Turning the Wheels:
Striving and African American Social Identity in the 21st Century

*Ronald E. Brown**
Wayne State University

Davin L. Phoenix
University of California, Irvine

James S. Jackson
University of Michigan

Abstract

This paper treats striving as an unobservable yet critical mental process in identity formation and social categorization among African Americans. Striving is a reflective, continuous attempt to develop and maintain a positive sense of the social self and the racial group in the presence of racial discrimination. We contend striving plays an important yet understudied function in the development of black social identity as this process interrupts the otherwise alienating and demobilizing effects of encounters with racial discrimination. Using the Black American subsample of the 2001-03 National Survey of American Life (NSAL-SAQ), we propose a structural model that estimates the direct and indirect influences of personal discrimination, systematic racial discrimination, and black–self-categorization on positive aspects of black social identity. We find some support for the model, suggesting that striving effectively affirms black individuals' positive social identification in light of their experiences with racial inequity, while surfacing potential cleavages within the black political coalition.

Keywords: Striving, social identity, black self-categorization, discrimination, linked fate
Relevant fields: Race and ethnicity; African American politics

> Ezekiel saw de Wheel
> Way in the middle o' the air
> The big wheel moved by faith
> The little wheel moved by the grace o' God
> A wheel in a wheel
> Way in the middle o' the air

Striving toward the kingdom of God, or metaphorically "walking with members of a congregation in a holy way" so that one is not overtaken with "weariness," was a major theological tenant of the Puritan clergy who settled in New England. Jonathan Edwards' reading of Luke 13:24—*strive to enter into the straight gait*"—led him to posit that striving requires strong desire, endeavor, and "agony" (Shepard 1999). W.E.B. Du Bois attended Congregational

* Direct correspondence to aa4723@wayne.edu, dphoenix@uci.edu, and jamessj@umich.edu

Sunday School in Barrington, Massachusetts, a community stepped in Puritan tradition, and the idea of striving is embedded in his writings and activism.[1] In an 1897 essay entitled *The Conservation of Races*, Du Bois contends that it is" our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endeavors, our spiritual ideas; as a race we must strive by race organizations, by racial solidarity by racial unity." And in *The Souls of Black Folk*, [1903], Du Bois articulates the ultimate aim of this effort: "the end of black striving is to be a co-worker in the kingdom of [American] culture, to escape death and isolation (Du Bois 1940).

The concept of striving carries potentially rich utility beyond Sunday morning teachings. We conceptualize striving as a deliberate mental process engaged in by black people in the immediate face of racial discrimination. By striving, we refer to the effort of black individuals to construct and adhere to a prototypical model of black identity. This identity in turn serves two critical functions for individuals, while informing their cognitive and behavioral responses to instances of racial subjugation. One, the act of striving draws a through line that connects the black individual's personal experiences of racial discrimination to the broader black collective experience of contending with racial injustice. This linkage imbues the individual with the belief that her toils fit within a larger narrative of black struggle. Situating her strife as one of many chapters in the ongoing story of black people's upward struggle toward self-actualization increases the individual's motivation to strive to *enter into the straight gait*.

Two, striving affirms the black individuals' sense of connectedness to other black people navigating racially injurious terrain. The perception that other members of the racial group—be they conceptualized as family members, friends, or other members of one's age, religious, or socioeconomic cohort—are also likely to encounter instances of racial discrimination can inhibit the sense of racial alienation that may arise in the face of race-based subjugation (Gurin, Miller and Gurin 1980*)*. The reinforced relational ties to other black people perceived to be soldiering through racial strife fortifies the black individual's belief that she is but one of many spokes in a wheel being turned toward racial equity.

Indeed, we find the Negro Spiritual "Ezekiel saw de Wheel," referenced in "The Sorrow Songs" and "Of the Wings of Atalanta," to be an apt metaphor for black striving. Du Bois writes, "the ferment of his striving toward self-realization is to the strife of the white world like a wheel in a wheel: beyond the Veil are smaller but like problems of ideals, of poverty, of order and subordination, and, through all, the Veil of Race." In this analogy, the larger wheel represents the institutions and tools of racial oppression employed by rulers of a white hegemonic racial order. From literacy tests, grandfather clauses, convict farms, and lynchings of past eras to mass-incarceration, racial profiling, false imprisonment, and discrimination in housing and employment, which remain a social reality for many black Americans today (Alexander 2012; Hinton 2016; Weaver 2007) .

Meanwhile, the wheel within the wheel represents the collective efforts of black people to mount sustained challenges to these ever-evolving instruments of racial strife. Du Bois conceptualized as the spokes of this wheel the members of a nascent black middle class, which despite their sociopolitical, legal and cultural "exclusion from the [white] demos" were nevertheless expected to be "girding herself for the race that must be run."

We conceptualize striving as both a deliberate and a moral choice, as it reflects an individual's belief in her obligation to affirm her place in the wheel within the wheel, to join in the collective efforts of African Americans to stand against agents of racial subjugation piloting the outer wheel. Thus, striving is a mechanism motivating political behavior in the face of racial discrimination. This process is illustrated in the life's work of abolitionist and author Harriet

Jacobs. After escaping from slavery, Jacobs risked re-enslavement by engaging in anti-slavery activism and publishing editorials and her own autobiography, in which she shined a light on the sexual violence often visited upon black enslaved women in North Carolina.

We also detect the concept of striving in President Obama's remarks at the June 21, 2015 church service at Emanuel Church, South Carolina.[3] In his public eulogy for Pastor Pickney, a state senator among those slain in the racist violence committed at Emanuel Church, Obama evoked Du Bois' idea that agony will not stop the striving of 21st century black pilgrims: "Mother Emanuel Church and its congregation have risen before, from flames, from an earthquake, from other dark times, to give hope to generations of Charlestonians, and with our prayers and our love and the buoyancy of hope, it will rise again now as a place of peace."

Within these remarks are the key components of our concept of striving. First, the situating of this tragic instance of racial violence within a broader narrative of black subjugation and overcoming. Second, a positioning of the black congregants as members of a collective with a solemn duty to uplift and affirm one another in the face of an exemplar of the challenges inflicted as part of the prototypical black experience—in essence, spokes with a common responsibility to keep turning the wheel. The case of Emanuel AME provides a particularly vivid recent example of African Americans continuing to turn the wheels of self-preservation and self-affirmation within the larger wheel of a "post-racial" America characterized by pernicious colorblindness and racial violence.

Dawson's (1994) application of linked fate to black identity—specifically the concept of the black utility heuristic—provides a conceptual window into why striving serves as a wheel within a wheel, thereby connecting the spokes of black social identity. While our concept of striving is informed by this theoretical foundation, there are key differences in how we anticipate linked fate and striving influencing the decisions made by black individuals to advance what they perceive to be the collective interests of the racial group.

Linked fate surmises that black individuals view their circumstances and life chances as inextricably connected to the circumstances and life chances of black people as a collective group (and vice versa). This symbiotic relationship between individual and group is reinforced from a "lived and articulated" understanding of how racial exclusion defines the self (Lubiano 1997, 232; Chong & Rogers 2005). The greater this perceived link between one's own fate and that of the race, the more salient a role played by an individual's racial identity on her political decision making (Dawson 1994, 61). Moreover, the intensification of racial hostility increases the propensity of African Americans to base their political choices and behaviors on a calculation of racial group interest. Hence, the more one believes her own life chances are linked to those of the group, the more one will consider racial group interest in evaluating alternative political choices (Dawson 1994, 62).

Whereas a black individual's sense of linked fate allows her to connect her experiences to other black spokes within the wheel, striving provides her with an interpretative lens that links her personal experiences around race to a prototypical black experience. This lens in turn causes her to look both *outward* toward other African Americans as a cognitive frame of reference to guide action, and to look *upward* toward the broader black struggle—historical, contemporary and future-focused—to turn against the outer wheels of racial oppression. This additional mental frame can provide black individuals with a broader range of options to consider when working to counter racism. Simultaneously, this additional frame can surface intragroup divisions, as the individual considers which sets of racial group members are and are not fellow spokes in the inner wheel.

Linked fate casts the black individual as firmly tethered to the group, engendering a sense of responsibility to and kinship with that group (Papish 2015). White, Laird and Allen (2014) highlight a key consequence of this responsibility, demonstrating that conformity to social pressure effectively informs black individual decisions to stake out positions aligned with the collective interests of African Americans, even if those individuals may not personally benefit from those positions. This work indicates that a potential consequence of the racial group ties animated by linked fate is the regulating of black people's actions. As the authors note, one such manifestation of this regulation is the near uniform support of African Americans for the Democratic Party, despite increasing heterogeneity in the socioeconomic statuses and political beliefs held by members of the group.

Similar to linked fate, striving is also relational—the *I* in relationship to some other, a *we* (Elstain 2008, 239; Papish 2015). But in positioning black individuals as pilgrims navigating a racially unjust terrain, striving also gives these individuals the grounds to affirm or contest which members of the group are fellow pilgrims—that is, other spokes in the wheel. It is possible for the mental construction of fellow pilgrims to place at the front and center groups that are typically marginalized within broader black movements. Such was the case of Harriet Jacobs, who conceptualized black enslaved women as fellow spokes in the wheel turning toward abolition.

Alternately, the construction of black pilgrims can effectively exclude black subgroups from the work of turning the wheel. Such exclusion is evident in Cathy Cohen's (1999) seminal treatise *The Bounds of Blackness*, which chronicles actions by black political and religious leaders to demarcate the specific black sub-constituencies ravaged by the AIDS crisis—gay men, intravenous drug users and formerly incarcerated individuals—as not fit for consideration as fellow spokes of the wheel. The inference to be drawn from these examples is that across different contexts, varying sets of black people more or less adequately conform to the prototypical black identity constructed in the process of striving. One's perceptions of the fellow spokes in the wheel both shapes the specific sets of black people with whom she feels the strongest identity ties, and informs the behaviors she decides to pursue in response to the racial injury encountered.

This element of striving differentiates it from the concept of linked fate, which implies a universally experienced commonality that ties together the members of the racial group while dampening the effects of variations in class, gender, and other cross-cutting identities. Informed by Laird's (2017) innovative examination of the conditionality of black identity based on one's perceptions of her fit within the broader construct of "black interests," we conceive of striving as a mental process that can increase rather than weaken the salience of intragroup divisions. This process, in turn, determines which specific constellations of black people are integrated within various efforts to turn the wheel against racial oppression, from struggles for abolition to enfranchisement, from desegregation to criminal justice reform.

By providing a lens of interpretation that links one's personal experiences of discrimination to a larger group narrative chronicling the struggle of black Americans to achieve full personhood, striving provides African Americans with an affirming sense of their valued role in the ongoing black narrative. In turn, this affirmation offsets the depersonalizing or alienating effects of encounters with discriminatory practices and policies (Du Bois 1903).

At the same time, we view striving as a cognitive mechanism animating a contingent type of racial solidarity. By considering which black subgroups are conceptualized as fellow spokes in the wheel across various instances of racial injustice, we can better understand

why and how varying black contingents are integrated within—and excluded from—various strategic efforts to combat racial oppression. Operationalizing the concept of striving should illuminate our knowledge of the specific aims toward which people direct their labor for the purpose of racial group advancement, and the people they conceptualize as fellow sojourners in this struggle.

A model of black social ideology that incorporates striving as a latent construct provides a more comprehensive assessment of the unique socialization and reasoning processes undertaken by African Americans—a process resulting in the affirmation of a prototypical identity of blackness within a societal order that defines the group as lesser. Understanding how black individuals strive continuously to position themselves favorably within a socially rigid racial order gives insight into the causal linkages between perceptions of racial discrimination, black self-categorization, and social identification.

We now present a structural model of black social identity that builds on the foundation laid by prior models exploring contours of black ideological thought (e.g. Allen, Dawson, and Brown 1989; Allen 2001; Sellers 1998 a & b, 2003). This model treats striving as a latent construct. We believe striving will be apparent primarily in the positive associations we find between African Americans' encounters with discrimination, as well as their broader perceptions of the extent of anti-black discrimination, and two factors. One, how integral their blackness is to their self-identification, and two, how close they feel with other black people. These relationships reflect the mental effort by African Americans to connect their experiences of racial subjugation to a larger prototypical black experience.

Additionally, we can infer from black individuals' reported senses of closeness to different sets of African Americans the sets of black people they perceive to be reflective (or not) of the prototypical black identity. Thus, we interpret this structural model to glean insight into how striving can augment African Americans' sense of racial identity as they feel the weight of that identity in a racially stratified world. We also aim to learn how striving can augment or weaken intergroup ties among various black subgroups.

Hypotheses

Consistent with our assertion that striving causes one to view her encounters with discrimination as affirming the consistency of her experience with prototypical blackness, we expect that believing one is a victim of personal discrimination will increase the propensity to place blackness at the center of one's self-categorization (H1a). Likewise, adherence to the belief that African Americans must contend with systemic racial discrimination indicates mental effort to construct a prototypical black experience. Thus, we expect perceptions of systemic racial discrimination will increase the propensity of individuals to place blackness at the center of their self-categorization (H1b). Further, we expect to find a direct causal relationship between black self-categorization and expressions of positive black social identity, as this reflects striving toward affirmation and maintenance of a positive prototypical black identity (H2).

We do *not* expect a direct causal relationship between personal discrimination and positive aspects of black social identity (H3). In the absence of a politicization of one's personal encounters with discrimination, such experiences will prove alienating rather than affirming to one's social self. This in turn will weaken the ties between the black individual and the racial group. Accordingly, we expect to find that the interaction between perceptions of personal discrimination and black self-categorization will have an indirect structural relationship with positive aspects of black social identity (H4).

In contrast, we expect that belief in the existence of systemic racial discrimination will have a direct structural relationship with positive aspects of black social identity (H5). This linkage reflects striving to affirm the value of black people collectively, in the face of structural disadvantage. Studies consistently reveal that systemic racial discrimination is positively associated with black social identity (Gurin, Miller and Gurin, 1980, Gurin, Hatchett and Jackson, 1989; Sellers 1998 a & b, 2003). The interaction of systemic racial discrimination and black self-categorization will yield an indirect and strong causal linkage to positive aspects of black social identity (H6).

In sum, the direct and indirect positive relationships will demonstrate empirical support for the metaphorical 'wheel a-turnin in the hearts' of respondents who make a causal connection between the salience of their blackness to their identity (operationalized as black self-categorization) and their continual efforts to maintain positive aspects of black social identity. Affirmation of these hypotheses will support our ideal model of black self-categorization and identity. For ease of comprehension, the hypotheses are listed here below:

H_{1a}: Perceptions of personal discrimination are positively correlated with black self-categorization.

H_{1b}: Belief in systemic racial discrimination is positively correlated with black self-categorization

H_2: Black self-categorization is positively correlated with positive social identity.

H_3: Personal discrimination is *not* correlated with positive social identity.

H_4: The interaction of personal discrimination and black self-categorization is indirectly correlated with positive social identity

H_5: Systemic racial discrimination is positively correlated with positive social identity

H_6: The interaction of systemic racial discrimination and black self-categorization is indirectly correlated with positive social identity

The Social and Cultural Context of Black Social Identity

We include socioeconomic status (SES) and religiosity as two control exogenous variables because both have independent effects on various dimensions of black social identity (Demo and Hughes 1989; Ellison 1991; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Tate 1996; Price 2009). SES is especially important, as the emergence of black middle-class enclaves in places such as Chicago, Detroit, Houston and Washington, D.C. can facilitate the tendency of black individuals to construct prototypical identities of blackness that exclude members of the racial group belonging to other socioeconomic classes.

McGowen's (2017) examination of the political behavior of African Americans in white suburbs indicates that black people in affluent residential sites engage in strenuous efforts to affirm their racial identity through maintaining connections to black churches and civic spaces. Accordingly, whereas we may not expect high SES African Americans to exhibit a weaker centrality of blackness, they may nevertheless project a prototypical image of blackness that is not inclusive of group members with whom high SES black individuals may feel less emotional connections, such as low-income black people.

We expect greater religiosity to augment the effects of striving on the associations between our measures of discrimination, black self-categorization and positive aspects of social identity. As indicated thus far, the disposition of striving as a pilgrimage or upward struggle toward progress bears resemblance to the black Christian ethos of salvation and justified suffering. Thus, we expect striving to be particularly resonant with religious black people, who should

express greater centrality of their blackness, greater closeness to other black people, and more positive elements of black identity.

Data

To conduct our analyses, we use the Black American subsample of the 2001-03 National Survey of American Life (NSAL-SAQ), and the supplemental self-administered mail re-interview of the survey. This complex household probability sample (weighted, clustered, and stratified) contains 3570 black Americans, 1621 blacks of Caribbean descent, and 891 non-Hispanic whites aged 18 and over. The sample weight represents the black American population in the 48 coterminous states. The weights account for disproportionate sampling (unequal probability of household selection), non-response, and post-stratification (adjustment for possible distributional mismatch across socio-demographic characteristics).[4]

Data Analysis

As recommended by Joreskog (1993), we first develop measurement models to test the validity of our hypothesized notion of striving as a latent construct that is measurable with observable variables. We use confirmatory factor analyses to validate the presence of ten proposed constructs: four exogenous and six endogenous. Subsequently, we use structural equation techniques to generate estimates for a proposed structural model. Structural equation modeling (SEM) allows us to block test how observed variables relate to hypothesized constructs, and subsequently how those constructs are linked to one another.

Structural equation modeling also enables us to overcome many of the limitations inherent in other widely used multivariate statistical techniques. It allows us to utilize a large number of variables, which enhances our capacity to develop and test complex theories. SEM provides for direct testing for both direct and indirect effects (i.e. mediation effects) of our predictors on the outcome variables. More importantly, it allows us to directly incorporate and account for measurement level errors in our data analysis, therefore enhancing the precision and efficiency of our coefficients (Lomax and Schumacker 2004).

Variables

Completely exogenous constructs

Table 1 contains information about the relevant exogenous constructs. All variables are coded so that a higher response score indicates more of the phenomenon under consideration. *Perceptions of systematic racial discrimination* includes three items: 1) perception of whites' level of respect for black people, 2) perception of whites' assessment of black contributions to the nation and 3) perceptions of respondents' beliefs about how other racial minorities evaluate black intelligence. The data in Table 1 reveal that our proposed measures of perceptions of systematic racial discrimination yield an adequate fit ($P<0.01$).

Personal discrimination includes four items asking respondents if they encountered discriminatory treatment in the past year, and if they attribute these actions to their race or skin color. Twenty-six percent of respondents reported at least one form of discriminatory treatment in the past year. The response categories are a) being fired from a job, b) denied a promotion, c) refused a job, and d) treated unfairly by the police. The value of 1 is assigned if the experience of personal discrimination is perceived to be due to race, and 0 otherwise. The data in table 1

reveals that our measures of personal discrimination yield an adequate fit ($P<0.01$).

We measure socioeconomic status (SES) using two variables: education and household income. Both variables are categorical variables, the first comprised of four and the second of five categories.

Table 1. Measurement Model (Completely Exogenous Indicators)

	Est.		S.E.
Religiosity			
how often read religious books	1.00	0.71	0.00
how often watch religious programs	0.86***	0.57	0.07
how often listen religious programs	0.99***	0.56	0.09
how religious are you	0.39***	0.58	0.02
how often attend religious service	0.57***	0.57	0.03
SES			
Education (4 Categories)	1.00	0.91	0.00
Income (5 Categories)	0.55***	0.49	0.12
Systemic Racial Discrimination			
whites not respect blacks	1.00	0.78	0.00
whites not think blacks add to United States	0.96***	0.71	0.05
minorities not think blacks smart	0.79***	0.58	0.05
Personal Discrimination (Past Year)			
Firing Discrimination	1.00	0.57	0.00
Hiring Discrimination	1.46***	0.83	0.21
Promotion Discrimination	0.86***	0.49	0.29
Police Discrimination	1.46***	0.83	0.30

*** $P<0.01$; ** $P<0.05$; * $P<0.10$

The data in table 1 shows that our SES construct yields an adequate fit (*P*<0.01). As shown by Chong and Kim (2006), while differences in socioeconomic status can potentially surface divisions in black policy preferences, working class and affluent African Americans still largely share fundamental views of the role of racial stratification in determining their lived outcomes. Our model pinpoints how class cleavages can manifest in intragroup divides in the prototypical black identities constructed by upper and working class African Americans, respectively.

Religiosity is a measure of respondents' personal piousness, religious attendance, and religious involvement. The five items are: a) how religious are you; and how often do you: b) attend religious services; c) listen to religious programs; d) watch religious programs; and e) read religious books. All five indicators are measured on a five-point scale. The confirmatory factor analysis yields an adequate fit (P<0.01). As indicated by the aforementioned work by Cohen (1999), religiously adherent African Americans may draw clear dividing lines between the sets of black people viewed as fellow spokes in the wheel, and the sets of black people excluded from the prototypical black identity.

Endogenous constructs

Table 2 presents the endogenous constructs. Black self-categorization*, labeled *black centrality*, consists of two items; the extent to which: 1) blackness defines the respondent's identity, and 2) the respondent's life depends on other black lives. The first item in the measure most closely hews to group identity, whereas the second resembles linked fate.

We also include measures of closeness and group stereotypes. Three measures are utilized to estimate each closeness construct. The first measures individuals' *perception of closeness to the racial group's rank and file masses;* we use respondents' assessments of their closeness to poor, religious, and working-class black people. The second construct measures *closeness to the group's elites*; we use respondents' assessments of their closeness to upper class, professional and elective office-holding black individuals. The data in Table 2 reveals that both closeness to masses (*P*<0.01) and closeness to elites (*P*<0.01) provide adequate fits.

We use three sets of indicators to measure positive and negative stereotypes. *Negative stereotypes* measures respondents' perception of group members' 1) laziness, 2) inclination to give up easily, and 3) violent nature. *Positive stereotypes* measures perceptions of black people's 1) intelligence, 2) perseverance, and 3) pride. The data in table 2 shows that the items selected for negative stereotypes (*P*<0.01) and positive stereotypes (*P*<0.01) are indeed valid measures.

Finally, we include an *autonomy* construct that measures black collectivist sentiments. We measure individuals' level of approval of the following actions: 1) always voting for black politicians, 2) forming a black political party, and 3) always shopping at black-owned stores. The confirmatory factor analysis reveals that our autonomy construct has sufficient factor loadings, and it provides an adequate fit (*P*<0.01).

Table 2. Measurement Model (Endogenous Indicators)

	Est.		S.E.
Black Centrality (Self-Categorization)			
being black is large part of identity	1.00	0.47	0.00
R's life depends on other black lives	1.23***	0.68	0.14
Closeness to masses			
how close to poor blacks	1.00	0.69	0.00
how close to working-class blacks	1.11***	0.76	0.04
how close to religious blacks	1.21***	0.83	0.04
Closeness to elites			
how close to upper-class blacks	1.00	0.78	0.00
how close to elected blacks	1.11***	0.79	0.04
how close to black professionals	1.02***	0.78	0.04
Autonomy			
blacks should vote for blacks	1.00	0.69	0.00
blacks should form political party	1.12***	0.70	0.12
blacks should shop black-owned stores	0.93***	0.60	0.11
Positive Stereotypes			
how true blacks are intelligent	1.00	0.58	0.00
how true blacks are hardworking	1.25***	0.73	0.11
how true blacks are proud of selves	0.57***	0.49	0.05
Negative Stereotypes			
how true blacks are lazy	1.00	0.75	0.00
how true blacks give up easily	0.78***	0.57	0.08
how true blacks are violent	0.82***	0.62	0.08

*** $P < 0.01$; ** $P < 0.05$; * $P < 0.1$

Results

Figure 1 shows the statistically significant direct and indirect structural effects for our proposed hypotheses. Table 3 contains the structural model parameters and a summary of the path models that allows us to reject or confirm hypotheses 1a through 3. Both theoretical and statistical criteria provide a baseline to assess the fit of our model. At the statistical level, the hypothesized model presented a good fit to the data. The RMSEA has a value of 0.019, and the CFI and TLI have values of .91 and .92 respectively (higher than the .90 threshold), all indicating acceptable fit. Table 3 also provides a summary of the path model results that allow us to describe the relative influence of control variables on our dependent variables.

Both hypotheses 1a and 1b are confirmed by the data. As expected, both personal discrimination (hypothesis 1a) and systemic racial discrimination (hypotheses 1b) independently

increase black centrality. Our findings indicate that invidious discriminatory treatment shapes identity (Appiah 2005, 68-69), and that black self-categorization is politicized; believing discrimination is systemic increases the significance of blackness to black individuals' conceptualizations of self.
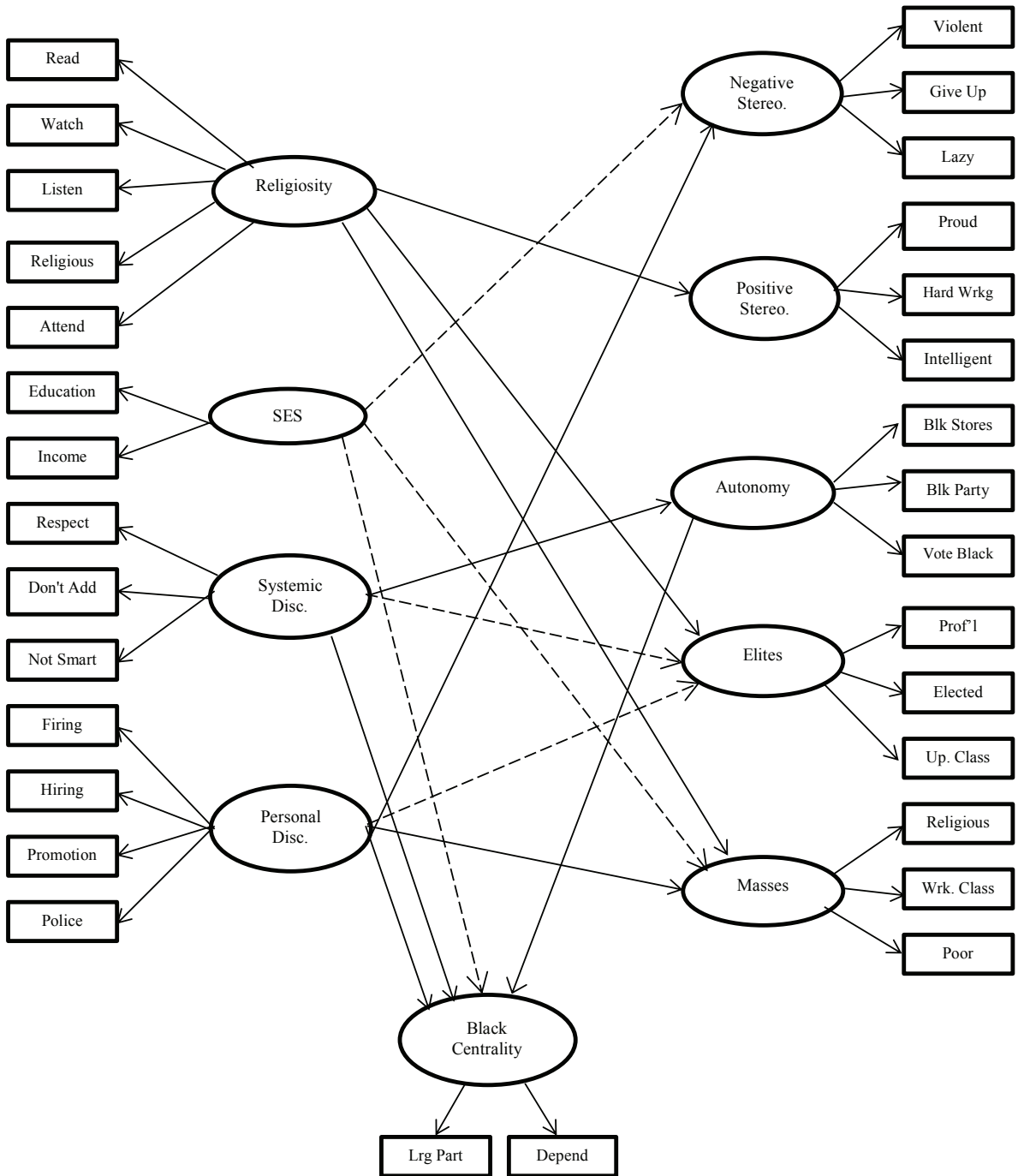
Hypothesis 2 (a direct causal relationship between black self-categorization and expressions of positive black social identity) is only partially confirmed by the data; black centrality is causally related to support for black political autonomy efforts, but not to positive stereotypes. The linkage between the salience of black identity and support for black autonomy reflects the idea that black self-categorization is, to quote Du Bois ([1919] 1996, 485) "an affirmation of pride in the race, the linage and the self." Consequently, it is a politically conscious understanding of the self. Our black autonomy construct may be tapping into this politically conscious conceptualizing of black prototypal identity. Whereas the stereotype questions gauge in-group perceptions, the autonomy construct gauges willingness to engage in group-based ideological strategizing.

Building on Young's (1998) argument, we speculate that individuals' high on our black self-categorization measure believe that blacks must deliberate within the group and acquire independent power before working in concert with white political actors. Worth noting here is the positive association between blackness being highly salient to an individual's identity conception and a propensity to engage in the group-centric strategic thinking.

For us, striving is the inductive cognitive pathway translating salient black identity to politicized black decision making. Positioning oneself within a larger narrative of black collective struggle informs one's desire to seek means of advancing the collective standing of the group. While this pathway is similar to the effect of linked fate on black political behavior, subsequent findings from the model demonstrate the distinctions between striving and lined fate.

Table 3 reveals two seemingly dissonant positive associations, which are illuminative of the complexity and variability of black identity. The first is the positive association between personal discrimination and closeness to black masses, and the second between personal discrimination and negative stereotypes. Only the second positive association is consistent with our expectation in hypothesis 3—that in the absence of a politicized lens through which to view racial discrimination, personal experiences with discrimination will estrange black individuals from the racial group, rather than affirm their connectedness to the group.

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model Diagram [¥][*]

¥ Only significant effects are represented in the diagram
*Solid lines connote positive statistical relationships; dashed lines connote negative statistical relationships

The first linkage implies that experiences of personal discrimination can indeed increase the likelihood of feeling a sense of sameness with ordinary black people, even if that experience is not viewed through a politicized lens. But concurrently, absent striving to connect the experience of receiving ill-treatment by the police or an employer to the larger narrative of black people crusading against an unjust racial order, black individuals may attribute discriminatory treatment to pathological behaviors or culturally inferior tendencies exhibited by black people relative to whites. This finding seems to be strongest indicator yet that politicization of racial discrimination—conceptualized in our striving process as the effort to link one's encounters with discrimination to a larger black narrative of soldiering on through injustice—is instrumental to preserving a sense of positive social identity among African Americans.

We also find that systemic racial discrimination is negatively related to closeness to black elites, yet positively related to autonomy. The positive association between systematic discrimination and autonomy provides partial support for H5, which stated that systematic racial discrimination is directly related to positive aspects of black identity. But the distancing from black elites, along with the null relationships between systematic discrimination and both closeness to black masses and adherence to positive black stereotypes, indicate that striving does indeed entail drawing lines of demarcation in the imagining of one's co-laborers in the pilgrimage toward racial salvation.

That perceptions of systemic racial deprivation are negatively associated with black elites indicates that black people feel greater social distance from those in-group members who have ascended to the professional and political elite classes. Because these black elites may be perceived to be more liberated from the racial constraints prototypical of the black experience, and thus less exemplary of "true" blackness, they appear to be viewed as unsuitable spokes in the wheel turning toward racial equity. The linkage may also reflect individuals' assessments that descriptive representation has yet to yield substantial benefit to black constituencies. Thus, the negative association may illustrate a hesitancy to view black elites as co-pilgrims in striving, while additionally reflecting a pointed critique of the capacity of such elites to leverage their positions to benefit the group.

The behavioral commitment to black autonomy among those scoring high on systemic racial discrimination is also reflective of the politicization of black prototypical identity. Those who view racial discrimination as systemic rather than episodic are inclined to seek redress through means of in-group empowerment within the social order, as opposed to working in collaboration with other racial groups to advance progress. Again, we posit that striving is the pathway that bridges maintenance of a politicized black identity with adoption of a behavioral stance directed toward racial collective action in the face of racial subjugation.

Table 3. Structural Model Parameters

	Black Centrality			Closeness to Masses			Closeness to Elites		
	Est.	Styx Est.	S.E.	Est.	Styx Est.	S.E.	Est.	Styx Est.	S.E.
Religiosity	-0.01	-0.03	0.02	0.27***	0.43	0.03	0.13***	0.22	0.03
SES	-0.04*	-0.06	0.02	-0.05*	-0.06	0.03	-0.02	-0.03	0.02
Systemic Racial Discrimination	0.45***	0.57	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.06	-0.11**	-0.12	0.05
Personal Discrimination	0.18***	0.20	0.06	0.25***	0.20	0.09	-0.03	-0.03	0.08
Black Centrality				0.07	0.05	0.09	0.12	0.10	0.08
		R^2=0.42			R^2=0.18			R^2=0.06	

Table 3. Structural Model Parameters (Ctd)

	Autonomy			Positive Stereotypes			Negative Stereotypes		
	Est.	StdYX Est.	S.E.	Est.	StdYX Est.	S.E.	Est.	StdYX Est.	S.E.
Religiosity	-0.01	-0.01	0.03	0.05**	0.09	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02
SES	0.00	0.00	0.03	-0.02	-0.02	0.03	-0.28***	-0.34	0.06
Systemic Racial Discrimination	0.25***	0.19	0.07	-0.01	-0.02	0.05	-0.04	-0.03	0.06
Personal Discrimination	0.20	0.13	0.13	-0.03	-0.03	0.07	0.19***	0.14	0.07
Black Centrality	0.52***	0.31	0.13	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.04	0.09
		R^2=0.26			R^2=0.01			R^2=0.14	

*** P <0.01; ** P <0.05; * P <0.10

χ^2 = 71.440; df=23; P= 0.000

CFI=0.91

TLI=0.91

RMSEA=0.019

Table 4 contains the indirect effects. The structural statistical relationships provide partial support for hypotheses 4 and 5. Personal discrimination and black centrality together increase the propensity to support black autonomy (H4); the same is true of the indirect effects of systemic racial discrimination and black centrality (H6). We suspect that African Americans who are personal victims of discrimination desire renewed focus from elites on eradicating the pernicious forms of institutional discrimination still present in various spheres of life. In essence, we surmise they seek to hold their fellow spokes in the wheel accountable for leveraging their positions of influence to strive for the betterment of the group.

Table 4. Indirect Effects

	Est.	StdYX Est.	S.E.
Effects of Personal Discrimination on Autonomy Through Black Centrality			
Total	0.29**	0.19	0.12
Total indirect	0.09***	0.06	0.04
Direct	0.20	0.13	0.13
Effects of Systemic Racial Discrimination on Autonomy Through Black Centrality			
Total	0.48***	0.37	0.06
Total indirect	0.23***	0.18	0.06
Direct	0.25***	0.19	0.07

Our control variables yield notable, albeit not entirely surprising, results. Religiosity is positively and significantly associated with closeness to black masses and closeness to black elites. It is also positively related to positive black stereotypes. As expected, these findings are in line with results from prior studies (Allen, Dawson & Brown, 1989; Allen, 2001), as well as our theoretical expectations. These findings suggest religious black individuals are indeed inclined to feel greater affinity for black people perceived to be fellow pilgrims working toward racial salvation. Further, perhaps contrary to what would be expected, religiously adherent black individuals appear to conceptualize a broad set of African Americans—both elites and poor and working class individuals—as fellow spokes turning the wheel.

We acknowledge, however, that black respondents in this data set are not asked to register their solidarity with groups that may be stigmatized within the black church community, such as members of the black LGBT community or unchurched African Americans. Our work also stops short of identifying how denominational differences may influence religious black people's conceptualization of the prototypical black identity. Broadening the set of black sub-constituencies with whom respondents indicate closeness, and accounting for variations across church affiliation, can be fruitful contributions made by future work.

Socioeconomic status is negatively associated with both closeness to masses and with negative stereotypes. The negative association with harmful stereotypes suggests that middle and upper-class black people may view themselves as worthy exemplars of the prototypical black image and experience in America. On the other hand, the negative association with black masses may indicate a perceived disconnect between higher SES black people and groups of

African Americans who they may be perceived to project images of blackness that tarnish or depart from the ideal prototypical image. Once again, we witness in these closeness measures an apparent attempt by particular members of the racial group to parse out which subgroups can make the most (and least) credible claims to projecting the exemplary image of blackness.

While we have argued that striving among black individuals carries the propensity to strengthen within group ties, we also acknowledge the potential for cleavages to arise between racial group members who navigate their experiences around race in heterogeneous manners, due to crosscutting identities such as class and religion (as well as identities that are not explored here but certainly worthy of in-depth examination, such as gender, age, and sexuality). In the concept of striving, we offer a framework for exploring the manifestation of these cleavages, and the distinct manner through which they emerge, highlighting the mutability and complexity of black identity. Our approach to exploring this mutability offers a complementary perspective to Laird's (2017) aforementioned work, which highlights the dynamism to black identity in the form of the exploration of the subcategories of "moveable blacks."

To summarize, the structural model reveals associations that provide strong support of hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2, and partial support of hypotheses 4 and 6. The model also reveals associations that both partially support and lend grounds to reject hypotheses 3 and 5. Perceiving either personal or fraternal deprivation increases the centrality of blackness to African Americans' self-identification. Absent politicization of their personal encounters with discrimination, black individuals feel greater closeness to other black people—likely due to perceived linked fate—while also adhering more strongly to negative stereotypes about the group. Black individuals who politicize discrimination—reflected in their belief in systemic discrimination—feel no closer to ordinary black people, while feeling more distant from black elites. Yet these individuals are more supportive of black autonomy efforts, indicating a commitment to a particular strategic vision of black uplift. Perceptions of both personal and systemic racism work in tandem with centrality of blackness to increase black people's support for black autonomy efforts.

We found within this structural model a number of relationships that appear to be particularly indicative of striving at work—for instance, the associations found between the politicization of discrimination and both centrality of blackness to one's self categorization and increased support for collective uplift efforts. Striving is a process that affirms rather than disparages the social significance of one's blackness, while acknowledging the systemic marginalization of black people in society. Such identity affirmation breeds action on behalf of the group, indicated by the support for autonomy efforts. As a preserver of positive self-categorization that interrupts the otherwise demobilizing effects of racial discrimination, striving acts as wheel within the wheel, turning the spokes of black racial identity toward action.

Conclusion

Like Ralph Ellison (1953, 1964], 1995), we believe that the black individual's experiences and interactions around race within both black spaces and wider American culture affects the definition, tenor and significance she gives to her self-categorization, which is causally linked to her social identity as a black American. The act of striving itself is far from a uniform process producing equivalent results across individuals. As indicated by the structural models, striving among poor and working class African Americans who possess structural views of discrimination may manifest in adhering to Black Nationalist ideals of self-improvement and community uplift. Simultaneously, their striving efforts may cause poor and working class

African Americans to reject the utility of seeking racial advancement through mainstream political channels, as well as through black elected officials.

Alternately, striving among more affluent group members may manifest as further widening the social and political distance between them and non-affluent African Americans, who may be perceived to be poor representatives of the prototypical black identity. The process of striving, therefore, can illuminate not only the motivation to take collective action in the face of racially injurious encounters, but can also inform the divergent strategic approaches taken to advance black interests from various factions of the patchwork black community.

The model presented here provides key insights into the role and function of prototypical black identity in connecting black individuals' categorization and social identity, while raising key questions that should motivate future inquiries. One, what precisely is the relationship between striving among black Americans and political behavior? We have argued that striving may serve as the pathway between politicized black identity and engagement in political activities directed toward black advancement. Our model stops short of examining actual behavior, exploring only preferred courses of action among respondents.

But the next iteration of the study can incorporate measures of political activity ranging from electoral actions such as voting and contacting political elites, to communal actions such as attending local meetings and working with civic organizations, to system-challenging activities such as participating in protests. We believe that pinpointing the sets of black people conceptualized as providing an adequate fit with the individual's conception of the prototypical black identity paves the way for understanding which political behaviors will be favored or disregarded by the individual when selecting their course of action for racial reprieve. Accordingly, the associations uncovered here between experiences with discrimination, self-categorization and closeness with various black subgroups can serve as the basis for exploring variations in the political actions preferred by people who perceive these respective sets of actors as fellow spokes in the wheel.

Another question to be addressed by future research explores the associations between striving and policy preferences. Given the potential for striving to intensify intragroup cleavages, particularly along lines of socioeconomic status, how might striving lead working class and affluent black people to adopt systematically different positions on the best means to alleviate racial ills? Indeed, surveying the current landscape of black discourse, one finds no shortage of perspectives revealing fundamentally distinct ideas about how the black body politic should distribute its energy and resources to advance the goals of the group. These ideas range from continued pursuit of electoral empowerment through black elective office holding, to calls for black individuals to assume greater moral and social responsibility, labeled as "respectability politics" (Higginbotham 1994; Harris 2014), to calls for a return to the counterinsurgency methods associated with the height of the Black Power movement.

These debates are critically important, as they shape both the archetypal images of blackness, and the strategic paradigms that will be adopted as the primary interpretive lenses through which the emergent black generation will come to view their racial identity and their role in the world. As the outer wheel of American society—comprising the workplace, legal system, media, and electoral system—continue to turn, serving as the filters through which individuals interpret and make sense of learning and socialization (Carmichael & Thewell, 2003), the inner wheel of black community—the colors, smells, sounds, music and memories of participation in formal and informal social groups—will continue to incubate and nurture an always evolving sense of meaning and attachment to black identity. We encourage future

exploration of the diversity of thoughts and behaviors that manifest from the efforts of individual African Americans to strive toward a prototypical black identity through which they can interpret their own experiences.

Notes

1. See "Christ's Agony," A Sermon by Jonathan Edwards http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons.agony.html

2. A computer assisted face-to-face instrument accounts for 86% of the initial NSAL interviews. Computer assisted telephone interviews account for the remaining 14% of the interviews. All interviews were conducted in English with an average length of two hours and twenty minutes. Data collection occurred between February 2001 and June 2003. The response rate for the sample was 70.7%.

3. See https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/06/18/latest-president-obama-delivers-statement-shooting-charleston

4. The questions are intended to tap into the longstanding attitudinal dispositions and perspectives that characterize respondents' racial worldviews. We are confident, therefore, that the responses offered are not simply artifacts of the time of data collection. Due to the coherent and constrained nature of black ideological belief systems, we contend that the responses we explore would exhibit little variation across different contemporary political periods. Accordingly, we affirm the generalizability of these findings when discussing the dispositions of Black Americans in the present context.

References

Alexander, Michelle. 2012. The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness. New York: The New Press.

Allen, Richard L. 2001. The Concept of Race. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University .

Allen, Ricahrd, Michelle Dawson, and Ronald Brown. 1989. "A schema-based approach to modeling an African American racial belief system." The American Political Science Review 2:431-441.

Appiah, Kwesi. 2005. The Ethics of Identity. Princeton NJ: Princeton Univeristy.

Calhoun-Brown, Allison. 1996. "African American churches and political mobilization: The Psychological Impact of Organizational Resources." Journal of Politics 4:935-953.

Carmichael, Stokely, and Michael Thelwell, M. 2003. *Ready for revolution: The life and struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Chong, Dennis and Dukhong Kim. 2006. "The experiences and effects of economic status among racial and ethnic minorities." *American Political Science Review,* 100(3), 335-351.

Chong, Dennis and Reuel Rogers. 2005. "Racial solidarity and political participation." *Political Behavior* 27:347-374.

Cohen, Cathy. 1999. *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dawson, Michael C. 1994. Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univeristy Press.

Dickerson, John S. 2015. "Charleston victims wield power of forgiveness." June 22. USA To-day. http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/06/21/charleston-church- shoot-ing-families-forgiveness-column/29069731/.

Du Bois, W. E. B. ([1897], 1999). "The conservation of races." In The Souls of Black Folk, edited by Henry Gates and Terri Oliver, 176-183. New York: Norton.

———. ([1903], 1999). "Of our spiritual striving." In The Souls of Black Folk, edited by Henry Gates and Terri Oliver. New York: Norton.

———. 1940. "A New England Boy and Reconstruction, in *W.E. B. Du Bois, Writings, Dawn of Dusk*, edited by Nathan Higgins. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1986, 59.

Ellison, Christopher. 1991. "Identification and separatism: religious involvement and racial orientation among Black Americans." Sociological Quarterly 32:477-494.

———. ([1953, 1964], 1995). "The world and the jug." In Shadow and Act, edited by Ralph Ellison, 107-143. New York: Vintage .

Elstain, Jean B. 2008. *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self.* New York: Basic Books.

Gurin, Patricia, Shirley Hatchett, and James Jackson. 1989. Hope and Independence: Blacks' Response to Electoral and Party Politics. New York: Russell Sage Foundation .

Gurin, Patricia, Arthur Miller, and Gerald Gurin. 1980. "Stratum identification and consciousness." Social Psychology Quarterly 43:30-47.

Harris, Frederick C. 2014. "The rise of respectability politics." Dissent 61(1):33-37.

———. 1994. "Something within: religion as a mobilizer of African-American political activism." Journal of Politics 56:42-68.

Higginbotham, Evelyn B. 1994. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hinton, Elizabeth. 2016. *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Jacobs, Harriet. 2019. *Incidents in the Life Of A Slave Girl.* Second Norton Critical Edition., edited by Francis S. Foster and Richard Yarborough. New York: Norton

Jackson, James S., Caldwell, Cleopatra H., Williams, David R., Neighbors, Harold W., Nesse, Randolph M., Taylor, Robert Joseph, and Trierweiler, Steven J. National Survey of American Life Self-Administered Questionnaire (NSAL-SAQ), February 2001-June 2003. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2010-04-13. https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR27121.v1

Joreskog, Karl. 1984. "Testing structural equation models." In Testing Structural Equation Models, edited by Kenneth Bollen and Scott Long 294-316. Newbury, Park : Sage Publishing.

Laird, Chryl. 2017. "Black like me: how political communication changes racial group identification and its implications." Politics, Groups, and Identities:1-23.

Lomax, Richard G., and Randall Schumacker. 2004. A Beginner's Guide to Structural Equation Modeling. Psychology Press.

McGowen III, Ernest. 2017. African Americans in White Suburbia: Social Networks and Political Behavior. University Press of Kansas.

Miller, Arthur, Patricia Gurin, Gerald Gurin, and Oksana Malanchuk. 1981. "Group consciousness and political participation." American Journal of Political Science 25:494-511.

Papish, Laura. 2015. "Promoting black (social) identity." *Social Theory & Practice* 41(1):1-25.

Pettit, Becky. 2012. Invisible men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Price, Melanye. 2009. Dreaming Blackness: Black Nationalism and African American Public Opinion. New York : New York University Press .

Schiavenza, Matt. 2015. "Hatred and forgiveness in Charleston." The Atlantic. June 20. http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2015/06/dylann-roof-manifesto-forgiveness/396428/.

Sellers, Robert and Nicole Shelton. 2003. "The role of racial identity in percieved racial discrimation." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 84:1071-1092.

Sellers, Robert, Tabbye Chavous, and Deanna Cooke. 1998. "Racial ideology and racial centrality as predicators of African American college students' academic performance." Journal of Black Psychology 24.

Sellers, Robert , Mia Smith, Nicole Shelton, Stephanie Rowley, and Tabbye Chavous. 1998. "Multidimensional model of racial identity: A reconceptionalization of African American raical identity." Personality & Social Psychology Review 2:18-39.

Shepard, Thomas. 1999. "The parable of ten virgins opened and applied." in A*merican Sermons: The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by Michael Warner. New York, NY: Library of America, 77-93.

Weaver, Vesla M. 2007. "Frontlash: Race and the development of punitive crime policy." *Studies in American Political Developmen*t 21.2: 230-265.

White, Ismael K., Chryl Laird, and Troy Allen. 2014. "Selling out?: The politics of navigating conflicts between racial group interest and self-interest." American Political Science Review 108(4):783-800.

Young, Iris M. 1997. Intersecting voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political philosophy and Policy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. 1990. Justice and the Politics of Difference. Princeton ,NJ: Princeton University Press