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Historical narratives and political behavior in the US

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE US

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Historical Narratives and Political Behavior in the US*

Diego Ramos-Toro† Elsa Voytas‡

April 13, 2026

Abstract

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JEL Codes: D63, D72, D83, J15, P16, Z1

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1. Introduction

Historical narratives play a central role in shaping how individuals understand their society and their place within it. These narratives organize and assign meaning to past events, linking them to the present and to future possibilities (White, 1973). In doing so, they both reflect and influence how individuals assess the legitimacy and perfectibility of contemporary social arrangements. Indeed, a growing body of research shows that collective memory, historical narratives, and institutionalized forms of remembrance affect individual attitudes and political behavior (Balcells, Palanza and Voytas, 2022; Ramos-Toro, 2023; Ochsner and Rosel, 2024). Yet historical narratives are neither uniform nor uncontested. Different groups may construct distinct narratives about the same events, reflecting differences in ideology, social position, and lived experience. To what extent do historical narratives differ across groups, and how do these differences shape contemporary political attitudes?

We address this question by studying how individuals think and speak about the history of race in the United States. The history of race in America occupies a central place in the country's social and political history. As historians have emphasized, narratives about slavery, Reconstruction, and the long struggle for racial equality have profoundly shaped political identity, institutional legitimacy, and conceptions of national belonging (Du Bois, 1935; Foner, 1988; Blight, 2001; Smith, 2021). Ongoing debates surrounding the teaching of slavery and the role of race in American history underscore the continued relevance of these narratives as interpretive constructs that reflect and shape how individuals evaluate the desirability of existing political and economic arrangements (Foner, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002). Understanding how individuals interpret and narrate the history of race in the United States is therefore critical to understanding how historical interpretation shapes contemporary political beliefs.

Between 2022 and 2023, we conducted four rounds of online surveys involving 14,033 US respondents drawn from a wide range of ideological backgrounds. We recruited participants through multiple survey platforms to ensure broad coverage across demographic groups, including 10,303 white respondents and 3,730 Black respondents.[1] Our survey consisted of

[1]We relied on Lucid (N = 1,933), Dynata (N = 7,957), and Prolific (N = 4,143). Table 1 presents summary statistics and Appendix Tables A.1 and A.2 compare our sample to national benchmarks.

multiple modules designed to measure historical beliefs, elicit open-ended historical narratives, and implement experimental interventions. The resulting data provide large and well-powered samples for both structured belief measures and open-ended historical narratives.

We asked respondents about three central historical topics: the causes of the Civil War, the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement, and the enduring legacy of slavery. Respondents evaluated a series of claims related to these topics (N = 12,264) and, in dedicated survey modules (N = 5,486), provided written narratives explaining and justifying their views.[2] These narratives offer rich insight into how individuals interpret historical events. The median narrative response, net of stop words, contains 20 words. Leveraging both structured responses and open-ended narratives, we document systematic variation in historical beliefs and interpretations across race, ideology, and demographic characteristics.

Our findings reveal substantial heterogeneity in historical views, often masked by aggregate agreement. While a majority of respondents across demographic groups agree that slavery was a cause of the Civil War, this apparent consensus conceals important differences across cohorts. Among older respondents, racial differences in these beliefs are minimal, whereas among younger respondents, white individuals are significantly less likely than Black individuals to attribute the Civil War to slavery. Conversely, racial differences in views about the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement are pronounced among older cohorts, with Black respondents less likely to view it as successful, but largely absent among younger ones. Views on the ongoing legacy of slavery exhibit persistent and substantial racial gaps across all cohorts, with white respondents systematically less likely to agree, and a particularly pronounced gap among younger respondents.[3] Respondents' racial affiliation does not seem to be a consistent organizing principle underlying differences in historical narratives. In contrast, ideological differences are pervasive across demographic groups and historical topics, and they tend to be larger among white respondents, especially when historical episodes are more explicitly linked to the present.

[2]Because these modules were embedded within randomized survey protocols, not all respondents were administered every component. The modular structure allowed us to ensure a large sample for each outcome of interest while minimizing respondent burden. Further details of the protocols are discussed in Section 3.

[3]Importantly, for agreement with the claim that slavery has an ongoing legacy, which is the one historical belief that can be directly benchmarked against nationally representative data, the patterns observed in our sample are nearly identical to those in the American National Election Studies (ANES), as discussed further in Section 4. This close correspondence suggests that the patterns we document are unlikely to reflect selection into our sample.

We further examine the structure and content of historical narratives using respondents' open-ended explanations. Negative emotions and expressions of pessimism frequently appear in discussions of race and history, regardless of race and ideology. However, the way in which historical events are linked to the present varies sharply across ideological groups. Conservatives, particularly white conservatives, tend to emphasize discontinuity between past and present, portraying historical injustices as disconnected from contemporary outcomes. Liberals, by contrast, more often describe the past as directly linked to present-day inequalities and emphasize ongoing collective responsibility. Respondents also differ in the sources they cite as shaping their historical views. Black respondents are more likely than white respondents to reference family members and personal lineage as sources of historical knowledge. Liberals rely more heavily on institutional sources such as schools and museums, whereas conservatives place less emphasis on these sources. These patterns highlight systematic differences not only in historical beliefs but also in how historical knowledge is transmitted and interpreted.

Historical beliefs are strongly correlated with deep-rooted factors that shape ideology in the United States (Bazzi, Gebresilasse and Fiszbane, 2020; Giuliano and Tabellini, 2020; Ramos-Toro, 2025). Respondents who grew up in counties that are Republican strongholds, as well as those who grew up in counties with a longer frontier history, are more likely to express what we classify as optimistic historical views, including attributing less importance to slavery in causing the Civil War, emphasizing the success of the Civil Rights Movement, and downplaying the contemporary legacy of slavery. In contrast, those who grew up in Democratic strongholds, those who grew up in former epicenters of historical immigration, as well as those who grew up in counties home to Civil War refugee camps, are less likely to express optimistic historical views. Individual-level experiences also appear to play a role in shaping these historical interpretations: Individuals who report greater interracial exposure while growing up tend to express more optimistic historical views, whereas those who frequently discussed race-related issues with family members are more likely to express less optimistic views. These results underscore the relevance of experiential factors linked to ideology as a fundamental principle shaping historical narratives.

We next implement two experimental protocols to test whether historical reasoning and historical narratives affect political attitudes. Consistent with the idea that historical narra-

tives shape views about contemporary social arrangements (White, 1973), our main outcome in both experiments is an index of institutional satisfaction capturing respondents' support for democracy, capitalism, and existing legal and political institutions. In the first experiment (N = 6,076), respondents were randomly assigned to report their historical views either before or after reporting their satisfaction with US institutions. In the second experiment (N = 7,957), we constructed historical narratives based on open-ended responses collected in earlier survey rounds and randomly exposed participants to narratives reflecting distinct ideological perspectives prior to eliciting their institutional attitudes. In both experiments, randomization was stratified by race and political ideology, and our preregistered analyses examine treatment effects separately by respondent race.

Across both experiments, historical reasoning increases ideological polarization in institutional satisfaction, particularly among white responses. Prompting respondents to reflect on historical events or exposing them to ideologically congruent historical narratives reduces institutional satisfaction among liberals, with weaker and less precisely estimated effects among conservatives. These effects extend beyond survey responses to behavioral measures and are consistent with historical reflection amplifying negative affect among liberals. Together, these findings suggest that historical narratives do not merely reflect existing political differences, but can actively intensify them.

Our paper contributes to several strands of literature. First, we contribute to research examining the role of narratives in shaping economic and political behavior (Shiller, 2017; Bénabou, Falk and Tirole, 2018; Kendall and Charles, 2023). While recent work has examined how narratives influence political conflict and reconciliation (Masera, Rosenberg and Walker, 2022; Esposito et al., 2023; Ang, 2023), the content and structure of historical narratives themselves remain less well understood. We provide systematic evidence on the coexistence of competing historical narratives and their relationship to political beliefs. Second, we contribute to research studying how historical events affect present-day behavior through memory and narrative transmission (Dessí, 2008; Balcells, Palanza and Voytas, 2022; Ramos-Toro, 2023; Fouka and Voth, 2023; Ochsner and Rosel, 2024; Balcells and Voytas, 2025). Prior work has emphasized how the recollection of historical events influences affected populations and their descendants. We instead focus on how individuals interpret and discuss contested historical events,

and how these interpretations shape contemporary political attitudes.

Our paper also contributes to the literature using large-scale surveys to study beliefs and preferences (Stantcheva, 2020, 2022; Alesina, Miano and Stantcheva, 2023; Dechezleprêtre et al., 2022; Enke, Rodríguez-Padilla and Zimmermann, 2023; Chinoy, Sequeira and Stantcheva, 2023). Related to our work, Alesina, Ferroni and Stantcheva (2021) document substantial differences across demographic groups in perceptions of racial economic gaps in the United States, showing that disagreement about their causes is pronounced. We extend this approach by combining open-ended and multiple-choice questions to document how people think and speak about the history of race, showing how narratives about past struggles both reflect and shape views about institutions, with liberals interpreting these historical processes as an indictment of institutional dysfunction, while conservatives (particularly white conservatives) tend to view these processes as largely unrelated to the way society currently operates. Crucially, our study provides a framework to examine views and narratives about the past that can be applied by future researchers studying other historical contexts and populations.

Finally, we contribute to the literature on political polarization. Previous research has identified media exposure, information environments, and social interactions as drivers of polarization (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017; Levy, 2021; Guriev, Melnikov and Zhuravskaya, 2021; Fryer, Harms and Jackson, 2019; Baysan, 2022). We show that historical narratives themselves constitute an important source of political division, influencing how individuals evaluate the legitimacy and performance of political institutions.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides a conceptual framework for understanding historical narratives, drawing on insights from history, sociology, and political economy to define historical narratives and explain how they shape political attitudes and institutional satisfaction. Section 3 describes the survey design, sample composition, and experimental protocols used to measure historical beliefs, narratives, and their effects on political attitudes. Section 4 examines the structure, variation, and correlates of historical narratives about race in the United States. Section 5 presents the experimental results. Section 6 concludes.

2. Historical Narratives: Conceptual Foundations

Knowledge of the past is accessible only insofar as it is articulated through narratives. Individuals cannot access past events directly, but only through accounts that provide meaning and a rationale for how and why those events unfolded. Historical narratives are thus interpretive constructs that select, connect, and assign meaning to past collective experiences (White, 1973) . Crucially, the significance of historical narratives lies not solely in their factual accuracy, but in their capacity to frame the relationship between past and present. As Carr (1961) and White (1973) emphasize, historical narratives are articulated and transmitted as ways of making sense of contemporary institutions, social arrangements, and political possibilities. By organizing events into coherent stories, narratives render the past intelligible and situate present-day conditions within a broader trajectory of development. Understanding how individuals speak and think about historical processes therefore provides insight into their views regarding the legitimacy, desirability, and potential reform of existing norms and institutions that are perceived to have emerged from the past, whether as its continuation or as a rupture with it.

2.1. How are historical narratives structured?

If historical narratives serve as interpretive frameworks through which the past is made meaningful in relation to the present, an important question is what governs their content and transmission. Following White (1973), a central organizing principle is ideology, which shapes whether historical processes are understood as leading to a present state of affairs that ought to be preserved, reformed, or fundamentally transformed. Historical narratives thus reflect underlying normative beliefs about the direction and consequences of social and political development.

In addition to ideology, the position individuals occupy within systems of social hierarchy may also influence the narratives they articulate and transmit. As Trouillot (1995) argues, historical production is shaped by power, and narratives originating from marginalized communities may differ systematically from those produced by dominant groups. These differences reflect not only variation in lived experience, but also differences in which events and connec-

tions are emphasized, downplayed, or omitted altogether. In this sense, historical narratives reflect both ideological frameworks and individuals' position within a social hierarchy.

Finally, as Carr (1986) emphasizes, historical narratives are articulated in ways that assign moral significance, organizing events so as to attribute responsibility, evaluate conduct, and distinguish between progress and injustice. As a result, historical narratives are not merely descriptive but also evaluative, conveying judgments about the legitimacy and moral implications of past actions, processes, and institutions. Ideology, social position, and moral interpretation thus help explain why individuals may hold fundamentally different narratives about the same historical processes, and why such narratives may diverge sharply even when based on a shared set of underlying facts (Cronon, 1992).

Taken together, by providing coherent explanations of how present conditions emerged, historical narratives shape beliefs about what social and political arrangements are possible and desirable. In doing so, they influence aspirations regarding the future as well as evaluations of existing institutions. Historical narratives therefore have the potential to shape political attitudes and behavior. Consistent with this view, a growing literature in economics and political science shows that exposure to historical accounts can affect political preferences, institutional trust, and economic behavior (Balcells, Palanza and Voytas, 2022; Ramos-Toro, 2023; Fouka and Voth, 2023; Ochsner and Rosel, 2024; Balcells and Voytas, 2025). However, because historical narratives are shaped by ideology and social position, they may also serve as a source of disagreement within society. When different groups articulate competing narratives about the origins and consequences of existing institutions, they may develop divergent views regarding the legitimacy and desirability of those institutions. Historical narratives may therefore contribute not only to the formation of political beliefs, but also to political polarization, particularly when they offer conflicting interpretations of whether existing institutional arrangements represent progress, injustice, or unfinished reform.

2.2. Historical Narratives About Race in the United States

Historical narratives about race occupy a central place in the history of the United States. As Du Bois (1935) and Smith (2021) argue, the history of race and slavery is not peripheral but foundational to the nation's political, economic, and social development. The historiography

of slavery, Reconstruction, and the long struggle for racial equality emphasizes that narratives about race have long served as vehicles through which competing ideological visions of American society are articulated and contested (Foner, 1988). These narratives have served as windows into how Americans understand the legitimacy of political institutions, the meaning of national identity, and the extent to which existing inequalities reflect historical injustice or subsequent social change.

Historical narratives about race have also played a direct role in shaping political behavior and institutional aspirations. As Blight (2001) documents, competing narratives about the Civil War and Reconstruction influenced processes of political reconciliation and helped define the boundaries of national belonging, often legitimizing racial exclusion while promoting national unity on unequal terms. More recent work in economics shows that cultural representations of historical narratives about race have influenced political behavior in measurable ways. For instance, Ang (2023) and Esposito et al. (2023) show that exposure to films such as The Birth of a Nation shaped political mobilization and reinforced narratives of racial hierarchy and exclusion, contributing to shifts in political attitudes and collective action.

The political relevance of historical narratives about race is not confined to earlier historical periods. Contemporary debates surrounding the teaching of slavery, the role of race in American history, and the appropriate representation of historical events in schools and museums reflect ongoing disagreement about how the past should be interpreted and how it relates to present-day institutions and inequalities (Foner, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002). These debates highlight the extent to which historical narratives remain closely tied to contemporary political and institutional aspirations. Understanding how individuals think and speak about the history of race therefore provides insight into how historical narratives both reflect and shape present-day beliefs about political legitimacy, institutional reform, and social justice. Moreover, because narratives about race vary across demographic groups, studying these narratives provides a window into how competing interpretations of the past can widen pre-existing differences in political attitudes and institutional aspirations across the American population.

3. Research Design and Data Collection

3.1. Data Collection and Sample

Between 2022 and 2023, we conducted four rounds of online surveys involving 14,033 respondents residing in the United States. The four survey rounds were fielded sequentially: Round 1 included 1,933 respondents, Round 2 included 1,479 respondents, Round 3 included 7,957 respondents, and Round 4 included 2,664 respondents. We designed our survey instruments on Qualtrics and used several distinct platforms (Lucid in round 1, Prolific in rounds 2 and 4, and Dynata in round 3). By recruiting participants from different platforms, we maximized access to a diverse pool of subjects which was essential to our task of understanding variation in historical narratives across demographic groups. We opted to use Prolific twice given that survey respondents displayed the highest attention levels compared to the other platforms. Surveys took less than 10 minutes to complete.

Each survey was conducted among adult populations (18+) who reported having grown up in the United States. We dropped individuals who failed a pre-treatment attention check and also excluded participants who did not self-identify as "White or Caucasian" or "Black or African-American."[4] All surveys began by collecting respondents' age, gender, place where they grew up (US or elsewhere), race or ethnicity, ideology, and partisan affiliation. For the ideology metric, individuals placed themselves along the political spectrum from "very liberal" to "very conservative" with "neither liberal nor conservative" in the middle. Respondents then completed the attention check. The rest of the survey differed by experiment but concluded with final demographic questions concerning income, marital status, education level, and occupation.

The summary statistics of our sample are presented in Table 1. We examine the representativeness of our data by comparing these characteristics with census data and with those of participants in nationally representative surveys, such as the American Election Studies (ANES).

[4] In all rounds, we required that white respondents *only* self-identify as "White or Caucasian" and no other race or ethnicity. For Black respondents, we dropped participants who identified as multiracial in Round 1. We kept these individuals in Rounds 2 and 3 for theoretical and practical reasons. Research finds that African-Americans with multiple racial identities tend to internally identify as Black (Khanna, 2010). Additionally, online panels have limited numbers of Black respondents, and by relaxing our initial criterion, we were able to access a larger pool of participants.

Table 1: Summary statistics.

	Black			White			
	Round 1 (1)	Round 2 (2)	Round 3 (3)	Round 1 (4)	Round 2 (5)	Round 3 (6)	Round 4 (7)
Woman	0.58	0.58	0.66	0.57	0.49	0.54	0.56
Married	0.32	0.34	0.30	0.56	0.51	0.62	0.55
18-29 years old	0.16	0.35	0.20	0.04	0.15	0.05	0.19
30-39 years old	0.19	0.26	0.24	0.10	0.27	0.14	0.28
40-49 years old	0.14	0.20	0.18	0.08	0.19	0.13	0.20
50-59 years old	0.14	0.14	0.19	0.12	0.21	0.15	0.18
60+ years old	0.38	0.06	0.19	0.65	0.19	0.53	0.15
$0-$44,999	0.45	0.36	0.47	0.30	0.34	0.27	0.32
$45,000-$135,000	0.50	0.51	0.46	0.62	0.52	0.54	0.54
$135,001+	0.05	0.13	0.07	0.08	0.13	0.20	0.15
Liberal	0.45	0.64	0.41	0.53	0.51	0.40	0.49
Conservative	0.22	0.12	0.19	0.47	0.49	0.40	0.36
Employed	0.34	0.66	0.55	0.23	0.59	0.41	0.63
Self-employed	0.05	0.09	0.07	0.03	0.13	0.06	0.09
Unemployed	0.19	0.09	0.13	0.09	0.07	0.06	0.08
College or more	0.30	0.51	0.34	0.37	0.55	0.56	0.78
N	965	701	2,064	968	778	5,893	2,664

Notes: Rows correspond to proportion of sample self-identifying in each category. Columns 1-3 show summary statistics for Black respondents. Columns 4-7 show summary statistics for white respondents. Round 1 was conducted with Lucid; Rounds 2 and 4 were conducted with Prolific; and Round 3 was conducted with Dynata. The sample is defined as respondents who progressed in the survey past the treatment condition.

Although our sample is similar to census data in various dimensions, Appendix Table A.1 shows that the average participant in our sample tends to be more educated than the average census respondent, and the average white respondent is also older. Crucially, however, Appendix Table A.2 reveal that our data aligns with the observable characteristics of participants in the ANES, suggesting that these differences are consistent with what can be expected in nationally representative surveys, instead of being specific to our sample frame.

Table 2: Historical legacy questions.

Close-ended Questions	Open-ended follow-up
"The main case of the Civil War was slavery."	[If agree] How was slavery dealt with after the war? [if disagree] How was (stated cause of the Civil War) dealt with after the war?
"All or most of the goals of the Civil Rights Movement have been achieved."	[If agree] Why do you think the goals of the Civil Rights Movement have been largely achieved? [If disagree] What has prevented progress toward the main goals of the Civil Rights Movement?
"Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Black people to work their way out of the lower class."	[If agree] Why do you think that the legacy of slavery and discrimination still affects people today? [If disagree] Why do you think that the legacy of slavery and discrimination has little or no effect on people today?

3.2. Core Measures: Historical Beliefs, Historical Narratives, and Institutional Satisfaction

Across rounds, respondents were asked about three central historical themes: whether slavery was the main cause of the Civil War, whether the goals of the Civil Rights Movement have been achieved, and whether slavery's legacy continues to shape contemporary racial inequality. For each theme, respondents first answered a multiple-choice question and were then asked to provide an open-ended explanation for their response. Table 2 details the questions about race in historical perspective that participants answered. We created a binary indicator variable for each question to capture whether the respondent expressed agreement with the closed-ended statement. Moreover, we use natural language processing methods to analyze open responses, as detailed in Section 4. A total of 12,264 respondents answered the multiple-choice questions concerning historical beliefs, and 5,486 respondents provided open-ended historical narratives.[5]

Participants also shared their satisfaction with the current institutional setup in the United

[5]To reduce costs deriving from survey length, a subset of participants in the control conditions in experiments 1 and 2 were not asked about their historical beliefs and their open-ended narratives in the follow-up module (See subsections 3.3 and 3.4, below).

States. Specifically, we gauged participant's support for democracy, support for capitalism, and support for working within existing institutions to achieve socioeconomic goals (rather than completely rebuilding these institutions). We created indicator variables for favorable answers to these questions and aggregate them into an index following Anderson (2008). This summary index, which we call Index of Institutional Satisfaction, captures the underlying predisposition of participants to support and feel satisfied with the institutional setup of the United States, and it is the main outcome of interest in our experimental interventions.

In addition, we used supplemental questions to parse out potential mechanisms. Specifically, in the third and fourth rounds of our protocol, we asked individuals whether they were feeling any of the following emotions: reassured, disillusioned, angry, happy, sad, scared, energized, or indifferent. We use this question to consider whether respondents express higher levels of negative affectivity (expressing they felt angry, disillusioned, sad, or scared). We also utilized a behavioral question to map the institutional satisfaction outcome to more costly changes in participant decisions. We told respondents that we were going to donate $100, and that the money would be allocated between three different organizations according to the preferences of a randomly selected survey respondent. We then asked respondents to indicate—should they be chosen—how they would like the donation to be allocated. We prompted respondents to divvy up $100 between a left-leaning, a right-leaning, or a bipartisan organization, and we examine the effects of our interventions on the share of money allocated to the latter.[6]

3.3. Experimental Interventions

Participants were enrolled in one of two possible experimental protocols, depending on the survey-round in which they participated. Respondents in Rounds 1,2, and 4 were enrolled in Experiment 1 (N=6,076), whereas those in Round 3 were enrolled in Experiment 2 (N=7,957). The experiments are meant to examine from different angles whether activating the history of

[6]This question was only included in Round 4. Participants were asked to split the $100 between the Free Enterprise Project, Race Forward, and Step Up. The first is a communication and research foundation that promotes the principles of a free market, individual liberty and personal responsibility as they "provide the greatest hope for meeting the challenges facing America in the 21st century". The second is a progressive organization working to address "structural racism by building collective community power and transforming institutions...to create sustainable change for racial equity in federal government structure, policy and practice." Finally, the third is described as a non-partisan organization that delivers "support to people experiencing serious mental health conditions and chronic homelessness, to help them recover, stabilize, and integrate into the community."

race can exacerbate polarization in institutional satisfaction in the US.

Experiment 1 - Historical Reasoning

Experiment 1 examines whether prompting respondents to reflect on historical issues affects their evaluation of contemporary institutions. To that end, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the treatment condition, participants answered the historical belief questions, including the open-ended narrative prompts, before reporting their institutional attitudes. In the control condition, participants reported their institutional attitudes before answering the historical questions. Randomization was stratified by race and ideology. In total, 4,410 white respondents and 1,666 Black respondents participated in this intervention.[7]

Experiment 2 - Historical Narratives

Experiment 2 examines whether exposure to structured historical narratives representative of different demographic groups can affect institutional satisfaction, and whether these effects vary by demographic group. To that end, we relied on the open-ended responses of participants in the first round to identify the dominant historical themes within the unstructured responses of four demographic groups: white liberals, white conservatives, Black liberals, and Black conservatives. Specifically, we generated historical narratives that encapsulate the prevailing historical views within each of these groups based on a process that combined deep learning models, focus groups, and generative AI. The output was four one-paragraph texts that summarize the dominant historical views in each group about the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, and slavery's legacy. Section 4.3 describes the process that we followed to construct and validate these narratives, and it details the historical narrative from each demographic group that resulted from this layered process. Each of these paragraphs correspond to one narrative-treatment condition.

A total of 5,893 white respondents and 2,064 Black respondents took part in this second

[7]All respondents assigned to the treatment condition in Experiment 1 evaluated the historical claims and provided open-ended explanations of their views within the same module. Control respondents completed the institutional satisfaction module first and subsequently answered the historical belief questions. To limit respondent burden, only a subset of control respondents were asked to provide open-ended narratives. This design choice affects the number of open-ended responses collected but does not affect treatment assignment or the measurement of the institutional satisfaction outcomes.

experiment. Given the smaller sample size for the latter, the protocol differed slightly by race. White respondents were randomly assigned to read one of the four validated narratives or to the control condition. Black respondents were assigned to a pure control group, or they were exposed to the white liberal or the white conservative narrative. In all narrative-treatment conditions, participants read a single narrative prior to evaluating institutions. Randomization was stratified by ideology within race. In line with what was pre-registered (see Section 3.4), we examine effects separately by race.

3.4. Pre-registration and Deviations from the Analysis Plans

Our survey and experimental protocols were approved by Dartmouth's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (Study #32438). Moreover, each of our rounds of data collection were pre-registered in the AEA RCT Registry (AEARCTR-0009108, AEARCTR-0011305, AEARCTR-0012177, and AEARCTR-0012299). The empirical design presented here closely follows these plans. Across rounds, we pre-registered the elicitation of open-ended narratives, order randomization of historical reflection, construction and validation of group-specific narratives, stratified randomization by race and ideology, and institutional support as the principal outcome domain. More broadly, we were explicit in our main goal of mapping variations in historical beliefs and narratives about race in the United States.

There are three main deviations from the original analysis plans. First, while the pre-analysis plans specified individual institutional-attitude items as outcomes, we only registered our choice of aggregating these outcomes into the summary index in later pre-registrations. We adopt the index as our main outcome in what follows to improve statistical precision and reduce concerns related to multiple hypothesis testing. Still, Appendix Figure A.26 reports results for each component separately. Second, the earlier pre-registrations included national pride and prosociality as outcomes, which are not the focus of the present manuscript. Although these outcomes were collected as planned, the empirical analysis in this paper centers on institutional satisfaction and how effects vary by ideology, which was pre-specified as a central aspect of our project in the pre-analyisis plans. Results for the additional outcomes are shown in Appendix Figures A.27 and A.28. Finally, the pre-registration of the third round described a protocol with five treatment arms, including one arm that would have replicated the historical-reasoning

prompt used in Experiment 1. In the implemented survey, however, this additional arm was not included because we did not collect open-ended responses about the causes of the Civil War and the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement in that round.[8] As a result, the realized design consists of four narrative treatment arms and a control group.

Despite these caveats, our approach to pre-registration follows the spirit of moderation advocated by Banerjee et al. (2020), who emphasize that pre-analysis plans are most valuable when they discipline core identification strategies and primary hypotheses, while allowing for reasonable adaptation as researchers learn from the data and refine measurement strategies. The experimental designs, treatment assignments, and primary hypotheses were pre-registered and implemented as planned. The deviations described above concern outcome aggregation and emphasis rather than treatment definitions, identification strategy, or hypotheses.

4. Historical Views and Narratives: Descriptive Evidence

Recent research has delved into the causes and consequences of the Civil War (Logan, 2020, 2023; Masera and Rosenberg, 2023), the Civil Rights Movement (Cascio and Washington, 2014; Ang, 2019), and slavery's persistent effects (Acharya, Blackwell and Sen, 2016). We focus instead on how people *think* about these historical issues today, and how these views are structured and transmitted as narratives about the past. Crucially, our goal is to map the coexistence of different views and narratives about the history of race in the United States, which may be diametrically opposed even if based on the same set of facts and historical episodes (Cronon, 1992).

Groups that have been marginalized and discriminated against may have different narratives about past events than dominant groups (Trouillot 1995). We thus begin by documenting differences across race and cohorts in views that relate to the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, and slavery's ongoing legacy. Panel A in Figure 1 plots the extent to which white and Black respondents from different cohorts agree with the claim that slavery was the main cause of the Civil War. Notably, a majority of respondents of all ages and races agree with this view.

[8] We decided not to collect these open-ended responses in order to reduce survey length and increase statistical power in the remaining treatment arms. This adjustment was made at the implementation stage but was not reflected in an updated pre-registration.

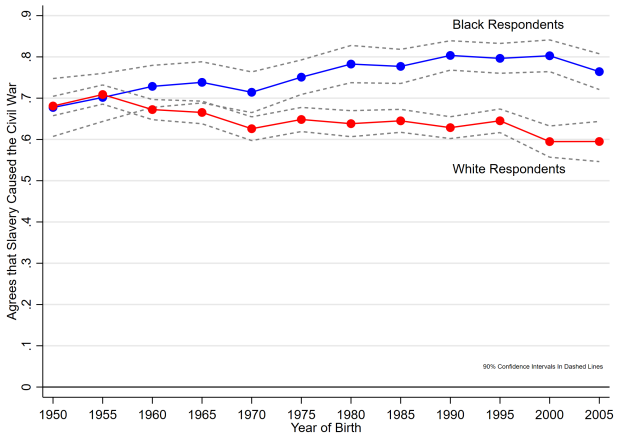
As shown in Appendix Figure A.1, these trends are consistent across gender lines and regions of origin. In sum, the general public appears to agree with the central role of slavery as a cause of the Civil War, a view that is a consensus among historians of secession (McCurry, 2012; Sinha, 2016). [9] Despite this overall consensus, the graph also indicates a generational shift that varies by race. The percentage of older respondents who agree that slavery caused the war is virtually the same for white and Black respondents, but views on this issue have diverged across racial lines in younger cohorts: Relative to older respondents, younger white participants are less likely to believe that slavery caused the Civil War, whereas younger African Americans are more likely to hold this view.

Are these patterns predictive of variations across race and cohort in perspectives toward other historical episodes? Panel B in Figure 1 shows that views toward the Civil Rights Movement follow completely different trends. A minority of respondents from both races consider that the movement was ultimately successful, and this general disagreement holds across all cohorts. Remarkably, the figure shows that the percentage of agreement in younger cohorts has converged across racial lines. Views toward the Civil Rights Movement have been somewhat comparable across different cohorts of white respondents, while there's a stark generational difference among African Americans: Younger Black respondents are nearly 30 percentage points more likely to agree that the Civil Rights Movement was successful compared to older Black respondents.

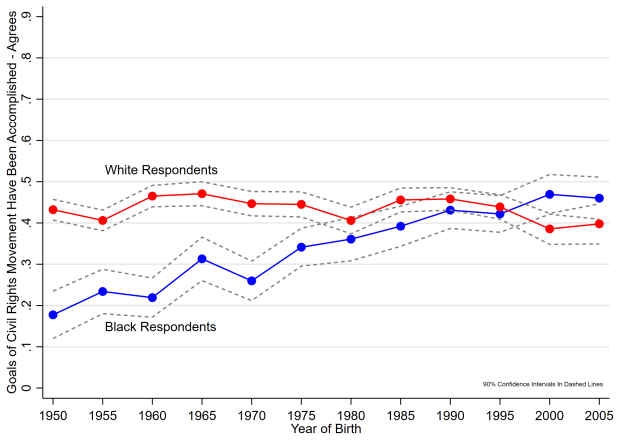
Perceptions of slavery's legacy differ from the views expressed about the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement. In particular, Panel C in Figure 1 shows that, across cohorts, there are noticeable gaps across racial lines in the extent to which respondents believe that slavery continues to affect socioeconomic outcomes. Crucially, the differences across race have increased in younger cohorts: The racial gap in views about this issue has increased from nearly 20 percentage points in older cohorts to more than 30 percentage points in younger ones. All in all, Figure 1 shows that race and age do not consistently predict views toward different historical episodes; racial differences persist only in perceptions regarding the legacy of slavery, while views on the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement vary across different cohorts.

[9] As with patterns pertaining to views on the Civil War, Appendix Figures A.2 and A.3 show that these trends and those relating to slavery's ongoing legacy are not driven by a specific gender or region.

(a) Slavery Caused the Civil War



(b) The Civil Rights Movement Was Successful



(c) Slavery Has a Lasting Legacy

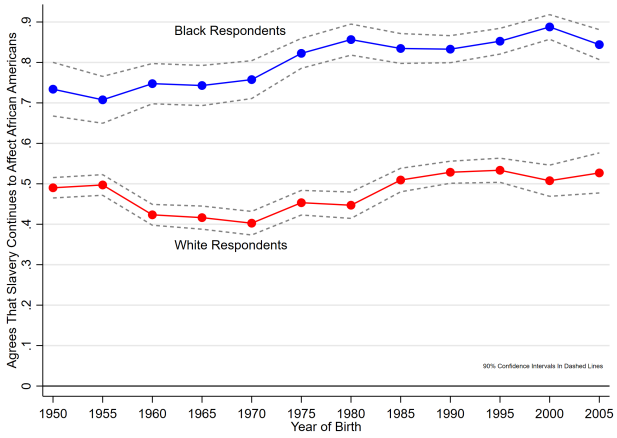


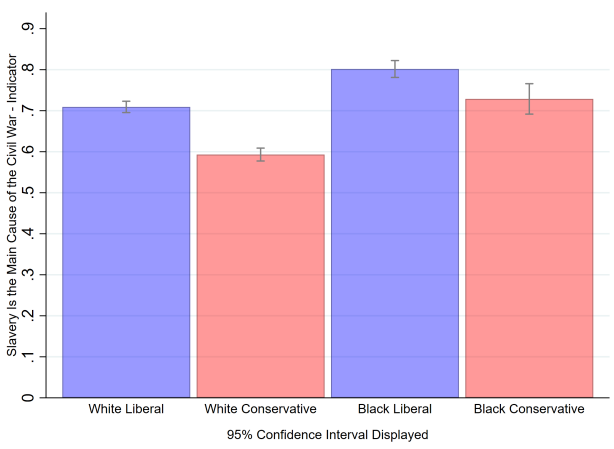
Figure 1: Race and cohort trends in views toward different historical episodes.

Notes: The graphs depict race and cohort trends in views about different historical episodes. In each panel-graph, a point represents the unconditional average of the variable on the y-axis for respondents born in the same five-year period with the same racial affiliation, and the dashed lines surrounding the points show the corresponding 90-percent confidence interval. Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023 (N=12,264, of which 9,265 are white and 2,999 are Black respondents).

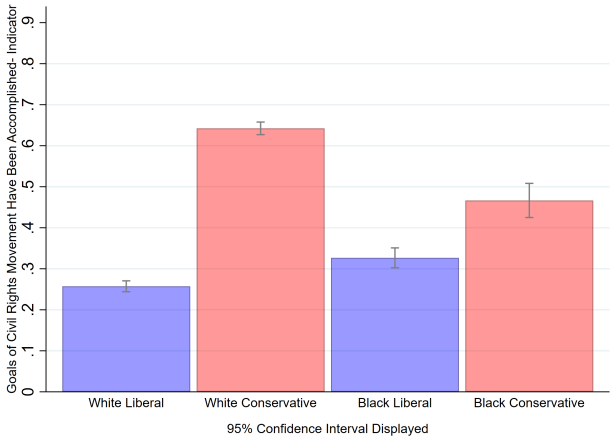
If race and age are not consistently predicting differences in how people think about the history of race, are there other factors that generate consistent patterns regardless of race and of the episode under scrutiny? Following White (1973), ideology is a predominant dimension that shapes historical views and narratives. We thus turn to examine whether liberals exhibit systematically different views about race in historical perspective than conservatives. Figure 2 shows the percentage of agreement with each of the historical claims for respondents with the same ideology and racial affiliation. Several patterns emerge from these figures. First, there is a conservative-liberal gap in views on all historical episodes, observed among both white and Black respondents. Ideological differences thus significantly predict variations in views pertaining to any historical episode.

Second, the ideological gap among white respondents widens when the historical episode is closer to the present, whereas the gap among Black respondents remains relatively stable, regardless of the episode under consideration. This suggests that dissent among white respondents increases when questions about history are more explicitly linked to the present, in line with narratives about the past being intertwined with views about current social arrangements. Third, perspectives of white conservatives diverge from other demographic groups, preventing what would otherwise be a consensus on the (lack of success) of the Civil Rights Movement (Panel B) and slavery's ongoing social relevance (Panel C). Notably, Appendix Figures A.4 and A.5 show that these ideological patterns are true across gender and education, respectively.

(a) Slavery Caused the Civil War



(b) The Civil Rights Movement Was Successful



(c) Slavery Has a Lasting Legacy

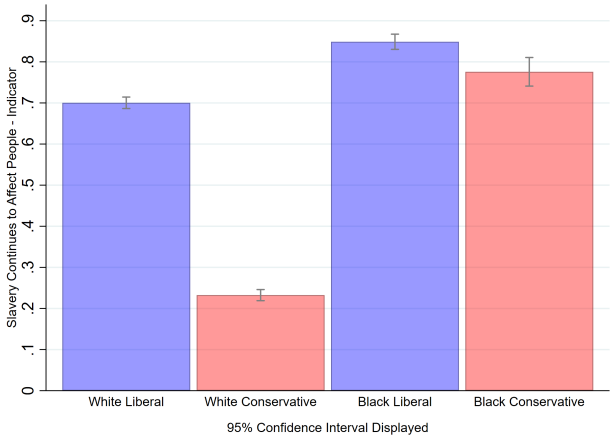


Figure 2: Differences in views toward historical episodes across race and ideology.

Notes: The figures show differences in historical views across race and ideology. Each panel-graph shows the unconditional averages of the variable on the y-axis for participants with the same racial affiliation and ideological inclination, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence interval. Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023 (N=12,264, of which 9,265 are white and 2,999 are Black respondents).

The open-ended responses shed light on other interesting differences in historical views across demographics. Appendix Figure A.6 shows that white conservatives are significantly more likely to mention states' rights compared to other racial-ideological groups when asked about the causes of the Civil War, whereas reference to that issue is negligible among other groups. Moreover, Appendix Figure A.7 shows that liberals (both white and African American) are substantially more likely to mention racism and exclusionary preferences when discussing the factors that have impeded the success of the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, Appendix Figure A.8 shows that African American narratives about the persistent effects of slavery are substantially more likely to mention the role of institutions in perpetuating slavery's ongoing legacy. Similarly, liberal narratives (both among white and Black respondents) are also more likely to highlight the role of institutions compared to their conservative counterparts.

4.1. Structure and Tone of Narratives

The open-ended questions also allow us to assess the structure and tone of the historical narratives shared by participants. Appendix Figure A.9 examines the length and complexity of responses across the three open-ended questions and shows no discernible differences across race and cohort in the extent to which participants provided elaborate historical views. This stability suggests that respondents across groups engage with the topic to a similar degree. To further assess response quality, Appendix Figure A.10 reports the share of responses flagged as faulty or uninformative using an indicator constructed with ChatGPT.[10] Fewer than 2 percent of responses are flagged, and the share does not vary meaningfully across groups, further corroborating the overall quality of the narratives we analyze.

Following Carr (1986), the way historical narratives are articulated follows the same discursive praxis than other narratives about the morality of individual or collective actions. To assess the structure of the narratives shared by participants, we thus draw on concepts from economics and other social sciences about narratives that can defend or condemn certain ac-

[10]Appendix Section B.2 provides the prompts that we used to flag faulty/uninformative responses

tions in moral terms. We begin by examining the prevalence of different types of narratives, following the typification proposed by Bénabou, Falk and Tirole (2018). Specifically, we create indicator variables for answers that reflect *exculpatory* and *responsibilizing* narratives, two prevalent types in discourse.[11] Exculpatory narratives provide excuses to justify self-centered behaviors, while responsibilizing narratives create moral pressure on the audience to promote morally desirable actions. Interestingly, Figure 3 reveals that white conservatives predominantly rely on exculpatory narratives, often rationalizing past errors and distancing themselves from historical wrongdoings. They are also less likely to discuss the past in ways that emphasize moral responsibility. By contrast, other demographic groups rely more on responsibilizing narratives, although Black conservatives are slightly more inclined toward exculpatory narratives than liberals.[12]

Participants' open-ended responses also provide a window into perceptions about the nature of social phenomena. In particular, these answers can reveal a tendency to consider social phenomena to be the result of actions and interactions between individuals endowed with preferences and agency (Menger, 1871; Arrow & Debreu, 1954), or as outcomes of slow-moving macro-structures that determine individual choice (Durkheim, 1895; Braudel, 1949). Whether a narrative emphasizes structural forces or individual choice matters because it reveals whether respondents see the discussed inequities as rooted in the social system they currently inhabit, or instead as the result of actions by particular individuals in a past that bears little connection to their present circumstances. We operationalize this distinction by coding respondents' narratives according to whether they emphasize structural forces or individual agency in explaining historical outcomes.[13] Figure 3 shows that liberals tend to emphasize the role of structures in

[11] We rely on the coding work of a team of 4 RAs who independently coded each of the open-ended responses, generating dummy variables that equal one for answers that make use of exculpatory or responsibilizing narratives following Bénabou, Falk and Tirole (2018). To account for the fact that organic historical discourse need not be fully coherent and cohesive, we did not impose these indicators to be mutually exclusive (i.e., both could be 1, both could be 0, or something in between).

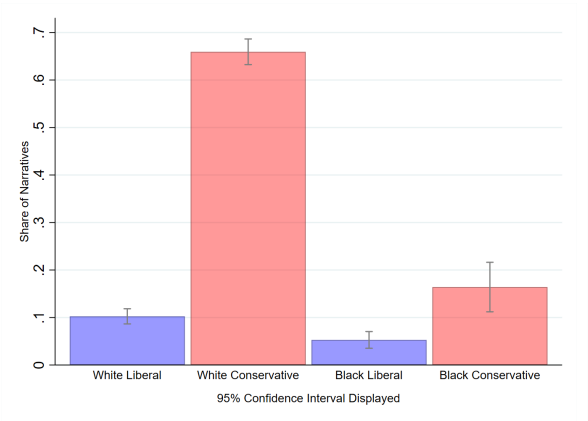
[12] As a robustness, we coded these indicators with the assistance of OpenAI's GPT engine, providing the definitions of responsibilizing and exculpating narratives detailed in Bénabou, Falk and Tirole (2018), and asking GPT to create indicator variables accordingly. Appendix Section B.2 details the prompts that we used to that end. The results, available in Apendix Figure A.11, largely align with the ones we obtained through human annotators.

[13] These indicators were coded by the same group of RAs that annotated the narrative types, and these indicators

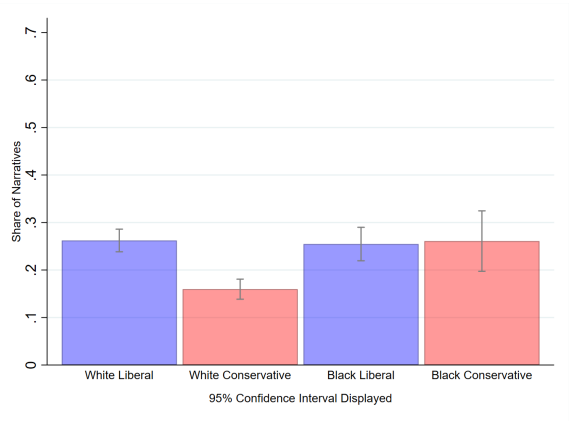
explaining historical processes, while conservatives highlight the influence of individuals and their choices as drivers of historical and social change.

What sentiments and emotions characterize the narratives about race in historical perspective? Appendix Figure A.12 graphs cohort and ideological trends in the mean sentiment of participants' open-ended responses. The narratives shared by participants from all cohorts and both races were characterized by negative sentiment scores, suggesting that pessimism and negativity are pervasive in discussions of race in historical perspective. Similarly, the emotional content of participants' responses suggests that discussions of history are intertwined with negative affectivity. Appendix Figure A.13 reveals that negative emotions (sadness, anger, fear, and disgust) are more prevalent than positive ones (trust, anticipation, joy, surprise) in narratives from participants from both races and all cohorts. Interestingly, both figures suggest that negative emotions tend to feature more prominently in the responses of younger respondents (regardless of race). Moreover, an analysis of each historical episode separately reveals varying degrees of negative affectivity: Negative emotions are more pervasive in narratives about the causes of the Civil War (Panel A in Figure A.14), they are predominant but less so in narratives about slavery's legacy (Panel C in Figure A.14), and they are not predominant in narratives about the Civil Rights Movement (Panel B in Figure A.14).

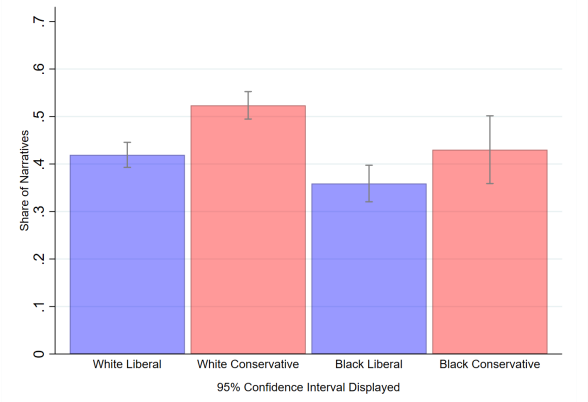
are also not mutually-exclusive. As with the types of narratives, we also coded these indicators with the assistance of OpenAI's GPT engine, providing the definitions of methodological individualism and structuralism, and asking GPT to create indicator variables accordingly. Appendix Section B.2 details the prompts that we used to that end. Apendix Figure A.11 shows that this robustness check yields patterns that largely align with the ones we obtained through human annotators.



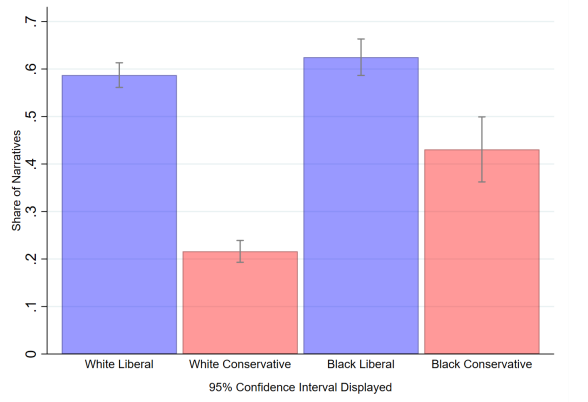
(a) Exculpating Narratives



(b) Responsibilizing Narratives



(c) Denotes Methodological Individualism



(d) Denotes Structuralism

Figure 3: Differences in How History is Discussed

Notes: The figures show differences in how the history of race is discussed across race and ideology. Specifically, it shows the prevalence of different types of narratives (*exculpating* or *responsibilizing*), as well as the underlying views of how historical processes come to exist (*methodological individualism* or *structuralism*). Each panel-graph shows the unconditional average of the indicator described in the panel-graph label for participants with the same racial affiliation and ideological inclination, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence interval. Data comes from open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023 (N=5,486, of which 3,936 are white and 1,550 are Black respondents).

Despite the pervasiveness of negative affectivity, there are strong ideological differences in the proclivity to express pessimism and negative emotions when discussing race in historical perspective. Indeed, the mean sentiment score of liberals' narratives is significantly lower than that of conservatives (Panel A of Appendix Figure A.15). Similarly, negative emotions are significantly more likely to predominate in the narratives of liberals compared to conservatives (Panel B of Appendix Figure A.15). Notably, the ideological patterns in negative affectivity are observable among white and Black respondents, but racial gaps in negative sentiment are generally insignificant. Overall, discussions about race in historical perspective are thus more likely to evoke pessimism among liberals.

We further examine the point of view from which participants discuss the history of race. Specifically, Appendix Figure A.16 reports the share of participants in each demographic group who narrate the history of race from a first-person perspective, as captured by the presence of first-person pronouns (e.g., "our," "we," "us," "I," "me"). The figure shows that liberals are significantly more likely than conservatives to frame their narratives in this way. This pattern suggests that liberals not only express more negative affect when discussing these issues but are also more likely to view themselves as personally connected to the history of race. In addition, the use of first-person language indicates that liberals are more inclined to position themselves as participants in an ongoing historical process rather than as observers of a distant past, which is consistent with viewing the consequences of that history as carrying present-day responsibilities.

4.2. Sources and Correlates of Historical Views

To shed light on the origins of these narratives, we next examine the sources from which respondents report learning about these historical issues and the correlates of the narratives and evaluations they express. We asked participants about the sources that informed their historical views. Figure A.19 shows the share of respondents from different demographic groups who report relying on distinct types of sources. Panel A examines the relevance of vertical sources (parents and grandparents), showing a clear pattern along racial lines but not along ideological ones. A majority of African Americans (both conservative and liberal) report drawing from direct ancestors when forming their historical views, whereas less than a fourth of white re-

spondents mention these sources. The descendants of those who have overcome a history of exclusion are thus more inclined to rely on their direct ancestors, consistent with findings from other contexts indicating the primary importance of vertical sources among groups that have endured historical trauma (Ramos-Toro, 2023).

Despite no overall differences between liberals and conservatives in the extent to which respondents rely on vertical sources, Panels B and C in Figure A.19 show clear ideological patterns in the relevance of other sources. In particular, liberals are more likely than conservatives to rely on institutional sources (schools and museums) and on the media (traditional media and social media). These differences across ideology underscore the potential for social media and school curriculum to both shape and amplify pre-existing differences in beliefs between liberals and conservatives, particularly those pertaining to the history of race in the US.

Given the pervasive differences between liberal and conservative beliefs and narratives about various historical episodes, are deep-rooted determinants of ideology relevant correlates of historical views? To examine this issue, we focus on the participants' likelihood of holding an optimistic outlook on historical racial tensions.[14] In other words, we assess the participants' tendencies to believe that slavery did not cause the Civil War, to agree that the Civil Rights Movement was successful, and to express that slavery has no enduring legacy. Specifically, following Anderson (2008), we construct a summary index that captures this underlying predisposition based on indicator variables for holding each of these views.

Based on respondents' counties, we can consider whether determinants of political ideology at the county level predict a higher or lower likelihood of having an optimistic view of race in historical perspective. Panel A in Figure 4 shows the correlation between the summary index and various county-level historical and contemporaneous determinants of ideology in the US, conditional on state fixed effects. Respondents in urban counties or those in counties with a high share of African Americans are significantly less likely to have an optimistic view of racial historical tensions. Conversely, respondents in regions where the Republican Party performs strongly are significantly more prone to hold this view.

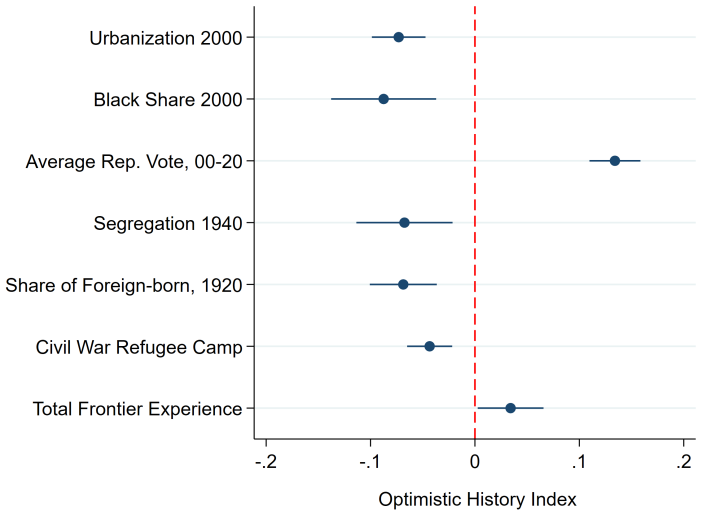
[14]We use the term "optimistic" as a descriptive label for ease of exposition. This terminology is not intended to endorse or evaluate these views, and we do not take a stance on whether they should be characterized as revisionist or minimizing. Rather, the term reflects how such responses are often framed by respondents themselves, who emphasize progress and improvement over time.

In line with previous studies that document deep-rooted determinants of ideology, an optimistic view of race in historical perspective is less prevalent among respondents in historically segregated counties, those in regions with historically high shares of foreign populations, or those where African Americans self-emancipated (Giuliano and Tabellini, 2020; Ramos-Toro, 2025). Conversely, those in counties with longer frontier experience are more likely to hold an optimistic view, possibly shaped by a cultural legacy of rugged individualism that aligns with conservative ideology (Bazzi, Gebresilasse and Fiszbane, 2020). Appendix Figure A.20 shows that these correlations are consistent for each of the historical views. Interestingly, however, the magnitudes of the correlations are higher for views about slavery's persistence and closer to zero for views about the Civil War, which is consistent with historical views becoming more divisive across partisan lines as history is more explicitly linked to the present.

What is the role of individual characteristics and experiences in predicting the aforementioned historical views? Panel B in Figure 4 shows, for white and Black respondents separately, the unconditional correlation between various individual-level characteristics and the index of optimistic history. Notably, not all correlations are consistent across racial lines. White women are less likely to hold optimistic views of race in historical perspective than white men, whereas gender differences are insignificant among African Americans (if anything, the point estimate shows the opposite trend). Conversely, low-income African Americans are substantially less likely to have optimistic historical views than high-income African American respondents, whereas income differences are insignificant among white participants. Notwithstanding these differences, some characteristics tend to consistently correlate with historical views across racial lines: Having a college degree predicts lower inclination toward holding an optimistic view of race in historical perspective (though the pattern is stronger for white respondents). Moreover, the likelihood of having these views is higher for those who reported growing up in a diverse environment, whereas the likelihood is lower for those who reported occasionally talking about racial historical issues with their relatives.[15]

[15]The correlation between these individual characteristics and views on each historical episode, shown in Appendix Figure A.21, are consistent with these patterns. However, there are some notable exceptions, such as the fact that having a college degree is uncorrelated with views on the causes of the Civil War for men, or the fact that women, irrespective of race, are significantly less likely to believe that the Civil Rights Movement was successful.

(a) County-level Correlates of Having an *Optimistic History*



(b) Individual-level Correlates of Having an *Optimistic History*

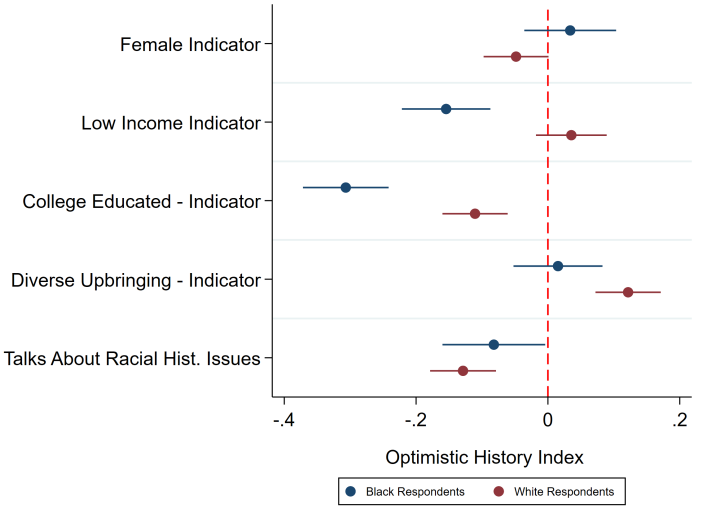


Figure 4: Predictors of optimistic view of race in historical perspective.

Notes: The figures show the association between holding an optimistic view of race in historical perspective and different geographic and individual determinants of political ideology. Each panel-graph shows the coefficients and the corresponding 95 percent confidence intervals of regressions of the Optimistic History Index on the variables on the y-axis, one at a time. Optimistic History Index refers to an index from the inverse covariance matrix (Anderson, 2008) constructed with indicators for believing that slavery did not cause the Civil War, that the Civil Rights Movement was successful, and that slavery has no ongoing legacy. Panel A shows the results of regressions of the index on county-level determinants of ideology (based on participants' counties of residence), accounting for state fixed effects. Panel B shows the results of regressions of the index on individual-level characteristics.

4.3. Data-driven Representative Historical Narratives

Can the thousands of narratives collected in our surveys be distilled into representative excerpts that encapsulate the dominant themes and discourse patterns within each race and ideology group? Because ideology strongly shapes historical views while race also influences how respondents frame the past, we use the open-ended responses collected in our surveys to construct representative narratives that encapsulate the dominant themes, tone, and discourse patterns within each race and ideology group. We implement a multi-method, layered approach to this question that combines the narratives shared in the first survey round, language model synthesis, focus group refinement, and validation exercises with survey participants in subsequent rounds.[16]

In particular, after our first round of data collection in March 2022, we utilized the open-ended responses to the historical legacy questions in Table 2 to understand recurring themes in responses along racial and ideological lines.[17] Using Python's TensorFlow library (Abadi et al., 2015), we built a model to predict and create a representative textual response for each question and demographic group (White Conservative, White Liberal, Black Conservative, and Black Liberal). To do so, we used recurrent neural networks (RNN) and long short-term memory (LTSM) models trained on actual responses from each group. We then provided seed text that rephrased the open-ended questions in Table 2 in the form of incomplete statements (e.g. 'the legacy of slavery and discrimination still affects people because', 'the legacy of slavery and discrimination has little or no effect on people today because'), and our model returned predictive text for each prompt that we combined into a paragraph.[18]

Because the raw output was disjointed, we refined the initial narrative with two approaches. First, we inputted the fragmened text into ChatGPT and asked it to refine the text into a coherent paragraph. Our second, alternative approach involved convening four focus groups comprised of members who self-identified as belonging to each racial-ideological group. We recruited focus group members on Facebook and held the conversations virtually over Zoom.

[16] In our pre-registration of our first two rounds of data collection (AEARCTR-0009108, AEARCTR-0011305), we registered this process and our intention of validating the narratives with actual survey participants.

[17] We thus relied on a total of 1670 open-ended responses (816 from white and 854 from Black respondents) to construct these representative narratives.

[18] Appendix Section B.1 details the raw output that our model generated for each demographic group, as well as the focus group and GPT versions of the refined representative narratives constructed with these raw outputs.

Focus groups lasted 30 minutes and respondents were compensated with an Amazon gift card. During the focus group, we began by leading the participants in a discussion centered around the historical legacy questions. We then asked participants to read the disjointed text outputted by our model and produce a coherent narrative, inviting them to edit the text as they saw fit to best align with their own views and those expressed by others in their group. At the end of the focus group, we held a vote to determine which narrative participants felt best represented their views. These two processes resulted in two refined versions per race-ideology group of their representative historical narrative.

To ensure that the narratives resonated with and represented the historical views of the group that they were supposed to represent, we validated the narratives with participants in the second round of data collection. In particular, we presented these respondents with the ChatGPT- and focus-group narratives generated for their race-ideology group and asked them to pick which best aligned with their views. In all cases, except for white conservatives, respondents selected the ChatGPT-generated narrative. Importantly, as shown in Appendix Figure A.17, less than 10% of each group disagreed with the historical views summarized in the selected narrative, suggesting that the narratives effectively represented each group's historical beliefs.

The selected narratives are shown in full in Table A.3. Interestingly, the texts largely align with the major themes described thus far: white conservatives tend to emphasize individual responsibility and to rely on exculpating narratives, while other demographic groups emphasize structural elements while casting the history of race as an unfinished struggle that must be dealt with today; conservatives tend to emphasize some racial progress since the Civil Rights Movement, and to downplay slavery's ongoing legacy, whereas the opposite is true for liberals.[19] These representative narratives are used to construct the treatment conditions in Experiment

[19]We conduct an additional validation exercise to assess whether the representative narratives capture the themes expressed by respondents within each group. Using OpenAI's GPT, we construct four variables measuring the similarity between each open-ended response and each representative narrative, defined on a 0–1 scale (up to three decimal places), where higher values indicate greater alignment between the response and the narrative. Appendix Section B.3.1 details the prompts that we used to create these similarity scores. As shown in Appendix Figure A.18, responses from members of a given demographic group tend to receive higher similarity scores when evaluated against their own group's representative narrative than when evaluated against the narratives associated with other groups. This pattern indicates that the representative narratives capture the dominant themes present in the responses of the groups they are intended to represent.

2, described in Sections 3.3 and discussed in Section 5.2.

4.4. Robustness and External Validity

Because our data are collected through online survey platforms, an important concern is whether the patterns we document reflect broader public views or instead arise from features of our sample. We present several pieces of evidence suggesting that the historical beliefs and narratives captured in our data closely resemble those observed in more representative settings and in real-world political discourse.

First, as shown in Appendix Table A.1, our sample is somewhat more educated than the general population. To assess whether this difference drives the patterns we document, we reweight the data by education so that the distribution of educational attainment matches that of the US population. The cohort patterns shown in Figure 1 remain virtually unchanged under this reweighting procedure. These results are reported in Appendix Figure A.22.

Second, recent advances in generative AI raise the possibility that automated responses could contaminate online survey data (Westwood, 2025). To address this concern, we replicate our main descriptive patterns using only responses from the first survey wave, fielded in 2022, prior to the widespread diffusion and increased sophistication of generative AI tools. During this earlier period, standard platform-level screening and attention checks were more likely to effectively filter non-human responses. Reassuringly, the differences in views about the history of race across demographic groups remain largely unchanged. These results are reported in Appendix Figure A.23.

Third, although a contribution of the paper is the collection of new data on historical beliefs and narratives, this also makes benchmarking more difficult because comparable questions rarely appear in representative surveys. One exception is the American National Election Study (ANES), which includes a question about slavery's legacy that is nearly identical to our close-ended question about the issue. When we compare cohort trends for white respondents in our sample with those observed among white respondents in the ANES, the patterns are virtually indistinguishable. This similarity holds even when examining trends separately for white men and white women. These comparisons are presented in Appendix Figure A.24. Although the ANES sample of Black respondents is too small for a comparable exercise (only 641 Black

respondents), the available evidence suggests that the patterns observed in our data align closely with those found in representative surveys.

Finally, we provide additional external validation for the open-ended narratives by comparing them with narratives that circulate in contemporary political discourse. Using speeches and interviews from elected politicians from each party discussing the legacy of slavery, we compute similarity scores between each respondent's open-ended narrative and the language used by Democratic and Republican members of Congress. Specifically, with the assistance of OpenAI's GPT, we construct two variables measuring the similarity between each response and statements by Democratic and Republican politicians, defined on a 0–1 scale (up to three decimal places) where higher values indicate greater alignment in narrative content. Appendix Section B.3.2 details the prompts that we used and the process that we followed to generate the similarity scores, including the speeches and politicians used for this exercise. As shown in Appendix Figure A.25, the similarity scores vary systematically across demographic groups: conservatives, both white and Black, receive higher similarity scores relative to Republican members of Congress than liberals, while liberals receive higher similarity scores relative to Democratic members of Congress than conservatives.[20] This pattern indicates that the narratives expressed by respondents align along the same ideological dimension that structures contemporary political discourse, providing external validation that the narratives elicited in our survey capture narratives circulating beyond the survey environment.

Taken together, these exercises suggest that the historical beliefs and narratives documented in our data are not artifacts of the online survey environment but instead closely track views expressed in broader political and social settings.

5. The Polarizing Effects of Historical Accounts

This section examines the extent to which historical accounts about race influence political behavior. Following White (1973), we explore whether confronting individuals with historical accounts about race in the United States affects their satisfaction with present-day institutions,

[20]Note that the similarity scores relative to Republican members of Congress are generally lower, even among white conservatives. This pattern suggests that, on the issue of historical narratives about race, Democratic politicians' discourse may be more closely aligned with the narratives expressed by their constituents than is the case for Republican politicians.

and whether these effects vary by ideology. Our empirical analysis leverages two experimental protocols that test whether engaging with the history of race increases ideological polarization in institutional satisfaction. We operationalize institutional satisfaction as a summary index constructed from indicator variables equal to one if the respondent reports supporting democracy, capitalism, and maintaining the current institutional framework in the United States. Importantly, following Trouillot (1995), we also examine whether these effects differ between historically dominant and historically marginalized groups. In our setting, this corresponds to examining effects separately by race.

5.1. Thinking About History

We begin by analyzing the polarizing effects of historical reasoning. As described in Section 3, our first experiment exploits variation in the order in which participants answered the historical legacy questions. Specifically, in the first, second, and fourth survey rounds we randomly assigned half of the participants to report their views on American institutions *before* answering the historical legacy questions, while the other half reported their institutional satisfaction *after* answering those questions.[21] Because the legacy questions ask respondents to articulate their views and narratives about the history of race in the United States, this protocol allows us to examine the effects of reasoning through one's own historical views. In particular, it allows us to test whether engaging in such reflection widens pre-existing ideological differences in institutional satisfaction between conservatives and liberals.

Table 3 presents the results from this experiment.[22] Odd columns report OLS regressions of the institutional satisfaction index on the treatment indicator (*Historical Reasoning*) without controls. Even columns include survey-round fixed effects, gender, and fixed effects for respondents' region of birth. The results indicate that historical reasoning amplifies pre-existing ideological differences in institutional satisfaction. Columns 1 and 2 in Panel A show that liberals who are prompted to think about the history of race in the United States report significantly

[21] Appendix Table A.4 shows that participants' observable characteristics are balanced by treatment status, suggesting that the randomization was successful and there was no accidental imbalance.

[22] We have no data on moderate whites (i.e., those who are neither conservative nor liberal) in the first two rounds, so our main specifications focus on respondents who identify as liberal or conservative. Appendix Table A.5 examines the effect of historical reasoning on the institutional satisfaction of moderates and finds economically small and statistically imprecise effects.

lower institutional satisfaction than liberals who are not prompted to do so. This pattern is also present when the sample is restricted to white liberals (Panel B) and Black liberals (Panel C), although the estimates for the latter are less precise. In contrast, thinking about the history of race has no discernible effect on the institutional satisfaction of conservatives, whether white or Black. If anything, conservatives who are prompted to reflect on the history of race report slightly higher institutional satisfaction on average, although the difference is not statistically significant.

The pooled estimates reported in Columns 5 and 6 show that prompting respondents to reflect on the history of race significantly widens the gap in institutional satisfaction between conservatives and liberals. Panel A indicates that the ideological gap increases by 0.086 standard deviations ($p = 0.023$), corresponding to an increase of 18.53 percent relative to the ideological gap among those in the control group. Columns 5 and 6 in Panel B show that the magnitude and significance of the effect are nearly identical when the sample is restricted to white respondents. When restricting the sample to Black respondents, the estimated increase in the ideological gap is substantially larger but less precisely estimated. Column 6 indicates that the ideological gap rises by 0.181 standard deviations relative to a baseline gap of 0.129 standard deviations between Black conservatives and Black liberals. Across specifications, the observed polarization is driven by the decline in institutional satisfaction among liberals when prompted to reflect on the history of race.[23]

Do these results extend to incentivized outcomes? Appendix Table A.6 examines how contemplating history affects the share of funds that participants in the fourth survey round allocated to a nonpartisan organization rather than to organizations aligned with conservative or progressive viewpoints. Consistent with the results in Table 3, prompting respondents to think about the history of race widens the ideological divide in support for nonpartisan causes. Historical reasoning significantly reduces the share allocated by liberals to the nonpartisan organization, while having no meaningful effect on conservatives.

Taken together, these results indicate that prompting individuals to reflect on their own historical accounts reduces institutional satisfaction among liberals but not among conservatives,

[23] Appendix Figure A.26 shows that the effects of the intervention are broadly consistent when examining each component of the institutional satisfaction index separately.

Table 3: Effects of historical reasoning on reported institutional satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Dependent Var: Index of Institutional Satisfaction					
	Liberals		Conservatives		Both Ideologies	
			Panel A - Both Races			
Historical Reasoning	−0.072***	−0.063**	0.015	0.013	0.015	0.017
	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Historical Reasoning × Liberal					−0.086**	−0.086**
					(0.038)	(0.038)
Liberal					−0.466***	−0.451***
					(0.027)	(0.026)
Observations	3,103	3,103	2,095	2,095	5,198	5,198
Mean Dependent Variable	-0.172	-0.172	0.323	0.323	0.027	0.027
			Panel B - White Respondents			
Historical Reasoning	−0.073**	−0.056*	0.010	0.016	0.010	0.021
	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Historical Reasoning × Liberal					−0.083**	−0.083**
					(0.041)	(0.041)
Liberal					−0.497***	−0.478***
					(0.028)	(0.028)
Observations	2,217	2,217	1,797	1,797	4,014	4,014
Mean Dependent Variable	-0.118	-0.118	0.407	0.407	0.117	0.117
			Panel C - Black Respondents			
Historical Reasoning	-0.066	-0.061	0.105	0.121	0.105	0.133
	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.088)	(0.090)	(0.088)	(0.087)
Historical Reasoning × Liberal					−0.171*	−0.181*
					(0.099)	(0.098)
Liberal					-0.045	-0.023
					(0.070)	(0.070)
Observations	886	886	298	298	1,184	1,184
Mean Dependent Variable	-0.308	-0.308	-0.185	-0.185	-0.277	-0.277
Survey-round FE		✓		✓		✓
Region FE		✓		✓		✓
Gender		✓		✓		✓

Notes: The table shows the effects of historical reasoning in Experiment 1 on reported institutional satisfaction. The unit of observation is an individual, and data comes from the first, second and fourth rounds of surveys conducted between 2022 and 2023. Each panel-column reports results from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable in the column heading on the variable(s) in the row heading(s). Historical Reasoning is an indicator that equals one for participants who were randomly chosen to answer the historical legacy questions before answering other survey questions, 0 otherwise. Liberal is an indicator that equals one if the participant reports being liberal. Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC2) are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

thereby contributing to an asymmetric increase in ideological polarization. These findings are consistent with White (1973)'s view of historical narratives as discourses that both reflect and shape attitudes toward contemporary institutional arrangements.

5.2. Exposure to Representative Narratives

We now turn to an analysis of the effects of exposing participants to different narratives about the history of race in the United States. As described in Section 3, we constructed narratives representative of the views expressed by individuals sharing the same ideology and racial affiliation, resulting in four narratives: Black Liberal, Black Conservative, White Liberal, and White Conservative. In Experiment 2, participants were randomly exposed to one of these narratives before reporting the outcome variables.[24] As specified in the pre-analysis plan (AEARCTR-0012177), the four narrative treatments and the control condition were implemented for white respondents. Due to recruitment constraints, Black respondents were randomly assigned to the white liberal narrative, the white conservative narrative, or the control condition. Accordingly, we estimate treatment effects separately for each race–ideology group.

Table 4 reports the results of these regressions. Each pair of columns corresponds to a separate regression estimated within a given race–ideology group. Odd columns report estimates from OLS regressions of the institutional satisfaction index on the treatment indicators without controls, while even columns include controls for gender and region of birth. Panel A reports the effects of the four narratives for white respondents, estimated separately for white liberals (Columns 1–2) and white conservatives (Columns 3–4). Panel B reports the effects of the white liberal and white conservative narratives for Black respondents, estimated separately for Black liberals (Columns 1–2) and Black conservatives (Columns 3–4).[25]

The results of this intervention broadly align with those of the historical reasoning experiment, though we are underpowered to precisely estimate some of these effects. Among white

[24] See Table A.3 for the full text of the narratives and Section 4.3 for details on how these narratives were constructed and validated.

[25] In line with our pre-registration, we also examine the effects of the narratives among respondents who identify as politically moderate. Appendix Table A.7 reports these results separately for white and Black moderates. The estimates are generally small and imprecise. One exception is that white moderates exposed to the white conservative narrative report lower institutional satisfaction on average, suggesting some degree of backlash generated by that narrative.

Table 4: Effects of exposure to representative narratives on reported institutional satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Dependent Var: Index of Institutional Satisfaction			
	Liberals		Conservatives	
	Panel A - White Respondents			
White Liberal Narrative	−0.078*	−0.070*	−0.002	−0.009
	(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.036)	(0.035)
White Conservative Narrative	−0.028	−0.023	0.034	0.028
	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.036)	(0.036)
Black Libeal Narrative	−0.048	−0.056	−0.036	−0.039
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Black Conservative Narrative	0.010	0.010	0.050	0.046
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.035)	(0.034)
Observations	2,338	2,338	2,380	2,380
Mean Dependent Variable	0.048	0.048	0.323	0.323
	Panel B - Black Respondents			
White Liberal Narrative	−0.101*	−0.072	−0.079	−0.071
	(0.058)	(0.057)	(0.089)	(0.090)
White Conservative Narrative	−0.079	−0.055	−0.029	−0.020
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.087)	(0.088)
Observations	851	851	397	397
Mean Dependent Variable	-0.401	-0.401	0.4187	0.418
Region FE		✓		✓
Gender		✓		✓

Notes: The table shows the effects of exposing participants to different historical narratives on reported institutional satisfaction. The unit of observation is an individual, and data comes from the third survey round. Each panel-column reports results from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable in the column heading on the variable(s) in the row heading(s). The treatment conditions are indicators that equal one if the participant was shown the representative narrative described in the row heading, zero otherwise. The text of these narratives is detailed in Appendix Table A.3, while Section 4.2 describes the process that we followed to generate these narratives. Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC2) are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

liberals, exposure to the white liberal narrative decreases institutional satisfaction by approximately 0.07 standard deviations ($p = 0.093$), a magnitude comparable to the effect observed when participants were randomly prompted to reflect on their own historical views in Experiment 1. Exposure to the other narratives produces smaller and less precisely estimated effects. This pattern suggests that the results of Experiment 1 are unlikely to be driven simply by prompting white liberals to think about politically contentious topics. If that were the case, exposure to any of the narratives would be expected to generate similar effects. Instead, the results point more specifically to the effects of confronting these respondents with narratives that closely resemble their own historical interpretations of the history of race in the United States.

Among African American respondents, exposure to the white liberal narrative is also associated with lower institutional satisfaction on average, and the magnitude of the estimated effect is similar to that observed for white liberals. However, these estimates are less precisely estimated due to the smaller sample size, reaching marginal statistical significance ($p = 0.083$) only when restricting the sample to Black liberals in the specification without controls. Exposure to the white conservative narrative generates smaller and more imprecise effects. Finally, when focusing on white conservatives, the results closely resemble those observed in the historical reasoning experiment: exposure to any of the narratives produces relatively small and imprecisely estimated changes in institutional satisfaction.

Taken together, the results of the second experiment suggest that the content and structure of the white liberal narrative has the potential to reduce institutional satisfaction among some groups but not others. In particular, by affecting the views of liberals more strongly than those of conservatives, exposure to this narrative has the potential to generate an asymmetrical form of polarization, consistent with the pattern observed in Experiment 1 when respondents were prompted to reflect on their own historical views. Appendix Table A.8 formally examines the implied changes in ideological polarization, showing that the liberal–conservative gap in institutional satisfaction among white respondents increases by nearly 20 percent when participants are exposed to the white liberal narrative, although the estimates are not precisely estimated given the available sample size.

5.3. Mechanism behind experimental effects

The experimental results corroborate the idea that historical narratives are as much about the present as they are about the past. Narratives about historical events are articulated in ways that both reflect and shape views about whether contemporary social arrangements ought to be maintained or transformed (White, 1973). What remains less clear is the mechanism through which historical narratives influence views about present-day institutions. Why would thinking or speaking about the past alter institutional satisfaction, and why might these effects vary systematically across ideological groups? In this subsection, we examine whether negative affectivity constitutes a mechanism partially underlying the experimental results discussed above. Negative affectivity refers to the predisposition to experience negative emotions, such as fear, sadness, anger, or disillusionment. These emotions activate neural processes that differ from those triggered by positive emotions (Lane et al., 1997), and they are often associated with more pessimistic evaluations of social and political conditions. Despite differences across specific emotions, a common feature of negative affectivity is that it increases individuals' susceptibility to dissatisfaction with the status quo. Indeed, a burgeoning literature in economics has documented the political consequences of some of these adverse emotions (Ali, Desmet and Wacziarg, 2024; Algan et al., 2025).

Some of the evidence discussed in Section 4 suggests that negative affectivity may help explain the experimental results. First, as shown in Appendix Figure A.15, liberals are significantly more likely than conservatives to convey negative sentiment and emotions when discussing race in historical perspective. Second, the fact that liberals respond most strongly to the liberal narrative in Experiment 2, in a manner consistent with the effects observed in Experiment 1 where participants were prompted to reflect on their own views, suggests that the observed effects are driven by liberals confronting their own historical interpretations rather than those of ideological outgroups. Taken together, these patterns indicate that reflecting on historical narratives about race may disproportionately trigger negative emotional responses among liberals.

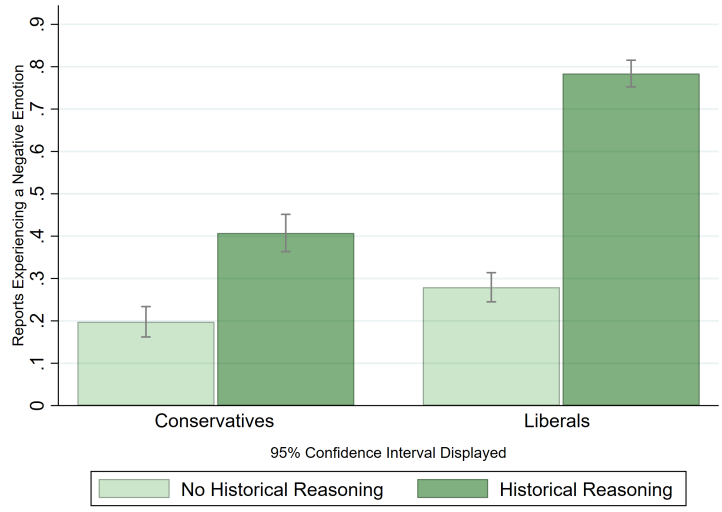
To further assess this possibility, we collected participants' reported emotions in rounds 3 and 4, which allows us to formally examine whether our interventions increase the likelihood

of experiencing negative affectivity. Figure 5 reports the effects of Experiments 1 and 2 on the probability of reporting a negative emotion. Panel A shows that prompting participants to engage in historical reasoning increases the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions for both ideological groups, but the effect is substantially larger among liberals than among conservatives. The probability of reporting a negative emotion increases by more than 50 percentage points for liberals, compared with a 20 percentage point increase for conservatives, which results in liberals being nearly 40 percentage points more likely than conservatives to report negative emotions after reflecting on the history of race.

Panel B of Figure 5 reveals a similar pattern for Experiment 2. With the exception of conservatives exposed to the white conservative narrative (who report a lower inclination toward negative affectivity), exposure to any type of historical narrative generally increases the likelihood of reporting a negative emotion across demographic groups. Importantly, however, more than 80 percent of liberals report experiencing a negative emotion after exposure to a liberal narrative (either the white liberal or Black liberal narrative). This share is more than 10 percentage points higher than the corresponding share among liberals exposed to a conservative narrative, and it is more than 20 percentage points higher than among conservatives exposed to any narrative. In other words, liberal historical narratives appear to be particularly effective at triggering negative emotional responses among liberals. The fact that this pattern closely aligns with the results from Experiment 1 provide further support for the interpretation that the treatment effects in the first protocol arise from liberals engaging with their own historical narratives about race (rather than from the salience of politically contentious topics related to race more broadly).

Overall, these results suggest that negative affectivity constitutes a plausible channel through which historical reflection and exposure to ideologically aligned narratives translate into lower institutional satisfaction among liberals.

(a) Negative Affectivity in Experiment 1



(b) Negative Affectivity in Experiment 2

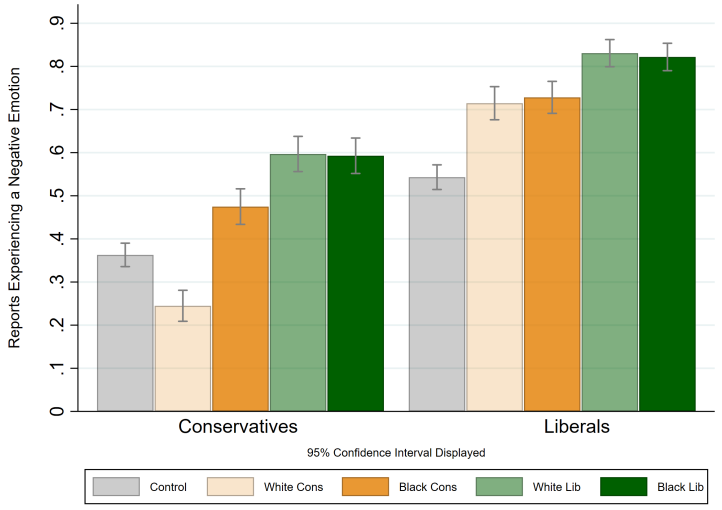


Figure 5: Effects of historical reasoning and historical narrative exposure on the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions

Notes: The figures depict the effects of prompting participants to contemplate their own views toward historical racial episodes (panel A) and being exposed to different types of historical narratives (panel B) on the likelihood of experiencing a negative emotion. Each panel-graph shows the unconditional averages of the variable on the y-axis for participants with the same ideological identity who were assigned to the same treatment condition, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence interval. Panel A depicts the results of Experiment 1, in which the treatment condition (Historical Reasoning) was prompting participants to share their historical views before (as opposed to after) answering outcome questions. Panel B depicts the results of Experiment 2, in which participants were randomly exposed to one of the representative narratives described in the legend box (as detailed in Appendix Table A.3), or to no narrative. Data comes from the third and fourth rounds of online surveys conducted in the US in 2023 (see Section 2 for more details on each protocol).

6. Conclusion

Interpretations of the past are inextricably linked to how individuals understand the societies in which they live. Narratives about past events and processes, i.e. historical narratives, both reflect and help structure beliefs about how present institutions emerged and whether existing social arrangements should be preserved or reformed. Yet these interpretations are rarely uniform. Different social and ideological groups often construct competing narratives about the same historical processes, drawing on distinct experiences, values, and normative frameworks. Understanding how such narratives vary across groups, and how these differences shape contemporary political attitudes, is therefore central to understanding the relationship between historical events, their interpretation, and present-day political behavior.

We examine how Americans think and speak about the history of race in the United States. Using new survey data from more than 14,000 respondents across multiple survey rounds, we document substantial variation in how individuals interpret key historical episodes such as the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the legacy of slavery. While some differences emerge across cohorts and racial groups, ideological differences constitute a particularly salient dimension shaping historical views and narratives. Respondents who share similar ideological orientations tend to emphasize similar themes, discursive practices, and moral evaluations when discussing these events. Given that historical narratives do not simply recount events but assign meaning and situate them within broader interpretations of social change (White, 1973), our findings suggest that such interpretive frameworks vary systematically across ideological groups in contemporary public discourse.

We then examine whether engagement with these narratives affects contemporary political attitudes. Evidence from two experimental protocols indicates that reflecting on historical accounts about race can increase ideological differences in institutional satisfaction. Importantly, these patterns appear to operate through emotional responses: historical reflection disproportionately triggers negative affect among liberals, particularly when individuals engage with narratives that closely resemble their own views about the past. This evidence suggests that historical narratives may influence political attitudes not only by shaping beliefs about historical processes but also by affecting the emotional lens through which individuals evaluate

present-day institutions.

Taken together, these findings highlight the potential political consequences of disagreement over the interpretation of the past. Historical narratives do not merely reflect existing ideological divisions; they can also amplify them by shaping how individuals emotionally and cognitively engage with contemporary institutions. In societies where competing interpretations of historically contentious events coexist, engagement with the past may therefore contribute to the persistence or intensification of political polarization.

Our findings also point to several avenues for future research. One direction is to examine how citizens interpret other historical episodes in the United States, particularly those involving different minority groups, and whether similar ideological patterns emerge. Relatedly, an intriguing area of research concerns how people view historical episodes and processes of global transcendence, and how these affect attitudes towards trade and international cooperation. More broadly, understanding how competing historical narratives influence political attitudes may shed light on how societies process historical grievances and how these processes affect institutional legitimacy and social cohesion.

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Online Appendix

Historical Narratives and Political Behavior in the US

Diego Ramos-Toro

Dartmouth College

Elsa Voytas

Meta

	Black Respondents		White Respondents	
	Survey Participants	US Population (ACS 2022)	Survey Participants	US Population (ACS 2022)
Panel A - Demographic Characteristics				
Female	0.622	0.542	0.543	0.521
Marital Status	0.313	0.385	0.587	0.618
Age 18 - 29	0.218	0.281	0.092	0.227
Age 30 - 39	0.228	0.197	0.179	0.179
Age 40 - 49	0.175	0.169	0.150	0.167
Age 50 - 59	0.167	0.140	0.161	0.152
Age 60 and more	0.213	0.214	0.418	0.276
Panel B - Economic Characteristics				
Labor Force Participation	0.753	0.682	0.769	0.738
Unemployed	0.130	0.092	0.071	0.043
Annual Income $>$ 135,000	0.077	0.113	0.167	0.112
College Educated	0.360	0.290	0.597	0.401
Sample Size	3,730		10,303	

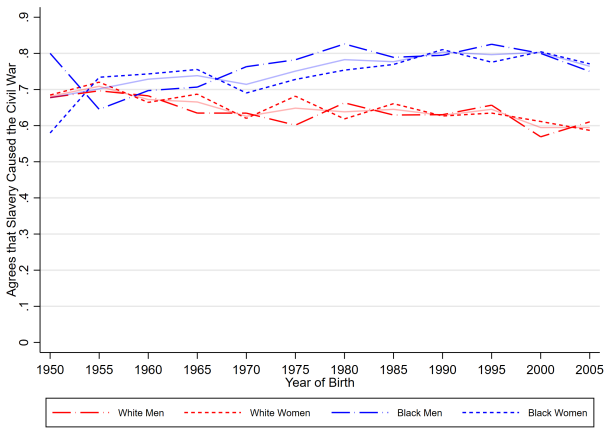
Notes: The table compares the characteristics of respondents in our sample with those of respondents in the American Community Survey from 2022. Columns 1-2 compare Black respondents, while Columns 3-4 compare white respondents. Rows correspond to proportion of sample self-identifying in each category.

Table A.1: Characteristics of Sample Compared to Census Data

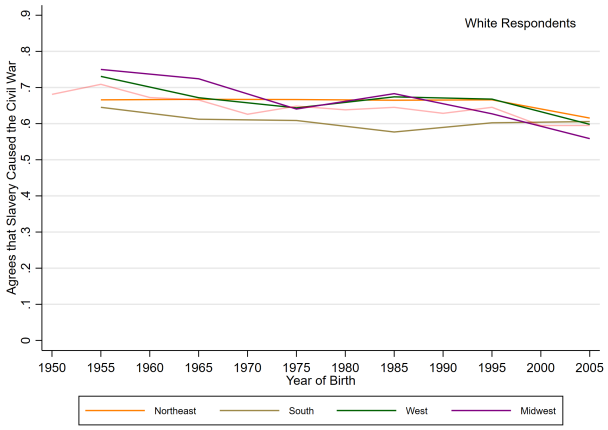
	White Liberals		White Conservatives	
	Survey Participants	ANES 2020-202	Survey Participants	ANES 2020-2022
Panel A - Demographic Characteristics				
Female	0.586	0.577	0.510	0.476
Marital Status	0.544	0.508	0.641	0.652
Age 18 - 29	0.113	0.065	0.076	0.034
Age 30 - 39	0.217	0.166	0.149	0.107
Age 40 - 49	0.152	0.178	0.140	0.131
Age 50 - 59	0.142	0.133	0.178	0.152
Age 60 and more	0.377	0.435	0.458	0.534
Panel B - Economic Characteristics				
Annual Income $>$ 135,000	0.174	0.215	0.158	0.112
College Educated	0.665	0.642	0.531	0.436
Sample Size	4,555	1,833	4,177	2,274

Notes: The table compares the characteristics of white respondents in our sample with those of white respondents in the American National Election Studies from 2020-2022. Columns 1-2 compare white liberals respondents, while Columns 3-4 compare white conservatives. Rows correspond to proportion of sample self-identifying in each category.

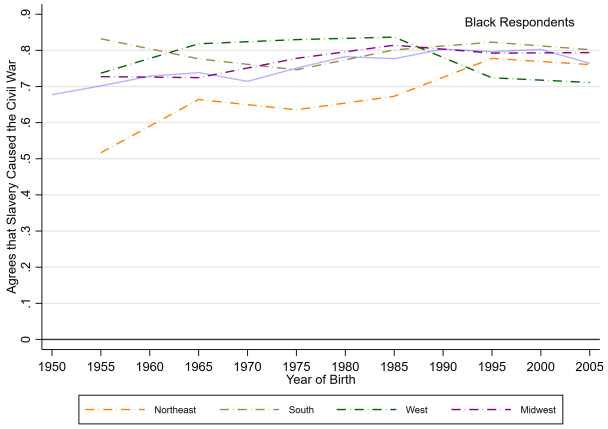
Table A.2: Characteristics of White Participants Compared to White Respondents in ANES



(a) Cohort trends by race and gender



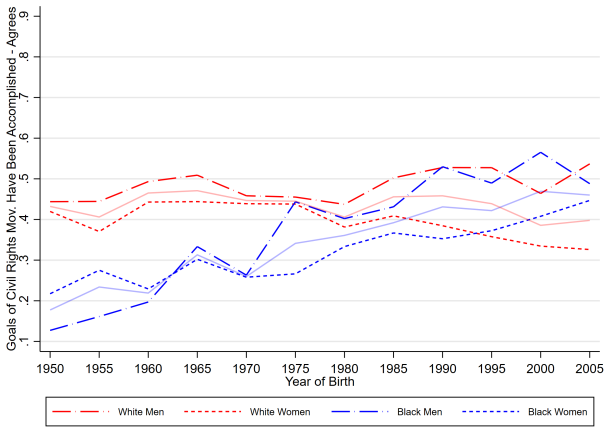
(b) Cohort trends by region - Black respondents



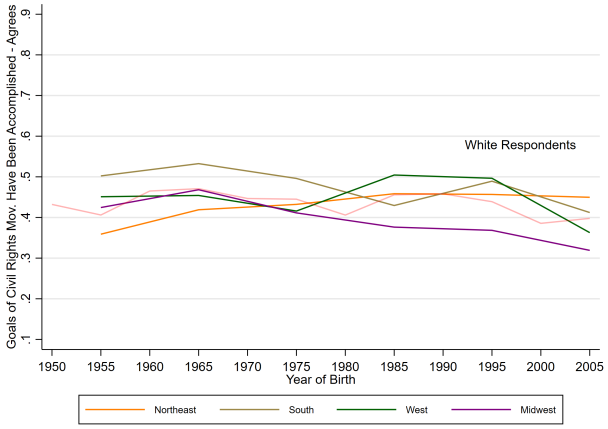
(c) Cohort trends by region - white respondents

Figure A.1: Race, gender, and regional trends in views toward causes of the Civil War.

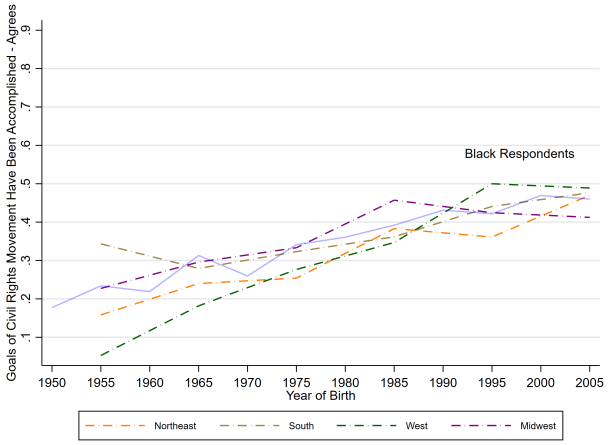
Notes: The graphs depict the race and cohort trends in views about slavery as a cause of the Civil War, split by gender (Panel A) and region (Panels B and C). In each panel-graph, a point represents the unconditional average of the variable on the y-axis for respondents born in the same five-year period with the same racial affiliation and gender (or region). Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023.



(a) Cohort trends by race and gender



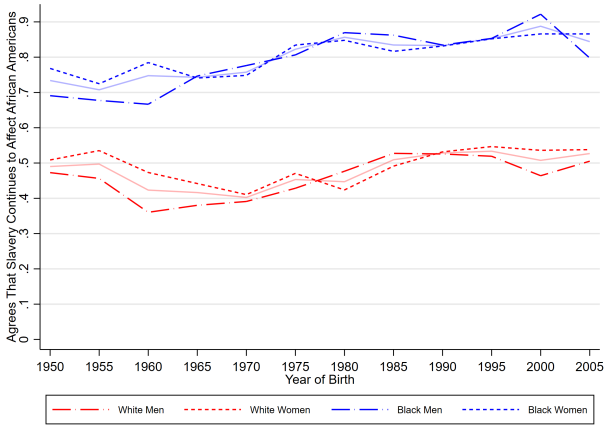
(b) Cohort trends by region - Black respondents



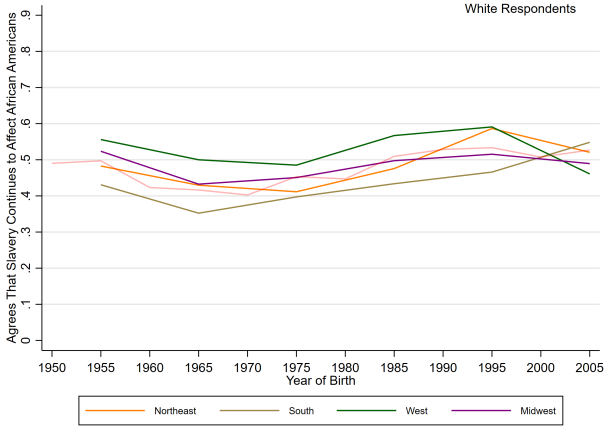
(c) Cohort trends by region - white respondents

Figure A.2: Race, gender, and regional trends in views toward achieving goals of the Civil Rights Movement.

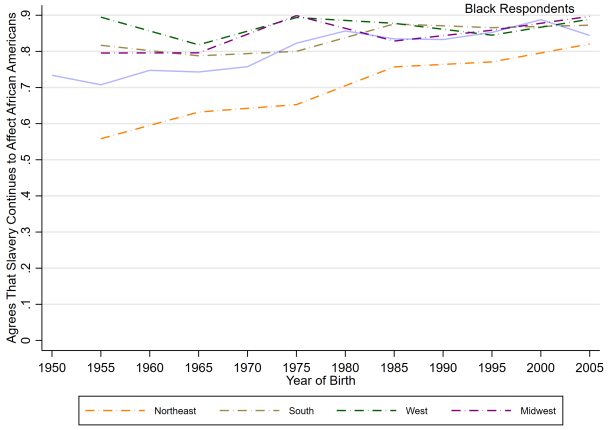
Notes: The graphs depict the race and cohort trends in views about the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement, split by gender (Panel A) and region (Panels B and C). In each panel-graph, a point represents the unconditional average of the variable on the y-axis for respondents born in the same five-year period with the same racial affiliation and gender (or region). Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023.



(a) Cohort trends by race and gender



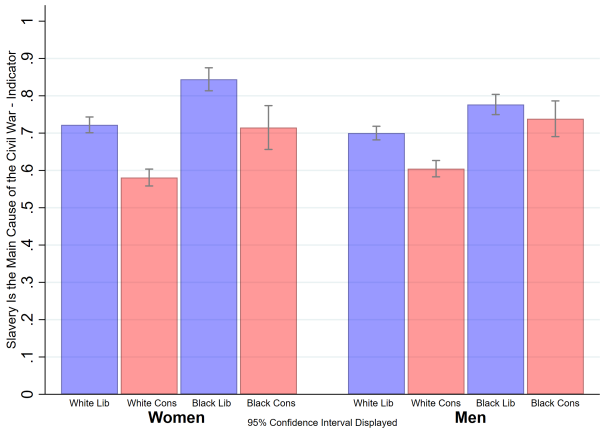
(b) Cohort trends by region - Black respondents



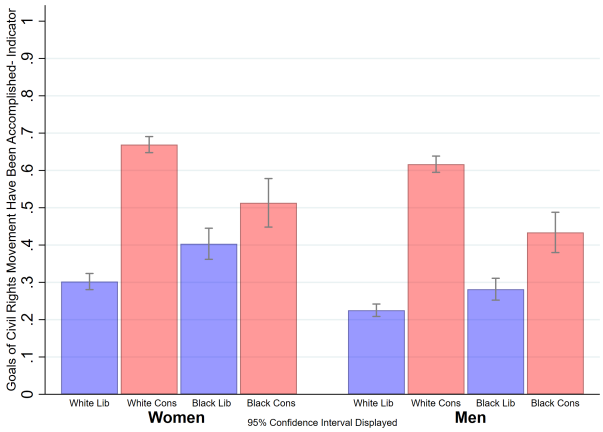
(c) Cohort trends by region - white respondents

Figure A.3: Race, gender, and regional trends in views toward the lasting impact of slavery and discrimination.

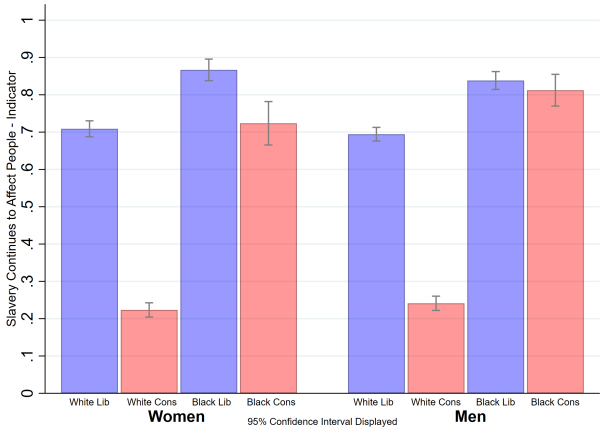
Notes: The graphs depict the race and cohort trends in views about slavery's persistence, split by gender (Panel A) and region (Panels B and C). In each panel-graph, a point represents the unconditional average of the variable on the y-axis for respondents born in the same five-year period with the same racial affiliation and gender (or region). Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023.



(a) Slavery as cause of Civil War by gender



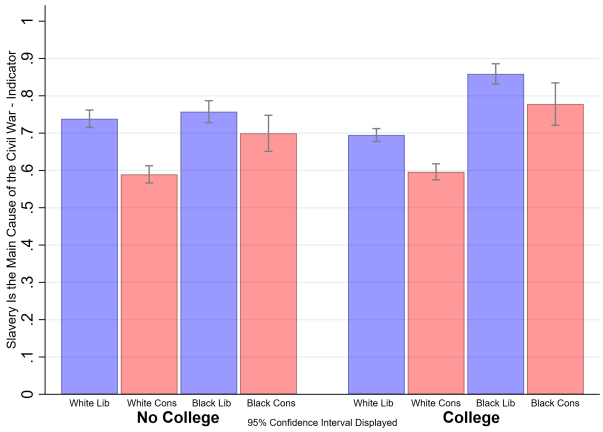
(b) Success of Civil Rights Movement by gender



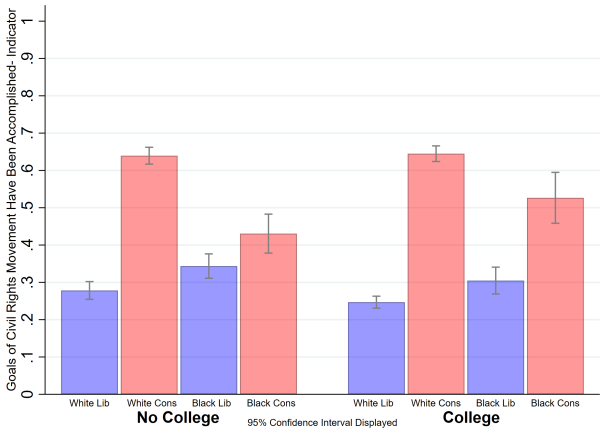
(c) Legacy from Slavery by gender

Figure A.4: Gender and ideological differences in views toward different historical episodes.

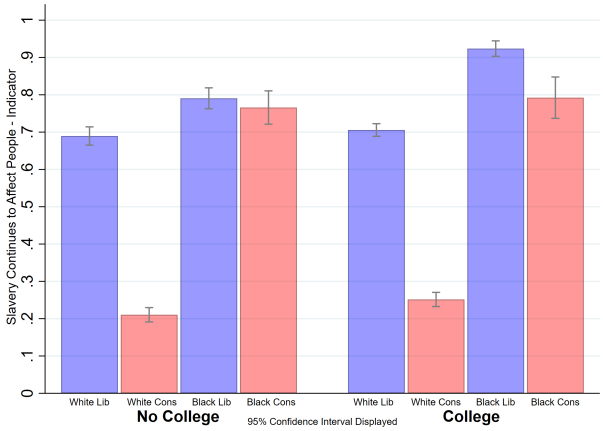
Notes: The graphs show differences in historical views across race and ideology, separate by gender. Each panel-graph shows the unconditional averages of the variable on the y-axis for participants with the same racial affiliation, ideological inclination, gender, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023.



(a) Slavery as cause of Civil War by college attainment



(b) Success of Civil Rights Movement by college attainment



(c) Legacy from slavery by college attainment

Figure A.5: Educational and ideological differences in views toward different historical episodes.

Notes: The graphs show differences in historical views across race and ideology, separate for those with and without college attainment. Each panel-graph shows the unconditional averages of the variable on the y-axis for participants with the same racial affiliation, ideological inclination, educational attainment, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023.

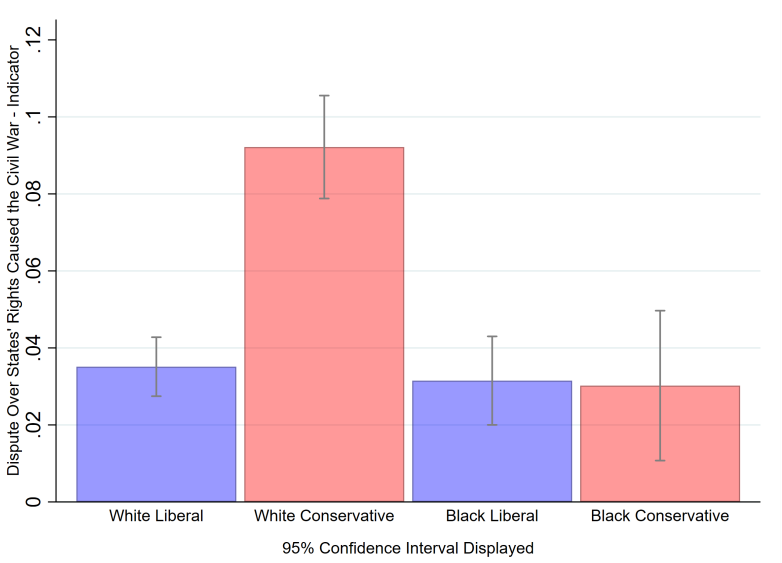


Figure A.6: Race and ideological differences in view that states' rights caused the Civil War.

Notes: The graph shows the share of respondents from each race-ideology demographic who mentioned states' rights in the open-ended responses about the causes of the Civil War. The graph is based on an indicator that equals one if the open ended response includes the terms "federal control" or "state rights". Also shown are the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

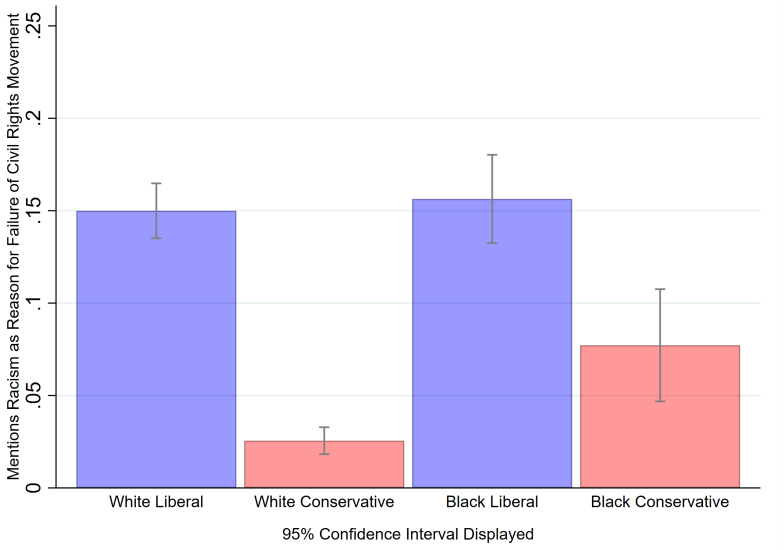


Figure A.7: Race and ideological differences in the view that racism underlies the failure of the Civil Rights Movement.

Notes: The graph shows the share of respondents from each race-ideology demographic who mentioned terms associated with racism when asked why the Civil Rights Movement was not successful in the end. The graph is based on an indicator that equals one if the open ended response includes the terms "discrimination", "bias", "bigot", "racism", and "inequality". Also shown are the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

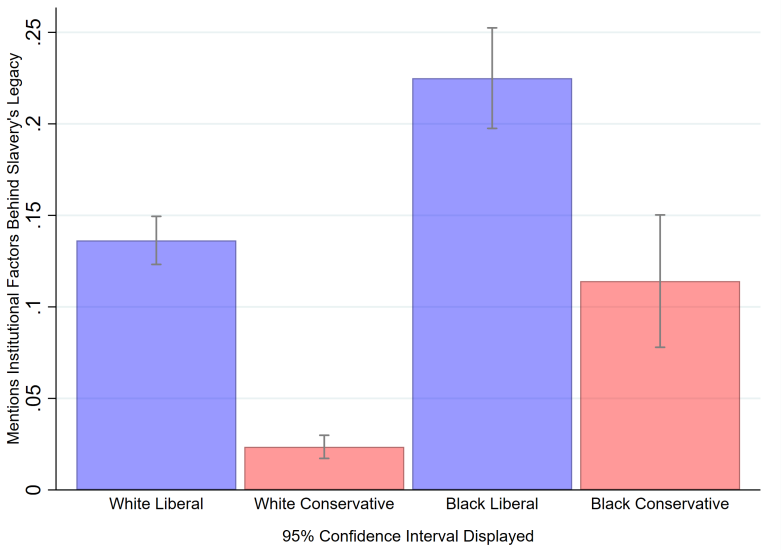
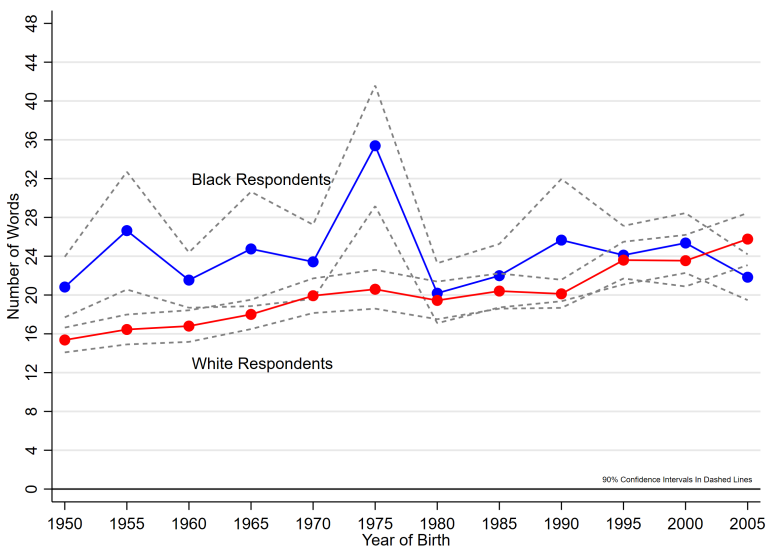
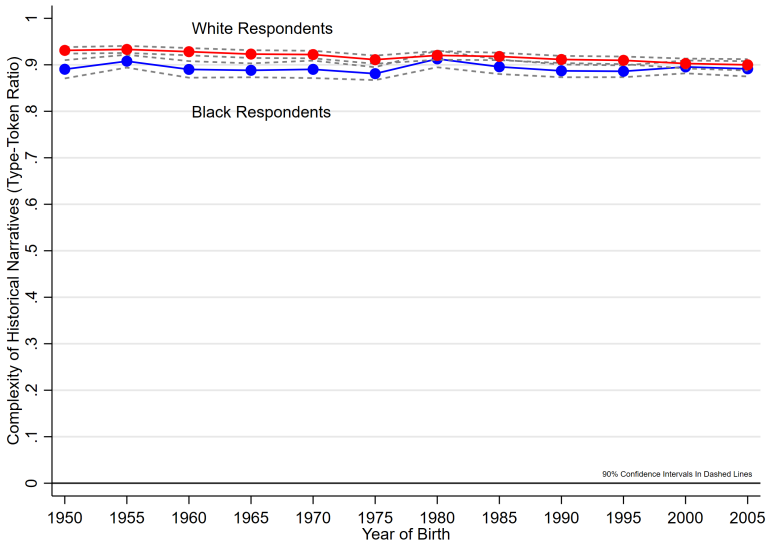


Figure A.8: Race and ideological differences in view that institutional factors are linked to slavery's legacy.

Notes: The graph shows the share of respondents from each race-ideology demographic who stated that US institutions played a role in perpetuating the legacy from slavery. The graph is based on an indicator that equals one if the open ended response includes the terms "legal", "constitution", "system", "right", "law" or the root words "govern", "politic", "polic", or "instit". Also shown are the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.



(a) Number of words



(b) Type-token ratio

Figure A.9: Length and complexity of historical narratives.

Notes: The graphs depict race and cohort trends in the length (number of words, Panel A) and complexity (type-token ratio, Panel B) of the open ended responses. In each panel-graph, a point represents the unconditional average of the variable on the y-axis for respondents born in the same five-year period with the same racial affiliation, and the dashed lines surrounding the points show the corresponding 90-percent confidence interval. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

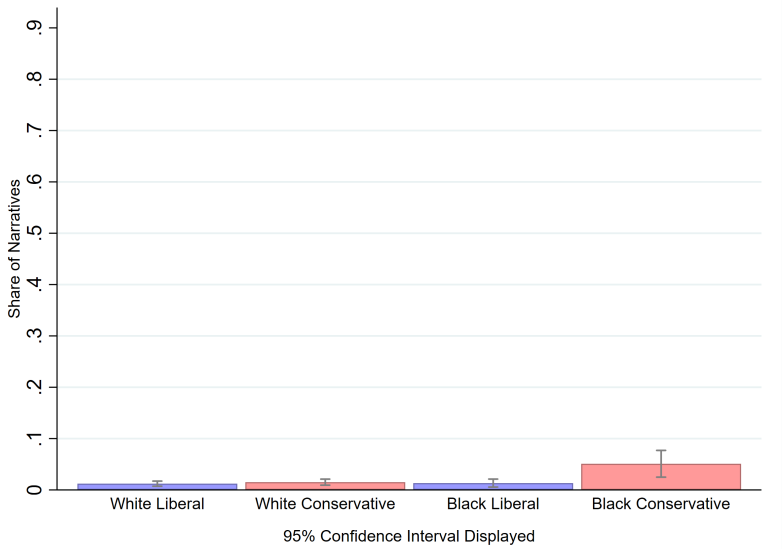
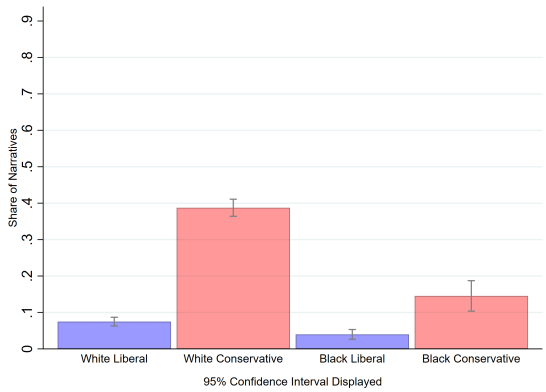
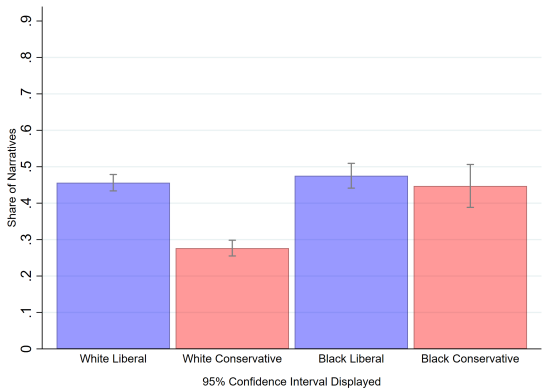


Figure A.10: Race and ideological differences in share of uninformative responses.

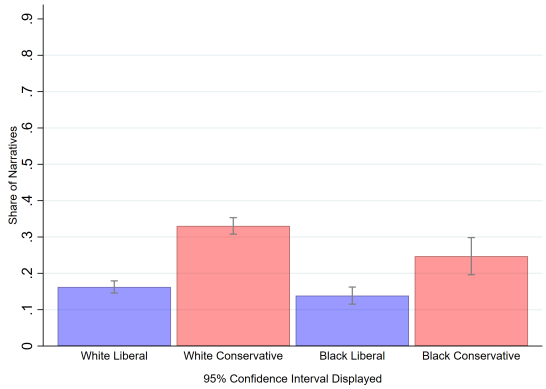
Notes: The graph shows the share of respondents from each race-ideology demographic who provided an uninformative open-ended response. The graph is based on an indicator that equals one if the OpenAI's GPT O.4 model flagged the response as being uninformative based on a prommpt describing what an uninformative response is (e.g., "asjsfie" or "i don't know") vs what it isn't (e.g., spelling errors, or signaling uncertainty despite having an opinion on the issue). Appendix Section B.2 details the prompt used to flag these responses. Also shown are the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.



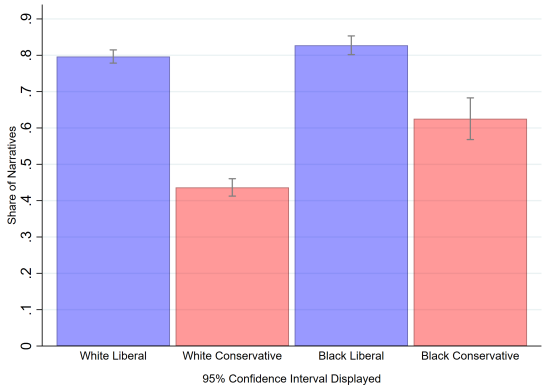
(a) Exculpating Narratives



(b) Responsibilizing Narratives



(c) Denotes Methodological Individualism



(d) Denotes Structuralism

Figure A.11: Differences in How History is Discussed (GPT Coding)

Notes: The figures show differences in how the history of race is discussed across race and ideology, based on coding performed with the assistance of OpenAI's GPT O.4 model. Specifically, it shows the prevalence of different types of narratives (*exculpating* or *responsibilizing*), as well as the underlying views of how historical processes come to exist (*methodological individualism* or *structuralism*). Each panel-graph shows the unconditional averages of an indicator of the variable described in the panel-graph label for participants with the same racial affiliation and ideological inclination. Appendix Section B.2 details the prompt used to flag these responses. Also shown are the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

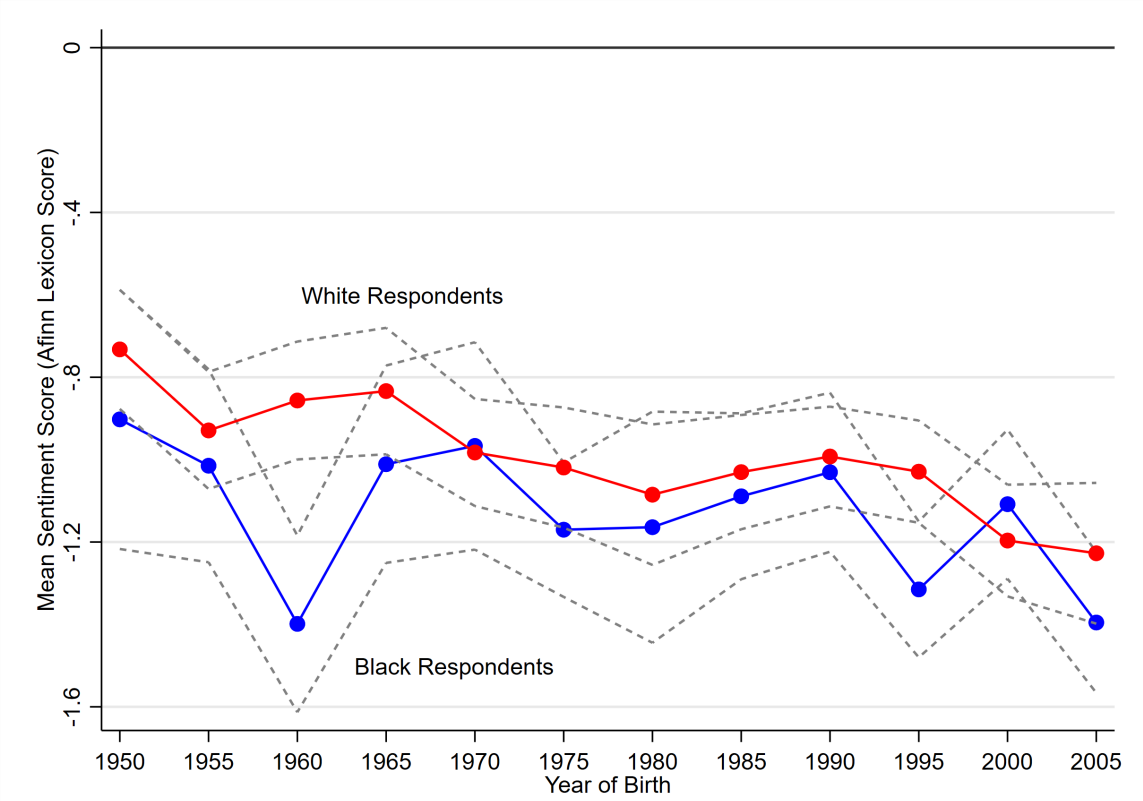


Figure A.12: Sentiment score of historical narratives.

Notes: The graph shows the sentiment score of open-ended responses across cohorts for white and Black participants. Each dot and corresponding 90-percent confidence interval correspond to the mean sentiment score (based on Afinn Lexicon score) of the open-ended responses from participants with the same racial affiliation who belong to the same cohort. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

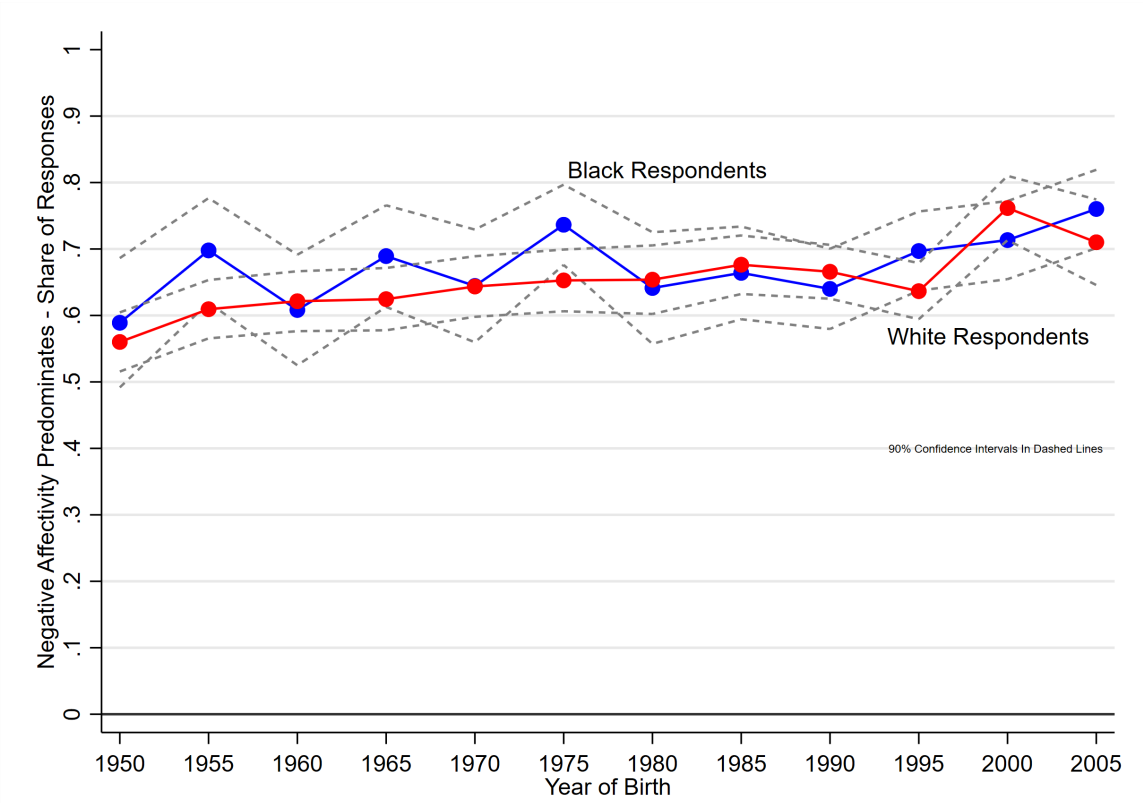
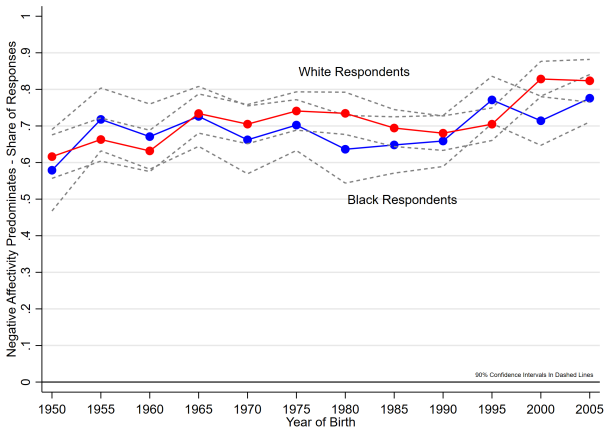
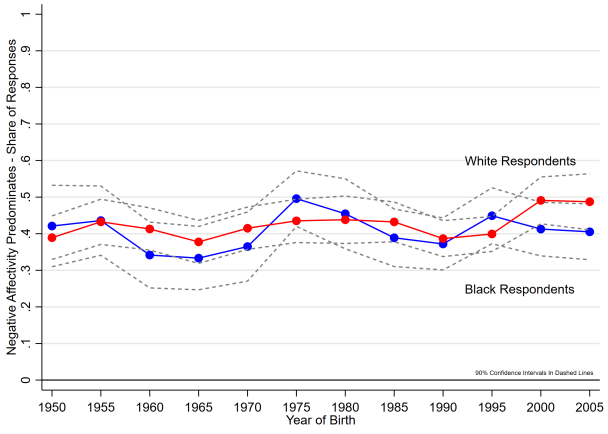


Figure A.13: Negative affectivity in historical narratives.

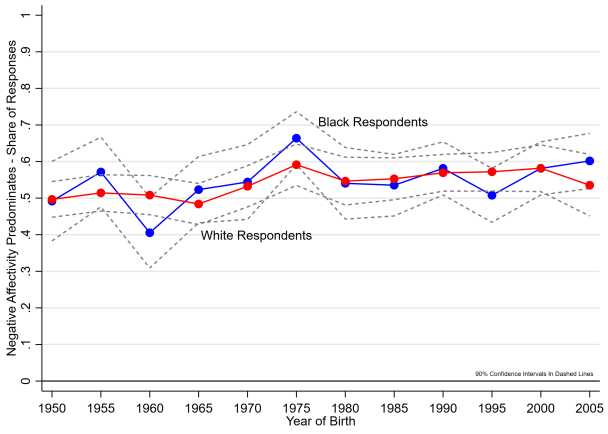
Notes: The graph shows the prevalence of negative affectivity in participants' open-ended responses across cohorts for white and Black participants. Each dot and corresponding 90-percent confidence interval correspond to the share of open-ended responses from participants with the same racial affiliation and cohort that were characterized by featuring more negative than positive or neutral emotions. Results are based on an indicator that equals one if the open ended response is such that the number of identified negative emotions is greater than the identified positive or neutral emotions. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.



(a)



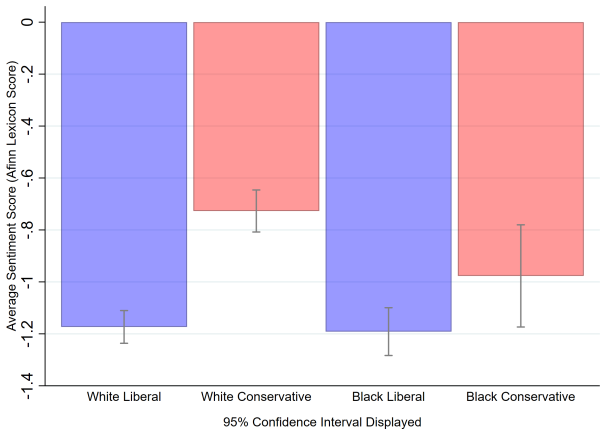
(b)



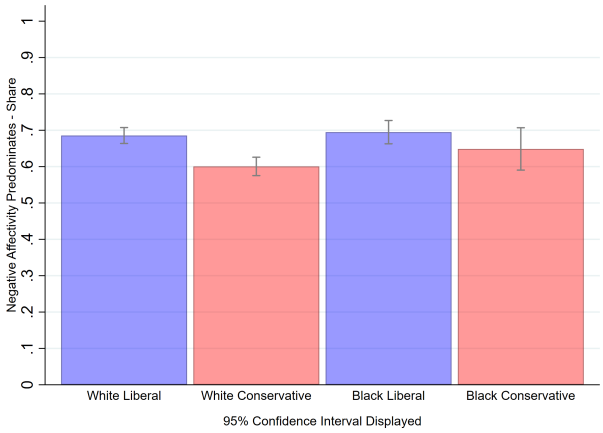
(c)

Figure A.14: Negative affectivity in views toward different historical episodes.

Notes: For the open-ended views about each historical episode (Civil War in Pane A; Civil Rights Movement in Panel B, and slavery's legacy in Panel C), the graphs show the prevalence of negative affectivity across cohorts for white and Black participants. Each dot and corresponding 90-percent confidence interval correspond to the share of open-ended responses about the relevant historical episode from participants with the same racial affiliation and cohort that were characterized by featuring more negative than positive or neutral emotions. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.



(a) Mean sentiment score



(b) Share of predominantly negative responses

Figure A.15: Race and ideological differences in sentiment scores and negative affectivity.

Notes: The figure shows the mean sentiment score (Panel A) and the prevalence of negative affectivity (Panel B) across different demographic groups. Each panel-graph shows the unconditional average of the variable on the y-axis for participants with the same racial affiliation and ideological inclination, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence interval. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

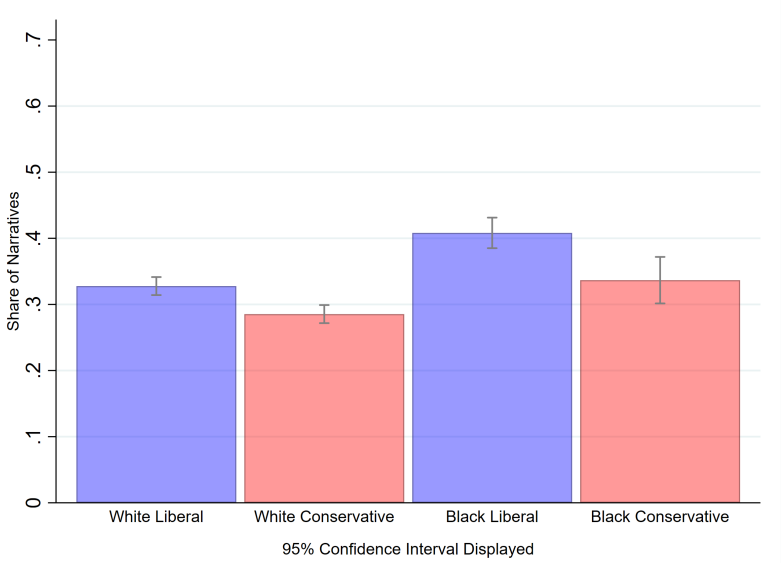


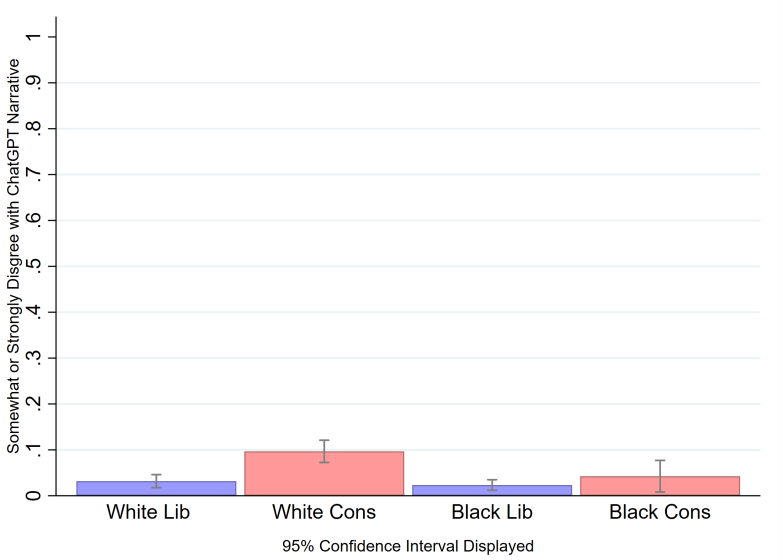
Figure A.16: Race and ideological differences in use of first-person point of view.

Notes: The graph shows the share of respondents from each race-ideology demographic who narrate the history of race from a first-person point of view. The graph is based on an indicator that equals one if the open ended response includes the terms “our”, “we”, “us”, “I”, “me”, or “mine”. Also shown are the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

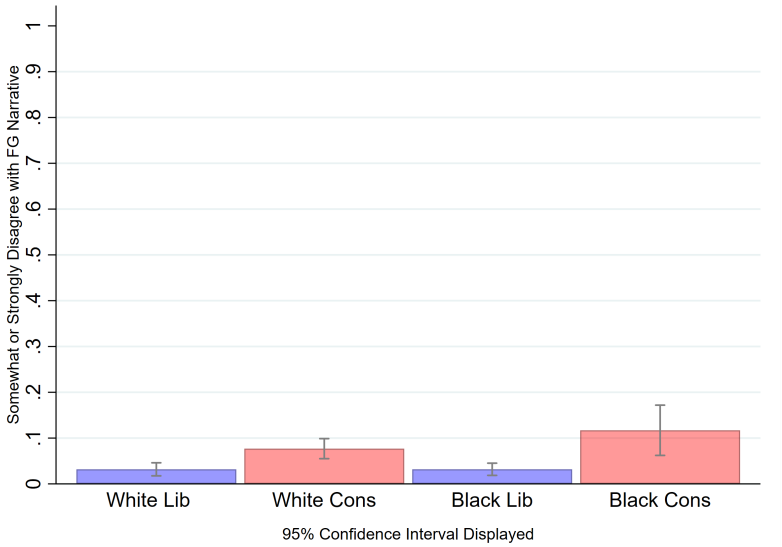
Racial-ideological group	Selected narrative
Black Conservative	The main cause of the Civil War is disputed, but it was primarily due to economic reasons with the South feeling undervalued for their cotton production. Slavery was also a major issue, as some states wanted to continue the practice and others did not. Slavery has been abolished, but racism is still a problem in the United States. The Civil Rights Movement helped achieve equal rights for all people, but discrimination still exists, and some people hold onto prejudices and stereotypes. The legacy of slavery still affects people today, as racism and discrimination continue to be issues.
Black Liberal	The main cause of the Civil War was slavery and disagreements between the northern and southern states regarding it. The issue of slavery was not completely resolved after the war, and racism has continued to exist and worsen over time. The Civil Rights Movement made progress, but there is still a long way to go, and some people are still discriminated against based on their race. Financial greed and ignorance are factors that have contributed to racism and discrimination.
White Conservative	The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's ushered in changes that focus on how laws in certain states were used to suppress people of color. In the proceeding years, those laws have been abolished and the rights of all to have opportunity is a reality. The limiting factors are one's ability and willingness to strive for those opportunities. Slavery was not unique to the United States and in some parts of the world persist still today. Slavery may play a part on the psyche of some Americans, but that's one of the challenges they must overcome. Everyone is treated the same and anything is achievable which is a huge accomplishment for the American people as we came a long way.
White Liberal	The causes of the Civil War were land rights, state autonomy, and slavery. While slavery was officially abolished after the war, racism remains a significant problem in the present day, and progress towards civil rights has been hindered by wealthy white people who believe in their superiority over people of color. Discrimination still affects many African Americans, with limited access to opportunities and equal pay, leading to ongoing poverty and distrust between races. Progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go in the fight for equal rights and understanding between different groups of people.

Table A.3: Selected representative narratives (treatment conditions in Experiment 2).

Notes: The table shows the representative narratives that were selected by participants with the same ideology and racial affiliation. These are the outputs of the process described in Section 4.2, and these narratives correspond to the treatment coniditions of Experiment 2 (described in Section 3.3 and discussed in Section 5.2).



(a) Disagreement with GPT-generated Narrative



(b) Disagreement with narrative generated by focus group

Figure A.17: Disagreement with representative historical narratives.

Notes: The graphs show the share of participants from each race-ideology group that disagreed with their group's representative narrative generated with ChatGPT (Panel A) and the corresponding disagreement with the representative narrative generated by the focus groups (Panel B). The graph is based on indicators that equal one if the respondent reports disagreeing with each of the narratives shown to them (see Section 4.3), which in turn are based on the raw output that identified common themes in the open-ended responses of each race-ideology demographic in the first round. Also shown are the corresponding 95-percent confidence intervals. Data comes from 1,479 respondents surveyed in our second round of surveys.

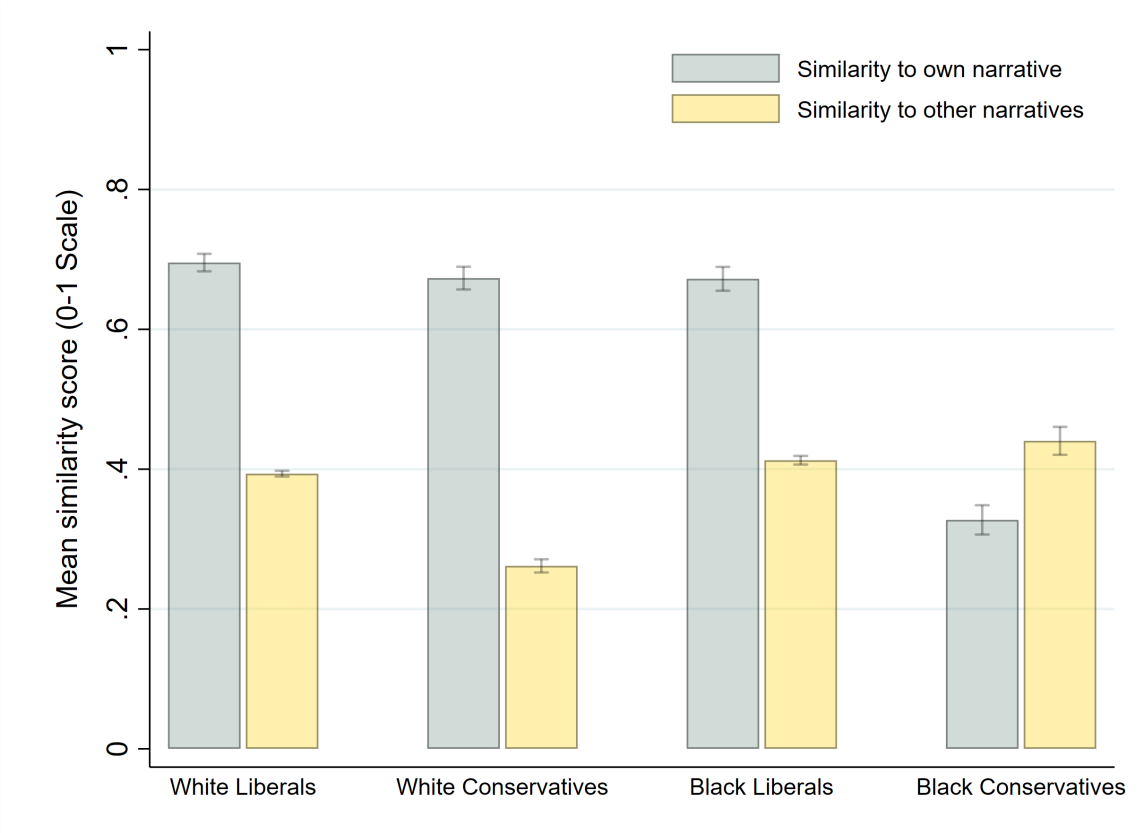
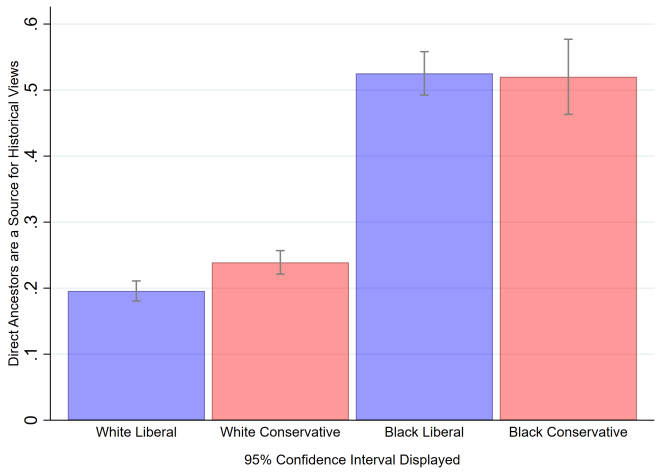


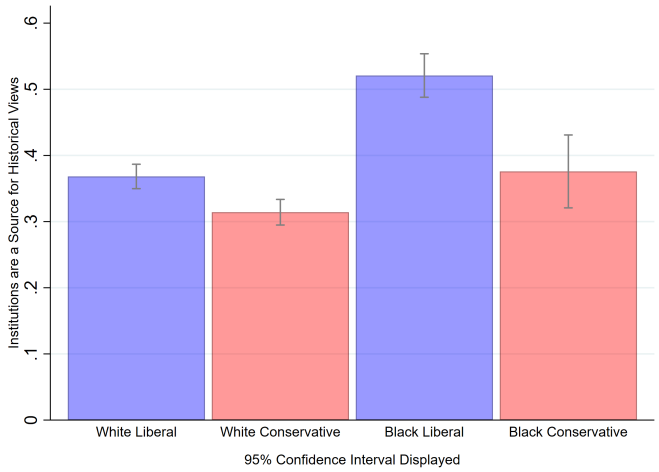
Figure A.18: Similarity of open-ended responses to representative narratives.

Notes: The graph shows, for each race-demographic group, the similarity score of the open-ended responses from members of the group relative to the group's representative narrative, and compares it with the average similarity score of outgroups relative the group's representative score. Each open-ended response was given a similarity score relative to each of the 4 representative narratives, and these scores were constructed based on prompts given to OpenAI's GPT O.4 model (see Section 4.3 and Appendix Section B.3). Also shown are the 95% confidence intervals for each of these average scores. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

(a) Relies on Vertical Sources



(b) Relies on Institutional Sources



(c) Relies on Media

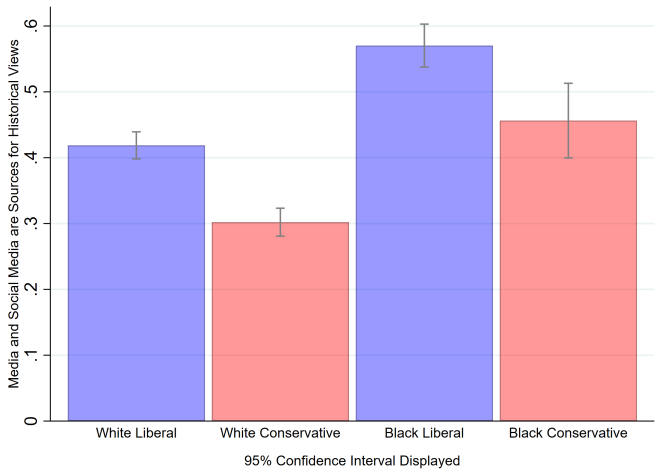
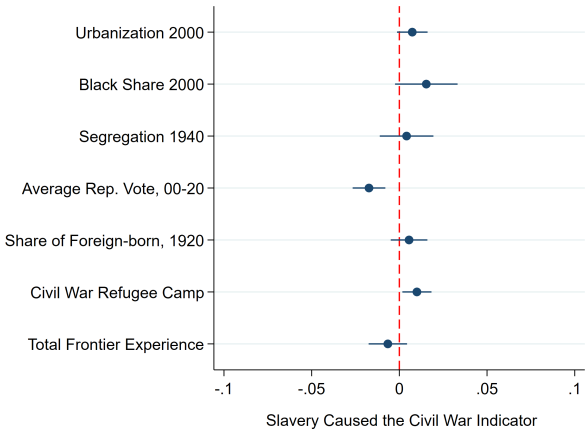
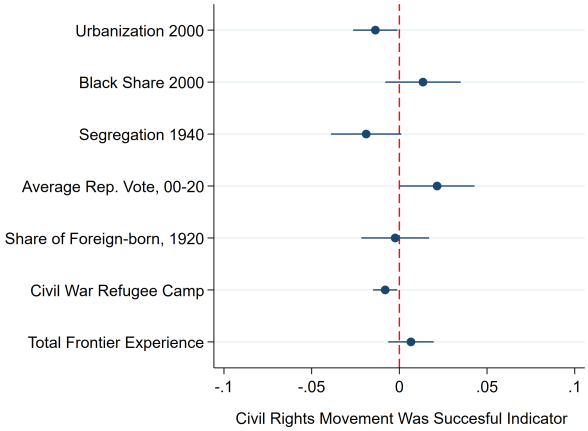


Figure A.19: Differences in historical sources across race and ideology.

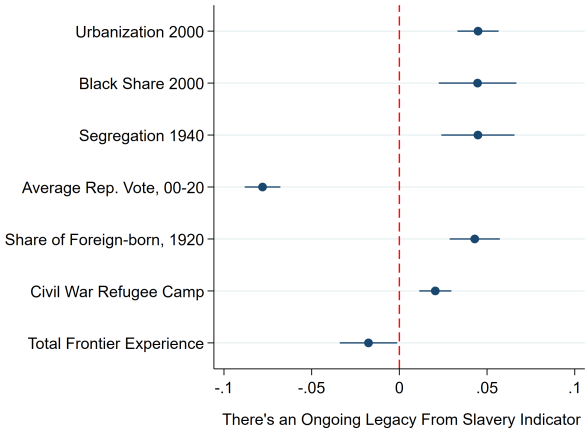
Notes: The figures show differences in historical sources across race and ideology. Each panel-graph shows the unconditional averages of the variable on the y-axis (indicators for relying on different types of sources) for participants with the same racial affiliation and ideological inclination, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence interval. Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023 (N= 12,264).



(a) Agrees that slavery caused the Civil War



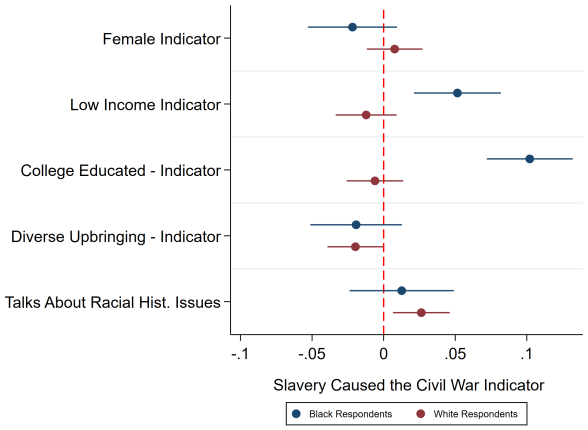
(b) Agrees that Civil Rights Movement succeeded



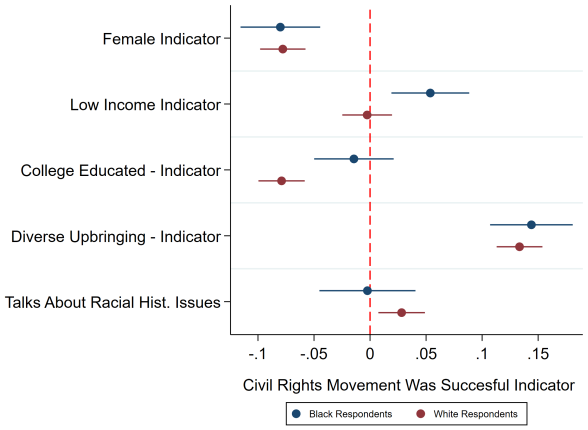
(c) Agrees that slavery has a lasting legacy

Figure A.20: County-level predictors of each historical view

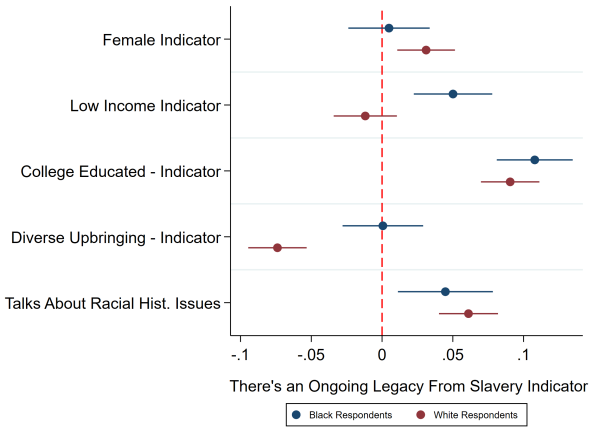
Notes: The graphs show the coefficient plots of regressing an indicator for agreeing with the historical claim described on the panel heading on the county-level characteristic described on the row heading and state fixed effects, one at a time. Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023 (N=12,264).



(a) Agrees that slavery caused the Civil War



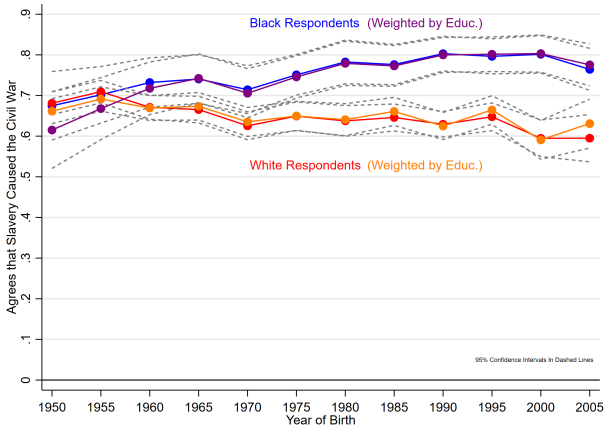
(b) Agrees that Civil Rights Movement succeeded



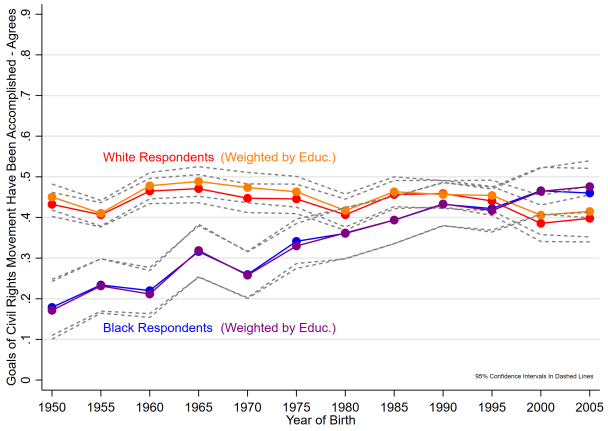
(c) Agrees that slavery has a lasting legacy

Figure A.21: Individual-level predictors of each historical views

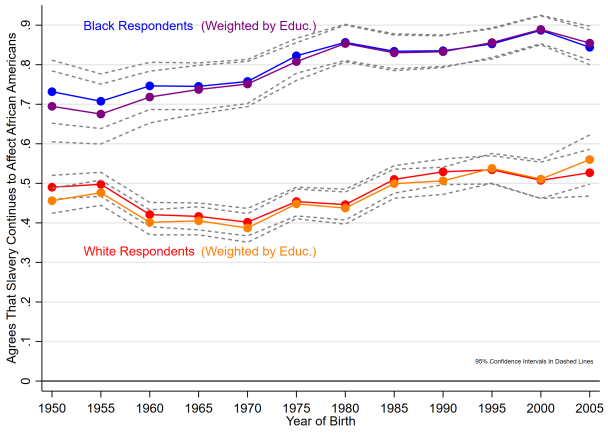
Notes: The graphs show the coefficient plots of regressing an indicator for agreeing with the historical claim described on the panel heading on the individual-level characteristics described on the row heading, one at a time. The plots are constructed after running regressions separately by race. Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023 (N=12,264).



(a) Slavery caused the Civil War - weighted by education



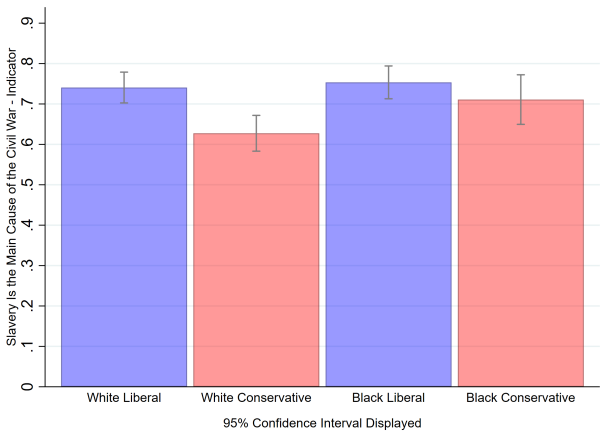
(b) Success of Civil Rights Movement - weighted by education



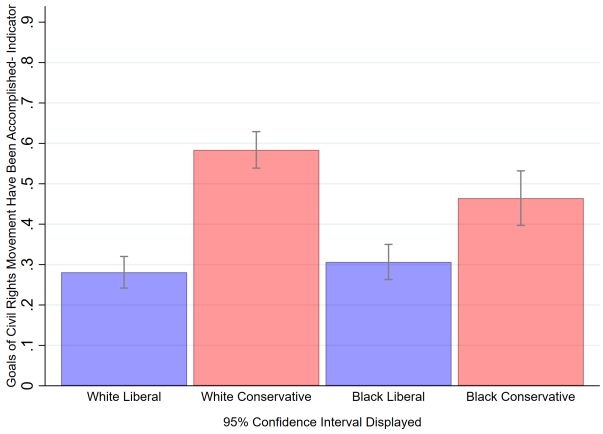
(c) Slavery Has a Lasting Legacy - weighted by education

Figure A.22: Cohort patterns weighted by education

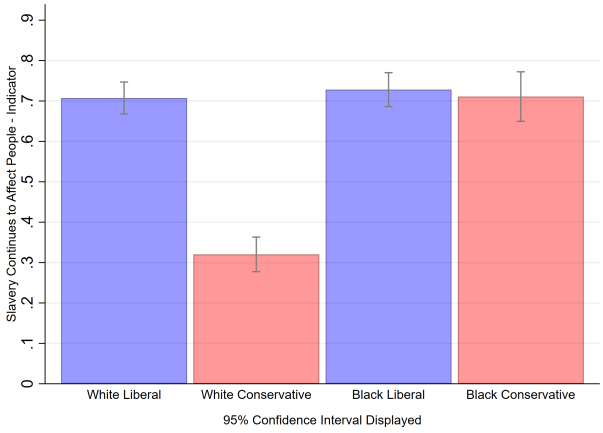
Notes: The graphs depict the race and cohort trends with and without weighting by college attainment. Weights are computed for each race-cohort to match the population share of college attainment by race-cohort. Cohort trends without weighting by education coincides with those shown in Figure 1. Data comes from four rounds of online surveys conducted in the US between 2022 and 2023 (N=12,264).



(a) Slavery caused the Civil War - Round 1



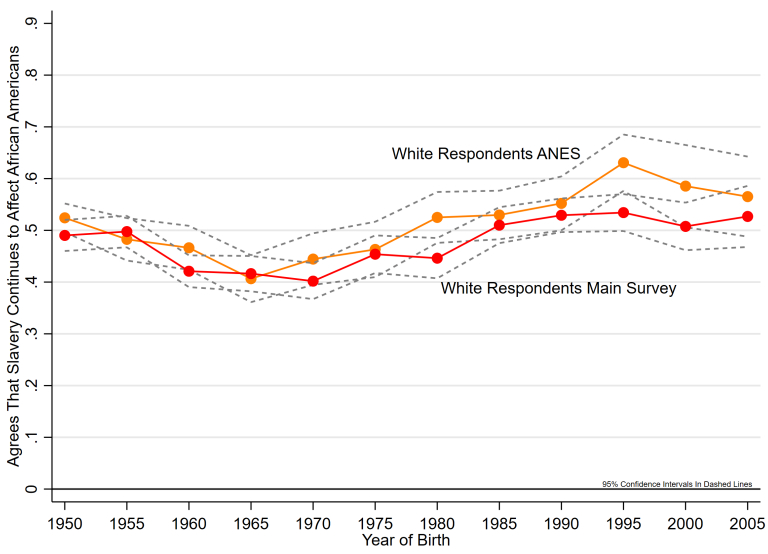
(b) Success of Civil Rights Movement - Round 1



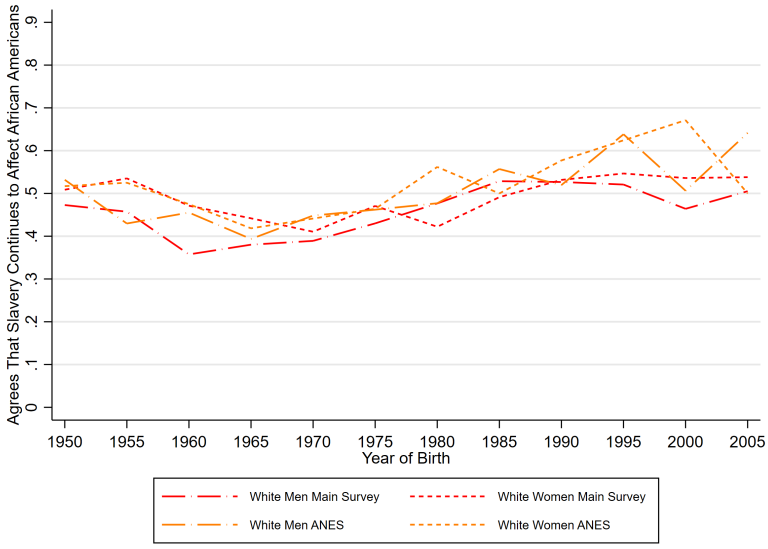
(c) Slavery Has a Lasting Legacy - Round 1

Figure A.23: Differences across race and ideology - Round 1 only

Notes: The graphs depict the differences in historical views across race-ideology groups after restricting the sample to data collected in the first survey round (fielded in 2022, N=1,933). Each panel-graph shows the unconditional averages of the variable on the y-axis for participants with the same racial affiliation and ideological inclination, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence interval.



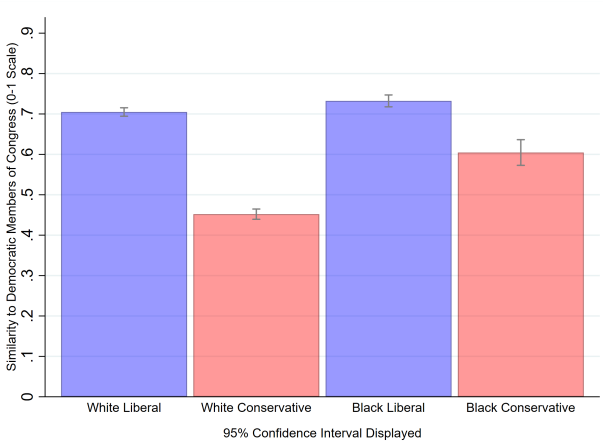
(a) Cohort trends - ANES



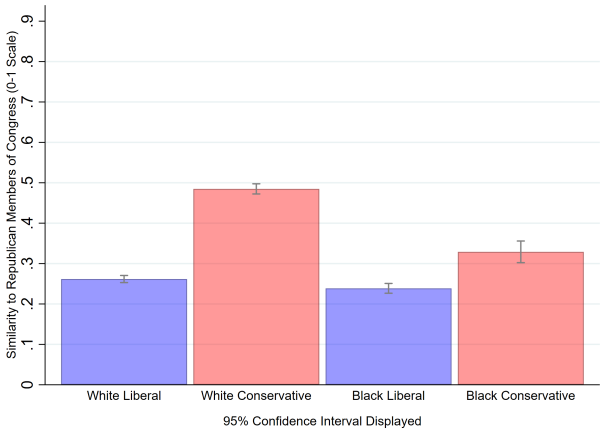
(b) Cohort trends by gender - ANES

Figure A.24: Cohort patterns in our sample relative to those in ANES.

Notes: The graphs compares the cohort trends based on our sample with those based on the American National Election Studies (ANES) regarding agreement with the claim that slavery has a lasting legacy. Panel A shows the cohort trends for white respondents in general, while Panel B shows the patterns by gender for each sample. In each panel-graph, a point represents the unconditional average of the variable on the y-axis for respondents born in the same five-year period. The dashed lines in surrounding the points in Panel A show the corresponding 95-percent confidence interval. Data comes from 9,265 responses from white participants in our survey (2022-2023) and from 5,375 white respondents in ANES (2020-2022).



(a) Similarity to Narratives of Democratic Politicians



(b) Similarity to Narratives of Republican Politicians

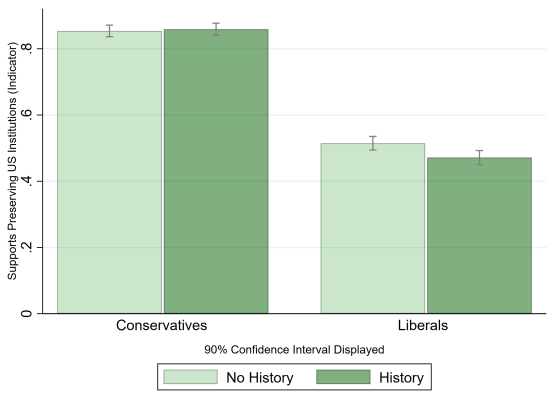
Figure A.25: Race and ideological differences in similarity to politicians' narratives.

Notes: The figure shows the average similarity score of participants' open-ended responses relative to the narratives of Democratic Politicians (Panel A) and to those of Republican Politicians (Panel B). Appendix Section B.3.2 details the speeches and politicians that we relied on, as well as the process that we followed to compute these similarity scores. Each panel-graph shows the unconditional average of the variable on the y-axis for participants with the same racial affiliation and ideological inclination, and the corresponding 95-percent confidence interval. Data comes from 5,846 open-ended responses collected in four rounds of online surveys between 2022 and 2023.

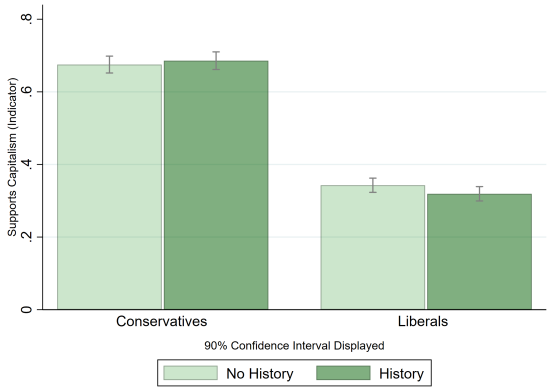
	(1) Gender	(2) 18-29 Indicator	(3) 30-39 Indicator	(4) 40-49 Indicator	(5) 50-59 Indicator	(6) 60+ Indicator	(7) High Income	(8) Labor Force Part.	(9) Unemployed
Historical Reasoning	0.001	0.009	0.012	-0.005	0.002	-0.019*	0.011	0.014	-0.005
	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.009)
Observations	6,076	6,076	6,076	6,076	6,076	6,076	6,076	6,076	6,076
R-squared	0.007	0.048	0.026	0.015	0.007	0.193	0.014	0.061	0.014
Mean Dep. Var	0.558	0.178	0.231	0.168	0.162	0.262	0.118	0.773	0.092

Note: The table presents balance checks on the main demographic variables of participants in the experiment 1 (*Historical Reasoning*), fielded in the first, second, and fourth rounds of our protocol. The unit of observation is the individual. Each column reports results from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on *Historical Reasoning*, an indicator that equals one if the participant was asked to answer the historical questions described in Table 2 before answering questions about institutional satisfaction. Since the randomization was stratified by race and ideology, results in all columns account for race, ideology, and round fixed effect. Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC2) are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

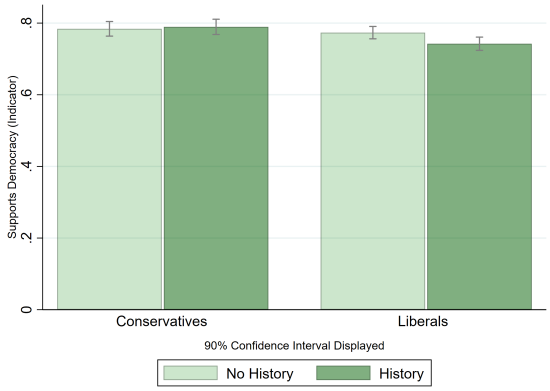
Table A.4: Balance of observable characteristics across treatment status - Historical Reasoning Experiment



(a) Support for Preserving Institutions



(b) Support for Capitalism



(c) Support for Democracy

Figure A.26: Effects of historical reasoning on institutional satisfaction components

Notes: The graphs depict the effects of the *historical reasoning* intervention (see Section 3.3) on the three components of the Institutional Satisfaction Index. Panel A examines the effects on support for preserving the US Institutions, Panel B focuses on support for Capitalism, and Panel C on support for Democracy.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Dependent Var: Index of Institutional Satisfaction					
	White Moderates		Black Moderates		Pooled	
Historical Reasoning	0.003	−0.014	−0.079	−0.045	−0.014	−0.036
	(0.071)	(0.072)	(0.066)	(0.067)	(0.052)	(0.048)
Observations	396	396	482	482	878	878
Mean Dependent Variable	0.80	0.80	-0.462	-0.462	0.027	-0.217
Region FE		✓		✓		✓
Gender		✓		✓		✓

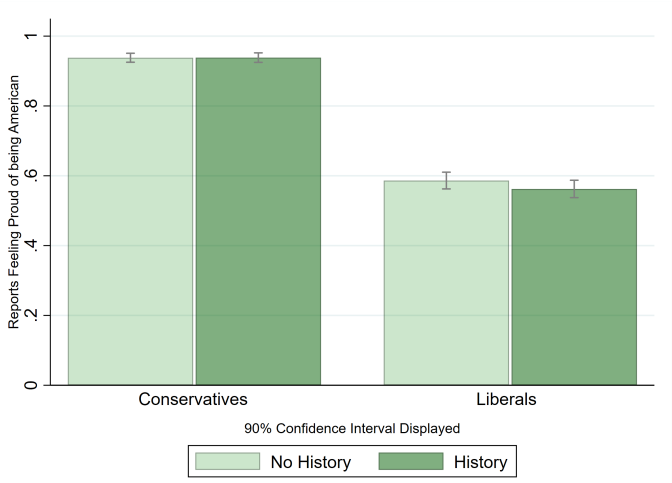
Table A.5: Effects of historical reasoning on reported institutional satisfaction of moderates

Notes: The table shows the effects of historical reasoning in Experiment 1 on reported institutional satisfaction of moderates (i.e., those who report that they are not liberal or conservative). The unit of observation is an individual, and data comes from the second (Black respondents) and fourth (white respondents) rounds of surveys. Each panel-column reports results from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable in the column heading on the variable(s) in the row heading(s). Historical Reasoning is an indicator that equals one for participants who were randomly chosen to answer the historical legacy questions before answering other survey questions, 0 otherwise. Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC2) are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

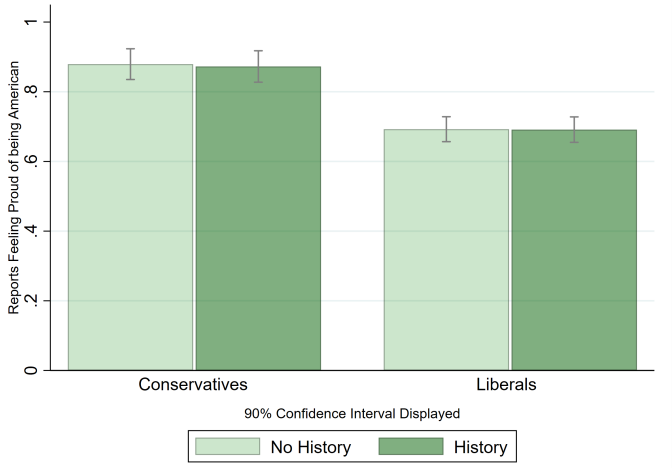
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Dependent Var: Share of Money Allocated to Nonpartisan Cause					
	Liberals		Conservatives		Both ideologies	
Historical Reasoning	−0.043***	0.044***	0.001	-0.002	0.001	0.001
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Historical Reasoning × Liberal					−0.044*	−0.043*
					(0.026)	(0.026)
Liberal					0.001	-0.005
					(0.018)	(0.018)
Observations	1,312	1,312	955	955	2,267	2,267
Mean Dependent Variable	0.517	0.517	0.539	0.539	0.527	0.527
Region FE		✓		✓		✓
Gender		✓		✓		✓

Table A.6: Effects of historical reasoning on allocating money to a nonpartisan cause

Notes: The table shows the effects of historical reasoning on allocating money to a nonpartisan cause. The unit of observation is an individual, and data comes from the fourth round of surveys (which only included white participants). Each panel-column reports results from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable in the column heading on the variable(s) in the row heading(s). Historical Reasoning is an indicator that equals one for participants who were randomly chosen to answer the historical legacy questions before answering other survey questions, 0 otherwise. Liberal is an indicator that equals one if the participant reports being a liberal. Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC2) are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.



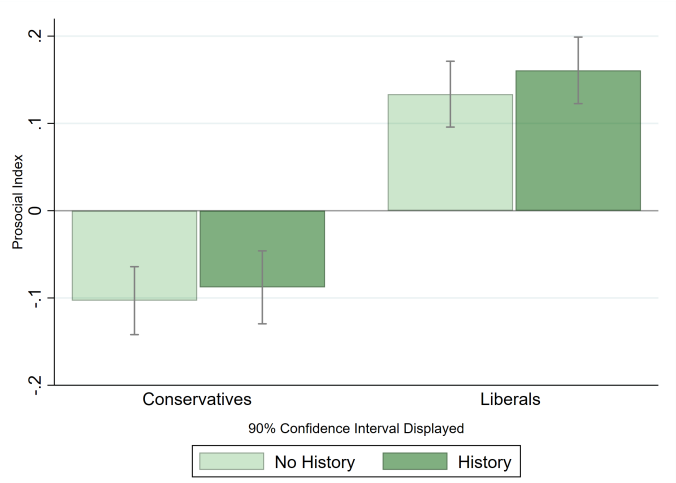
(a) Nationalism - White Respondents



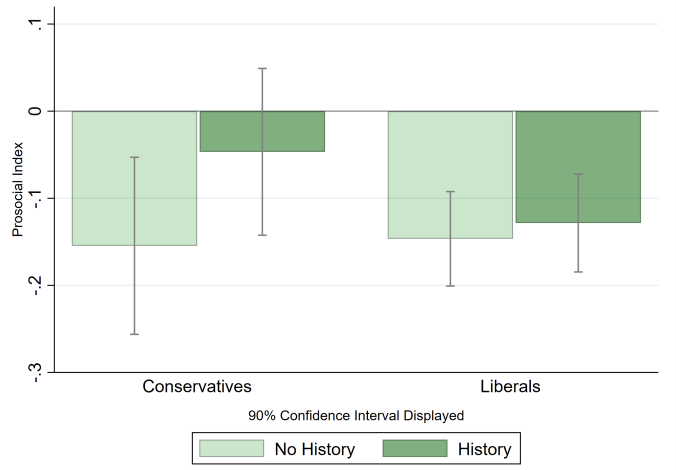
(b) Nationalism - Black Respondents

Figure A.27: Effect of historical reasoning (Experiment 1) on reported national pride.

Notes: The graphs depict the effects of the *historical reasoning* intervention (see Section 3.3) on an indicator that equals one if the respondent reports feeling proud of being American. Panel A examines the effects for white respondents, and Panel B for Black respondents.



(a) Prosociality Index - White Respondents



(b) Prosociality Index - Black Respondents

Figure A.28: Effect of historical reasoning (Experiment 1) on the prosociality index.

Notes: The graphs depict the effects of the *historical reasoning* intervention (see Section 3.3) on an ICW index built with indicators for reporting that helping others is important and that trusting others is important. Panel A examines the effects for white respondents, and Panel B for Black respondents.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Dependent Var: Index of Institutional Satisfaction			
	White Moderates		Black Moderates	
White Liberal Narrative	−0.024	−0.039	0.028	0.012
	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.059)	(0.059)
White Conservative Narrative	−0.168***	−0.168***	0.060	0.044
	(0.010)	(0.005)	(0.060)	(0.061)
Black Liberal Narrative	−0.010	−0.005		
	(0.057)	(0.056)		
Black Conservative Narrative	−0.033	−0.030		
	(0.055)	(0.055)		
Observations	1,175	1,175	816	816
Mean Dependent Variable	0.140	0.140	-0.660	-0.660
Region FE		✓		✓
Gender		✓		✓

*Notes:*The table shows the effects of exposing participants who report being ideologically moderate to different historical narratives on reported institutional satisfaction. The unit of observation is an individual, and data comes from the third survey round. Each column reports results from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable in the column heading on the variable(s) in the row heading(s). Columns 1-2 examine white moderates, while Columns 3-4 examines Black moderates. The treatment conditions are indicators that equal one if the participant was shown the representative narrative described in the row heading, zero otherwise. The text of these narratives is detailed in Appendix Table A.3, while Section 4.2 describes the process that we followed to generate these narratives. Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC2) are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table A.7: Effects of representative narratives on reported institutional satisfaction of moderates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Dependent Var: Index of Institutional Satisfaction			
	White Participants		Black Participants	
White Liberal Narrative x Liberal	−0.077	−0.063	−0.022	−0.010
	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.106)	(0.105)
White Conservative Narrative x Liberal	−0.062	−0.050	−0.050	−0.041
	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.105)	(0.104)
Black Liberal Narrative x Liberal	−0.012	−0.016		
	(0.056)	(0.053)		
Black Conservative Narrative x Liberal	−0.040	−0.037		
	(0.053)	(0.052)		
White Liberal Narrative	−0.002	−0.009	−0.079	−0.065
	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.089)	(0.089)
White Conservative Narrative	0.034	0.027	−0.029	−0.17
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.087)	(0.087)
Black Liberal Narrative	−0.036	−0.040		
	(0.037)	(0.037)		
Black Conservative Narrative	0.050	0.047		
	(0.035)	(0.034)		
Liberal	−0.244***	−0.235***	0.041	0.040
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.071)	(0.072)
Observations	4,718	4,718	1,248	1,248
Mean Dependent Variable	0.187	0.187	-0.406	-0.406
Region FE		✓		✓
Gender		✓		✓

*Notes:*The table shows, for participants from each racial affiliation, the specifications that pool participants from both ideologies and account for all relevant interaction terms to formally assess the implied changes in ideological polarization from exposure to various representative historical narratives. The unit of observation is an individual, and the sample comprises participants who are liberal or conservative. Data comes from the third survey round. Each column reports results from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable in the column heading on the variable(s) in the row heading(s). Columns 1-2 examine white participants only, while Columns 3-4 examine Black participants. The treatment conditions are indicators that equal one if the participant was shown the representative narrative described in the row heading, zero otherwise. Liberal is an indicator that equals one if the participants reports having that ideology. The text of these narratives is detailed in Appendix Table A.3, while Section 4.2 describes the process that we followed to generate these narratives. Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC2) are in parenthesis. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table A.8: Pooled specifications with interactions - Effects of representative narratives on reported institutional satisfaction

B.1 Detailed description of each step involved in the construction of the representative narratives

Below are the outputs of each of the steps involved in constructing a representative narrative for each race-ideology demographic group. As discussed in Section 4.3, the result of this process was a representative narrative, with most race-ideology groups voting for the GPT-generated refined version of their group's representative narratives, and white conservatives being the only ones who voted for the focus group version of their representative narrative.

B.1.1 Output of deep learning model

As detailed in Section 4.3, we first processed the open-ended responses collected in the first round through our own deep-learning model to create a representative textual response that featured the common or recurrent themes mentioned by members of each race-ideology group. The following raw output would be the basis for subsequent steps aimed at refining and making this representative text coherent:

Raw White Liberal Output: *the main cause of the civil war was economics the south was far underpaid for like cotton the north paid next to nothing for it and made a huge profit profit profit profit profit a a political point of view the racism towards black people chicken laundry biden idents brian icing biden bucket the main cause of the civil war was between slavery wanting wanting to fight for their side and not being taken controlled of from the government of the war present in the country country in America since the civil war slavery has been dealt with by not doing nothing insane to other countries it has be banned and we all have freedom provided agricultural and industrial labor union era was a means to reward modern day slavery people are still slaves but in a different way slavery is still going on today it was abolished but racism still is strong in our country's to a certain extent it's on a great track we as a people need to come together it was abolished in most places like the north but in the south it was still somewhat going on it's actually been taken away ever since the goals of the civil rights movement have been achieved because the ones who fought for civil rights never gave up and were determined to make a change even if small small or know how wrong slavery is will try to make a change we all need to start with lots of thanks and respect and do the goals and stop complaining just do it because of MLK a lot laws have been passed that give people equal rights people have the*

same opportunities in life as anyone else where the war and all that stuff civil rights have seen it become a reality they worked their way up because they the legacy of slavery and discrimination still affects people because they don't want to let go of the past people still intend to look at our skin and judge good thoughts better option for me to be better than the other option it's great and nice race is the only thing i can the world see people differently just some people still have the i hate in their hearts or if they're in a position they will always choose the other not the black most white people are still racist black people are still racially profiled and treated unfairly because we as black people don't have money due to slavery.

Raw White Conservative Output: *the main cause of the civil war was states' rights the southern states not willing to let go of old ways and traditions difference of opinion between northern and southern states in america me explain that i've had numerous hs and college history courses including those specifically about the civil war since the world was in the throes of the industrial revolution and slavery was simply too expensive to be able to compete against machines and states rights states rights the states the north states rights in the country the north was trying to impose it's will on the southern states taxes and trade of goods like cotton since the civil war slavery has been dealt with by abolished but it took a while to end especially in the south it has been all but eliminated but still exists in some ways but it was abolished after the civil war Lincoln freed the slaves and an amendment to the constitution gave all races the right to vote that all slaves were freed slowly moving to the good the north won the war and slavery was ended not sure it is completely dealt with or over that it has been dealt with or over in the united states but not in the world that it has been dealt with the goals of the civil rights movement have been achieved because other races have taken up higher positions in the workforce people of color than color or religion are given equal rights to advance if they will only try to be sure that all people regardless of sex or color or religion are given equal rights and equal opportunity to equal treatment equal pay equal housing equal treatment equal opportunity to eat sit live use restroom work etc work etc work etc work etc work etc work etc work they they never silent the legacy of slavery and discrimination has little or no effect on people today because it was a long time ago and those who had owned slaves are no longer as we are equal under the law some people never move on they keep on bringing it up to take the steps to truly make it equal opportunities are guaranteed by law while not everyone always follow anti discrimination practices as they should the majority do not if they try i don't really know the answer everyone has the same opportunity to make or break themselves it does with the line always playing the race card no effect on people today it happened too long.*

Raw Black Liberal Output: *the main cause of the civil war was slavery and slavery the main cause of the civil war was slavery and the disagreement between southern and northern states on slavery different laws between the north and the south it was a dispute on oil selfishness some wanting more than others i think commerce and land purchase were more the main cause differences of opinion between two different governments in one place of slavery one group wanted to take control over the governor of the country the country into two countries of the southern states wanted to secede from the union 1860 united states president election i do not since the civil war slavery has been dealt with by containing the racism that caused it has not been dealt with it's hust hust been getting worst as time goes on it's like an issue slavery slavery still exists except for people are still enslaved just by a system level to do that it but I'm not gonna do anything that much would are still fighting for freedom to do that relied on slave labor to slaves free free but it continued after that in some ways it still existed to changed never it's been dealt with through voting right and justice for all ppl property and burning continue pay progress towards the main goals of the civil rights movement have been prevented by the government we still have a ways to go there's still a lot to go in the civil rights movement came a long way but there's a long way ahead especially now i really don't know because i never got into the civil war individual groups of citizens pushing their races ideals that they are better then their fellow citizens sparked by financial greed stupidity and creating walls of logic that are non sense ignorant and bigoted people everyone coming together can change a lot political positions of making the way of level headed thinking people attempting to undo the legacy of slavery and discrimination still affects people because they don't trust god power seeking people who want forget all different today they want to see black african americans were as a slow case to overturn and inhuman treatment because if one does not fight for the rights as everyone on this earth we will continue to go backwards responses to go and hate and blacks to get together its goods in all places it has affected their will to get ahead bigotry still heavily exist in the world you can be at the resilience of the human mind to problem solve than other races and well made because.*

Raw Black Conservative Output: *the main cause of the civil war was fighting over rights of land and properties belonging to families that were meant to be handed down and used for their future well being and for their future families state's rights i don't know the issue of slavery was a human rights issue and opinions differed north to south slavery was one of the main causes of the civil war but a way of life was the overpowering reason of the civil war since the civil war slavery has been dealt with by prison system complex after the civil war and slaves were freed I'd say it*

is illegal but racism is still a problem that white Americans are equal in white people and guarantee their rights and opportunities for equal rights equal opportunities education slavery is gone however i think that there is still quite a lot of unrest between the races while trying to make amends offer apologies and inclusion we still have a long way to go we're fighting against a lot of people well it has barely been dealt with very poorly over the last few hundred years on getting progress towards the main goals of the civil rights movement have been prevented by the civil rights movement the fight against letting all Americans regardless of race have equal access to the vote and practiced in other walks of life white people have been the greatest prevention towards completing the civil rights movement agenda rich white men they still believe that they are the superior race and that any one that disagrees is a lesser life form people unwilling to give up prejudices there are some hard core feelings about people of color and the perceived notion they are not deserving of being humanized and white men who they want to the u way the legacy of slavery and discrimination still affects people because there are many people who still believe that African Americans are not capable of getting ahead of color and others there is still a huge amount of poverty and there is not the same opportunities or equal pay for black people to work out their feelings about others who do not look for think like them yes it has affected generations of persons because there is still discrimination in some areas that black people experience because the races often don't accept or understand or trust each other cuz people don't want to accept people for who they are there still

B.1.2 Output of focus groups' refined texts

After coming up with the raw output detailed above, we ran a focus group for each race-ideology group, each with 5 to 6 participants. As discussed in Section 4.3, the focus groups were tasked with coming up with a narrative representative of the historical views of the group and of the demographic they were supposed to represent, based on the raw output described above. The output of these focus groups were the following:

White Liberal Focus Group Narrative: *The main cause of the civil war was slavery, and the American iteration of capitalism is a system that perpetuates remnants of discrimination and inequity that was once present to a greater extent during American slavery. We are not living in a society that is done working on civil rights or correcting the wrongs of American history. Some of the goals of the civil rights movement have been achieved, but we have not solved most of the problems.*

White Conservative Focus Group Narrative: *The Civil Rights movement of the 1960's ushered in changes that focus on how laws in certain states were used to suppress people of color. In the preceding years, those laws have been abolished and the rights of all to have opportunity is a reality. The limiting factors are one's ability and willingness to strive for those opportunities. Slavery was not unique to the United States and in some parts of the world persist still today. Slavery may play a part on the psyche of some Americans, but that's one of the challenges they must overcome. Everyone is treated the same and anything is achievable which is a huge accomplishment for the American people as we came a long way.*

Black Liberal Focus Group Narrative: *Civil rights for individuals of color is still a work in progress, and racism is still very present in America today. The goals of the civil rights movement are far from met and the government plays a big part in the slow progress. In the last years, open discrimination has become more prevalent.*

Black Conservative Focus Group Narrative: *Slavery was not about the enslavement of people but more about economics. Because of the effects of slavery, African Americans do not have generational wealth. African Americans have to work harder to achieve economic self-sufficiency because they lack the benefit of generational wealth. The fight for civil rights has not been finished although there has been some significant improvement.*

B.1.3 Output of GPT-refined texts

Finally, we asked OpenAI's GPT model to refine the raw output detailed above, generating a cohesive and coherent representative text for each demographic. The output for each race-ideology is below. These alternatives were ultimately put to vote against the focus group narratives, with participants of each race-ideology group voting for their preferred version of their group's representative narrative.

White Liberal GPT Narrative: *The causes of the Civil War were land rights, state autonomy, and slavery. While slavery was officially abolished after the war, racism remains a significant problem in the present day, and progress towards civil rights has been hindered by wealthy white people who believe in their superiority over people of color. Discrimination still affects many African Americans, with limited access to opportunities and equal pay, leading to ongoing poverty and distrust between races. Progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go in the fight*

for equal rights and understanding between different groups of people.

White Conservative GPT Narrative: *The main cause of the Civil War was states' rights, with the Southern states unwilling to let go of old ways and traditions, and the North trying to impose its will on the South in taxes and trade of goods like cotton. Although slavery was abolished after the Civil War, it took a while to end, and the legacy of slavery and discrimination still exists in some ways, although it has been all but eliminated. The goals of the Civil Rights Movement have been achieved, and people of color are given equal rights to advance. The legacy of slavery and discrimination has little or no effect on people today, as equal opportunities are guaranteed by law, although not everyone always follows anti-discrimination practices as they should.*

Black Conservative GPT Narrative: *The main cause of the Civil War is disputed, but it was primarily due to economic reasons with the South feeling undervalued for their cotton production. Slavery was also a major issue, as some states wanted to continue the practice and others did not. Slavery has been abolished, but racism is still a problem in the United States. The Civil Rights Movement helped achieve equal rights for all people, but discrimination still exists, and some people hold onto prejudices and stereotypes. The legacy of slavery still affects people today, as racism and discrimination continue to be issues.*

Black Liberal GPT Narrative: *The main cause of the Civil War was slavery and disagreements between the northern and southern states regarding it. The issue of slavery was not completely resolved after the war, and racism has continued to exist and worsen over time. The civil rights movement made progress, but there is still a long way to go, and some people are still discriminated against based on their race. Financial greed and ignorance are factors that have contributed to racism and discrimination.*

B.2 GPT prompts to assess narratives' types and structures

Below are the exact prompts that we provided to OpenAI's GPT O.4 model to annotate the open-ended narratives and create alternative versions of the indicators capturing the presence of *Methodological Individualism*, *Structuralism*, *Exculpating Narratives*, and *Responsibilizing Narratives*. Note that none of these indicators are mutually exclusive, so all indicators could be 1, 0 or a mix of these values for a given response. The prompt also details how to identify faulty/meaningless open-ended responses. It is important to note that the data uploaded to GPT did not include respondents' race, ideology, or any other characteristic that could be used to create or modify these indicators. The only data that the model had was the open-ended responses from each participant, nothing more.

I need you to code a series of open-ended responses based on 5 indicator variables, which are listed and explained below. For each open-ended response, please create a column for the respondent's ID, a column for their response, a column for each of the 5 indicator variables (7 columns in total). It is fine if a response has all indicators equal to 0, all indicators equal to 1, or anything in between.
Here are descriptions of each indicator:

Exculpating Narrative: *Absolving narratives or excuses serve to legitimize selfish, short-sighted or even intentionally harmful actions, by providing representations and rationalizations of such acts as consistent with the standards of a moral person. They operate through various exculpatory or neutralization strategies (Sykes and Matza 1957) such as: (a) downplaying the harm; (b) blaming the victims; (c) denying agency or responsibility; (d) appealing to higher loyalties [. . .] Typical of (a) are euphemisms such as the military taking out people and carrying out surgical strikes with collateral damage; the framing of a nuclear-reactor accident as a normal aberration (Bandura 1999); and describing lies as a different version of the facts (Watergate hearings, see Gambino 1973) or, nowadays, as alternative facts. Extreme uses of (b) include degrading victims as subhuman, as in the Nazi propaganda against Jews (Levi 1988, Zimbardo 2007) and that of the Hutu government against Tutsis (Yanagizawa-Drott 2014). Common instances of (c) are we just followed orders and I am just doing my job, or underestimating being pivotal, as in the bystander effect (Darley and Latane 1968): if I don't do it, someone else will. Finally, a vivid example of (d) is the systematic use of narratives and analogies from the Old Testament to support the Indian Removal policy and related atrocities in 19th*

century America (Keeton 2015). Examples include, "It was years ago. Get over it," "It only has an effect if you let it," and "Every race has been discriminated against."

Responsibilizing Narrative: *Responsibilizing narratives [...] create pressure to behave well, by emphasizing how a person's actions impact others, as well as the moral responsibility and inferences that result from such agency: making a difference, setting a precedent, etc. Examples include: (a) appeals to moral and religious parables, inspiring myths or role models; (b) arguments and cues inducing empathy (What if it were you?), making salient the plight of others (identifiable victim effect) and the personal benefits of good behavior (You will feel good about yourself); (c) stressing common identities, such as national and religious brotherhood, sharing the same planet, etc.; (d) appealing to Kantian-like arguments (What if everyone did the same?) or again invoking some higher moral authority that will pass judgement (God, Adam Smith's impartial spectator within the breast). Basically, any signs of remorse, recognition of slavery and racism's lasting consequences today, or acknowledgement of ongoing inequalities that serve to emphasize moral behaviors and increased moral responsibility. However, merely stating efforts towards improving discrimination is not enough; for example, a response that just says "affirmative action" and doesn't indicate any moral responsibility is likely not enough to turn on this variable. Methodological Individualism: Methodological individualism [... is] a thesis about the cause and/or nature of social phenomena. Social phenomena are caused or created by individuals, and they are made up of individuals. To cite a well-known statement made by Epicurus and repeated by Margaret Thatcher: 'There is no such thing as society,' at least not as distinct from individuals. [. . .] Sometimes methodological individualism is also stated as, or supported by, an epistemological thesis about knowledge [. . .] Because only individuals can be directly observed in society, it is suggested that all knowledge about social phenomena can, at least in principle, be stated in terms of individuals: Social concepts can be defined in terms of individuals, social phenomena explained in terms of individuals, and macro-theories reduced to micro theories. Basically, any comments related to individual choice/individual agency/the presence of "bad apples"/individual empowerment/strong willed actors/etc. Furthermore, things like "awareness within ourselves", personal beliefs, and "it has effect for people who don't want to move forward are good examples.*

Structuralism: *Structuralism emphasizes that elements of society must be understood in terms of their relationship to the entire system (Rubel and Rosman 1996:1263). According to structuralists, the whole is greater than the parts, and "phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations." (Blakburn, 2008). Individuals and*

their choices can only be understood in relation to a broader system that gives meaning and constraints individuals' decisions. Structures that underlie processes of historical change are slow-moving and all-encompassing. Basically any references to structures constraining or contributing to people's views, such as the Civil Rights Movement, changed legal frameworks, the government, systemic discrimination, etc. Also, even if the response denies the existence of slavery's legacy, this does not automatically mean that the person is shying away from structural explanation.

Red Flag: *Please code any responses that seem like a "garbage" response as 1. These could be responses such as "dfghjhfsdvjksdhnvbsk" or "i don't know". Because a prize was awarded at the end of the survey, it could be that some respondents typed random letters or gave a meaningless response just so they could finish the survey and receive their award. However, DO NOT code a response as a Red Flag due to spelling or grammatical errors. Code as a red flag variable ONLY if the response lacks meaning, not for any grammatical/spelling/formatting mistakes. Lastly, do not code a response as a red flag if it expresses confusion or uncertainty (such as "It's confusing, but I think that…"). A response that is just "I don't know" and nothing else would be an example of a Red Flag variable.*

Please note that none of these variables are mutually exclusive. In particular, keep in mind that methodological individualism and structuralism are not mutually exclusive; additionally, responsibilizing narrative and exculpating narrative are also not mutually exclusive, as responses are often hypocritical and may present contrasting perspectives. Lastly, even if structuralism=1, one or more of the other indicators could also equal 1.

B.3 GPT prompts to compute similarity scores

Below are the exact prompts that we provided to OpenAI's GPT O.4 model to create different similarity scores (similarity of the open-ended responses relative to the different representative narratives, as well as similarity scores relative to the speeches of current Democratic or Republican members of congress). It is important to note that the data uploaded to GPT did not include respondents' race, ideology, or any other characteristic that could be used to create or modify the similarity scores. The only data that the model had was the open-ended responses from each participant, nothing more.

B.3.1 Similarity Relative to Representative Narratives

I need you to code a series of open-ended responses according to the following selected narratives for 4 racial-ideological groups. For each open-ended response, please generate 4 new variables—1 for each narrative below; for each response, assign any number between 0 and 1 to each variable based on how similar the response is to each selected narrative. For example, a response would be coded as 1 for Black conservative if the response matches perfectly the content and spirit of the Black Conservative narrative; if the response conveys the complete opposite of the selected narrative, then that response would be coded as 0 for that narrative. Please note that a response can mimic aspects of none or even all of the selected narratives, and please produce the coding in a .csv format. Please do not consider preconceived notions regarding racial-ideological groups' beliefs and code the responses based on their likeness to only the selected narratives below. Please code the responses to the third decimal point. They can be numbers such as 0.215 and don't need to be values that end in 0.

***Black Conservative**: The main cause of the Civil War is disputed, but it was primarily due to economic reasons with the South feeling undervalued for their cotton production. Slavery was also a major issue, as some states wanted to continue the practice and others did not. Slavery has been abolished, but racism is still a problem in the United States. The Civil Rights Movement helped achieve equal rights for all people, but discrimination still exists, and some people hold onto prejudices and stereotypes. The legacy of slavery still affects people today, as racism and discrimination continue to be issues.*

***Black Liberal**: The main cause of the Civil War was slavery and disagreements between the northern and southern*

states regarding it. The issue of slavery was not completely resolved after the war, and racism has continued to exist and worsen over time. The Civil Rights Movement made progress, but there is still a long way to go, and some people are still discriminated against based on their race. Financial greed and ignorance are factors that have contributed to racism and discrimination.

***White Conservative**: The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's ushered in changes that focus on how laws in certain states were used to suppress people of color. In the proceeding years, those laws have been abolished and the rights of all to have opportunity is a reality. The limiting factors are one's ability and willingness to strive for those opportunities. Slavery was not unique to the United States and in some parts of the world persist still today. Slavery may play a part on the psyche of some Americans, but that's one of the challenges they must overcome. Everyone is treated the same and anything is achievable which is a huge accomplishment for the American people as we came a long way.*

***White Liberal**: The causes of the Civil War were land rights, state autonomy, and slavery. While slavery was officially abolished after the war, racism remains a significant problem in the present day, and progress towards civil rights has been hindered by wealthy white people who believe in their superiority over people of color. Discrimination still affects many African Americans, with limited access to opportunities and equal pay, leading to ongoing poverty and distrust between races. Progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go in the fight for equal rights and understanding between different groups of people.*

B.3.2 Similarity Relative to Politicians' Narratives

The construction of the similarity scores relative to politicians' narratives entailed a two-step process in which we first used GPT to create a representative historical narrative for elected Democrats and another one for elected Republican, based on documented speeches and media interviews by politicians belonging to these two parties. Below are the exact quotes that we used to that end.

Democratic Politicians

Nancy Pelosi (former Speaker of the House)

"Madam Speaker, nearly one year ago, George Floyd gasped his last words, 'I can't breathe,' and ignited a nationwide reckoning on the racial injustice and police brutality in America. Americans from every corner of the country took to the streets to peacefully protest violence against Black Americans, waving Black Lives Matter flags, chanting the names of the murdered, repeating George Floyd's dying words, 'I can't breathe.' They turned their agony into action, but tragically, despite these mass protests, the injustice, killings continued. Those protests were global. They were all over the world. Here, as Members of Congress and as Americans, we cannot accept this epidemic of injustice. We cannot stay silent when one – when our most vulnerable and historically marginalized communities, people of color, those living in poverty, Americans with disabilities are being targeted and sometimes killed." Maxine Waters (US Rep) "The murder of George Floyd, and the pleasure the murdering officer seemed to take in his power over a struggling Black man, are nothing new. My heart broke when I first saw the video footage of the murder, not just for George Floyd and his loved ones, but also because this brutality, and all the police violence against Black men and women before it, have been used for centuries to terrorize, subjugate, and silence the Black community."

Cory Booker et. al (Senator)

"Whereas the use of excessive force during a period of pretrial detention constitutes the deprivation of due process under the Fifth and 14th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, which guarantee the right of every person in the United States to be free from arbitrary interference with the liberty of that person at the hands of law enforcement officers; Whereas the use of excessive force during a term of imprisonment constitutes the use

of cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which guarantees the right of every person in the United States to be free from cruel and unusual punishment at the hands of law enforcement officers" "Whereas the Government of the United States has established itself as a government of laws, and not of men, but will cease to be so if it does not furnish a viable remedy for all civil rights violations"

John Lewis (Late Rep)

"People walked the streets and shared cause and rise. They stood and moved the lines. But they never gave up. Dr. King inspired us to stand up. And he inspired us to believe in the philosophy and the discipline of nonviolence (3:50-4:09). "Just think in 1961, the same year that President Obama was born, my people and white people couldn't leave the city sitting together to travel on a bus to the south" (4:37-4:49). "Justice has, indeed, been denied for far too long. Rioting, looting, and burning is not the way. Organize. Demonstrate. Sit-in. Standup. Vote. Be constructive, not destructive. History has proven time and again that nonviolent, peaceful protest is the way to achieve the justice and equality that we all deserve." (page 12)

Chuck Schumer (Senator)

"I don't think people understand that slavery is not far away. I think that's the biggest problem. People say, 'Oh, it happened way back then what do we have to pay attention now.' The legacy of slavery and Jim Crow — which is a type of semi, quasi, of slavery — is still with us and so we need to do a lot more." "Racism is the poison of America. . . when a significant part of America is held back, all of America is held back."

Cory Booker (senator) - remarks in response to proposed reparations legislation

"We as a nation have not yet truly acknowledged and grappled with racism and white supremacy that has tainted this country's founding and continues to persist in those deep racial disparities and inequalities today. This a very important hearing. It is historic, it is urgent. I look at communities like mine and you could literally see how communities were designed to be segregated, designed based upon enforcing institutional racism and inequities. . . The stain of slavery was not just inked in bloodshed but in the overt state-sponsored policies that fueled white supremacy and racism and have disadvantaged African Americans economically for generations. Many of the bedrock policies that ushered generations of Americans into the middle class were designed to exclude African Americans — from the G.I. bill to Social Security — intentionally designed to exclude blacks — as was school

segregation, redlining – in neighborhoods like the one in which I live, which were by design walled off and disinvested in." "These injustices do not just cause injustice for African Americans. It enforces a deep injustice in our nation as a whole. It is a cancer on the soul of our country and hurts the whole body — making us all less wealthy, making us all less just, making us all fall far short from being who we say we are when we swear an oath that this will be a nation of liberty and justice for all."

Ayanna Pressley (Rep)

"In this moment of anti-Blackness on sterioids—when our very existence is under attack, our history is being erased, diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives are under assault, and our civil rights are under threat from the highest levels of government—we must remain unapologetic in advancing bold policies that protect Black lives and freedom. This means passing H.R. 40, our bill to advance reparations and address America's shameful legacy of slavery. It means safeguarding voting rights, securing reproductive freedom, and ending the Black maternal morbidity crisis. It means investing in Baby bonds, confronting the rise of book bans, ending mass incarceration, investing in housing and education as human rights, and so much more."

Sheila Jackson Lee (late Rep) - interview about reparations bill

"Since 1989 . . . we've filed, H.R. 40, which was filed initially by [the late Michigan Democratic Rep.] John Conyers. [It] was filed right after the passage of the American Civil Liberties Act in 1988, which provided, and rightly so, reparations for the Japanese Americans that were interned in the 1940s. So we could look at it and say that it has been that long. But I take the response in a positive way, which is, in a matter of the intensity [over] the three years when the collection of over 300 organizations have been meeting and strategizing and recognizing that now is the time. Our call to action is why we can't wait. The same message that Dr. King used as they moved forward the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act of 1965 Voting Rights Act. It was not easy. This is a success. We are grateful that we've had the time and in the course of that any number of opportunities to educate members, for them to understand that this is about repair. It is about healing." "No one can match 246 years of bondage. And I do hear that. I do hear the idea that these rich African Americans are going to receive reparations — that's prejudging. H.R. 40 doesn't prejudge. What it says is that we will develop a commission and the study and we'll discern, we will decide how we deal with these very conspicuous disparities. And the numbers are stark because the amount of wealth that we have does not compensate for the vast numbers of African Americans who find

themselves incarcerated, who find themselves without health care, who find themselves in schools that do not have access to broadband, laptops or books. We have to try. H.R. 40, for me, is trying."

Elizabeth Warren - CNN Town Hall during her 2020 Presidential Election campaign

"It's time to start the national, full-blown conversation about reparations in this country. And that means I support the bill in the house to appoint a congressional panel of experts—people who are studying this—to talk about different ways we may be able to do it and make a report back to congress so that we can, as a nation, do what's right and begin to heal."

Kamala Harris (former Senator and VP)

"I think that we have got to address that again. It's back to the inequities. . . America has a history of 200 years of slavery. We had Jim Crow. We had legal segregation in America for a very long time. We have got to recognize, back to that earlier point, people aren't starting out on the same base in terms of their ability to succeed and so we have got to recognize that and give people a lift up." "This stuff needs to be studied. Because America needs a history lesson, to be honest about it, and we need to study it in a way that we are having a very comprehensive and fact-based conversation about policies and the connection between those policies and harm if we're going to have a productive conversation. It can't just be, 'Hey . . . write some checks.' "If we're talking about writing a check, I don't think it is that simple. And frankly, I don't support an idea or a notion that after all this, we're going to say, 'Okay, I'm going to write you a check, and then be quiet.' Because that won't solve the problem, which is the systemic issues that are present and will continue to exist, whether or not you write a check. So I'm just saying it's just not that simple. And I don't buy into an argument that it is."

Cori Bush (Rep)

"America must provide reparations if we desire a prosperous future for all. . . We know that we continue to live under slavery's vestiges. We know how slavery has perpetuated Jim Crow. We know how slavery's impacts live on today. . . It's unjust and it wouldn't happen in a just and fair and equitable society."

Republican Politicians

Tim Scott (Senator)

"This is only a symptom of a much deeper issue, a systemic problem. Let me explain. I'm a kid who grew up in

poverty, abject poverty in many ways. There's much worse poverty in America and certainly around the world than I grew up in." "Today, we lost a vote on a piece of legislation that would have led to systemic change in the relationship between communities of color and the law enforcement community. We would have broken the concept in this nation that you have to be for law enforcement or for communities of color. That is a false binary choice." "There is no question that slavery is a scourge on the history of America. The question is, are reparations a realistic path forward? The answer is no. The fact is if you just try to unscramble that egg to figure out who are we compensating, who's actually paying for it and who was here in 1865?...I think you start seeing a formula that (it) is impossible to unscramble that egg. So I think it's a nonstarter. . . Reparations are about what happened in the past, not what's happening in the present. That's my theory."

Marco Rubio (former Senator—current Secretary of State)

"Yes, we must address racial inequality. Yes, black lives must matter. But the vandalism, the arson, and the anarchy in our streets have nothing to do with this important cause. . . These anti-American radicals don't care about racial equality. And they will not stop as long as everyone is afraid to call them out for who and for what they are." For decades, African Americans have complained that they feel that their voices are ignored, their problems are not addressed, and their lives are not valued. Given our nation's history with race, this is an uncomfortable grievance, and one many would rather avoid. But like a bad debt that must eventually be paid, it is a grievance we can no longer ignore. The foundations of our country are not irredeemably racist. Abolition, women's suffrage, desegregation, the Civil Rights movement—these were not appeals to overthrow our values, these were demands that we fulfill them. And the Constitution that once considered slaves three-fifths of a human being was ultimately the vehicle used to free them and, eventually, to secure their most basic rights. We have made tremendous progress on racial equality over the last fifty years, but there remain shocking racial disparities on health, on education, on housing, on economics and criminal justice. None of this excuses radical, violent extremists' setting fires, looting buildings, and hurting innocent people. It also shouldn't lead us to stupid ideas like de-funding the police. And this is not going to be fixed by endless e-mails from corporation after corporation trying to prove how "woke" they are, even as they outsource your job to China. But it's also not going to be fixed by pretending that race is no longer an issue, and by accusing everyone who disagrees and says it is, of hating America. Yes, there are still vile racists among us, although few of them will ever openly admit it. But,

in twenty-first-century America, few people consider themselves racists. The primary reason why race remains relevant today is that the African American community faces a unique set of challenges that far too few people in positions of power and politics fully understand. Some suggest these disparities are the result of institutionalized racism or of a deliberate effort designed to harm African Americans. I believe that it's the product of something far less sinister, but sometimes equally damaging. It is the result of racial indifference. This is the empathy that is required of us as neighbors, as friends, and as children of the same God.

Tom Cotton (Senator)

"We have to study the history of slavery and its role and impact on the development of our country because otherwise we can't understand our country. As the Founding Fathers said, it was the necessary evil upon which the union was built, but the union was built in a way, as Lincoln said, to put slavery on the course to its ultimate extinction."

Susan Collins (Senator)

"As Americans, we all need to frankly acknowledge and work to resolve our longstanding, ongoing struggles with racial inequality. The President should help to heal the racial divisions in this country. It is at times like this that a President needs to speak to the Nation to pledge to right wrongs and to calm inflamed passions." (page 12)

Mitch McConnell (Senator)

"I don't think reparations for something that happened 150 years ago for whom none of us currently living are responsible is a good idea. . . We've tried to deal with our original sin of slavery by fighting a civil war, by passing landmark civil rights legislation. We elected an African American president. . . I think we're always a work in progress in this country but no one currently alive was responsible for that and I don't think we should be trying to figure out how to compensate for it. First of all, it'd be pretty hard to figure out who to compensate. We've had waves of immigrants as well come to the country and experience dramatic discrimination of one kind or another so no, I don't think reparations are a good idea."

Tommy Tubberville (Rep)

"They're not soft on crime. They're pro-crime. They [Democrats] want crime. They want crime because they want to take over what you got. They want to control what you have. They want reparations because they think the people that do the crime are owed that. Bulls**t. They are not owed that."

Jim Jordan (Rep)

"Spending $20 million in taxpayer money to reach a conclusion you already know what it's going to be. . . Look, everyone knows how evil slavery was, wrong as wrong can be. But this is not something we should be passing."

Mark Robinson (former Lt. Gov)

"Nobody owes you anything for slavery. If you want to tell the truth about it, it is you who owes. It's you who owes. Why do you owe? Because somebody in those fields took strikes for you. Somebody after those fields were ended and slavery was ended, somebody had to walk through Jim Crow for you. Somebody fought wars and died for you. Somebody lived less than because they didn't have what you have, and they did it for you. There are people in their graves right now, and they are there because they were willing to stand up and fight for you."

Bernie Moreno (Senator)

"You know, when they talk about reparations, where are the reparations for the people in the north who died to save the lives of Black people? I know it's not politically correct to say that. But you know what? We gotta stop being politically correct, we gotta call it how it is."

Burgess Owens (Rep)

"Reparations is divisive. It speaks to the fact that we are a helpless, hopeless race that never did anything but wait for white people to show up and help us. . . It's a falsehood. It is demeaning to my parents' generation. That is one of the greatest generations in the history of the country. . . By the way, reparations, where you take people's money that they've earned is punishment. It's theft. It's judgment. It's saying that because of your skin color, you owe me," he said. "That is not the American way. We're not racist people. This American country is based on meritocracy."

Prompt to generate summaries of Democratic and Republican narratives

I am going to share famous quotes from elected Democratic politicians about the history of race. Create concise narrative that summarizes these quotes from democrats regarding BLM, george floyd, slavery, reparations, etc. This narrative will then be used to create a proximity measure against a series of open-ended survey responses

[Democratic Quotes Inserted]

I am going to share famous quotes from elected Republican politicians about the history of race. Create concise narrative that summarizes these quotes from republicans regarding BLM, george floyd, slavery, reparations, etc. This narrative will then be used to create a proximity measure against a series of open-ended survey responses

[Republican Quotes Inserted]

Politicians' Representative Narratives

Democrat Summary: Democratic leaders frame the murder of George Floyd as a catalyst for a nationwide reckoning with systemic racism and police brutality. They portray racialized violence not as isolated incidents but as part of a long historical continuum of state-sanctioned oppression against Black communities. Protest is seen as a legitimate, often nonviolent tool for demanding justice and democratic accountability. The narrative links current inequities to slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, and discriminatory policies that deliberately excluded Black Americans from economic and social advancement. Democrats emphasize that racism is a structural force undermining both Black communities and the nation as a whole. Addressing this requires acknowledging historical wrongs and implementing systemic reforms—including policing reform, civil rights protections, and reparations. Reparations are framed less as simple monetary compensation and more as a process of repair, healing, and structural redress through policy changes and investment in historically marginalized communities.

Republican Summary: Republican leaders acknowledge the historical reality of slavery and the persistence of some racial disparities but reject the idea that the U.S. is systemically or irredeemably racist. They emphasize individual responsibility, progress made since the Civil Rights era, and the importance of uniting rather than dividing the country. While some call for addressing racial inequality and improving policing, they strongly oppose rioting, "defund the police" efforts, and corporate performative activism. Reparations are widely rejected as unfair, divisive, and impractical—framed as backward-looking rather than forward-focused. Many argue it's impossible or unjust to determine responsibility and compensation for slavery today, stressing meritocracy and shared national values as the path forward rather than race-based remedies.

Prompt to generate similarity relative to Democratic and Republican narratives

I need you to code a series of open-ended responses according to the following narratives for 6 racial-political groups.

For each open-ended response, please generate 6 new variables—1 for each narrative below; for each response, assign any number between 0 and 1 to each variable based on how similar the response is to each selected narrative. For example, a response would be coded as 1 for Democrat Narrative if the response matches perfectly the content and spirit of the Democrat Narrative; if the response conveys the complete opposite of the selected narrative, then that response would be coded as 0 for that narrative. Please note that a response can mimic aspects of none or even all of the selected narratives, and please produce the coding in a .csv format. Please do not consider preconceived notions regarding racial-political groups' beliefs and code the responses based on their likeness to only the selected narratives below. Please code the responses to the third decimal point with values such as 0.215 and 0.467.

[Summary of Democratic Narratives]

[Summary of Republican Narratives]