assessing economic realities. We are also interested in a mistaken economic perception made by an increasing percentage of African Americans during the Clinton years.

There is a clear trend visible in the economic assessment questions across the period 1984 to 2000 (see Appendix). In each study, more African Americans assess their family’s economic position as having improved over the previous year. Figure 1 demonstrates that from 1984 to 2000, the percentage of African American respondents who believed that their economic position had improved in the past year nearly doubled from about 31% to about 60%. In that

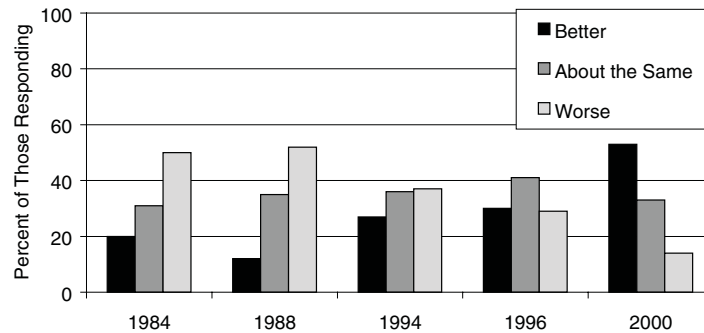


FIGURE 2 Assessment of National Economy Among African Americans

same time, the percentage who believed their family was worse off declined from a high of more than 40% in 1984 to a low of 12% in 2000. During the years when Reagan and Bush occupied the White House, no more than a third of Black Americans believed that their own household was economically better off than in the previous year. Within 2 years of Clinton taking office, nearly half of Black respondents perceived an improvement in their household economic situation and by the end of Clinton's tenure, a strong majority believed themselves to be better off.

Among Black Americans, perceptions of the national economy follow a similar trend. As Figure 2 demonstrates, between 1984 and 2000, there is a steady increase in the percentage of African Americans who believe the economy is doing better than in the previous year. The number of respondents believing that the economy had improved over the past year increased from about a third to nearly 60%. Those believing the economy was doing worse declined from more than 40% to only 14% in the same time period. For African Americans, a perception of a robust national economy mirrored closely the perception of improved personal fortunes.

Over the surveys, more African Americans believe that economic situations had improved for themselves and the country. They also believed that African Americans were doing well as a race. Between 1984 and 2000, a decreasing percentage of African

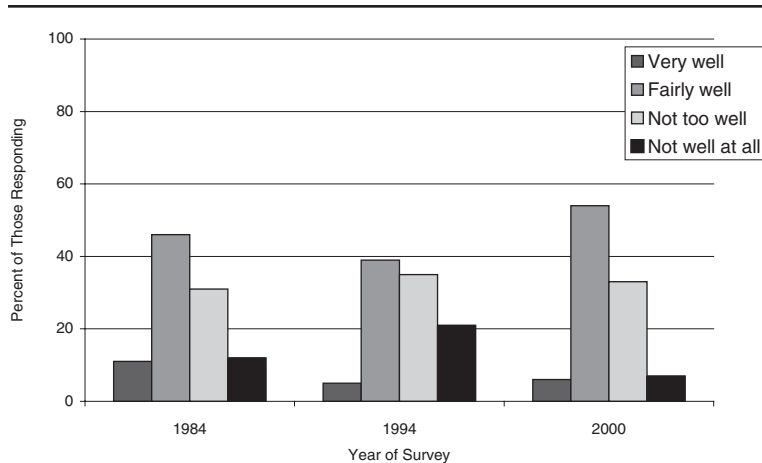


FIGURE 3 Assessment of How Blacks Are Doing Economically Among African Americans

NOTE: Not asked in 1988 and 1996 National Black Election Studies.

Americans believed that Blacks were doing not too well or not well at all, and by 2000, more than half of respondents believed that Blacks were doing very well or fairly well (see Figure 3).

For the most part, African Americans held an increasingly optimistic belief about the economic health of their families, race, and nation between 1984 and 2000. This trend was not entirely unique to African Americans. For some White Americans, the 90s ushered in perceived improvements in personal and national economic situations. Most of the surveys we use for this analysis are exclusively Black samples, so we look to the National Election Studies⁵ to assess White economic attitudes in these same years. Although a thorough investigation of White Americans' perceptions of racial differences in economic fortunes is beyond the scope of this article, it is interesting to note the trends in economic perceptions among Whites. White Americans' perceptions of both the national economy and their personal economic situation differ greatly according to partisanship. Figure 4 tracks the percentage of White Democrats, White Republicans, and African Americans in the National Election Studies samples who believe that the national economy has

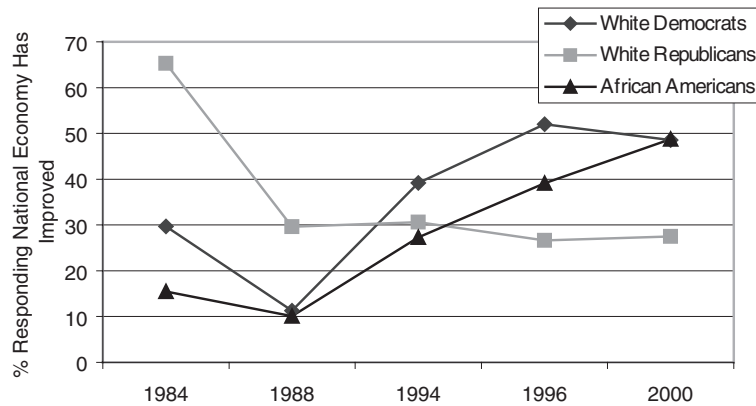


FIGURE 4 Belief That the National Economy Has Improved
 SOURCE: National Election Studies, 1984, 1988, 1994, 1996, 2000.

gotten better. White Republicans were very enthusiastic about the national economy in 1984, with 65% responding that the national economy had gotten better. Only 30% of White Democrats and 15% of African Americans agreed. Positive assessments of the national economy dropped for all three groups in 1988, but only White Republicans continued to have a gloomy economic outlook throughout the 90s. White Democrats and African Americans grew more enthusiastic about the national economy during the Clinton years.

Partisan differences are also important in White Americans' assessments of their personal economic situation. As in the case of the national economy, White Democrats' perceptions resemble African Americans' in their assessments of their personal economic fortunes. White Republicans were more likely to hold positive views in 1984 and 1988 but dropped below both White Democrats and African Americans in 1994, 1998, and 2000. Although the trends of White Democrats and African Americans are similar in both national and personal economic assessments, White Democrats offered more positive assessments of the national economy whereas African Americans offered more positive assessments of

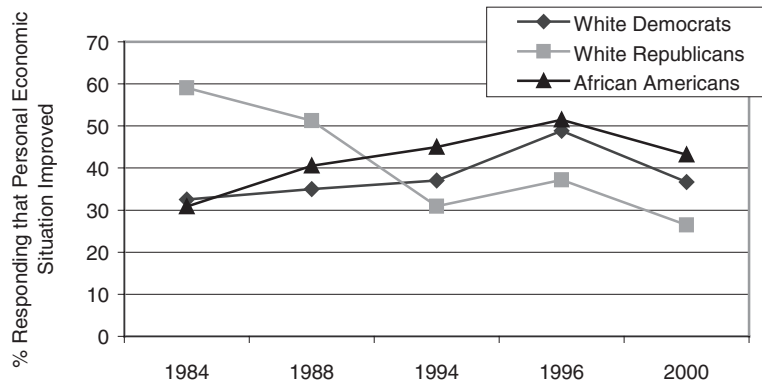


FIGURE 5 Belief That Personal Economic Situation Has Improved
 SOURCE: National Election Studies, 1984, 1988, 1994, 1996, 2000.

their personal economic situation during the Clinton years (see Figure 5).

Both White Democrats and African Americans perceived improvements in personal and national economics during the 90s, but the most intriguing trend in Black attitudes toward economic fortunes over this period is the stunning increase in the percentage of African American respondents who claim that Blacks are doing better than Whites economically and the attendant sharp decline in the percentage who think that Blacks are doing worse than Whites.⁶ Between 1984 and 1994, the percentage of African Americans who believed Blacks were doing better economically than Whites never rose above 7%. By 1996, however, nearly 10% of respondents perceived Black economic fortunes as superior to Whites, and by 2000, more than a quarter of Black respondents assessed African Americans as economically better off than Whites. Across these five surveys, there is an attendant decline in the percentage who perceive Blacks as doing worse than Whites. In 1984, nearly 65% of respondents felt that Blacks were worse off economically than Whites; this percentage declined to less than half (43%) by 2000 (see Figure 6).

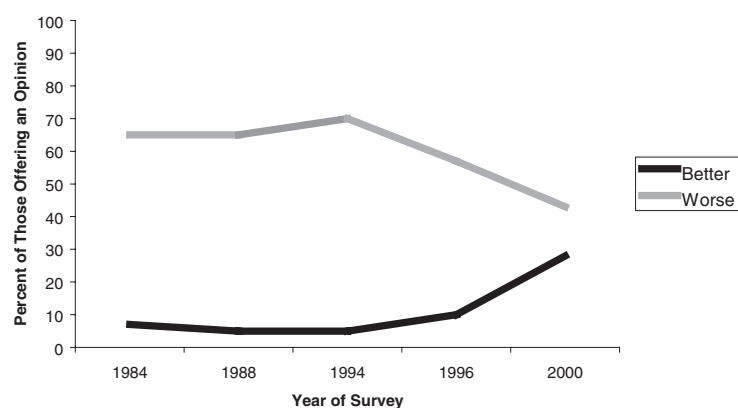


FIGURE 6 Assessment of Black Economic Position Relative to Whites

There is empirical evidence to provide at least qualified support for the perceptions of improved personal and national economic well-being reflected in these surveys. The annual inflation in consumer prices in 1980 was a staggering 12.4%. Throughout Reagan's tenure (1981-1989), it averaged 4.28%, and for Bush, the average annual inflation was 4.21%. Alternately, Clinton's two terms saw an average inflation of only 2.59%. When Reagan took office in January 1981, he inherited a 7.5% unemployment rate that climbed to nearly 11% by the end of 1982. When he left office in December 1988, the unemployment rate had declined to 5.3% and hovered there for most of Bush's tenure. Although Clinton's first term began with an unemployment rate of 6.4%, it declined to 3.9% by the end of his tenure in 2000. With inflation under control and unemployment declining, many Americans, including African Americans, perceived the 90s to be good times economically.

In 1999, *Newsweek* reported in "The Good News About Black America" (Cose, 1999) the increasing rates of Black employment, home ownership, educational proficiency, and college attendance. They also reported the improvement in other quality-of-life indicators such as a declining violent crime rate, a lower out-of-wedlock birth rate, and the lowest percentage of Black families living below the poverty line since 1967. This good news was attributed in part

to the “superheated economy that has been booming since April 1991” (Cose, 1999). There is some evidence that supports the notion that the 90s were particularly good for African Americans. In 1998, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that the economic highs of the 90s were particularly important for African Americans, whose household incomes from 1992 to 1998 jumped by 16.8%, representing an improvement that was three times greater than that of the nation as a whole (Census Bureau Data, cited in McLaughlin, 1998). Andrews (1999) points out that, in fact, “when economic times are good, black unemployment rates come down far faster than white unemployment rates” (p. 17). In this sense, the economic boom of the 90s had a tremendous effect on the income and earning power of African Americans.

Still, the trend in African American assessments of the relative economic position of Blacks and Whites is surprising because empirical evidence does not support the contention that Blacks were better economically positioned than Whites at any point between 1984 and 2000. The same 1999 *Newsweek* article heralding the significant improvements in racial fortunes cautions, “It’s impossible to say whether things are better or worse without asking ‘compared with what?’ . . . When blacks compare themselves with whites in virtually any arena, the picture is unsettling” (Cose, 1999). Andrews (1999) also cautions that “when economic times are bad, black unemployment rates rise far faster than white unemployment rates” (p. 17). Without the accumulated wealth of White middle and upper income families, Black households continue to be especially vulnerable to financial downturns and shock. Between 1967 and 1996, there was an overall decline in family poverty rates, with Black family poverty declining from more than 35% to slightly more than 28%. In addition to the overall decline, the gap between Black poverty and White poverty narrowed over this 30-year period. But more than a quarter of Black families still live in poverty, whereas only 1 in 10 White families are below the poverty line. Although many inequalities have lessened since 1960, wealth and income among African Americans have consistently lagged behind White Americans. In 1997, median per capita income for Whites was \$20,425 whereas Blacks had a per capita median

TABLE 1
Quintile Family Income Averages

	<i>Lowest Quintile</i>		<i>Middle Quintile</i>		<i>Highest Quintile</i>	
	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Blacks</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Blacks</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Blacks</i>
1970	12,746	6,489	38,564	23,778	88,384	60,902
1980	13,732	6,467	41,972	24,237	96,140	67,112
1990	13,632	5,438	44,430	25,798	116,536	78,174
1995	13,241	5,687	44,011	26,689	126,379	85,176
1996	13,097	5,651	44,784	26,594	129,773	84,627

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, as reported in Andrews (1999).

income of \$12,351. Median household incomes also show Blacks lagging considerably.

Data from the census bureau show income inequality to be persistent even in the post-civil rights era. If the income of all members of each racial group is arranged from lowest to highest and then divided evenly into fifths, the averages of those quintiles can be compared. Between 1970 and 1996, the average income of the poorest fifth of Whites rose by \$351. The average income of the poorest Blacks, which began as nearly half that of the poorest Whites, declined by \$838. Not only did the poorest African Americans experience an absolute decline in income, they also became poorer relative to the poorest Whites. The wealthiest African Americans saw an absolute increase in income between 1970 and 1996 and even narrowed the gap between themselves and their White counterparts, but in 1996, the wealthiest fifth of Blacks still lagged the wealthiest fifth of Whites by more than \$45,000 annually (see Table 1).

Even more telling than the income disparity is the racial wealth gap. In 1997, Shipler reported that the median net worth for White households was \$43,800 but only \$3,700 for Black households. "Even blacks and whites with roughly the same income possess such different financial assets and real estate that placing them in the same class of material well-being, as the income statistics generally do, is misleading" (p. 18). Not only do African Americans

tend to earn less than Whites, Black families also do not benefit from the security of generations of accumulated wealth. As a consequence, the Black middle class is precariously positioned. Any reversal of economic fortunes could allow them to slip into poverty (Carnoy, 1994). In her assessment of the Black middle class in the 1990s, Jones (1998) argues, "Members of the black middle class escaped the ghetto, but many found themselves . . . in new 'racialized' jobs working as administrators dependent on increasingly insecure sources of public and private funding for their livelihood" (p. 371). Even in white-collar professions such as architects, surgeons, engineers, and stockbrokers, Black income is strikingly below that of Whites in the same professions (Jones, 1998). Within the context of these empirical realities, it is clear that the belief that Blacks are doing better than Whites is erroneous.

CAUSAL MODEL

Despite a deep and persistent economic gap between Blacks and Whites, a larger percentage of African Americans at the close of the 90s perceive Blacks as doing better than Whites economically. Who are the African Americans who hold this empirically false perception of the world? How are they different from other Blacks?

From 1984 to 2000, there was little gender difference between those who perceived Blacks as doing better and those who perceived Blacks as doing worse than White Americans. In the first three surveys, between 5% and 8% of women and between 4% and 7% of men misperceived Blacks as better off economically than Whites. In 1996, 9% of men and 10% of women made this mistake and in 2000, women were only slightly more likely to misperceive the relative economic standings of the races, 30% compared with men's 27%.

Those who think Blacks are doing better than Whites are not significantly different from other respondents with respect to income. In each year, the respondents who believed that Blacks were doing better than Whites reported a lower income on average than those who believed that Blacks were doing worse than Whites. In every

year except 1988, the difference in the average incomes across groups was negligible. In all years except 2000, the average income of all groups was below the median and in 2000, the average income of all groups was just at the median.

On balance, neither gender nor income has much explanatory power for uncovering why some Blacks misperceive relative racial economic standing. Further, those who believe Blacks are doing better than Whites are not systematically different from other Blacks in terms of age, education, urban dwelling, and other standard demographic characteristics. Therefore, it is reasonable to question if there are economic and political beliefs that distinguish this group of African Americans. In particular, it is possible that the misperception of economic status among African Americans in the late 90s is tied to a belief that Clinton's presidency was good for Black people. The model below tests whether African Americans who believe that Clinton is a friend to African Americans will more frequently believe that Blacks are doing better than Whites.

The model below is a system of equations linking the perception of the relative economic position of Blacks and Whites to a set of economic perceptions, political beliefs, and demographic characteristics. Specifically, the perception that Blacks are doing better than Whites is modeled as a function of perceptions of the economic status of one's family, the Black race, and the nation, warmth toward Clinton, a belief that Democrats work hard on issues that concern Blacks, and Black linked fate. Perceptions of the economic status of one's family, the Black race, and the nation are modeled as a function of warmth toward Clinton, a belief that Democrats work hard on issues that concern Blacks, and Black linked fate. Finally, the belief that Democrats work hard on issues that concern Blacks is modeled as a function of Black linked fate, warmth toward Clinton, and a number of demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education, and income. This model is then estimated using a least squares regression procedure (see Figure 7).

This model is suggested by earlier findings in the economic attitudes literature. Age, income, education, and sex⁷ are included in the model even though these demographic characteristics show no significant relationship to the perception of relative racial position

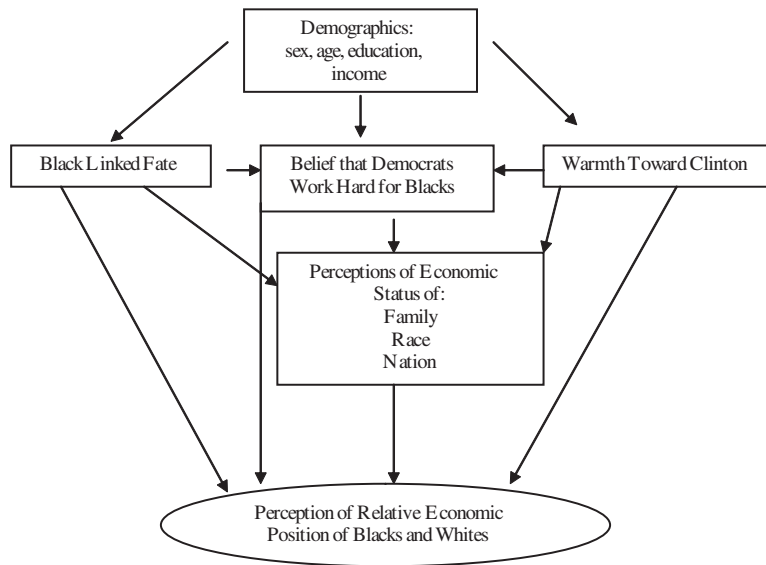


FIGURE 7 Proposed Causal Model of Perception of Relative Racial Economic Position

in the bivariate relationships, because it is possible that they have an indirect effect when mediated through other political beliefs. Perceptions of personal, racial, and national economic well-being⁸ are modeled as the most direct influences on the perception of relative economic position of Blacks and Whites. Assessment of the national economy is included on the guidance of the 1979 findings of Kinder and Kiewiet on the influential role of sociotropic considerations in economic attitudes. Perceptions of personal economic situation are included because Haller and Norpoth (1997) find that those who are attentive to economic news and those who report no exposure to economic news share strikingly similar economic attitudes. They explain this attitudinal similarity in the face of informational asymmetry as resulting from the ability of personal economic experiences to convey pertinent economic information.

Through jobs held or lost, prices paid for goods and services, and the economic well being of one's community, people are constantly exposed to the realities of the economic wilderness. A person's own encounter with the facts of economic life, supplies real-world cues for taking the measure of the national economy. (p. 556)

Black linked fate⁹ and perception of the race's economic well-being are included based on the assertion by Duch et al. (2000) that heuristics are critical to understanding the variation in individual economic assessments. Heuristics allow citizens in low information environments to fill in the blanks of missing knowledge (Brady & Sniderman, 1985; McKelvey & Ordeshook, 1986; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Michael Dawson (1994) demonstrates the importance of a Black utility heuristic operating in African American public opinion that allows Blacks to infer individual positions from group preferences. In light of Dawson's (1994) evidence, it is reasonable to hypothesize that a sense of linked fate with Blacks and one's perception of the economic status of the race should play an important role in economic beliefs of African Americans.

This model hypothesizes that African American perceptions of relative racial position¹⁰ are influenced by partisan considerations, specifically the belief that Democrats tend to work hard on the issues Black people care about.¹¹ Explaining the connection between partisanship and economic beliefs, Quinn and Shapiro (1991) argue that voters make prospective judgments about economic strategies by using macroeconomic "stories" that resonate with their preferences. These authors maintain that two alternatives are available to American voters: a consumption model associated with the Democratic party and an investment model associated with the Republican party. These two models connect to broad visions of society and thus act as cues for judging economic policies. Quinn and Shapiro (1991) contend that the consumption-driven model, concerned with decreasing interest rates and increasing capital taxation, is deeply associated with "powerful images of distributive justice" (p. 667). These are notions that resonate with Black Americans. "Ideological partisanship sees partisan macroeconomic politics as being motivated by voter preferences for

social images of society. . . . Democratic administrations have promoted growth through a consumption-led strategy” (p. 677).

Finally, this model hypothesizes an important role for African American attitudes toward Clinton in shaping perceptions of economic position.¹² Although the work by earlier researchers suggests that demographics, racial heuristics, and partisan attachments should influence economic assessments, there is less guidance in the established literature as to what would lead to mistaken perceptions of economic well-being. In this case, we believe the answer lies squarely in a specific set of assumptions held by African Americans about the nature of the Clinton presidency. We will first review the empirical results of the statistical analysis and then explore how popular understandings of Clinton’s relationship to Black communities influenced the findings.

FINDINGS

Table 2 presents the results of a least squares regression estimation of the model proposed in Figure 7 using data from the 1994 National Black Politics Study, the 1996 National Black Election Study, and the 2000 DuBois/CSRPC Study. The 1996 National Black Election Study does not ask respondents about the general economic well-being of African Americans nor does it ask about whether the Democratic Party works hard on issues that are important to Blacks. Therefore, a somewhat different model is estimated on the 1996 data. All comparable items that are available are used. Strength of attachment to the Democratic Party is substituted for belief that Democrats work hard on issues Blacks care about. Without a measure to assess racial economic well-being, the 1996 model is underspecified, however, many similar patterns are apparent.

In 1994, only 5% of respondents mistakenly believed Blacks to be doing better than Whites; in 1996, the proportion had doubled to 10%; and in 2000, nearly 30% of respondents held this erroneous belief. The direct effects in the first equation reveal that in both 1994 and 2000, the belief that Blacks are doing better than Whites is significantly and positively related to beliefs that the national

TABLE 2
Model of Belief That Blacks Are Doing Better
Than Whites Among African Americans^a

	1994 NBPS (n = 1,181)	1996 NBES (n = 1,138)	2000 DuBois/ CSRPC (n = 831)
Blacks doing better than Whites	$r^2 = .20$	$r^2 = .15$	$r^2 = .21$
Assessment of family economic situation	.03 (.02)	.06 (.03)*	.06 (.04)
Assessment of Blacks' economic situation	.17 (.02)**	—	.42 (.04)**
Assessment of national economic situation	.03 (.01)**	.04 (.03)*	.19 (.03)**
Warmth toward Clinton	.02 (.02)	.03 (.03)	.06 (.04)
Black linked fate	-.06 (.01)**	-.06 (.02)**	.04 (.03)
Democrats work hard for Blacks	.04 (.01)**	—	.06 (.03)*
Attachment to Democrats	—	-.04 (.04)	—
Assessment of family economic situation	$r^2 = .04$	$r^2 = .02$	$r^2 = .06$
Warmth toward Clinton	.03 (.03)	.12 (.03)**	.10 (.03)**
Black linked fate	-.06 (.02)**	.003 (.02)	.05 (.03)
Democrats work hard for Blacks	.05 (.02)*	—	.16 (.03)**
Attachment to Democrats	—	.001 (.02)	—
Assessment of Blacks' economic situation	$r^2 = .06$	—	$r^2 = .06$
Warmth toward Clinton	.05 (.02)*	—	.03 (.03)
Democrats work hard for Blacks	.14 (.02)**	—	.19 (.03)**
Black linked fate	-.07 (.02)**	—	.07 (.03)**
Assessment of national economic situation	$r^2 = .07$	$r^2 = .06$	$r^2 = .06$
Warmth toward Clinton	.31 (.05)**	.25 (.03)**	.11 (.04)**
Black linked fate	.02 (.03)	.02 (.02)	-.003 (.03)
Democrats work hard for Blacks	.19 (.04)**	—	.23 (.04)**
Attachment to Democrats	—	.01 (.02)	—
Democrats work hard for Blacks	$r^2 = .10$	—	$r^2 = .07$
Warmth toward Clinton	.30 (.03)**	—	.24 (.03)**
Black linked fate	.02 (.02)	—	.02 (.03)
Age	.002 (.001)*	—	.01 (.01)
Income	-.002 (.003)	—	.0002 (.002)
Education	-.005 (.003)	—	-.0006 (.004)
Female	.05 (.02)**	—	.02 (.02)
Black linked fate	$r^2 = .05$	$r^2 = .03$	$r^2 = .03$
Age	-.002 (.001)*	.0003 (.001)	-.00 (.01)
Income	.005 (.004)	-.002 (.004)	-.00 (.002)
Education	.01 (.003)**	.03 (.007)**	-.01 (.01)
Female	-.10 (.02)**	-.03 (.02)	.02 (.02)

(continued)

TABLE 2 (continued)

	1994 NBPS (n = 1,181)	1996 NBES (n = 1,138)	2000 DuBois/ CSRPC (n = 831)
Warmth toward Clinton	$r^2 = .05$	$r^2 = .06$	$r^2 = .03$
Age	.004 (.0004)**	.003 (.001)**	.01 (.01)
Income	.003 (.003)	.00 (.002)	.001 (.002)
Education	.001 (.004)	-.002 (.002)	.001 (.005)
Female	.02 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.006 (.01)

NOTE: Coefficients are estimates derived from separate ordinary least squares procedures. NBPS = National Black Politics Study; NBES = National Black Election Study; DuBois/CSRPC = DuBois Institute/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture Study.

a. Path analysis models are extensively for exploring the plausible structure of relationships among several variables. The model estimated above is hypothesized to be fully recursive with no reciprocal effects between the variables. We use an equation-by-equation ordinary least squares model to estimate the coefficients.

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

economy has improved, that the race is fairing well economically, and that Democrats work hard on issues that concern Black people. In the absence of a measure of racial well-being in 1996, personal economic assessment emerges as significant, as do attitudes toward the national economy.

Mistaken relative racial economic assessments stem from a positive outlook on the nation, race, and political party. Respondents who believe that Democrats are working hard for Blacks, that Blacks are fairing well, and that the nation's economy is improving are significantly more likely to believe that Blacks are doing better than Whites. Although the same indicators are significant across the three surveys, the magnitude of effects in 2000 tends to be greater. The effect of a positive assessment of the race, nation, and party is significantly amplified at the end of the decade.

The first equation in the system does not show statistically significant direct effects of warmth toward Clinton. However, warmth toward Clinton has important indirect effects operating throughout the system of equations. In 1994, positive affect toward Clinton is significantly associated with optimistic assessments of racial and national economic health and to the belief that Democrats work

TABLE 3
Total Effects of Warmth Toward Clinton on Perception of
Relative Economic Position Among African Americans

	<i>1994 NBPS</i>	<i>1996 NBES</i>	<i>2000 DuBois/CSRPC</i>
Direct	.02	.03	.06
Through family assessment	.001	.01*	.01
Through Black assessment	.01*	—	.01*
Through national assessment	.01*	.01*	.02*
Through partisan attitudes	.01*	—	.01*
Total effect	.05	.05	.11

NOTE: NBPS = National Black Politics Study; NBES = National Black Election Study; DuBois/CSRPC = DuBois Institute/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture Study.

*Both paths used in computing the coefficient are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

hard on Black issues, all of which contribute significantly to an erroneous assessment of the relative economic position of Blacks and Whites. In 1996, warmth toward Clinton significantly positively contributed to both personal and national economic assessments that were both significant indicators. These effects are mirrored in the 2000 data and are more substantively important in 2000. Warm affect toward Clinton tends to contribute to a positive outlook on national and racial economic well-being and to positive racial assessments of the Democratic party, all of which contribute to the likelihood of mistakenly believing that Blacks are actually doing better than Whites economically. Assessments of Clinton are therefore important in the mistaken assessment that Blacks are fairing better than Whites. In 1994 and 1996, the total effect of the Clinton feeling thermometer had a coefficient of .05, and by 2000, the total effect was more than double that at .11 (see Table 3).

The total effect of attitudes toward the Democratic Party mirror and reinforce the effects of warmth toward Clinton (see Table 4). In both 1994 and 2000, respondents who believed that the Democratic Party works hard on issues that are important to Black people were significantly more likely to mistake the relative economic position of the races. Just as the effect of warmth toward Clinton was twice as large in 2000 as in 1994, so too was the effect of partisan assess-

TABLE 4
Total Effects of Partisan Racial Assessment on Perception of
Relative Economic Position Among African Americans

	<i>1994 NBPS</i>	<i>1996 NBES^a</i>	<i>2000 DuBois/CSRPC</i>
Direct	.04*	—	.06*
Through family assessment	.002	—	.01
Through Black assessment	.02*	—	.08*
Through national assessment	.01*	—	.04*
Total effect	.07	—	.19

NOTE: NBPS = National Black Politics Study; NBES = National Black Election Study; DuBois/CSRPC = DuBois Institute/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture Study.

a. The 1996 NBES does not ask respondents about the extent to which the Democratic Party works hard on issues of concern to Black people. There are no significant effects of general attachment to the Democratic Party in the 1996 model estimation.

*Both paths used in computing the coefficient are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

ments. The effect of positive, racial partisan attitudes was more than twice as large in 2000. Respondents who like Clinton and who think the Democrats are good for Blacks are always more likely to mistake Blacks as doing better than Whites, but the effect of these attitudes was significantly greater at the end of Clinton's presidency than at the beginning.

We learn more about these effects by considering the role of Black linked fate. A review of the direct effects shows that in 1994 and 1996, Black linked fate was significantly and negatively related to a mistaken perception of Blacks as better off economically. In 2000, Black linked fate did not have a statistically significant direct effect on this belief, but Black linked fate was operating throughout the system of equations and had important opposing effects (see Table 5). When the total effects are considered, Black linked fate has an effect of the same magnitude, but in opposite directions in 1994 and 2000. In 1994, Black linked fate protected against the perceptual mistake that Blacks are doing better than Whites; in 1996, the protective magnitude of Black linked fate had diminished; and in 2000, Black linked fate contributed to this error. The most important pathway for this effect is through assessments of Black economic well-being in 1994 and 2000. In 1994, those

TABLE 5
Total Effects of Black Linked Fate on Perception of
Relative Economic Position Among African Americans

	<i>1994 NBPS</i>	<i>1996 NBES</i>	<i>2000 DuBois/CSRPC</i>
Direct	-.06*	-.06*	.04
Through family assessment	-.001	.000	.003
Through Black assessment	-.01*	—	.03*
Through national assessment	.001	.001	-.001
Through partisan attitudes	.001	—	.001
Total effect	-.07	-.05	.07

NOTE: NBPS = National Black Politics Study; NBES = National Black Election Study; DuBois/CSRPC = DuBois Institute/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture Study.

*Both paths used in computing the coefficient are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

with a strong sense of Black linked fate were significantly less likely to positively assess African American economic fortunes, and in 2000, those with strong Black linked fate were significantly more likely to think that Blacks are doing well. This suggests that the content and meaning of the Black utility heuristic with regard to economic assessments shifted over the course of Clinton's tenure.

When Clinton first took office, the Black utility heuristic encouraged restraint with respect to economic assessments. By the end of his presidency, Black linked fate encouraged rosy outlooks that led to mistaken perceptions of racial economic fortunes. One important explanation is a partisan one. Prior research indicates that the patterns we observe here are not necessarily specific to the African American experience. Duch et al. (2000) posit that "individuals with stronger attachments to the incumbent's party perceive the national economy more positively" (p. 638). Certainly, the patterns in the NES data for White partisans reported above (Figures 4 and 5) support this finding. White Republicans had a rosier outlook on personal and national economics in the 80s, and Democrats were more optimistic in the 90s. These are patterns that reflect partisan control of the White House. But we are interested not only in general economic perception but in the economic misperception, holding a belief that seems to be empirically false

by all objective indicators. It is not simply partisanship, but a particular racialized attachment to the Democratic Party that misinforms economic perceptions. In 1996, simple partisan identification, detached from its racial component, had no statistically significant direct or indirect effects on economic attitudes. For African Americans, it is the idea that Democrats are hard working on racial issues that meaningfully informs Black economic attitudes.

DISCUSSION

There is a partisan effect at work for African Americans. Black Americans tend to be solidly Democratic partisans and, therefore, their optimistic perception of the economy is not surprising in a period when they are deeply attached to the party that controlled the White House. White Democrats are also increasingly optimistic about the state of their families' and the nation's economic circumstances during the 90s. But several issues in this analysis point to a unique pattern among African Americans. First, misperceiving the relative economic position of Blacks and Whites in the face of tremendous empirical evidence to the contrary is more than just a positive assessment of the economy. It reflects a perception about the relative power and well-being of racial groups in America. It is one thing to believe that the national economy is performing well under the direction of your preferred party. It is quite another thing to perceive a reversal in the deeply historically entrenched economic position of the races. A more extraordinary context is necessary to account for the latter.

Second, the empirical results show that Black linked fate had opposite effects in 1994 and in 2000. Given previous findings on the centrality of Black linked fate in shaping Black political attitudes, this reversal deserves attention. Dawson (1994) convincingly demonstrates that African Americans with a strong sense of linked fate to the race frequently use that linked fate as a political heuristic. By his reasoning, those with a strong sense of linked fate

will often use the welfare of the collective as a proxy for understanding individual interests. Dawson (1994) argues that

it is more efficient for African Americans to determine what was good for the racial group than to determine what was good for themselves individually, and more efficient for them to use the status of the group both relative and absolute, as a proxy for individual utility. (p. 10)

The findings from the model estimated above point to a shift in the meaning of the Black utility heuristic for African Americans during the 90s. The key to understanding these results lies in the unique relationship that Bill Clinton enjoys with the African American community.

In 1998, Nobel Prize-winning African American author Toni Morrison suggested in a *New Yorker* article about Bill Clinton that "White skin notwithstanding, this is our first black President." Morrison's description of Clinton as Black was prompted by his experience of personal, public humiliation at the hands of his political foes. When Morrison labeled Clinton Black, she was not making a claim about his genetic heritage but instead drawing parallels between his public debacle and the historic treatment of Black public figures. She was also commenting on his experience with and use of cultural markers that often stand for the denigrated elements of Black life in America. "Clinton displays almost every trope of Blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone-playing, McDonald's-and-junk-food-loving boy from Arkansas" (Morrison, 1998). Although Morrison drew a firestorm of responses from African American observers angered by the assertion that these "negative" traits represented Blackness, Morrison had correctly tapped into an important and unique connection between Clinton and African American people. In fact, the most fascinating element of the Black president label was that Clinton himself relished it. Clinton acknowledged his "honorary Blackness" in a 1999 speech at the Congressional Black Caucus' annual dinner and frequently thereafter. His choice to locate his personal office in Harlem at the close of his presidency confirmed the deep connection he had cultivated with Black Americans.

Morrison's critics notwithstanding, on the whole, African Americans perceived Bill Clinton as a great president and as a friend to the race (Branch, McCoy, & Whigham-Desir, 1993). Clinton's willingness to pay attention to racial issues and his "comfort with Black people" were among the most frequently cited reasons that Blacks assessed him positively (Bobo & Dawson, 2001). Both the intensity and character of Clinton's popularity among African Americans is unique among all modern presidents.

Journalist DeWayne Wickham (2002) compiled a fascinating array of interviews with African American leaders and lay persons chronicling the unique relationship between Bill Clinton and Black America. Wickham's respondents offer a wide array of anecdotes and reasons that Clinton enjoys a privileged status among Blacks. Popular syndicated radio host Tom Joyner recalls Clinton being the only man in a room full of African Americans who knew the words to every verse of the Black national anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing." White House correspondent Bill Douglas was amazed at Clinton's comfort and knowledge while attending a soul food dinner at his home.

He knew how to eat them. He had corn bread on the side. He dipped a little cornbread into the hot sauce and he was just gnawing on those chitlins. He served himself. I just looked at him in amazement. (Wickham, 2002, p. 80)

Norma Johnson, a retired woman from Indiana reasons, "The part of him I do like is the respect that I think he gives black people" (Wickham, 2002, p. 35). Former Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell reports of Clinton that

the combination of how he grew up, where he grew up, the people he grew up around, but also the fact that he was young enough to really appreciate the African American quest for equality, helped him to connect with us in a way that is rare. (Wickham, 2002, p. 58)

New York television reporter April Woodward went so far as to state, "He must have been breast-fed by a black woman because he's so comfortable around us" (Wickham, 2002, p. 64). Civil

rights activist Joseph Lowery pointed to Clinton's record of appointments but also argued that

the real thing is that the boy blew saxophone. He wasn't no Chew Barry or Sonny Hodges, but the fact that he just blew a saxophone made White folks hate him . . . the saxophone is about as black an instrument as you can get. (Wickham, 2002, p. 26)

The interviews throughout Wickham's text enunciate common themes of shared cultural understanding and genuine personal connection that Clinton exuded to both Black leaders and masses. Respondents were critical of some of Clinton's actions and policies, most notably his hasty retreat from Lani Guinier and Jocelyn Elders, and his passage of welfare reform and crime legislation, but they also argue that he was more closely aligned with Black policy interests than any president in two decades. Black Americans repeatedly cited Clinton's experience as an underdog, publicly embattled by his enemies, as one of the reasons he could relate to the African American experience. Overall, they express significant personal respect and admiration for Clinton as someone who "has a general fondness for African Americans" (Kweisi Mfume, cited in Wickham, 2002, p. 101).

Whether these impressions are misguided or correct, this is the context in which we must understand the relationships between Black linked fate, attitudes toward Clinton, and economic attitudes. Strong affect toward Clinton encouraged Black Americans to perceive the Democratic Party as interested in Black issues, to perceive the economic well-being of the race as good, and to see the national economy as improving. The strength of these attitudes contributes to erroneous conclusions about the relative economic position of Blacks and Whites. Clinton was fully embraced by Black America. He was seen as a kindred spirit, a true friend of the race, and an effective champion for Black interests. In this context, the content of Black linked fate changed. At the start of his presidential term, those who relied on a Black utility heuristic for understanding the political world were more likely to be pessimistic about the economic welfare of the race, both absolutely and relative to Whites.

By the end of his term, those with a strong sense of Black linked fate had a more optimistic outlook on racial economic fortunes and position. After 8 years of Clinton, a strong identification with the fate of other Blacks led African Americans to believe that things were so good for the race that Blacks had exceeded the economic prosperity of Whites. Thus, racial attitudes and political allegiances interacted to misinform the economic perceptions of a significant portion of African Americans.

An interesting corollary can be found in the research of Bobo and Gilliam (1990) on the effects on political interest and participation that accrue to African Americans living in cities with Black mayors. Analyzing data from a 1987 national sample, Bobo and Gilliam demonstrate that living in an area with a Black mayor changes the fundamental political orientation of African Americans by increasing their sense of trust and efficacy. These authors refer to control of the mayor's office as political empowerment and find that empowerment "increases attentiveness to politics and contributes to a more engaged orientation to politics" (p. 384). For Bobo and Gilliam, these effects are all positive, encouraging interest, attentiveness, and participation.

The results of this study suggest that the Clinton presidency may have had a similar effect on many African Americans in the 90s. This study shows that there may be some negative consequences to this feeling of political empowerment, namely an overly optimistic perception of relative economic strength. To the extent that African Americans perceived Clinton as a Black president, he may have offered some of the same elements of empowerment that accrue to those living with Black mayors. It appears that for those who felt most warmly toward Clinton and most trusting of his party's commitment to African Americans, there was a danger that this sense of empowerment led to a misperception of the continued economic inequality of African Americans relative to Whites.

The erroneous belief that Blacks are doing better than Whites is in part explained by the nature of Clinton's popularity and by the dynamics of empowerment described by Bobo and Gilliam. Clinton was wildly popular among African Americans but under attack by Republican "White people." The public narrative by indi-

viduals like Morrison suggested that this attack was prompted in part because of his proximity to Blackness. Simultaneously, the economy was booming and Blacks saw their families, race, and nation living in better economic circumstances; however, Republican White people remained critical of Clinton. Within this context, some African Americans attributed the economic good times to a president who was particularly interested in their welfare, perhaps even perceiving Clinton as being good for Black folks to the detriment of Whites. After all, he was the "Black president." Perhaps, like Black mayors, he made African Americans feel more hopeful, trusting, and powerful within the U.S. electoral system. Along with these political attitudes came attendant perceptions of economic realities, some of which were false.

These findings suggest that among contemporary African Americans, subjective political allegiances exert a tremendous influence on perceptions of objective economic realities. African Americans responded to the economic boom of the 90s with positive assessments of their households, race, and nation. Because the economic good times were presided over by a president widely embraced by African Americans, many perceived the economic good times as being especially good for Blacks. However, like the idea of Bill Clinton as a Black president, the economic benefits accruing to African Americans in the 90s were at least partially illusory. Blacks made significant gains, but those gains did not erase the persistent gaps in income and wealth wrought from generations of economic disadvantage.

APPENDIX
Economic Perception Questions 1984-2000

	<i>Perception of Familial Economic Position</i>	<i>Perception of Racial Economic Position</i>	<i>Perception of National Economic Position</i>	<i>Perception of Relative Economic Position of the Races</i>
1984	Would you say that you and your family living with you are better or worse off financially than you were 4 years ago?	Would you say that Blacks are getting along very well, fairly well, or not too well at all?	Would you say that over the past year, the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?	On the whole, would you say that the economic position of Blacks is better, the same, or worse than Whites?
1988	Would you say that you and your family living with you are better or worse off financially than you were a year ago?	not asked	Would you say that over the past year, the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?	On the whole, would you say that the economic position of Blacks is better, the same, or worse than Whites?
1994 NBPS	Would you say that you and your family living with you are better or worse off than you were a year ago?	Would you say that Blacks are getting along very well, fairly well, or not too well at all?	Would you say that over the past year, the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?	On the whole, would you say that the economic position of Blacks is better, about the same, or worse than Whites?
1996 NBES	Would you say that you and others living in your household are better or worse off than you were a year ago?	not asked	Would you say that over the past year, the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?	On the whole, would you say that the economic position of Blacks is better, about the same, or worse than Whites?
2000 DuBois/ CSRPC	Would you say that you and your family living with you are better or worse off than you were a year ago?	Would you say that Blacks are getting along very well, fairly well, not too well, or not well at all?	Would you say that over the past year, the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?	On the whole, compared with White Americans, would you say that the economic position of Black Americans is better, about the same, or worse?

NOTE: NBPS = National Black Politics Study; NBES = National Black Election Study; DuBois/CSRPC = DuBois Institute/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture Study.

NOTES

1. The 1984 National Black Election Study (NBES) included telephone interviews with 1,150 Black voting-age respondents prior to the presidential election and postelection reinterviews with 872 of the original preelection respondents. The 1988 NBES attempted to recontact all 1,150 original respondents and was successful in completing 473 preelection interviews and 392 postelection interviews. The sample was drawn using a random digit dialing design that selected disproportionately from different geographic areas representing varying densities of Black populations. Respondents were selected randomly from all eligible households. The 1984 and 1988 NBESs were administered through the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor under principal investigator James Jackson. The final response rate in the 1984 preelection NBES was 57%. The average education among respondents was high school diploma or equivalent. Nearly 30% had incomes of less than \$10,000 per year; 62% of the sample were women. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 91, with 41 being the average age.

2. The data from the National Black Politics Study (NBPS) come from a probability sample of all African American households, yielding 1,206 respondents who were African Americans 18 years or older. The survey was conducted by telephone between November 20, 1993, and February 20, 1994, with a response rate of 65%. The survey was administered through the University of Chicago with principal investigators Ronald Brown of Wayne State University and Michael Dawson of the University of Chicago. NBPS respondents ranged in age from 18 to 88, with 43 being the average age. Sixty-five percent of NBPS respondents were women. Eighty-six percent completed at least a high school diploma.

3. The 1996 National Black Election Study (NBES) was administered through the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor under principal investigator Katherine Tate. This survey was modeled after the original 1984 NBES. The NBES telephone interviewing began July 19 and ended November 4, 1996. The data include telephone interviews with 1,216 voting-eligible Blacks. Immediately following the election, 854 respondents were reinterviewed; the postelection reinterviewing ended January 6, 1997. Sixty-three percent of the sample was female. The 1996 NBES sample was very similar to the original 1984 sample. Both overrepresented women, middle-income and educated Blacks, and Blacks in the labor force and working.

4. This W.E.B. DuBois Institute/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture (CSRPC) survey was conducted December 1 through December 15, 2000, and includes 605 Black adults and 724 White adults. The principle investigators were Lawrence Bobo of Harvard University and Michael Dawson of the University of Chicago. The data were collected by Knowledge Networks. The sampling error for the Black sample is approximately 4.0 percentage points, and the sampling error for the White sample is approximately 3.6 percentage points. Knowledge Networks employs a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) telephone methodology to develop a representative sample of households for participation in its panel. Once a Knowledge Networks household is selected, members are contacted first by an express delivery mailing and then by telephone for enrollment in the *Knowledge Networks*TM panel. The panel structure enables clients to conduct surveys of low-incidence populations, such as African Americans, more efficiently and inexpensively than would otherwise be possible. Every participating Knowledge Networks household receives free hardware, free Internet access, free e-mail accounts, and ongoing technical support. Participants receive a short multimedia

survey about once a week. Surveys are delivered by e-mail on the same standardized hardware, through the television set.

5. See Shapiro and Rosenstone (2001). Data for most American National Election Studies time series surveys are obtained from in-person interviews with citizens of voting age (a) living in households (b) within the coterminous United States exclusive of those on military reservations (c). Election Study samples are multistage area probability designs. That is, in a series of hierarchical steps, geographically defined sampling units of decreasing size are selected with probability proportionate to their total occupied housing unit count.

6. The National Election Study does not ask White respondents about the relative economic position of the races. Our samples from 1984, 1988, 1994, and 1996 are exclusively African American and therefore do not allow cross-racial comparisons. Only the 2000 DuBois/Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture Study asks the relative racial economic question of both a Black and White sample. Analysis of the White sample in 2000 appears in Table 6. However, there are no data available to assess a change over time in this attitude among Whites.

7. Age is measured in natural units as reported age at time of interview. Income is measured in categories and standardized on a unit scale so that 1 is the highest reported income category in a given year. Education is measured as reported years of education completed. Sex is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for female.

8. Personal and national economic assessments are measured on a 5-point scale of *much better*, *somewhat better*, *about the same*, *somewhat worse*, and *much worse*. They are coded on a unit range so that numbers closer to 1 reflect a more positive assessment. Racial economic assessments are measured on a 4-point scale of *very well*, *fairly well*, *not too well*, or *not well at all*. This is also coded on a unit range so that numbers closer to 1 reflect a more positive assessment.

9. Black linked fate is measured on a 4-point scale in response to the question, "Do you think what happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?" Response categories are *yes, a lot*; *yes, some*; *yes, not very much*; or *no*. This is coded on a unit range such that higher values reflect a stronger sense of linked fate.

10. The dependent variable is measured on a 5-point scale assessing Blacks' economic position as *much better*, *somewhat better*, *about the same*, *somewhat worse*, or *much worse* than Whites. The variable is constrained to a unit range such that values close to 1 reflect a belief that Blacks are doing much better than Whites.

11. The belief that Democrats work hard on issues that Black people care about is measured on a 4-point scale of *very hard*, *fairly hard*, *not too hard*, or *not hard at all*. This variable is coded to a unit range such that higher values reflect a belief that Democrats are hard working on Black issues.

12. The Clinton feeling thermometer is used. Values range from 0 to 100 and are coded on a unit scale.

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Melissa Harris-Lacewell is an assistant professor of political science and for the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago. She is the author of Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought (2004).

Bethany Albertson is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Chicago. She has published research in the fields of political psychology and racial politics.