

## Consequences of Learning About Historical Racism Among European American and African American Children

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Knowledge about racism is a critical component of educational curricula and contemporary race relations. To examine children's responses to learning about racism, European American (Study 1;  $N = 48$ ) and African American (Study 2;  $N = 69$ ) elementary-aged children (ages 6–11) received history lessons that included information about racism experienced by African Americans (*racism condition*), or otherwise identical lessons that omitted this information (*control condition*). Children's racial attitudes and cognitive and affective responses to the lessons were assessed. Among European American children, racism condition participants showed less biased attitudes toward African Americans than control condition participants. Among African American children, attitudes did not vary by condition. Children in the two conditions showed several different cognitive and affective responses to the lessons.

The very ink with which all history is written is merely fluid prejudice (*Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World* by Mark Twain [1897])

The historical treatment of African Americans is replete with examples of racism, including the most virulent and extreme forms of racial prejudice (e.g., slavery, lynching). Learning about racism constitutes a critical part of understanding the history of the United States and thus is a component of the educational curricula in nearly every American school. Understanding the history of racism in the United States is also fundamental to understanding and improving race relations (e.g., Barnes & Lightsey, 2005; Quillian & Pager, 2001). Despite the importance of this topic, very little is known about children's cognitive and affective responses to learning about racism. The research described here examined the consequences of learning about historical racism among European American (Study 1) and African American (Study 2) children.

There are both theoretical and practical reasons to be concerned with children's reactions to learning about historical racism. At the theoretical level,

knowledge of the ways in which children respond to learning about racism should lead to the formulation of more comprehensive developmental models of racial identity, intergroup attitudes, and civic engagement (Coll, Crnic, & Lamberty, 1996). At the applied level, such knowledge should be useful for informing educational curricula and socialization practices. The United Nation's 2001 World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance called for all countries to increase their efforts to educate children about racism (United Nations, 2001). There is, however, little agreement about when and how to do so. Although children's perceptions of racial prejudice and discrimination is a burgeoning area of psychological investigation (e.g., Brody et al., 2006; Brown & Bigler, 2005; McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Quintana, 1994; Quintana & Vera, 1999), no work to date has examined children's responses to learning about historical racism.

Two existing literatures are relevant to the topic of racism education. One such literature concerns parental racial socialization. Many African American parents discuss racism with their children, although the percentage reported to do so varies across studies (D. Hughes, 2003; Marshall, 1995; Overby & Eccles, 2001). Some studies suggest that high levels of racism awareness are associated with positive outcomes among African American youth, including better grades in school (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006), fewer behavioral problems (O'Brien Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002), and more fully

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developed racial identities (Marshall, 1995; Stevenson, 1995). Other studies report perceptions of racial discrimination to be linked to depression and conduct problems (Brody et al., 2006; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). Some writers have claimed that awareness of the potential for oneself to be discriminated against leads to chronic stress among stigmatized youth (Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1991). In sum, this literature suggests conflicting hypotheses about the effects of learning about racism on African American children.

European American parents, in contrast, appear to avoid discussions of racism with their children (Katz, 2003). Thus, many European American children may be relatively uninformed about racism when they first encounter school lessons related to the topic. There are many possible reasons for parents' neglect of this issue; for example, some European American parents believe that detailed information about racism is irrelevant, and possibly even harmful, to young children (Peters, 1985; Williams, 2005). In contrast, other parents and educators claim that knowledge of racism is an important component of nonprejudiced attitudes (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003). In sum, the scant literature on European Americans also suggests conflicting hypotheses about the effects of learning about racism on children's intergroup attitudes.

Importantly, parents who differ in racial socialization strategies—and children who differ in their perceptions of racism—are likely to differ in many other significant ways (e.g., socioeconomic background, political views, levels of intergroup contact), thereby limiting our ability to pinpoint causal effects of learning about racism. The primary goal of our work is, therefore, to investigate the consequences of exposure to information about historical racism among African American and European American children via the use of a methodology in which children were selected to receive (or not) a standard set of lessons about historical racism in the United States.

A second literature that is related to racism education concerns intervention. Some intervention programs, referred to as *antiracism curricula*, explicitly address the history and pernicious effects of racism, with the goal of reducing children's racial prejudice and stereotyping (e.g., Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Gimmetstad & DeChiara, 1983; Sefa Dei, 1996). Unfortunately, the vast majority of antiracism programs have not been evaluated empirically (McGregor, 1993). When antiracism programs have been empirically evaluated, they have received both favorable (e.g., McGregor, 1993; Reeder, Douzenis, & Bergin, 1997) and unfavorable (e.g., Kehoe & Mansfield,

1993; Weiner & Wright, 1973) reviews. In addition, the vast majority of participants in the few existing studies of antiracism curricula have been European American children (e.g., Culbertson, 1957; Greenberg, Pierson, & Sherman, 1957; Sedlacek, Troy, & Chapman, 1976). Thus, a clear understanding of the consequences of learning about racism among children from a variety of racial backgrounds is lacking.

Children's responses to learning about racism are likely to be complex and multifaceted and thus we sought to provide initial data on a variety of outcomes (i.e., dependent measures). Our primary outcome of interest was racial attitudes. Following others' recommendations (Aboud, 2003; Brewer, 1999; Nesdale, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 2001), we included independent assessments of children's attitudes toward African Americans and European Americans. That is, we independently assessed African American and European American children's evaluations of their racial ingroup and their racial outgroup. In addition, we assessed a variety of cognitive (i.e., perceptions of within- and between-group variability) and affective (e.g., guilt, defensiveness, anger) responses to learning about racism. These data allowed us to test whether children's racial attitudes were mediated by their cognitive and affective responses to the lessons.

Because European Americans were typically the perpetrators—and African Americans the targets—of racial discrimination, we expected European American and African American children to respond differently to learning about historical racism, especially with respect to their cognitive and affective responses. So, for example, feelings of guilt might be expected to arise among European American—but not African American—children. For this reason, we examined the consequences of learning about racism among European American and African American children in separate studies.

Finally, it is important to note that children's reactions to information about racism are likely to vary with age. The elementary school years are characterized by a host of cognitive constraints that limit children's ability to understand and perceive discrimination (Brown & Bigler, 2002, 2005; Quintana & Vera, 1999). We sampled participants from a broad range of ages (6–11 years) in order to detect possible developmental patterns in children's responses to learning about racism.

### Study 1

Because European American children will live and work within increasingly racially diverse contexts, it

is important that they endorse positive racial attitudes. European American children are, however, likely to hold racial biases by the time that they begin school. Many European American children prefer same-race peers (Doyle, Beaudet, & Aboud, 1988; Levy, West, Ramirez, & Pachankis, 2004) and make racially biased trait attributions (Bigler & Liben, 1993). Is learning about historical racism likely to exacerbate, or improve, racial biases among European American children? The answer is likely to depend on children's cognitive and affective responses to such information.

We examined children's responses to learning about racism with respect to three cognitive constructs: (a) endorsement of counterstereotypic beliefs, (b) perceptions of within-group variability, and (c) perceptions of between-group variability. One possible cognitive response to learning about racism is a greater appreciation of the positive characteristics of African Americans. Most children are aware of the lower social status of African Americans relative to European Americans (Aboud, 1988; Bigler & Liben, 1993). Learning about racism may provide children with an environmental explanation (i.e., discrimination) for existing race differences in status. Children who understand racial differences to be the result of racial discrimination (rather than biological factors) may be more likely to endorse counterstereotypic beliefs about African Americans than their peers.

Learning about racism may also affect children's perceptions of within- and between-group variability. Racism lessons expose children to information about experiences that African Americans share (i.e., experiences with racial discrimination) solely as a function of their group membership and thus may decrease children's perceptions of within-group variability of African Americans. In addition, such lessons expose children to information about discriminatory experiences suffered by African Americans but not by European Americans. This information may increase children's perceptions of variability between African Americans and European Americans. Research indicates that low perceptions of variability within—and high perceptions of variability between—social groups are linked to high levels of stereotyping and prejudice (Doyle et al., 1988).

We also examined three possible affective responses to learning about racial discrimination: (a) valuing of racial fairness, (b) defensiveness, and (c) guilt. Issues of fairness are highly salient to young children, who often use equality of treatment as the basis for reasoning about justice (Damon, 1975; Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). Elementary-school-aged children who learn about the discrimi-

natory treatment of African Americans may respond, therefore, by adopting personal standards of racial fairness, which in turn may reduce their racial prejudice (Finlay & Stephan, 2000).

The induction of racial guilt is another possible consequence of exposure to information about racism. Monteith, Devine, and Zuwerink (1993) reported that some European American adults experience guilt upon learning about racism and are motivated to inhibit their own prejudicial responses to members of racial outgroups as a means of alleviating this guilt (Monteith & Walters, 1998; Monteith et al., 1993). We expected that European American children would also experience racial guilt as a result of learning about European American racism and would in turn be motivated to inhibit their own prejudicial attitudes. This may, however, occur only among older children who are able to view themselves in a fully integrated manner as members of their larger racial group and thus feel some culpability for the past actions of their ingroup members (Brown & Bigler, 2005).

Finally, learning about racism may trigger defensiveness, which may serve to block attitudinal change (Monteith et al., 1993; Semons, 1991). Children may experience discomfort upon learning that members of their racial ingroup played a role in the unfair treatment of others (Finlay & Stephan, 2000), and in response, they may interpret the lessons as unfair or inaccurate. No prior work has tested this notion and thus it is difficult to predict whether such responses are common or vary in frequency across age.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 48 European American children (25 girls, 23 boys) attending a summer school program in the Midwest. Seven additional children who were members of racial or ethnic minority groups (two African Americans, two Asian Americans, and three Latinos) participated in the study but were not included in data analyses. The summer school program is a laboratory school and is designed to provide teacher training and tests of new curricula. Parents were informed of the nature of the school prior to enrolling. In addition, parents were sent letters asking permission to have their child attend the lessons and complete the study measures. Three students attending the program were excused from the lessons and testing because parent permission was not obtained.

Participants ranged in age from 6 years 10 months to 11 years 0 months ( $M = 8, 11$ ;  $SD = 1, 8$ ). For purposes of

data analysis, children were sorted into three groups on the basis of age: 6–7 ( $n = 16$ ), 8–9 ( $n = 16$ ), and 10–11 years ( $n = 16$ ). Socioeconomic status was not formally assessed, although the school program draws students from predominantly middle-class European American neighborhoods. Educational and logistical constraints required that children be assigned to classrooms prior to the start of our study. Because the summer program draws students from dozens of schools, program staff were unfamiliar with characteristics (e.g., academic records) of the enrollees; thus assignment to classrooms was random within age groups. The program director created six classrooms: two comprising children aged 6–7 years, two comprising children aged 8–9 years, and two comprising children aged 10–11 years. We then randomly assigned one classroom within each age level to each treatment condition. Twenty-four children (12 girls, 12 boys) were assigned to the racism condition, and 24 children (13 girls, 11 boys) were assigned to the control condition. The age distribution was similar in the racism and control conditions ( $M = 9, 0$ ;  $SD = 1, 5$ ; minimum = 7, 0; maximum 10, 11; and  $M = 8, 9$ ;  $SD = 1, 11$ ; minimum = 6, 10; maximum = 11, 0, respectively).

#### Overview of Procedure

All children received history lessons taught by the same European American experimenter. Lessons took place every day for six consecutive school days, lasting approximately 20 min each day. Children's immediate cognitive and affective responses (e.g., defensiveness) to daily lessons were assessed with a brief questionnaire at each lesson's conclusion. One or two days after the series of lessons, children's attitudes toward African Americans and European Americans were assessed.

#### Treatment Conditions

Short biographies of 12 famous Americans (six European American, six African American) were written specifically for this investigation. Participants heard two biographies each day. The biographies emphasized the individuals' positive attributes and contributions to society. A sample biography appears in Appendix A. The racism and control lessons were identical except for the manipulation of the target information about racism. In the *racism condition*, the lessons included explicit information about some of the discriminatory experiences endured by the famous African American individuals at the hands of European Americans. In the *control condition*, the lessons made no reference to racial discrimination.

#### Dependent Measures

*Black/White Evaluative Trait Scale.* Participants completed the Black/White Evaluative Trait Scale (BETS; J. M. Hughes & Bigler, 2007). Like the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure (Williams, Best, Boswell, Mattson, & Graves, 1975) and the Multiple-Response Racial Attitude Measure (Doyle & Aboud, 1995), this scale was designed to assess children's positive and negative attitudes toward African Americans and European Americans. The scale consists of 12 traits, including five positive (nice, pretty, honest, generous, happy), five negative (selfish, cruel, dishonest, unkind, awful), and two neutral (curious, trusting) traits. The BETS was administered once for each target race, with order of target race counterbalanced across participants. Because forced-choice response formats have been criticized as lacking validity (Aboud, 2003), the BETS included multiple response options. Children responded to the question, "How many African American [White] people are \_\_\_\_\_?" using a 5-point scale, including the response options, *almost all* (4), *a lot* (3), *some* (2), *a few* (1), or *hardly any* (0). Such a response format has been used successfully in work on children's attitudes toward gender, socioeconomic, and novel groups (Bigler, 1995; Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997; Karafantis & Levy, 2004; Levy & Dweck, 1999). Four scores were derived from these responses for each child by summing the child's ratings of the relevant traits (positive or negative) for the indicated racial group (African American or European American) and dividing by the total number of traits (5), with possible scores ranging from 0 to 4: (a) positive evaluations of African Americans (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$ ), (b) negative evaluations of African Americans (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .63$ ), (c) positive evaluations of European Americans (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ), and (d) negative evaluations of European Americans (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Cognitive and affective responses to lessons.* Immediately after each lesson, participants were asked questions designed to tap six possible cognitive and affective responses to lesson content. The cognitive items concerned (a) *endorsement of counterstereotypic beliefs* ("Did today's lesson make you think that African American [Black] people are really smart and hard-working?"  $\alpha = .72$ ), (b) *perception of within-group variability* ("Did today's lesson make you think that African American people are unique, special, and different from each other?"  $\alpha = .66$ ), and (c) *perception of between-group variability* ("Did today's lesson make you think that African American people and White people have a lot in common and aren't very different?"  $\alpha = .74$ ). The affective responses included

(a) *valuing of racial fairness* ("Did today's lesson make you wish African American people were treated more fairly and given what they deserved?"  $\alpha = .68$ ), (b) *racial guilt* ("Did today's lesson make you feel bad about being White?"  $\alpha = .62$ ), and (c) *racial defensiveness* ("Was today's lesson unfair because it made White people look meaner and more unfair than they really are?"  $\alpha = .77$ ). Participants answered *yes* (scored as 1) or *no* (scored as 0) to each question following each of the six lessons. Thus, scores ranged from zero to six for each question.

*Debriefing.* After the completion of data collection, the experimenter explained the purpose and design of the study to all participants. This explanation required an abbreviated presentation of information about the racism that had been included in racism lessons. In addition, children were told about a racially diverse group of international figures (e.g., Mary Robinson, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma) working to counter the effects of racism. Thus, all children were informed that, although some European Americans have discriminated against African Americans, other European Americans have fought against racial discrimination.

## Results

### Overview

Data analyses were done in three steps. In the first step, we examined relations among the racial attitude measures and participant characteristics (e.g., gender, age). In the second step, we conducted our primary analysis of the effects of treatment condition on children's racial attitudes and their cognitive and affective responses to the lessons. Finally, in the third step, we examined whether children's cognitive and affective responses mediated the effects of condition on racial attitudes.

### Relations Among Racial Attitude Measures

Correlation coefficients were computed between children's age, gender (dummy coded), and scores on the four racial attitude subscales (i.e., +AA, -AA, +EA, -EA). Neither age nor gender was significantly correlated with racial attitude scores ( $r$ s ranged from  $-.23$  to  $.15$ ,  $p$ s  $> .10$ ). Correlation coefficients among the four scales of the composite racial attitude scores were as follows: -AA and +AA,  $r = -.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ; -EA and +EA,  $r = -.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ; -AA and +EA,  $r = -.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ; +AA and -EA,  $r = -.21$ ,  $p = .15$ ; +AA and +EA,  $r = .57$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and -AA and -EA,  $r = .56$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### Effects of Condition on Racial Attitudes

Our primary interest was the effect of the lessons on children's attitudes. Because of the large number of potential variables, preliminary analyses of variance (ANOVAs) examined the effects of gender of participant. Results indicated no significant main effects of, or interactions involving, gender ( $p$ s ranged from  $.14$  to  $.95$ ), and thus, data were pooled across this variable. To examine the effects of treatment condition, we conducted a 2 (condition: racism, control)  $\times$  3 (age: 6-7, 8-9, and 10-11 years) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) using the BETS attitude scores (i.e., +AA, -AA, +EA, -EA) as the dependent variables.

Results of the MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of condition,  $F(4, 38) = 8.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .49$ . Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. Separate follow-up ANOVAs were conducted for each BETS score. Results indicated significant effects of condition for only two of the four scores: (a) positive attitudes toward African Americans and (b) negative attitudes toward African Americans. Children who received racism lessons had significantly more positive attitudes toward African Americans than children who received control lessons,  $F(1, 41) = 10.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$ . Children who received racism lessons also had significantly less negative attitudes toward African Americans than children who received control lessons,  $F(1, 41) = 10.84$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .21$ . Children in the two conditions did not differ in their positive ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) or negative ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) views of European Americans.

### Effects of Condition on Cognitive and Affective Responses

We next examined participants' cognitive and affective responses to the lessons in a 2 (condition: racism, control)  $\times$  3 (age: 6-7, 8-9, and 10-11 years) MANOVA. Results indicated a significant main effect of condition,  $F(6, 36) = 5.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .45$ . Separate follow-up ANOVAs for each cognitive and affective response are described below.

*Counterstereotyping.* Results indicated a significant main effect of condition,  $F(1, 41) = 4.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Children in the racism condition stated that the lessons led them to endorse counterstereotypic views ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) more often than did children in the control condition ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ). No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $p$ s  $> .15$ ).

*Perceptions of within-group variability.* Results indicated no significant main effects or interactions ( $p$ s  $> .10$ ). Overall, children showed little agreement with

Table 1  
Means and Standard Deviations of Racial Attitudes in Studies 1 and 2

	Study 1		Study 2			
	Control	Racism	Pretest		Posttest	
			Control	Racism	Control	Racism
+AA attitudes	3.12 (0.59)	3.83 (0.71)	2.84 (0.60)	2.79 (0.64)	2.99 (0.61)	3.10 (0.50)
-AA attitudes	3.23 (0.61)	2.52 (0.84)	2.15 (0.68)	2.26 (0.78)	1.82 (0.64)	1.70 (0.77)
+EA attitudes	3.46 (0.72)	3.57 (1.10)	1.82 (0.79)	2.06 (0.67)	2.35 (0.74)	2.41 (0.62)
-EA attitudes	2.60 (0.79)	2.83 (0.83)	1.87 (0.71)	1.85 (0.67)	2.17 (0.62)	2.21 (0.58)

Note. Racial attitudes scores range from 0 to 4, with higher scores representing the assignment of the traits indicated (i.e., positive or negative) to a greater proportion of the target racial group (e.g., a score of 0 corresponds to *hardly any* and a score of 4 corresponds to *almost all* of the target group).

the notion that the lessons facilitated the perception of within-group variability ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ).

*Perceptions of between-group variability.* Results indicated no significant main effects or interactions ( $ps > .05$ ). Overall, children showed little agreement with the notion that the lessons facilitated the perception of between-group variability ( $M = 1.77$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ).

*Valuing of fairness.* Results indicated a significant main effect of condition,  $F(1, 41) = 19.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .32$ . Children in the racism condition expressed valuing racial fairness more often ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) than did children in the control condition ( $M = 1.26$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ). No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $ps > .40$ ).

*Racial defensiveness.* Results indicated a significant main effect of condition,  $F(1, 41) = 9.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .18$ . Children in the racism condition stated that the lessons made them feel defensive more often ( $M = 1.33$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) than did children in the control condition ( $M = 0.57$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ). No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $ps > .05$ ).

*Racial guilt.* Results indicated a significant interaction effect between condition and age,  $F(2, 41) = 4.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .18$ . Bonferroni multiple comparisons revealed that among 10- to 11-year-olds (but not other age groups), children in the racism condition expressed racial guilt ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) more often than did children in the control condition ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ). Subsumed by the interaction was a significant main effect of condition,  $F(1, 41) = 5.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ , with children in the racism condition expressing guilt more often ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) than children in the control condition ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ).

#### Mediation of Effects of Condition on Racial Attitudes

We next examined whether cognitive and affective responses to the lessons mediated the effects of condi-

tion on children's attitudes. Because learning about racism did not affect attitudes toward European Americans, we focused on potential mediators of the relation between learning about racism and attitudes toward African Americans. That is, we considered whether children's less negative and more positive attitudes toward African Americans in the racism condition could be explained by their cognitive and affective responses to the lessons. We conducted a series of regression analyses to test for conditions of mediation as delineated by Baron and Kenny (1986). We first ran a series of regressions in which the hypothesized cause (condition) was the predictor variable and the hypothesized mediators (e.g., racial guilt, defensiveness) were the criterion variables. These models appear in Table 2. Results indicated that condition was a significant predictor of two affective responses to the lessons. Exposure to information about racism was associated with higher levels of valuing of racial fairness and higher levels of racial guilt.

In the second series of regression analyses, the hypothesized cause (condition) was the predictor variable and the hypothesized effects (positive and negative attitudes toward African Americans) were the criterion variables (Table 2). Results indicated that condition was a significant predictor of positive and negative attitudes toward African Americans. Exposure to information about racism was associated with more positive and less negative views of African Americans.

In the third series of regression analyses, the hypothesized mediators (i.e., guilt and fairness) and hypothesized cause (i.e., condition) were simultaneous predictors and the hypothesized effects (i.e., positive and negative attitudes toward African Americans) were the criterion variables (Table 2). Stronger valuing of racial fairness remained a significant predictor of positive attitudes and negative attitudes toward African Americans, suggesting that valuing of racial

Table 2  
Study 1: Regression Analyses of Mediation Effects

Predictor(s)	Criterion	$\beta$	$R^2$
Series 1			
Condition	Counterstereotyping	.27	.07
Condition	Within-group variability	.23	.05
Condition	Between-group variability	.02	<.01
Condition	Racial fairness	.56***	.32***
Condition	Racial defensiveness	.28	.06
Condition	Racial guilt	.31*	.09*
Series 2			
Condition	+AA attitudes	.42**	.18**
Condition	-AA attitudes	-.45**	.20**
Series 3			
Condition, fairness	+AA attitudes	Condition: .02; fairness: .72***	.53***
Condition, fairness	-AA attitudes	Condition: -.35*; fairness: -.17	-.22**
Condition, guilt	+AA attitudes	Condition: .29*; guilt: .42**	.34***
Condition, guilt	-AA attitudes	Condition: -.45** guilt: -.02	-.20**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

fairness predicts positive and negative attitudes toward African Americans over and above any direct influence of condition. In the regression analysis for *positive* attitudes toward African Americans, the beta for condition was reduced to .02 (from .42 in the unmediated second equation) and was no longer significant,  $F(1, 46) = 0.10$ ,  $p = .91$ . According to the Sobel test of mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986), this reduction was significant,  $Z = 3.55$ ,  $p < .01$ . In the third regression analysis for *negative* attitudes toward African Americans, the beta for condition was reduced to -.31 (from -.45 in the unmediated second equation;  $Z = 1.01$ ,  $p > .30$ ); however, it remained significant,  $F(1, 46) = 4.14$ ,  $p < .05$ . Racial guilt also remained a significant predictor of positive attitudes toward African Americans,  $\beta = .51$ ,  $F(1, 46) = 15.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting that racial guilt predicts positive attitudes toward African Americans over and above any direct influence of condition. In this third regression analysis, the beta for condition was reduced to .32 (from .42 in the unmediated second equation;  $Z = 1.74$ ,  $p > .05$ ), but it remained significant,  $F(1, 46) = 4.26$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### Discussion

The primary purpose of Study 1 was to examine European American children's responses to learning about racism. Of primary interest was the possible effect of learning about historical racism on children's attitudes toward African Americans and European Americans. Results indicated that children in the racism condition had more positive and less

negative attitudes toward African Americans than did children in the control condition. Attitudes toward European Americans did not, in contrast, vary across conditions. These findings suggest that learning about racism is beneficial among European American children because it promotes more positive—and less negative—views of African Americans.

Clues concerning the mechanisms that link learning about racism to improved attitudes toward African Americans can be derived from children's cognitive and affective responses to the lessons. There were four differences in these responses between conditions. Compared to children in the control condition, children in the racism condition (a) expressed stronger valuing of racial fairness; (b) showed higher levels of defensiveness; (c) expressed higher levels of racial guilt, if they were older than age 7; and (d) endorsed more counterstereotypic views of African Americans. Of these responses, only increased valuing of racial fairness mediated the effects of condition on children's negative attitudes toward African Americans. It is possible, however, that our sample size introduced power limitations that prevented us from finding evidence for further mediators of treatment effects.

The results of Study 1 are promising because they suggest that racism education is likely to promote prejudice reduction in European American children. Before advocating the use of such lessons in schools, however, it is necessary to document the consequences of racism education among African American children, whose reactions to learning about racism

are likely to differ from those of European American children.

### Study 2

The primary purpose of Study 2 was to examine the consequences of learning about racism among African American children. As noted earlier, existing work leads to conflicting predictions concerning the effects of learning about racism on African American children's racial attitudes. On the one hand, learning about racism may have positive outcomes for African American children, in part, because their own racial group is stigmatized. Research indicates that even young African American children are aware that their own racial group is associated with lower status than European Americans (Bigler, Averhart, & Liben, 2003; McKown & Weinstein, 2003). By providing children with an environmental explanation (i.e., discrimination) for the differential status of African Americans and European Americans, information about racism may increase African American children's positive perceptions of their ingroup. On the other hand, learning about the racial discrimination suffered by African American leaders may be detrimental to African American children's ingroup attitudes because it may lead children to perceive African Americans as powerless victims of racism (McGregor, 1993). Thus, African American children who learn about historical racism may come to view their ingroup more negatively.

The effects of learning about racism on African American children's racial attitudes may depend, as in Study 1, on children's cognitive and affective responses to the lessons. We examined two possible affective responses to the lessons: valuing of racial fairness and anger toward European Americans. According to Derman-Sparks (1989) and other authors (e.g., Kohl, 1995), learning about the negative consequences of racism should increase children's valuing of racial fairness. If this is the case, learning about racism may increase African American children's positive views of all racial groups, including European Americans.

On the other hand, information about racial discrimination may cause African American children to feel anger toward European Americans (Caddick, 1982) and thus increase their negative attitudes toward European Americans. Support for this notion comes from a recent study of adult German Jews' attitudes toward non-Jewish German peers. Wohl and Branscombe (2005) demonstrated that Jewish Germans who were reminded of the Holocaust had more

negative attitudes toward non-Jewish German peers than Jewish Germans who were not reminded of the Holocaust. It is possible that young children, in particular, may have difficulty understanding the time frame in which historical racism occurred, and as a consequence, younger African American children may show higher levels of anger toward contemporary European Americans than older African American children.

Learning about racism might also affect African American children's cognitive beliefs about race. Social psychological work suggests that awareness of racism is linked to African American adults' political attitudes (Fried, Levi, Billings, & Browne, 2001; Kravitz et al., 2000), but no study to our knowledge has investigated children's views of such issues. Thus, in addition to examining children's affective responses to the lessons, we examined children's views concerning civil rights and affirmative action. Based on psychological work with adults, we expected children in the racism condition to value civil rights and endorse affirmative action more strongly than children in the control condition.

Finally, learning about racism may be a negative—or positive—experience for African American children. Because the subject matter concerns maltreatment of their ingroup, it may produce general negative affect and be experienced as unpleasant. Racially integrated classrooms, and feelings of being responsible for representing one's race, may magnify such feelings. So, for example, Williams (2005), an African American journalist, noted that—as a child—she “resented the notion that because I was Black, MLK Day [celebrated in memory of the slain African American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.] and Black History Month were somehow ‘mine,’ . . . rather than feeling excited to learn the history and facts that usually were glaring omissions the rest of the school year, I felt instead the burden of being the ‘Black ambassador.’” Conversely, exposure to school lessons that highlight African Americans' accomplishments, while simultaneously acknowledging the racial oppression that they endured, might be especially enjoyable to African American children because they are encountered so infrequently. Thus, in Study 2 we examined children's overall satisfaction with the lessons.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Participants were 69 African American children (34 girls; 35 boys) attending one of four after-school or summer programs in the Southwest. Each of these

programs served predominately African American populations. All parents received letters asking permission to have their child attend the lessons and complete the study measures. Only children who agreed to participate and whose parents gave consent for their participation were included in the lesson series. In addition to the African American participants, one Asian American and three Latino/a children agreed to participate. Data from these children were omitted from the analyses reported here.

Participants ranged in age from 6 years 7 months to 11 years 11 months ( $M = 8, 3; SD = 1, 9$ ). For purposes of data analysis, children were sorted into 6- to 7-year-old ( $n = 25$ ), 8- to 9-year-old ( $n = 22$ ), and 10- to 11-year-old ( $n = 22$ ) groups. Socioeconomic status was not formally assessed, although the programs draw students from predominantly lower to middle-class neighborhoods.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions. Thirty-five children (17 girls, 18 boys) were assigned to the racism condition, and 34 children (16 girls, 18 boys) were assigned to the control condition. The age distribution of participants was similar in the racism and control conditions ( $M = 8$  years 2 months;  $SD = 1, 9$ ; minimum = 6, 7; maximum = 11, 9; and  $M = 8, 3; SD = 1, 9$ ; minimum = 6, 10; maximum = 11, 11, respectively).

### Overview of Procedure

Children were individually given a pretest measure of their racial attitudes by one of three female African American experimenters. Children were then randomly assigned to either the racism or control condition. All children heard an unfamiliar female European American experimenter present the biographies of several famous African Americans and European Americans. As in Study 1, lessons took place every day for six consecutive weekdays, lasting approximately 20 min each day. Within 1 week after the series of lessons had concluded, African American research assistants assessed children's racial attitudes and cognitive and affective responses to the lessons. Finally, children were debriefed (as in Study 1) and thanked for their participation.

### Pretest Measures

*Black/White Evaluative Trait Scale.* Participants completed the BETS (J. M. Hughes & Bigler, 2007). As in Study 1, four scores were computed: (a) positive evaluations of African Americans (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .62$ ), (b) negative evaluations of African Americans (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ), (c) positive evaluations of

European Americans (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ), and (d) negative evaluations of European Americans (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ).

### Treatment Conditions

Lessons were identical to those in Study 1 and thus included either standard biographical information about African American and European American historical figures (control condition) or the identical biographical information accompanied by information about the racial discrimination experienced by the African American figures (racism condition).

### Posttest Measures

*Black/White Evaluative Trait Scale.* Participants completed the BETS (J. M. Hughes & Bigler, 2007) a second time.

*Cognitive and affective responses to lessons.* Participants responded to 15 statements (three per construct) using a 5-point scale that ranged from *strongly disagree* (0) to *strongly agree* (4). Scores for each construct ranged from 0 to 12, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement. The constructs were (a) *valuing of racial fairness* (e.g., I think African American people should be treated fairly by White people, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ), (b) *anger toward European Americans* (e.g., I'm mad at White people for how unfairly they treated African American people in the past, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ), (c) *interest in civil rights* (e.g., I want to teach White people to be fair to African American people, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .69$ ), (d) *support of affirmative action* (e.g., African American people should get something to make up for being treated unfairly in the past, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ), and (e) *lesson satisfaction* (e.g., I want to hear more lessons like these about U.S. leaders, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .73$ ).

## Results

### Overview

Data analyses were done in three steps. In the first step, we examined children's pretest racial attitude scores across conditions and research sites, and the relations among participant characteristics (gender, age) and pretest racial attitudes. In the second step, we tested for effects of treatment condition (i.e., racism vs. control) on children's racial attitudes and cognitive and affective responses to the lessons. Finally, in a third step, we examined whether children's cognitive and affective responses were predictive of their racial attitudes at posttest.

*Pretest Measure of Racial Attitudes*

We first examined pretest racial attitudes scores across the four research sites. One-way ANOVAs by site were run for each racial attitude subscore. None of the ANOVA indicated significant effects,  $F_s(3, 65) < 0.65$ ,  $ps > .60$ . Next, we examined pretest racial attitudes across condition. Results of independent-samples  $t$  tests for each subscore (i.e., +AA, -AA, +EA, -EA) revealed no significant differences between conditions,  $t_s(67) < 1.30$ ,  $ps > .20$ .

*Relations among variables.* Correlation coefficients were computed among participant age, participant gender (dummy coded), and scores on the four racial attitude subscales (i.e., +AA, -AA, +EA, -EA). Neither gender nor age was significantly correlated to scores on the four racial attitude scales ( $r_s$  ranged from  $-.27$  to  $.25$ ,  $ps > .15$ ). Correlation coefficients between the four scales of the composite racial attitude scores were also nonsignificant and ranged from  $-.08$  to  $.17$  ( $ps > .15$ ).

*Effects of Condition on Racial Attitudes*

Because of the large number of potential variables, effects of participant gender on racial attitude subscales were examined in preliminary ANOVAs. No main effects or interactions involving gender were significant ( $ps$  ranged from  $.21$  to  $.63$ ), and thus, data were pooled across this variable. Because of the increased complexity of the analyses stemming from the inclusion of pretest and posttest data, we performed separate analyses for attitudes toward African Americans and European Americans.

*Attitudes toward African Americans.* To examine the effects of treatment condition and participant age on attitudes toward African Americans, we conducted a 2 (condition: racism, control)  $\times$  3 (age: 6–7, 8–9, and 10–11 years)  $\times$  2 (trait type: positive, negative)  $\times$  2 (time: pretest, posttest) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two variables. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. A significant three-way interaction of trait type, time, and age group,  $F(2, 63) = 4.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$  emerged. ANOVAs within each age group revealed that among 6- to 7-year-olds, positive attitudes toward African Americans increased from pretest ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) to posttest ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ),  $F(1, 20) = 15.16$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not among 8- to 9-year-olds or 10- to 11-year-olds ( $F_s < 1$ ). Negative attitudes toward African Americans decreased from pretest to posttest among 6- to 7-year-olds ( $M_s = 1.96$  and  $1.31$ ,  $SD_s = 0.65$  and  $0.61$ ),  $F(1, 20) = 6.01$ ,  $p < .01$ , and 8- to 9-year olds ( $M_s = 2.21$  and  $1.71$ ,  $SD_s = 0.71$  and  $0.66$ ),  $F(1, 22) =$

$10.50$ ,  $p < .01$ , but not among 10- to 11-year-old children ( $F < 1$ ).

Subsumed within the three-way interaction was a significant two-way interaction of trait type and age,  $F(2, 63) = 11.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .26$ . Children at every age level were significantly more positive than negative toward African Americans, but Bonferroni multiple comparisons revealed that this difference was greater among children aged 6–7 ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ , vs.  $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) than among 8- to 9-year-old children ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ , vs.  $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) and 10- to 11-year-old children ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ , vs.  $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ). Subsumed within this interaction was a significant main effect of trait type,  $F(1, 63) = 177.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .74$ , with children giving higher ratings for positive ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ) than negative ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) traits.

Also subsumed within the three-way interaction was a significant two-way interaction of trait type and time,  $F(1, 63) = 25.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .29$ . The  $t$  tests indicated that negative ratings of African Americans significantly decreased from pretest to posttest,  $t(68) = 4.66$ ,  $p < .001$ , but positive ratings of African Americans did not change. No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $ps > .05$ ).

*Attitudes toward European Americans.* A 2 (condition: racism, control)  $\times$  3 (age: 6–7, 8–9, and 10–11 years)  $\times$  2 (trait type: positive, negative)  $\times$  2 (time: pretest, posttest) ANOVA with repeated measures on the two last variables was conducted. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. Results indicated a significant main effect of time,  $F(1, 63) = 26.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .29$ . Post hoc  $t$  tests for effects of time revealed that children's positive and negative ratings of European Americans increased from pretest ( $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ , and  $M = 1.87$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ , respectively) to posttest ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ , and  $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ , respectively),  $t(68) = 3.29$ ,  $p < .01$ . No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $ps > .05$ ).

*Effects of Condition on Cognitive and Affective Responses*

We next examined the effects of condition on children's cognitive and affective responses to the lessons. The five responses were analyzed using a 2 (condition: racism, control)  $\times$  3 (age: 6–7, 8–9, and 10–11 years) MANOVA. Results indicated significant main effects for condition,  $F(5, 58) = 9.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .46$ , and age group,  $F(10, 120) = 2.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .18$ . We followed up by conducting a separate ANOVA for each cognitive and affective response.

*Valuing of racial fairness.* Results indicated a significant main effect of condition,  $F(1, 63) = 36.80$ ,  $p <$

.001,  $\eta^2 = .37$ , with children in the racism condition valuing racial fairness more strongly ( $M = 8.23$ ,  $SD = 2.37$ ) than children in the control condition ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ). No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $ps > .30$ ).

*Anger toward European Americans.* Results indicated a significant main effect of age group,  $F(2, 63) = 4.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ , with 6- to 7-year-old children expressing significantly less anger toward European Americans ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 2.26$ ) than 8- to 9-year-olds ( $M = 6.63$ ,  $SD = 2.60$ ) and 10- to 11-year-olds ( $M = 6.17$ ,  $SD = 2.56$ ). No other effects were significant ( $ps > .50$ ).

*Civil rights valuing.* Results indicated a significant main effect of age group,  $F(2, 63) = 4.67$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ . Bonferroni multiple comparisons revealed that civil rights valuing was higher among 8- to 9-year-olds ( $M = 7.63$ ,  $SD = 2.52$ ) and 10- to 11-year-olds ( $M = 7.57$ ,  $SD = 2.48$ ) than among 6- to 7-year-olds ( $M = 5.77$ ,  $SD = 2.09$ ). No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $ps > .10$ ).

*Affirmative action.* Results indicated a significant main effect of age,  $F(2, 63) = 6.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .17$ , with 6- to 7-year-olds ( $M = 7.73$ ,  $SD = 2.72$ ) expressing stronger endorsement of the need to compensate African Americans for their unjust treatment than 10- to 11-year-olds ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 3.23$ ). Children aged 8-9 did not differ significantly in their views from children in the other age groups ( $M = 5.79$ ,  $SD = 2.52$ ). No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $ps > .20$ ).

*Lesson satisfaction.* Results indicated a significant main effect of condition,  $F(1, 63) = 15.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$ , with children in the racism condition reporting greater satisfaction with the lessons ( $M = 8.49$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) than children in the control condition ( $M = 6.71$ ,  $SD = 2.18$ ). No other main or interaction effects were significant ( $ps > .20$ ).

#### *Cognitive and Affective Predictors of Racial Attitudes*

Because there was no effect of condition on racial attitudes, it was impossible to test for mediation effects. Instead, we examined whether children's cognitive and affective responses to the lessons predicted their posttest racial attitudes. Separate models were run for each of the four racial attitudes subscores (+AA, -AA, +EA, -EA). Children's age (in months) and pretest racial attitude subscore was included in Step 1 of each regression, and the five cognitive and affective responses were included in Step 2 of each regression.

*Positive attitudes toward African Americans.* Results of Step 1 indicated that the change in  $R^2$  was significant ( $.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that age was

a significant predictor of positive attitudes toward African Americans, consistent with previous analyses ( $\beta = -.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Results of Step 2 also indicated a significant change in  $R^2$  ( $.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Examination of the regression coefficients revealed that civil rights valuing ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and age ( $\beta = -.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significant predictors of positive attitudes toward African Americans. Younger children, and those children who reported valuing civil rights more strongly, were more positive toward African Americans than older children and those children who reported valuing civil rights less strongly.

*Negative attitudes toward African Americans.* In Step 1, the change in  $R^2$  was significant ( $.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that age was a positive predictor of negative attitudes toward African Americans, consistent with previous analyses ( $\beta = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results of Step 2 also indicated a significant change in  $R^2$  ( $.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Examination of the regression coefficients revealed that endorsement of affirmative action ( $\beta = -.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ), valuing of racial fairness ( $\beta = -.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and age ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significant predictors of negative attitudes toward African Americans. Those children who reported endorsing affirmative action more strongly and those children who valued racial fairness more strongly were less negative toward African Americans than other children.

*Positive attitudes toward European Americans.* In Step 1, the change in  $R^2$  was not significant ( $.01$ ,  $p = .77$ ), indicating that age alone was not a significant predictor of positive attitudes toward African Americans. Results of Step 2 indicated a significant change in  $R^2$  ( $.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Examination of the regression coefficients revealed that anger toward European Americans ( $\beta = -.42$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was a significant predictor of positive attitudes toward European Americans. Those children who reported greater anger toward European Americans were less positive toward European Americans than children who reported less anger toward European Americans.

*Negative attitudes toward European Americans.* In Step 1, the change in  $R^2$  was not significant ( $.05$ ,  $p = .20$ ), indicating that age was not a significant predictor of negative attitudes toward European Americans. Results of Step 2 indicated a significant change in  $R^2$  ( $.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Examination of the regression coefficients revealed that lesson satisfaction ( $\beta = -.31$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was a significant predictor of negative attitudes toward European Americans. Those children who were more satisfied with the lessons were less negative toward European Americans than those children who were less satisfied with the lessons.

### Discussion

The purpose of Study 2 was to examine the consequences of learning about historical racism among African American children. In contrast to Study 1, lessons about racism had no unique effects on African American children's attitudes toward African Americans or European Americans. Instead, patterns of racial attitude change from pretest to posttest (discussed below) were similar across conditions.

There are several possible explanations for the lack of significant effects of condition on children's racial attitudes. One possible explanation concerns children's prior knowledge about racism. As discussed earlier, African American children, as a group, may be more knowledgeable about racism than European American children by the time that they start school, in part, because their parents may discuss the topic at home. If this is true, African American children may interpret information about other African Americans (such as that presented in the control lessons) through a schema that includes knowledge about racism. That is, children who heard the standard biographies of African Americans (i.e., control lessons) may have assumed that these individuals experienced racial discrimination in their lives and, as a consequence, reacted to the lessons in ways that were similar to their peers who heard the racism lessons.

Both racism and control lessons appeared to affect children's attitudes, although patterns of change differed across age groups. In both conditions, children aged 6–7 years developed more positive and less negative attitudes toward African Americans. Children aged 8–9 years grew less negative (but not more positive) toward African Americans. Among children aged 10–11 years, evaluations of African Americans did not change from pretest to posttest. These age differences may be due to children's familiarity with positive African American historical achievements. That is, younger children may have been less aware of the achievements of the figures presented in the lessons than the older children; therefore, younger children's racial attitudes were more influenced by the lessons. Future research should investigate this and other possible explanations for these age differences.

Analyses of children's cognitive and affective responses to the lessons yielded two noteworthy results. First, children in the racism condition expressed significantly higher levels of lesson satisfaction and valuing of racial fairness than children in the control condition. These results indicate that teaching African American children about racism has positive consequences, independent of changes in racial attitudes.

Second, contrary to expectations, older children showed higher levels of anger toward European Americans than younger children. It is important to note, however, that levels of anger did not differ by condition and that even older children did not show high levels of anger. Overall, older children neither agreed nor disagreed with statements expressing anger toward European Americans (i.e., mean responses were at the midpoint of a 5-point Likert scale).

Finally, regression analyses suggested that some cognitive and affective responses are associated with favorable racial attitudes. Favorable views of African Americans were predicted by stronger valuing of civil rights, stronger valuing of racial fairness, and stronger endorsement of affirmative action. Favorable views of European Americans were also predicted by less anger toward European Americans and by greater lesson satisfaction. These findings suggest that African American children's racial attitudes may be associated with their views of other race-related matters, such as affirmative action.

### General Discussion

Experts on interracial relations have concluded that it is essential to teach children about national histories of racial and ethnic discrimination (United Nations, 2001). Within the United States, history and multicultural curricula (e.g., Black History Month) require discussion of racial discrimination, making learning about racism a normative experience in child development. With the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of youth in the United States and the increasing levels of school segregation along racial and ethnic lines (Orfield & Yun, 1999), it is particularly timely and important to devote rigorous empirical attention to understanding the effects of messages about racial discrimination on children's racial attitudes and beliefs.

Despite the importance of the topic, little research has investigated the consequences of learning about historical racial discrimination among children. The primary purpose of this paper was to determine the consequences of learning about racism among elementary-school-aged European American (Study 1) and African American (Study 2) children by assigning children to receive lessons that did, or did not, include explicit information about historical racism. Overall, results indicated that there are many positive consequences of learning about racism.

Learning about racism had positive outcomes for our primary variable of interest, racial attitudes, in

Study 1. European American children who learned about historical racism had more positive and less negative views of African Americans than did children who received similar lessons that did not include information about racism. Improvements in European American children's attitudes toward African Americans may be the result of increases in children's valuing of racial fairness.

In contrast to European American children, African American children who learned about racism and children who received similar lessons that omitted information about racism did not differ in their racial attitudes. Instead, both control and racism lessons appeared to have positive effects on African American children's racial attitudes, especially among younger children. Attitudes toward African Americans became more positive among children aged 6–7 years and less negative among children aged 6–9 years. Additionally, attitudes toward European Americans became more positive and more negative among all African American children. The simultaneous increase in African American children's positivity and negativity toward European Americans is perhaps unsurprising given that the lessons focused children's attention on both the positive (e.g., occupational achievements) and negative (e.g., racial oppression) contributions of European Americans to U.S. history.

These two studies are notable for documenting the cognitive and affective responses that children report following lessons about discrimination. European American and African American children who heard explicit information about racism expressed greater valuing of racial fairness than their peers who did not receive explicit lessons about racism. Racial fairness valuing may lead children to form interracial friendships, which have been linked to higher levels of social competence and self-esteem among elementary-school-aged children (Fletcher, Rollins, & Nickerson, 2004), and to lower levels of racial prejudice among middle school children (Damico, Bell-Nathaniel, & Green, 1981). Additionally, learning about racism was associated with greater lesson satisfaction among African American children and with greater endorsement of counterstereotypic information among older European American children. These responses provide further evidence for the positive consequences of learning about racism among European American and African American children.

As noted earlier, little prior work has examined effects of antiracism education among children, in part, because of concerns about emotional distress. The results from these studies suggest that lessons

about racism may not be as harmful as some individuals have predicted. Although learning about racism was associated with higher levels of racial guilt and defensiveness among some European American children, these responses may not be wholly negative. Among college-aged samples, guilt may motivate racial tolerance (e.g., Monteith & Walters, 1998). If inducing racial guilt in children also motivates them to be racially tolerant, then experiencing guilt in response to racism education may be a desirable reaction. Additionally, explicitly acknowledging and discussing defensive and otherwise hostile interracial feelings may bring about further understanding of the reasons for the persistence of racism, and lead to greater racial prejudice reduction (Bigler & Liben, 2007; Kohl, 1995).

Results of Study 2 indicate that learning about racism did not produce more negative cognitive or affective responses among African American children than did learning biographical information. To the contrary, children who learned about racism expressed *greater* satisfaction with the lessons than children who received standard biographical lessons. This finding suggests that lessons about racism are not necessarily associated with negative feelings among African American children. The emergence and intensity of negative emotions, however, may vary with the types of information presented (e.g., discussions of lynching vs. occupational discrimination), whether the teacher is of the same racial background as the students (Sechrist, Stangor, & Jost, 2001), and the racial diversity of classroom in which such lessons occur. So, for example, although racially homogenous classrooms are an increasingly common context for children (Orfield & Yun, 1999), it is important to examine whether children respond differently to learning about racism within racially integrated settings.

The studies presented here also indicate that children's cognitive and affective responses to learning about racism may play a role in shaping their racial attitudes. For example, consistent with work from Devine et al. (1991), European American children who expressed higher levels of racial guilt were especially likely to hold positive attitudes toward African Americans. European American children who expressed higher levels of racial fairness valuing were also likely to hold favorable views of African Americans, as predicted by Derman-Sparks (1989). Among African American children who received lessons about racism, stronger interest in civil rights and support of affirmative action predicted favorable views of African Americans. These results suggest complex relations among children's racial attitudes, race-related political beliefs, and racial background.

The studies presented here are notable in that they included measures of children's attitudes toward both their racial ingroup and outgroup. Although most researchers advocate the use of such measures, there is little consensus concerning the types of relations one expects to find between ingroup and outgroup attitudes. That is, researchers have debated whether—and if so when—beliefs about ingroups and outgroups are related (Aboud, 2003; Brewer, 1999; Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). We found that relations among ingroup and outgroup attitudes differed among African American and European American children. Ingroup and outgroup attitudes were unrelated among African American—but not European American—children. Furthermore, treatment conditions affected children's evaluations of European Americans and African Americans differently. For example, young African American children's evaluations of African Americans grew more positive as a result of the lessons, but this was not accompanied by a negative shift in evaluations of European Americans. These findings are consistent with recent theoretical and empirical work suggesting that ingroup and outgroup attitudes are conceptually distinct (e.g., Aboud, 2003; Brewer, 1999; Cameron et al., 2001) and highlight the need for additional research on factors that shape relations among ingroup and outgroup attitudes.

Although results from these studies suggest that discussion of racism is a promising means of promoting positive interracial views among European American and African American children, these studies are characterized by several important limitations and thus must be interpreted with caution. First, we were able to assess children's racial attitudes and cognitive and affective responses only immediately after the lesson series. It will be important for future work to include longer term assessments of the effects of learning about racism. Second, we examined only explicit attitudes and responses. It will be also important that future research investigate children's *implicit* responses to information about racism. It is possible, for example, that children experience defensiveness and anger of which they are not wholly conscious and thus unlikely to report. The use of implicit attitude measures would also minimize concerns about social desirability and demand characteristics. Third, Study 1 employed a group-randomized design. That is, groups of participants (i.e., classrooms) were assigned to conditions, and thus, participants' responses within classrooms were not independent. Given that classrooms are a common context for history lessons, such a design is reasonable. Nonetheless, the design of the study may have

influenced the outcome. Finally, we decided to forgo pretest attitude assessment in Study 1, and thus, we cannot be certain that children in the two treatment groups showed equivalent racial attitudes prior to receiving lessons. Future research should make use of alternative methodologies. It would be especially interesting to obtain pretreatment measures of children's knowledge about racial discrimination.

In summary, all children in the United States learn about European Americans' history of racism toward African Americans, and yet, very little research has examined the cognitive and affective consequences of such lessons. As an initial step toward filling this gap in our understanding, we showed that six brief classroom lessons that included information about moderate forms of racism experienced by African Americans at the hands of European Americans had largely positive effects on the attitudes and beliefs of both European American and African American children. In Study 1, for example, the effects of condition accounted for approximately one fifth of the variance in children's attitudes toward African Americans and approximately 32% of the variance in children's valuing of racial fairness. In Study 2, our results indicated that the effects of condition accounted for approximately 37% of the variance in children's valuing of racial fairness. These effect sizes are, we believe, nontrivial and offer evidence of the practical importance of teaching children about historical racism. These initial findings offer promise that facing historical truths—even those that are abhorrent—may be associated with some positive outcomes among children.

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## Appendix A

### *Abbreviated Sample Racism Lesson*

Today we're going to learn about Jackie Robinson, a famous African American baseball player. When he was a little boy he lived in a mostly White neighborhood in Georgia, *and his White neighbors teased him because he was African American.* Jackie Robinson was good in many sports. He went to college, where he played baseball, football, basketball, and ran track. After college he served in the U.S. Army as a lieutenant. After he was in the Army, he played professional baseball for the Kansas City Monarchs, which was a team in an all-African American baseball league, and for the Montreal Royals. *The reason he played in an all-African American baseball league was that, in those days, the White people in charge of the Major League were*

*racist and didn't let any African Americans play on a Major League team, no matter how good they were.* In 1947, Jackie Robinson joined Major League Baseball and played on a team called the Brooklyn Dodgers for 10 seasons. He was the first African American Major League baseball player, *and after that more African Americans were allowed to join.* Jackie Robinson was inducted to the Baseball Hall of Fame because he played so well on the Dodgers. After he retired from professional baseball, he did a lot of work for the public good, like opening a bank for African Americans *that didn't treat African Americans unfairly, like so many banks did back then, and working for equal rights for African Americans.* He was also the vice president for the Chock Full O'Nuts Coffee Company, which still makes coffee today.

*Note.* Control lessons were identical except that the italicized material was omitted.

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