Perceptions of Racial Gaps, their Causes, and Ways to Reduce Them

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and
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NBER Race and Stratification Meeting
Perceptions of and Attitudes Towards Racial Inequities

**Question:** large racial disparities, but little agreement on what to do. What is the reason?

**Knowledge:** Do people have accurate information about economic circumstances and opportunities of their own racial group and other groups?

**Beliefs about causes** of racial inequities: Do people explain the existence of racial gaps in different ways?

**Policy Views:** Do people have different views on what should be done, e.g.: on income-targeted vs. race-targeted policies?

**Young people’s views:** Are these views already formed and are they still malleable among very young people (aged 13-17)?
Social Economics Surveys and Experiments

• Surveys have been used for a long time for measurement & statistics.
  We now have high-quality admin data on many variables (income, family situation, employment, etc.)

• Yet, some things remain invisible in data other than survey data (even great data!): perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and reasoning.
  Critical role in social, economic, and political outcomes.

• Revealed preference approach – our holy grail – can be challenging due to lack of data and identifying variation.
  We often do not “reveal” our beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, etc. on important issues with our micro, observed behaviors.

• Surveys are more than a measurement tool. Control of data generating process. “Creating your own identifying variation and uncovering the invisible.”
Using surveys

- If used well, approach can be applied to many settings and questions (including as complement to other approaches).
- New mobile technologies & platforms offer opportunities.
- For the results to be reliable, it is critical that these surveys are well-designed, carefully calibrated, and deployed on appropriate samples.
- **Comprehensive guide**: “How to Run Surveys: A guide to creating your own identifying variation and revealing the invisible.” (socialeconomicslab.org/how-to-run-surveys/)
Large-scale surveys in the US of **8,400 adults** and **2,000 teenagers (13-17 years old)**.

Done through commercial survey companies in 2019/20.

Broad pools of respondents, variety of recruiting channels and rewards.

**Adult sample:** 4,200 people who identify as “Black” or “African American” (for brevity: “Black respondents”) and 4,200 “White,” “European American,” and not “Hispanic” (for brevity: “white respondents”).

**Youth sample:** 1,000 Black and 1,000 white non-Hispanic respondents.
Survey Structure

Background of respondent

Treatments

Wave 1
- Mobility treatment
- Historical earnings gap treatment
- No treatment

Wave 2 + Youth survey
- Systemic racism treatment
- No treatment

Perceptions of racial gaps in economic conditions and opportunities

Perceived causes of racial gaps

Race-targeted policies

General redistribution policies
Data and Response Quality

**Question design:** balanced and benchmarking, images, minimize sensitive questions, adapted to teenagers.

**Avoiding selection:**

Recruit respondents without revealing topic or our identity.

Add benchmark questions from existing surveys (responses very close).

**Careless responses:** timer on each page; attention check questions.

**Incentives:** rewards for accurate answers (no effects); real stakes donation question (correlated with answers).

**Feedback** post-survey: 12% thought was left-wing biased; 17% right-wing.
Perceived Income and Mobility Gaps

Perceived Causes of Racial Gaps

What Predicts Policy Views?
Perceived Income and Mobility Gaps
Perceived Racial Income Inequality

Adult survey
% of respondents who thinks that...
- A white person earns more than a Black person (in US)
- Black/white earnings difference has not decreased

Youth survey
% of respondents who thinks that...
- A white person earns more than a Black person (in US)
- Black/white earnings difference has not decreased

Respondents who are:
- white
- Black

Respondents who are:
- white Democrats
- white Republicans
- white with Democrat parents
- white with Republican parents
Eliciting Perceptions on Black and White Children’s Mobility

Imagine now 100 white children born in one of the poorest 100 families. How will these white children do when they grow up?

Please fill out the entries to the right of the figure below to tell us, in your opinion, how many out of 100 white children coming from the poorest 100 families will grow up to be in each income group.

Please note that your entries need to add up to 100 or you will not be able to move on to the next page.
Perceived Racial Gaps in Mobility

**Adult survey**
Perceived probability of moving from Q1 to at least Q3

- **White children**: 0, 25, 40, 62, 100
- **Black children**: 25, 40, 46

- **Reality**
- **Respondents who are**: white, Black

**Youth survey**
% of respondents who thinks that...

- **Black children**: 9, 18, 55
- **White children**: 14, 19, 23, 55

- **White with Democrat parents**: 9, 18, 21, 26
- **White with Republican parents**: 0, 25, 50, 75, 100

- **Reality**
- **Respondents who are**: white, Black

- **Perceived probability of moving from Q1 to at least Q3**

- **Black children**: 0, 25, 37, 45, 75
- **White children**: 0, 25, 50, 75, 100

- **Reality**
- **Respondents who are**: white Democrats, white Republicans

- **White children have ≥ fairly high chances of becoming rich**
- **Black children have ≥ fairly high chances of becoming rich**
Perceived Causes of Racial Gaps
Racial income gaps

Racial mobility gaps
Racial income gaps

Racial mobility gaps

Labor market
Education System
Police & Judicial System
Other:
Health care
Credit access
…
…
Systemic Racism
Institutional settings

- Labor market
- Education System
- Police & Judicial System
- Other: Health care Credit access ...

Racial income gaps
Racial mobility gaps
Perceived Causes among Adults

% of respondents who think that...

**Labor Market**
- White people get more job offers: 0.173 (0.024)
- Black people are often discriminated in getting a job: 0.172 (0.011)
- Black people are often discriminated at work: 0.165 (0.012)
- A white person is less likely to be hired: -0.197 (0.023)

**Education**
- Black children attend worse quality schools than white children: 0.189 (0.025)
- Black people are often discriminated at school: 0.105 (0.012)
- A white person is less likely to be admitted to college: -0.211 (0.023)

Respondents who are:  
- White
- Black

% of respondents who think that...

- White Democrats: -0.207 (0.033)
- White Republicans: -0.293 (0.016)
- White Democrats: -0.27 (0.017)
- White Republicans: 0.32 (0.032)
Perceived Causes among Adults (II)

Police and Judicial System
- Black people are often discriminated by the police: 15.8% (0.11)
- Black people are often discriminated in the judicial system: 17.8% (0.11)

Racism, History, Discrimination
- Lack of effort is the reason people are poor: -5.1% (0.12)
- Lack of effort is the reason Black people are poor: -12.1% (0.23)
- The reason Black people are poor is enslavement and discrimination: 17% (0.12)
- Racism is a serious problem: 20.4% (0.11)

Respondents who are:  
- White
- Black

% of respondents who think that...

Youth sample
Disagreements on What Causes Racial Inequities

- People perceive the income and mobility gaps between Black & white Americans differently...

  ... but by far the biggest disagreements lie in their perceived causes of racial inequities.

- What predicts policy views?

  People’s support for general redistribution (or race-targeted policies) does not so much depend on their perceptions of the magnitudes of racial gaps, it depends on why they think those gaps exist.
Large Partisan Gaps

**Black & white Democratic respondents:**
- attribute persistent racial gaps to enslavement, long-standing discrimination, & racism.
- support income-targeted redistribution & race-targeted policies.

**White Republican respondents:**
- tend to view racial inequities primarily as the result of lack of effort and individual decisions.
- less inclined to support redistribution and race-targeted policies to reduce them.

**Strikingly, these racial & partisan gaps are already prevalent among teenagers.**

Teens’ views imply substantial partisan gaps in line with their parents’ political affiliation (sometimes even more polarized!)
What Predicts Policy Views?
Changing Policy Views

- Experiments:
  
  Showing people **information on gaps in earnings & opportunities** between Black & white people does not move policy views.

  Explaining some of the causes & consequences of **systemic racism** does.

- Interpretation: Simply showing **how** unequal circumstances & opportunities are does not move people’s beliefs on **why** they are unequal, does not change the narrative that respondents believe in.

- Although there are clearly large racial gaps along many econ & social dimensions, and although many people are (at least to some extent) aware of them, they disagree on their causes and, hence, on the way or even need to resolve them.
Thank you!
APPENDIX
## Adult Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black Population</th>
<th>White Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-59 years old</td>
<td>0.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-69 years old</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>$0-$19,999</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-$39,999</td>
<td>0.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>$40,000-$69,999</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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<td>$70,000-$109,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>$110,000+</td>
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<td>Northeast</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
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<td>4-year college or more</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
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<td>Employed</td>
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<td>Self-employed</td>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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</table>

Sample size: 2,500 851 847 2,509 850 850
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black Population</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pop (1) Urban (2) Sample (3)</td>
<td>Pop (4) Urban (5) Sample (6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.51 0.50 0.50</td>
<td>0.52 0.51 0.50</td>
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<td>13 years old</td>
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<td>0.19 0.19 0.19</td>
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<td>0.19 0.19 0.20</td>
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<td>15 years old</td>
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<td>0.20 0.20 0.19</td>
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<td>16 years old</td>
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<td>0.21 0.21 0.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 years old</td>
<td>0.20 0.20 0.23</td>
<td>0.21 0.21 0.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Share for which parents reported income</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.87</td>
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<td>Parental income</td>
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<td>$0-$19,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>$70,000-$109,999</td>
<td>0.15 0.16 0.21</td>
<td>0.22 0.22 0.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>$110,000+</td>
<td>0.19 0.21 0.19</td>
<td>0.44 0.48 0.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>0.16 0.17 0.19</td>
<td>0.18 0.20 0.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>0.19 0.20 0.17</td>
<td>0.29 0.27 0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.58 0.55 0.52</td>
<td>0.34 0.33 0.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>0.07 0.08 0.12</td>
<td>0.19 0.20 0.21</td>
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<td>Democratic parents</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<td>Republican parents</td>
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<td>0.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent parents</td>
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<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>1,005</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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</table>
Perceived Causes among Teens

**Labor Market**
- White people get more job offers: 15.4% (0.25)
- Black people are often discriminated in getting a job: 22.7% (0.24)
- Black people are often discriminated at work: 22.7% (0.25)

**Education**
- Black children attend worse quality schools than white children: 15.7% (0.26)
- Black people are often discriminated at school: 20.7% (0.26)
- A white person is less likely to be admitted to college: -11.7% (0.32)

**Respondents who are:**
- White
- Black

**Parents:**
- White with Democrat parents
- White with Republican parents
Perceived Causes among Teens (II)

**Police and Judicial System**
- Black people are often discriminated by the police: 19 (0.022)

**Racism, History, Discrimination**
- Lack of effort is the reason people are poor: 0.047 (0.025)
- Lack of effort is the reason Black people are poor: -0.075 (0.029)
- The reason Black people are poor is discrimination: 0.037 (0.021)
- Racism is a serious problem: 0.189 (0.021)

Respondents who are:
- White
- Black
- White with Democrat parents
- White with Republican parents
Support for Race-Targeted Policies among Adults

- Support government intervention to reduce unequal opportunities between Black and white children.
- Are in favor of preferential hiring for Black people.
- Are in favor of preferential college admissions for Black students.
- Are in favor of paying reparations to descendants of enslaved.

Respondents who are:
- White
- Black
- White Democrats
- White Republicans

Believe more changes are needed to give Black people equal rights.

% of respondents who...

- .398 (0.011)
- .207 (0.012)
- .18 (0.011)
- .065 (0.019)
- .175 (0.011)
- .137 (0.015)
- .16 (0.017)
- .108 (0.016)
- .421 (0.015)
- .201 (0.026)
Support for Race-Targeted Policies among Teens

- Support for paying reparations to descendants of enslaved are in favor of preferential college admissions for Black students.
- Support for government intervention to reduce unequal opportunities between Black and white children.
- Believe more changes are needed to give Black people equal rights.

% of respondents who...

Respondents who are:
- white
- Black
- white with Democrat parents
- white with Republican parents

Correlations:
- 0.467 (0.026)
- 0.305 (0.026)
- 0.162 (0.028)
- 0.124 (0.021)
- -0.186 (0.037)
- -0.307 (0.042)
- -0.163 (0.036)
- -0.366 (0.03)
Support for Redistribution Policies among Adults

% of respondents who...

think upper income people pay too much in taxes
favor more spending on...
... income support programs
... schools
... housing
... poorest neighborhoods
... health care
support government intervention to reduce...
... unequal opportunities between rich and poor children
... income differences

Respondents who are:
- white
- Black
- white Democrats
- white Republicans
Support for Redistribution Policies among Teens

- % of respondents who think upper income people pay too much in taxes: 
  - White: 0.016 (0.015)
  - Black: -0.016 (0.015)

- % of respondents who favor more spending on helping the poor: 
  - White: 0.037 (0.026)
  - Black: 0.037 (0.026)

- % of respondents who support government intervention to reduce... 
  - ... unequal opportunities between rich and poor children: 
    - White: 0.129 (0.025)
    - Black: 0.129 (0.025)

- % of respondents who support government intervention to reduce... 
  - ... income differences: 
    - White: 0.116 (0.027)
    - Black: 0.116 (0.027)

Respondents who are: 
- White
- Black

- White with Democrat parents
- White with Republican parents
In 1970, a black person would on average earn only two thirds as much as a white person. That is, for every dollar a white person earned, a black person would earn 63 cents.
Over time, the earnings of white and black people have grown. But the gap in earnings between black and white people has not been closed at all over the years.
Mobility Gap Treatment

Out of 100 black children born in one of the poorest 100 families,

Parents’ income group

- The richest 100 families
- The second richest 100 families
- The middle 100 families
- The second poorest 100 families
- The poorest 100 families

Children’s income group, once they grow up

- 3 will make it to the richest 100 families when they grow up
- 6 will grow up to be among the second richest 100 families
- 16 will be among the middle 100 families
- 38 will make it to the second poorest 100 families
- 37 will remain among the 100 poorest families
Out of 100 white children born in one of the poorest 100 families,

**Parents' income group**
- The richest 100 families
- The second richest 100 families
- The middle 100 families
- The second poorest 100 families
- The poorest 100 families

**Children's income group, once they grow up**
- 10 will make it to the richest 100 families when they grow up
- 16 will grow up to be among the second richest 100 families
- 20 will be among the middle 100 families
- 25 will make it to the second poorest 100 families
- 29 will remain among the 100 poorest families
Mobility Gap Treatment

Let's compare again how **black** and **white** children born in one of the poorest 100 families will do when they grow up.

**Black children**

- 3 will be in the richest 100 families
- 6 will be in the second richest 100 families
- 16 will be in the middle 100 families
- 38 will be in the second poorest 100 families
- 37 will be in the 100 poorest families

**White children**

- 10 will be in the richest 100 families
- 16 will be in the second richest 100 families
- 20 will be in the middle 100 families
- 25 will be in the second poorest 100 families
- 29 will be in the 100 poorest families
Systemic Racism Treatment
Systemic Racism Treatment
Systemic Racism Treatment
Systemic Racism Treatment

[Diagram showing symbols of housing and education with an 'X' through them, indicating denial or prohibition.]
Systemic Racism Treatment
Systemic Racism Treatment
Systemic Racism Treatment

“WHITE” Sounding Resumes Get Twice as Many Interview Requests

% of Resumes that Received Interview Requests

Identical Resume with “White” Name

Identical Resume with “Black” Name

Systemic Racism Treatment

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY RACE

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Treatment Effects - Racial Income Inequality

-1 -.5 0 .5 1 1.5

- Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
- Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Treatment Effects - Racial Income Inequality

Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Systemic racism explanation
Treatment Effects - Racial Income Inequality

Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Systemic racism explanation
Systemic racism explanation - Teenagers
Treatment Effects - Racial Mobility Gap

<table>
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<th>T x White</th>
<th>T x Black Dem</th>
<th>T x White Dem</th>
<th>T x White Rep</th>
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<td>-.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>-2.0</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
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</table>
Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Treatment Effects - Racial Mobility Gap

Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Systemic racism explanation

-1 -0.5 0 0.5 1 1.5

- Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
- Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
- Systemic racism explanation
Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Systemic racism explanation
Systemic racism explanation - Teenagers
Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Treatment Effects - Perceived Causes

Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Treatment Effects - Perceived Causes

- Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
- Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
- Systemic racism explanation
**Treatment Effects - Perceived Causes**

- **Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility**
- **Information on Black/white historical earnings gap**
- **Systemic racism explanation**
- **Systemic racism explanation - Teenagers**
Treatment Effects - Race-Targeted Policies

- T x Black
- T x White
- T x Black Dem
- T x White Dem
- T x White Rep
Treatment Effects - Race-Targeted Policies

Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility

Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Treatment Effects - Race-Targeted Policies

- Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
- Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
- Systemic racism explanation
Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Systemic racism explanation
Systemic racism explanation - Teenagers
Treatment Effects - Redistribution Policies

Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Treatment Effects - Redistribution Policies

Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
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Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Systemic racism explanation
Information on Black/white gap in intergenerational mobility
Information on Black/white historical earnings gap
Systemic racism explanation
Systemic racism explanation - Teenagers
Asking about race and ethnicity

- Census asks: “Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?” [No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; Yes, Mexican; Yes, Puerto Rican; Yes, Cuban; Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin].

Followed by: “What is this person’s race?” [White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaskan Native; Chinese; Vietnamese; Native Hawaiian; Filipino; Korean; Samoan; Asian Indian; Japanese; Chamorro; Other Asian; Other Pacific Islander; Some other race].

- We originally asked: “How would you describe your ethnicity/race?” European American/White; African American/Black; Hispanic/Latino; Asian/Asian American; Mixed race; Other (please specify)].

Most problematic for our purposes is that we are not sure how Black Hispanics would identify themselves given these categories (0.4% of the US population). We exclude mixed race (not an option in Census). Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin rarely select “White” in our old question.