Book Reviews

Black and Blue: How African Americans Judge the U.S. Legal System. **By James L. Gibson and Michael J. Nelson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. 196 pp., $29.95, paper.**

Nyron N. Crawford
Temple University

It is rare to read a book in the main of political science that considers African American political psychology, namely, how race intersects with evaluations about law and legal institutions—historically and racially fraught systems that remain so despite critical attention to their racially imbalanced processes and outcomes. In *Black and Blue: How African Americans Judge the U.S. Legal System*, James L. Gibson and Michael J. Nelson provide a wide-ranging but critical empirical assessment of what shapes African Americans' support for the judiciary. Although the authors focus on the U.S. Supreme Court, the findings do much more. In the simplest terms, the book asks how Black people's experiences with law enforcement, their attachment to group-based politics, and their reaction to legal symbology bend or bind the Court's legitimacy. The answers are not always obvious. *Black and Blue* may well be "one of the most comprehensive analyses of African Americans" support for the legal system…" (p. 6).

The chief claim animating the book's pages is that African Americans vary in their evaluation of legal institutions. The core evidence is drawn from the (1) Freedom and Tolerance Surveys (FATS), (2) a survey of Black Americans ($n = 1,676$), and (3) a randomized experiment of the same. *Black and Blue* is methodical and organized to be attendant to different variables that explain various legal attitudes among Black Americans. Notwithstanding its interest in one racial group, Chapter 2 presents data on interracial attitudes related to the courts to provide context for the remainder of the book. Gibson and Nelson find that Black and Latino respondents, for example, are generally less supportive

of the Court than Whites. The two groups' belief in two democratic values—support for the rule of law, political tolerance—do not predict their embrace of the Court. Rather, a third democratic value—support for liberty over social order—*is* significantly related to support for the institution.

Establishing that African Americans evaluate legal systems differently, Chapter 3 pivots to illustrate heterogeneity in Black people's experiences with legal authorities and in how they relate to their racial group (p. 52). By making distinctions between personal or vicarious experiences with legal systems, Gibson and Nelson consider the extent to which learning effects of both kinds are deleterious to judicial legitimacy. Similarly, distinguishing between group identity and linked fate draws out useful nuance in how group-based attachments color citizen–state interactions. The value of discerning between these items in both sets of variables is first evident in Chapter 4, in which they are used to determine diffuse support for the U.S. Supreme Court and general legal system fairness. Here, group identification mattered in the first instance, while linked fate mattered in the second. Black Americans identifying less strongly with the group, for example, supported the Court more (p. 79). These effects are exacerbated by vicarious experiences and perceived legal fairness.

The final empirical chapters examine the relationship that symbols of judicial authority impose on acquiescence (5) and change in support for the Court (6), using data from an experiment with a representative sample of African Americans. Chapter 5 is an interesting account of reactivity to legal symbols, which Gibson and Nelson leverage to understand the extent to which Black Americans are willing to accept a decision with which they disagree. The authors consider whether legal symbols reinforce the legitimacy of the court—or if they are understood as a source of social control—in a manner that influences Black respondents to "accept losing" judicial decisions. We learn that symbols have no direct effect on acquiescence (Chapter 5) or change in support of the U.S. Supreme Court (Chapter 6). Rather, exposure to legal symbols interacts with expectations of and affect for the court to condition acceptance; in Chapter 6, the interaction between exposure to legal symbols and unfair personal experiences with the legal system is particularly deleterious to diffuse support for the court.

The insights of *Black and Blue* are both valuable and belated. On the first count, the book is a sophisticated and compelling empirical survey of how various factors render Blacks' attitudes about court-related outputs (e.g., decisions and symbols). It offers the legal system as a set of institutions with which this group is assumed to have had contact. The evidence

shows that these interactions vary, and in unanticipated ways, in terms of how African Americans perceive legal authority, fairness, and legitimacy. On the second count, the attention to Black Americans is born out of a late recognition that racialized policy feedback can imperil support for public systems. Even the authors seem to acknowledge as much, writing: "we have been among the most insensitive scholars in terms of our unwillingness in our past research to acknowledge that general findings may not pertain to all segments of the general population. Even the widely accepted Positivity Theory (PT) on which we have so often relied has failed to recognize that positivity may not apply to minority groups that have experienced rocky relationships with legal authorities" (xviii).

The resultant book is recalibrating Positivity Theory, an effort "to try to rectify the myopia of [their] earlier research agenda" (xviii). *Black and Blue* is a welcomed example. The research is well-designed, clearly written, and updates an existing framework to take better account of race. But *Black and Blue* warrants a reminder from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (p. 3). One substantive criticism is perhaps that the invisibility of the first kind—i.e., that race was not considered relevant to positivity—introduced a second veil that made more research in Black political psychology, the racial socialization of Black Americans, and race in American political development less seen. There was too little retelling of Black political thought. While *Black and Blue* may be less inventive in this regard, it affirms the relevance of the question: How do African Americans judge public systems? In answer, the authors achieve their analytic objectives well.

Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police. By Micol Seigel. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2018. 312 pages, $27.95, paperback

Christian Davenport 🆔
University of Michigan

Borrowing and modifying a phrase popularized by the late Woody Guthrie, "this book kills fascists." In nothing less than a historical and