

RACE, CRIMINAL INJUSTICE FRAMES, AND THE LEGITIMATION OF CARCERAL INEQUALITY AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

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Abstract

Michelle Alexander argues that carceral inequality and mass incarceration together have created a “new racial caste system” in America (2010, p. 11). She contends that only a race-conscious social movement that engages both legal actors and the public can dismantle this system of racial control. Unfortunately, very little research has examined views about carceral inequality. Little is known about the attitudes of juvenile and criminal justice workers. We build on and integrate three literatures—scholarship on the framing perspective, comparative conflict theory, and group position theory and racial ideology—to develop a theoretical model of attitudes toward carceral inequality. We hypothesize that race influences the resonance of attributional frames, especially criminal injustice frames, but endorsement of these frames represents the primary factor shaping judgments about whether carceral inequality is a social problem (propriety, urgency, severity and policy frames). For several decades, framing efforts have been underway aimed at mobilizing JCJW to reduce racial disparities in the juvenile justice system. And most offenders first have contact with the state as juveniles. Accordingly, to test our theory, we analyze data on views about carceral inequality in the juvenile justice system—or disproportionate minority contact—among a nationwide sample of justice workers (N = 543). The findings show that race is strongly associated with attributional frames about carceral inequality, and is indirectly related, through attributional frames, to endorsement of propriety, urgency, severity, and policy frames about carceral inequality.

Keywords: Racial Attitudes, Racial Bias, Discrimination, Imprisonment, Collective Action Frames, Social Movements, Disproportionate Minority Contact

Du Bois Review, 14:2 (2017) 577–602.

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doi:10.1017/S1742058X17000121

INTRODUCTION

America's current racial caste system has two mutually supporting pillars: carceral inequality and mass incarceration (Alexander 2010). Minorities are overrepresented at nearly every stage of the juvenile justice system (Sickmund and Puzzanchera, 2014), and in the criminal justice system (Travis et al., 2014). Blacks and Hispanics are incarcerated at six and three times the rate of Whites, respectively; indeed, there is more disparity between Blacks and Whites in imprisonment than in wealth, employment, poverty, or infant mortality (Travis et al., 2014). Because of carceral inequality, the prison boom has "sealed the social immobility of poor blacks," and "subtracted from the gains to African American citizenship hard won by the civil rights movement" (Western 2006, p. 191). Mass incarceration thus functions as a "system of racialized social control ... [that] creates and maintains racial hierarchy," and amounts to "the New Jim Crow" (Alexander 2010, pp. 11–13)

Imprisonment has detrimental effects on offenders, their families and communities; and minorities disproportionately suffer due to this carceral inequality (Clear 2007; Western 2006). As Tonry explains, "a dose of prison can damage anyone, and usually does" (2011, p. 6). Job applicants with a criminal record are less likely to be hired, and this substantially affects minority applicants more so than White applicants (Pager 2007; Pager et al., 2009). In many states, particularly those with large Black prison populations, ex-felons are disenfranchised, often for life (Behrens et al., 2003; Manza and Uggen, 2008). More broadly, it remains "legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways [e.g., in education, housing, jury service, etc.] that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans" (Alexander 2010, p. 2). Further, the numerous adverse outcomes of parental incarceration, such as child homelessness, are concentrated most heavily among minority families (Wakefield and Wildeman, 2011; Wildeman 2014).

Racial differences in offending cannot fully explain the disparities in either the juvenile or criminal justice system (Engen et al., 2002; Leiber 2002; Tonry and Melewski, 2008). In fact, "racial disparities in imprisonment have worsened substantially since the early 1990s relative to racial patterns of involvement in serious crimes" (Travis et al., 2014, p. 94). Racial bias, both conscious and unconscious, in legal and legislative decision-making clearly plays a role in causing carceral inequality (Beckett et al., 2005, 2006; Kutateladze et al., 2014; Spohn 2013; Weaver 2007). For example, criminal defendants who have a darker skin tone and Afrocentric facial features tend to receive harsher court sentences, controlling for relevant case characteristics like prior record and offense severity (King and Johnson, 2016).

Punitive sentiment in America has plunged since the mid-1990s to a thirty-year low (Enns 2016; Ramirez 2013). Moreover, Whites' tolerance for racial discrimination has been on the decline for four decades (Bobo et al., 2012). Why, then, has no broad-based social movement emerged to oppose carceral inequality?¹ Perhaps more importantly, why haven't legal actors working in the juvenile and criminal justice systems done more to reduce racial disparities in imprisonment? These are critical questions. Alexander argues that "nothing short of a major social movement can successfully dismantle the new caste system" (2010, p. 18). Yet, answers remain elusive. A sizable literature has investigated perceptions about the causes of Black-White socioeconomic inequality, and support for policies to reduce economic and educational disparities between the races (Bobo 1991, 1998; Bobo and Kluegel, 1997; Hunt 2007; Kluegel 1990; Kluegel and Smith, 1982; Sears et al., 1979, 1997). By contrast, perceptions about the causes, consequences, and policy importance of carceral inequality have largely escaped empirical attention (Unnever 2008). The least is known about juvenile

and criminal justice workers' (JCJW) perceptions of these issues. This is regrettable because "professionals' perceptions help explain organizational outcomes" (Bridges and Steen, 1998, p. 554).

The criminal labeling process that underpins the racial caste system begins very early in offenders' lives (Alexander 2010). Over 25% of Black and Hispanic males are arrested by the age of eighteen (Brame et al., 2014). The opportunities for racially biased decision-making are also greater in the juvenile than criminal justice system, because there is more discretion during processing (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1997). For this reason, over the past three decades, there have been many efforts by scholars and activists to call attention to and lobby against carceral inequality in the juvenile justice system (Feyerherm 1995; Kempf-Leonard 2007). Indeed, since 1988, Congress has mandated that states develop plans to reduce the "disproportionate minority confinement" of youth (DMC) in order to receive federal formula grant funding for juvenile justice initiatives (Leiber 2002).² Despite the DMC mandate, pronounced racial disparities still exist throughout the juvenile justice system (Leiber and Rodriguez, 2011). "The persistence of DMC," Geoff Ward and colleagues explain, "may relate in part to a failure among government and academic researchers to assess professional orientations toward the mandate, including perceptions of the severity of the problem" (2011, p. 174).

For this reason, our analysis focuses specifically on JCJW's views about carceral inequality within the juvenile justice system. We build on and integrate three literatures to develop a theoretical model of JCJW's views about whether carceral inequality constitutes a social problem: 1) the framing perspective (Benford and Snow, 2000); 2) comparative conflict theory (Hagan et al., 2005); and 3) group position theory and racial ideology (Blumer 1958; Bobo et al., 1997). Scholarship on social movements has identified several specific types of beliefs that encourage social action to address social problems, including endorsement of attributional, severity, urgency, propriety and policy frames. We hypothesize that race directly influences JCJW's endorsement of attributional frames about carceral inequality, and, in turn, indirectly influences endorsement of severity, urgency, propriety and policy frames about carceral inequality, through its effect on attributional frames. We test these hypotheses using data from a recent nationwide survey of JCJW.

FRAMES, EXPERIENCE, AND IDEOLOGY

Scholarship on collective action frames and social movements provides evidence about the types of beliefs, and relationships between them, that are essential for motivating both individual and collective efforts to address social problems (Benford and Snow, 2000). The literature we review in this section offers insights about the various beliefs that likely encourage (or discourage) support for taking steps to reduce carceral inequality among JCJW.

Recent theoretical and empirical work identifies the importance of framing and frames for understanding attitudes toward crime, justice, and racial policy (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Drakulich 2015a, 2015b; Hagan 2010). The absence of widespread mobilization against racial disparities in imprisonment—by either the public or JCJW—is what allows racial inequality to persist at current levels both within and outside of the justice system (Alexander 2010). This is despite repeated calls for a social movement to oppose carceral inequality (Alexander 2010; Tonry 2010). According to David Snow and Robert Benford, "the failure of mobilization efforts when structural conditions seem otherwise ripe" often reflects "the absence of resonant mobilizing frames" (1988, p. 214).

The framing perspective distinguishes between the activity of *framing*—the signifying or meaning work in social movements—and its negotiated cognitive outcomes, *frames* (Benford and Snow, 2000). Framing activities focus on diagnosing a social problem and its causes, specifying specific solutions, and motivating corrective collective action (Snow and Benford, 1988); they can be spearheaded by individuals, organizations, or the media (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; Gamson et al., 1992). A frame, on the other hand, “is a central organizing idea ... for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue” (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p. 3).

There are many types of attributional frames, but injustice frames are of particular importance. An injustice frame is a belief that an identifiable authority—a person, group, or agency—operates in a way that causes unjust harm and suffering, and violates shared moral principles (Gamson 1992; Gamson et al., 1982). For example, the belief that police bias causes carceral inequality is an injustice frame, or more accurately a “criminal injustice frame.” The adoption of an injustice frame breaks “the hegemony of the legitimating frame” (Gamson et al., 1982, p. 122), calls into question the status quo, and serves as “a critical catalyst for the appearance of other elements [agency and identity] of a collective action frame” (Gamson 1992, p. 58).

Audience members often decline to adopt injustice frames when exposed to relevant framing activities. Frames are most likely to be adopted when they resonate well with individuals (Benford and Snow, 2000). Frame resonance is a function of several factors, with the most influential of these factors are the person’s relevant prior experiences (personal and vicarious) and ideology (Gamson 1992; Snow and Benford, 1988, 2000). These influence, respectively, an injustice frame’s experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity (Benford and Snow, 2000).

The central theoretical argument advanced in the current paper is that criminal injustice frames about carceral inequality often fail to resonate with White JCJW. This, in turn, helps to explain the absence of widespread JCJW mobilization against the racial disparities that exist in either the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Theoretically, race should impact the resonance of criminal injustice frames through its effects on one’s life experiences (Hagan et al., 2005; Unnever 2008; Weitzer and Tuch, 2006) and racial ideology (Bobo et al., 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Adoption of criminal injustice frames, more so than beliefs about racial differences in behavior, should shape JCJW’s judgments about the consequences and importance of carceral inequality (Gamson 1992), and policy preferences (Bobo and Kluegel, 1997; Matsueda and Drakulich, 2009). We discuss these theoretical expectations in more detail below.

RACE AND CRIMINAL INJUSTICE FRAME RESONANCE

Race and Discrimination Experiences

As noted above, relevant personal or vicarious experiences impact frame resonance by influencing the frame’s experiential commensurability—or relevance to adverse events and situations encountered in one’s life (Benford and Snow, 2000). Black and Hispanic adolescents and adults report being more afraid of, and having more experience with, racial discrimination than their White counterparts (Herda 2016; Kessler et al., 1999). This divide tends to be exceptionally large in the case of interactions with criminal justice actors (Herda 2016; Weitzer and Tuch, 2005, 2006). One recent nationally representative poll of Americans revealed that 19% of Blacks and 17% of Hispanics reported being discriminated against by the police in just the past *month*, compared to only 3% of Whites (DiJulio et al., 2015).

Similarly, Callie Burt and colleagues (2012) found that over half of the Black adolescents in their sample reported experiencing racial discrimination by the police in just the past year.

Comparative conflict theory provides a framework for understanding the importance of minorities' experiences at young ages with discrimination. According to this theory, minorities begin to develop an understanding of their relative subordination very early in their lives, by comparing the treatment they receive from authorities, and particularly from criminal justice actors, to that of Whites (Hagan and Albonetti, 1982; Hagan et al., 2005). These comparisons are made on the basis of both personal and vicarious experiences, and have lasting attitudinal effects; they foster a sense of disadvantage in group position, as well as a general belief that legal authorities cannot be trusted and are racially biased (Matsueda and Drakulich, 2009; Unnever and Gabbidon, 2011; Weitzer and Tuch, 2005, 2006). Therefore, by a relatively young age, even before graduating high school and/or starting their careers, minorities develop a distinct appreciation for how racial bias contributes to their subordination (Hagan et al., 2005; Unnever and Gabbidon, 2011). For this reason, the experiential commensurability of criminal injustice frames should be greater for minority than White JCJW. That is, non-White JCJW should be more likely to perceive these frames as being consistent with their past personal and vicarious experiences (Unnever 2008).

Race, Group Position, and Racial Ideology

The narrative fidelity or cultural resonance of criminal injustice frames should also diverge for minority and White JCJW because of group differences in racial ideology. Group position theory connects a racial group's particular racial ideology to their systemic location within an existing social structure and the nature of the social and political context (Blumer 1958). This theoretical perspective illuminates how a racial ideology protective of the structural arrangements that convey advantages on the dominant group emerges among its members, and changes over time in response to contextual shifts (Bobo et al., 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2014).

A change or refinement in Whites' racial ideology occurred during the post-civil rights era, when it became unacceptable to openly express Jim Crow-style prejudice (Jackman and Muha, 1984; Omi and Winant, 1994). Over time, there were genuine reductions in Whites' beliefs in innate racial differences and support for discrimination (Bobo et al., 2012). At the same time, however, "a new mood of 'social meanness'" took root among Whites (Omi and Winant, 1994, p. 113), which reflected the emergence of a new racial ideology to ensure the continuance of minority subordination (Bobo et al., 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2014).

Many different theoretical conceptualizations of this new White racial ideology exist—e.g., symbolic racism (Kinder and Sears, 1981), modern racism (McConahay 1986), laissez-faire racism (Bobo et al., 1997), and color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2014). Each "new racism" theory provides a different picture of Whites' contemporary racial ideology, depicting it as composed of a unique set of perceptions, attitudes, and sentiments (Krysan 2000; Quillian 2006). For instance, the two central components of laissez-faire racism are racial stereotypes and the denial of discrimination (Bobo et al., 1997); but in contrast, symbolic racism is theorized to reflect a combination of antiblack affect and individualism (Kinder and Sears, 1981).

Empirical tests of the new racism theories raise questions about the validity of the different theorized "blends" of racial views (Carmines et al., 2011; Zigerell 2015). Michael Hughes, for example, finds that "the theoretical grounding of symbolic racism in individualism and antiblack affect is weak" (1997, p. 70). Likewise, the negative

cultural stereotypes about Blacks that are central to both *laissez-faire* racism and color-blind racism are often endorsed by Blacks, sometimes even more so than by Whites (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993). Just as important, in today's multiracial society, the scope of theoretical conceptualizations of Whites' racial ideology must extend beyond their views about Blacks and Black-White relations.

The various new racism theories agree, however, that a key component of Whites' current racial ideology is the general belief that discrimination (racial and ethnic) is in the past (Krysan 2000; Murakawa and Beckett, 2010). Poll evidence suggests that this is "the centerpiece of the modern racial divide" in attitudes (Bobo 2001, p. 280). The racial divide in beliefs about discrimination is very wide (Bobo and Thompson, 2010; Hunt 2007; Norton and Sommers, 2011). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014), for example, finds that of the four main components of color-blind racism, the largest difference between Whites and Blacks is in the extent to which the denial of discrimination informs their understanding of racial matters.

The racial divide in beliefs about discrimination reflects a fundamental disagreement between minorities and Whites about what constitutes racism (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Carter and Murphy, 2015). The racial politics that forged Whites' new racial ideology centered on narrowing the definition of racism and discrimination to the individual level (Omi and Winant, 1994). As a result, Whites tend to narrowly define racism as explicit prejudice by individuals (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Sommers and Norton, 2006). The dominant ideology among Whites thus holds that a behavior constitutes discrimination only when it meets two standards: 1) it results from intentional and explicit bias by an individual actor (intent standard), and 2) causes a specific instance of racial inequality (causation standard) (Murakawa and Beckett, 2010). Whites' racial ideology is institutionally anchored in antidiscrimination law (Alexander 2010; Murakawa and Beckett, 2010), which produces a discursive opportunity structure that is generally unsupportive of criminal injustice frames (see Ferre 2003). By contrast, most minorities' define racism broadly—explicit, subtle, or systemic bias—and understand discrimination simply to be unequal treatment, whether intentional or unintentional (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Carter and Murphy, 2015). For this reason, the narrative fidelity (or cultural resonance) of criminal injustice frames should be greater among minority than White JCJW.³

INJUSTICE FRAMES, VOCABULARIES OF MOTIVE, AND POLICY PREFERENCES

Injustice frames are communicated through diagnostic framing activities, which identify and attribute blame for a social problem (Benford and Snow, 2000). Motivational framing activities provide individuals with the impetus to get moving to set things right. This is done by constructing and nurturing "vocabularies of motive," which include frames about the severity of the problem, as well as about the urgency, efficacy, and propriety (or moral duty) of taking action (Benford 1993). Prognostic framing activities propose specific ways to fix the problem, such as changing existing policies or implementing new policies (Snow and Benford, 1988).

Theoretically, however, the process through which individuals come to adopt the different frames—injustice, motivational, and policy—disseminated by the above framing activities should have a particular causal order. Endorsing injustice frames should, in turn, greatly increase the probability of adopting the vocabularies of motive and policy preferences promoted in related framing activities (Gamson 1992; Gamson et al., 1982). William Gamson (1992) suggests that endorsing an injustice frame leads

to adoption of other mobilizing beliefs by increasing attention to and sympathy for framing efforts aimed at rectifying the injustice, and promoting personal identification with the victims of the injustice. Injustice frames have these effects because they collectivize victimization, and cause moral indignation, but they also imply that change is possible (Gamson 1992).

Research on views about racial policies supports the theory that injustice frames open the door for other types of mobilizing beliefs. Studies find that endorsing injustice frames for the Black-White socioeconomic gap strongly influences relevant policy preferences. Specifically, agreeing that this racial gap is caused, in part, by discrimination greatly increases support for government spending and intervention; indeed, the effect is even larger than that for racial stereotypes (Bobo and Kluegel, 1997; Hughes and Tuch, 1999; Kluegel 1990). Likewise, when citizens agree that the legal system treats minorities unfairly, another injustice frame, it reduces their racial prejudice and support for the movement to get tough on criminals (Bobo and Johnson, 2004; Johnson 2008; Matsueda and Drakulich, 2011). In short, the extant theory and research both suggest that JCJD's endorsement of injustice frames to explain racial disparities in imprisonment should be a primary factor; and perhaps should be the primary factor, influencing both their vocabularies of motive—or judgments about the salience of carceral inequality as a social problem—and policy preferences.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Literally hundreds of studies have investigated the sources and effects of views about racial matters such as busing, segregation, and the Black-White socioeconomic gap. For example, a large body of research has explored explanations for racial differences in support for ostensibly race-neutral crime policies, such as the death penalty (Bobo and Johnson, 2004; Peffley and Hurwitz, 2010). This research has consistently found that there is a large racial gap in punitiveness, which is explained primarily by differences between whites and minorities in their racial attitudes (Brown and Socia, 2016; Unnever and Cullen, 2007, 2010; Unnever et al., 2008).

By contrast, there is a paucity of research examining injustice frames for, or mobilizing beliefs about, carceral inequality, especially among JCJW. As a result, we currently know very little about the factors explaining attitudes toward the overrepresentation of minorities in the justice system. Yet, carceral inequality is the linchpin of America's current racial caste system (Alexander 2010). Additionally, as Paul Sniderman and Thomas Piazza (1993) observe, the sources of "racial policy positions differ in significant ways from one type of racial policy to another" (p. 9); indeed, this "issue pluralism" is perhaps "the single most important feature of contemporary racial politics" (p. 20).

JCJW have opportunities in their day-to-day activities to either reproduce or reduce racial bias (Bridges and Steen, 1998). In the case of the DMC mandate specifically, the support and mobilization of JCJW is critical for the success of DMC interventions (OJJDP 2009), but it is often not forthcoming (Talley et al., 2005; Ward et al., 2011). Our analysis begins to shed light on the micromobilization processes that may help to explain why there is not greater mobilization against racial disparities in imprisonment, particularly by JCJW. We test four hypotheses about the factors that may function to legitimize or delegitimize carceral inequality as a social problem in the eyes of JCJW.

Theoretically, as noted above, race should shape the experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity of criminal injustice frames for JCJW. James Unnever's (2008)

analysis of *public* views supports this position. He found that Black citizens were more likely than Whites to believe that discrimination by the police and courts is a cause of carceral inequality. However, Blacks were also *more* likely than Whites to attribute carceral inequality to Blacks' bad morals and poor parenting. This is consistent with research on citizens' views about socioeconomic inequality, which suggests that minorities are especially likely to have a "dual consciousness," such that they endorse both individualistic and structuralist frames to explain poverty (Hughes and Tuch, 1999; Hunt 1996, 2007). Building on this work, we test the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis #1: Non-White JCJW will be more likely than White JCJW to endorse criminal injustice frames to explain carceral inequality.

Hypothesis #2: As compared to White JCJW, Non-White JCJW will either be more likely or equally likely, but not less likely, to endorse individualistic frames to explain carceral inequality.

We are aware of only one previous study that has examined the correlates of JCJW's views about carceral inequality in either the juvenile or criminal justice system. This study found that Black juvenile probation officers were more likely than White officers to believe that minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system is a serious problem (Ward et al., 2011). By contrast, the perception that "minority youth often require more restraint" was unrelated to this belief. Theoretically, however, injustice frames, more so than individualistic frames, should influence JCJW's attention and receptivity to motivational and prognostic framing (Gamson 1992). Extant scholarship on framing and social movements suggests that endorsement of severity, urgency, propriety and policy frames are essential for motivating individual and collective action to address social problems. This literature also indicates that endorsement of these various frames should be influenced by individuals' attributional beliefs. Comparative conflict theory suggests that individuals' racial backgrounds and associated experiences should shape their attributional beliefs. Thus, the final two hypotheses that we test are:

Hypothesis #3: JCJW who endorse criminal injustice frames will, in turn, be more likely to hold vocabularies of motive and policy preferences that challenge carceral inequality.

Hypothesis #4: Criminal injustice frames will mediate the relationship between JCJW's race and these variables.

DATA AND METHODS

In analyzing views of carceral inequality, *all* JCJW are relevant; there is no occupational group of JCJW with a monopoly of influence over racial disparities in imprisonment (Baumer 2013). Racial disparities not only exist at nearly all decision-making points in the justice system, but there is also "cumulative disadvantage," whereby disparities at later stages build on disparities at earlier stages (Kutateladze et al., 2014; Sickmund and Puzzanchera, 2014; Sutton 2013). As Besiki Kutateladze and colleagues explain, "law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges" are all "vested with key decision-making power that holds the potential to contribute to racial inequity in punishment" (2014, p. 515). Other JCJW—including, but not limited to, probation officers, defense attorneys, and administrators—may also influence case outcomes and/or help shape the organizational culture in which legal decisions are made (Birckhead 2010; Bridges and Steen, 1998). Indeed, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

stresses that interventions to reduce racial disparities in youth justice require “the top-down support from local agency directors and bottom-up support from all line workers and other staff throughout the agencies involved in juvenile justice” (2009, p. 3).

Accordingly, for the current study, we sought to survey an occupationally diverse and nationwide sample of JCJW. We were able to do this by leveraging a Listserv containing email addresses of JCJW who participated in training offered by the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC). The NCJTC coordinates training programs for a large number of local, state and national juvenile and criminal justice agencies. JCJW from every U.S. state and territory have participated in NCJTC training on applied topics, such as investigative techniques and defensive tactics. The NCJTC has compiled contact information for every individual and organization attending its training programs since 2005. The NCJTC’s Listserv contained email addresses for approximately 50,000 JCJS workers from across the United States.⁴ The diversity in the NCJTC Listserv allowed us to sample for heterogeneity, which is recommended when probability sampling is not an option (Blair et al., 2014; Shadish et al., 2002). As Johnny Blair and colleagues explain, “measures of relationships should be resistant to sample bias as long as the sample is diverse but not necessarily if the sample is restricted” (2014, p.101; see also Pasek 2016). We emailed an invitation to complete an anonymous online questionnaire to the Listserv on July 8, 2014; a reminder email was sent on August 13, 2014. Following previous research (e.g., Tyler et al., 2007), we also incorporated a chain snowball sampling technique in which we encouraged respondents to forward the survey link to other JCJW. Our sampling method made calculation of a response rate impossible, although it was clearly very low.⁵ However, the most important consequence of using a nonprobability sample is that, regardless of the response rate, the generalizability of the findings remains unknown. Even still, several studies have found the use of a diverse online nonprobability sample generally allows for relatively accurate inferences about the direction and approximate magnitude of relationships between variables (Ansolabehere and Schaffner, 2014; Bhutta 2012; Pasek 2016; Simmons and Bobo, 2015).⁶

A total of 636 CJW completed the questionnaire. After excluding cases with item nonresponse on the measures used in the analysis, the analytic sample includes 543 JCJW from forty-seven states.⁷ In the analytic sample, 260 (or 48%) respondents are sworn (local, state, or federal) law enforcement officers, and 283 (or 52%) work (or have previously worked) in the juvenile or criminal justice system in another capacity (e.g., probation officer, prosecutor, defense attorney, judge, court administrator, correctional officer, non-sworn law enforcement officer, dispatcher, or victim advocate).

As noted earlier, we focus on JCJW’s views about carceral inequality in the juvenile justice system—or DMC—because “the impact of the new [racial] caste system is most tragically felt among the young” (Alexander 2010, p. 185). Not only is there greater discretion in processing juveniles than adults, but “most adult offenders begin their criminal contact with the state through the juvenile justice system” (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1997, p. 341). The DMC mandate in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) originally focused on “disproportionate minority confinement.” However, because carceral inequality is a cumulative result of disparities at multiple decision-making points, the 2002 amendment to the JJDP A expanded the DMC mandate to focus on disproportionate minority “contact” broadly.

Dependent Variables: Motivational and Policy Frames

The objective of the analysis is to examine the predictors of beliefs about whether DMC is a serious and increasingly salient social problem that warrants ameliorative action.

We accomplish this by analyzing endorsement of “vocabularies of motive” about DMC as well as relevant policy frames. The first variable measures whether JCJW endorse a severity frame about DMC.⁸ Severity frames focus on the seriousness of a social problem—that is, the amount of harm it causes (Benford 1993). We asked JCJW about the “key outcomes” of DMC, where: 0 = “increases public safety in minority communities,” and 1 = “increases inequality and poverty in minority communities.”⁹ Another important motivational frame focuses on urgency, or the belief that a problem is increasingly salient and/or that time is running out to fix it (Benford 1993). We asked JCJW whether over the past ten years, DMC had decreased greatly, decreased, stayed about the same, increased, or increased greatly. Less than 1% of JCJW believed that DMC had decreased greatly, so we recoded responses so that: 0 = decreased, 1 = stayed about the same, 2 = increased, and 3 = increased greatly. Another important motivational frame is the “propriety of taking action”—that is, the belief that one has a personal duty to address the problem (Benford, 1993, p. 206). We asked JCJW “how important or unimportant is the issue of disproportionate minority contact to you personally?” (1 = very unimportant, 5 = very important). The descriptive statistics for these measures and those discussed below are presented in Table 1.

We also incorporate two measures of policy frame endorsement. The first is measured with a question that asked: “should reducing disproportionate minority contact (or minority overrepresentation) be a very low, low, medium, high, or very high priority for legal authorities?” The responses were coded such that 1 = very low priority, and 5 = very high priority.¹⁰ Among the most frequent policy recommendations for reducing DMC are to increase law enforcement diversity and cultural competence (Cabaniss et al., 2007; Leiber 2002). The second variable is therefore measured with a question that asked JCJW how much they supported or opposed (1 = strongly oppose, 5 = strongly support): 1) “Making sure that the racial makeup of a police department is the same as that of the local community,” 2) “Eliminating affirmative action preferences for minority applicants in the hiring of police officers,” and 3) “Reducing the amount of time police spend in diversity (or ‘cross-cultural’) training.” We recoded the responses so that higher values indicated greater support for police diversification and cross-cultural training, and then standardized and averaged across the responses to generate a mean index (factor loadings = .561, .640, and .484, respectively; $\alpha = .633$).¹¹

Mediating Variables: Attributional Frames

Prior studies have often measured public perceptions of the extent of racial bias by legal actors like the police (Bobo and Johnson, 2004; Matsueda and Drakulich, 2009). There is an important difference, however, between perceiving that bias exists and believing that it is, in fact, a principal cause of carceral inequality (Talley et al., 2005; Unnever 2008). Our interest is specifically in JCJW’s endorsement of attributional frames to *explain* carceral inequality in the juvenile justice system. We asked the JCJW in our sample “how much of a role does each of the following play in causing disproportionate minority contact (or minority overrepresentation)?” Next, we listed nine different attributional frames, which included five separate types of legal bias, and four types of individual differences in behavior (see Table 1). The responses were: 1 = a very small role, 2 = a small roll, 3 = a moderate role, 4 = a large role, and 5 = a very large role.

Table 2 provides the question wording and descriptive statistics for each of the nine attributional items. The JCJW in our sample are *far* more likely to endorse individualistic frames than criminal injustice frames to explain carceral inequality in the juvenile justice system. The magnitude of this endorsement gap cannot be overstated;

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	Range	
			Min	Max
Policy Frames				
Police Diversification and Training ¹	.022	.756	-1.785	1.802
Make Priority	2.595	1.180	1	5
Vocabularies of Motive				
Propriety	3.192	1.068	1	5
Urgency	1.343	.701	0	3
Severity	.341	.474	0	1
Attributional Frames				
Criminal Injustice ¹	.019	.884	-1.051	2.022
Individualistic ¹	.019	.772	-2.200	1.158
Demographic and Biographical				
Non-White	.232	.423	0	1
Sworn L.E. officer	.479	.500	0	1
CJ career length	16.779	9.178	0	43
Male	.534	.499	0	1
Age	45.029	9.537	22	70
Education	3.390	1.226	1	6
Conservatism	3.258	.835	1	5
Punitiveness ¹	.007	.834	-2.758	2.989
Victimization risk ¹	-.015	.799	-1.567	2.606
Crime increasing	1.867	.778	0	3
Crime victim	.586	.493	0	1
Southern	.337	.473	0	1
After Ferguson	.558	.497	0	1
N		543		

NOTES: ¹Variable is a standardized mean index.

ABBREVIATIONS: DMC = disproportionate minority contact; SD = standard deviation.

between 49% and 75% of the JCJW believe that each of the individualistic factors play a large or very large role in causing DMC, compared to only 18% to 29% for the different types of criminal injustice. When disaggregated by race, we can see that between 43% and 58% of non-Whites believe that each form of bias plays a large or very large role in causing DMC, compared to only 10% to 20% of Whites. Comparing the means (for the full sample) for the five types of criminal injustice, we see that JCJW tend to believe that police and legislative bias play larger roles in causing DMC than bias in court processing or sentencing. These differences in means are highly significant ($p < .01$).

Table 2 also presents the result of a promax-rotated exploratory factor analysis for the nine attributional frames. Two factors emerge with eigenvalues greater than one. The five criminal injustice frames all load on a single factor, with loadings between .752 and .929. By contrast, the individualistic frames all load on a separate factor, with loadings between .662 and .733. This is consistent with research on endorsement of attributional frames for racial differences in socioeconomic inequality, which finds that

Table 2. Question Wording, Response Distributions and Factor Loadings for Attributional Frames About DMC

Index <i>Survey Question</i>	Percent Large Role ¹			Mean ²	Factor 1	Factor 2
	Total	Non-White	White			
Criminal Injustice Frames ($\alpha = .936$)						
<i>Patrol bias</i> : “Racial/ethnic bias in police patrols and police stops”	29%	58%	20%	2.59	.835	-.068
<i>Arrest bias</i> : “Racial/ethnic bias police officers’ arrest decisions”	23%	52%	14%	2.41	.898	-.021
<i>Court processing bias</i> : “Racial/ethnic bias in court processing”	20%	47%	12%	2.27	.929	.014
<i>Sentencing bias</i> : “Racial/ethnic bias in judges’ sentencing decisions”	18%	43%	10%	2.19	.898	.035
<i>Law bias</i> : “Criminal laws that impact minorities more than whites”	23%	47%	15%	2.41	.752	.036
Individualistic Frames ($\alpha = .801$)						
<i>Criminality</i> : “Higher crime rates among minority youth than among white youth”	64%	63%	64%	3.71	-.017	.662
<i>Gangs</i> : “Higher rates of gang membership among minority youth than among white youth”	75%	69%	77%	3.96	.038	.664
<i>Morals</i> : “Lower levels of respect for authority among minority youth than among white youth”	56%	57%	55%	3.54	.012	.731
<i>Traits</i> : “Higher levels of aggression among minority youth than among white youth”	49%	48%	49%	3.31	-.032	.733
Eigenvalue	—			—	3.775	1.926

NOTES: ¹Includes respondents saying either “a very large role” or “a large role.” ²Responses are coded 1 = a very small role, 2 = a small role, 3 = a moderate role, 4 = a large role, and 5 = a very large role.

individualistic and structural attributions represent distinct attitudinal commitments (Bobo 1991; Hunt 2007). Accordingly, we construct two standardized mean indices to measure separately the endorsement of criminal injustice ($\alpha = .936$) and individualistic frames ($\alpha = .801$). The two indices are weakly correlated ($r = -.087$), which further supports the theoretical distinction between injustice and individualistic frames.

Independent and Control Variables

The key independent variable in our analysis is JCJW's race, coded 0 = non-Hispanic White, 1 = non-White.¹² The analysis also incorporates controls for respondents' total number of years working in the justice system, occupation (1 = sworn law enforcement officer), gender (1 = male), age in years, education (1 = high school degree or less, 6 = PhD), political ideology (1 = very liberal, 5 = very conservative), and region of residence (1 = south). Our interest is specifically in the relationship between endorsing criminal injustice frames and adopting motivational and policy frames about DMC, net of the effect of the former on punitive attitudes (Johnson 2008; Matsueda and Drakulich, 2009); thusly, we control for punitiveness. The measure is a standardized mean index of JCJW's preferred sentences in two sentencing vignettes describing juvenile offenders convicted of felonies (burglary and murder) ($r = .401$).¹³

Finally, we include three controls for crime salience. The first measures whether anyone in the respondent's family had been the victim of a crime in the past five years (1 = yes). The second is a standardized mean index measuring perceived victimization risk (1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely) for four crimes (theft, burglary, assault, and murder) ($\alpha = .818$). The third variable measures perceptions of the juvenile crime trend over the past ten years. Very few JCJW believed juvenile crime had decreased, thus the responses were coded 0 = decreased or decreased greatly, 1 = stayed about the same, 2 = increased, and 3 = increased greatly. Finally, because the highly publicized police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, occurred during the survey administration period, we control for whether respondents completed the questionnaire before or after the event (1 = after Ferguson).

FINDINGS

The starting point for the analysis is to examine whether JCJW's race affects their endorsement of different attributional frames to explain DMC. Table 3 contains two OLS regression equations in which criminal injustice frames (model 1) and individualistic frames (model 2) are specified as the dependent variables. The coefficients for model 1 show a very large and highly significant ($b = .585$, $p < .001$) effect of race on endorsement of criminal injustice frames. As hypothesized, non-White JCJW are much more likely than their White counterparts to believe that bias in the legal system causes DMC. Indeed, the standardized coefficients show that JCJW's race is the strongest predictor of whether they endorse criminal injustice frames to explain DMC.

By contrast, the results for model 2 reveal that race is *not* a significant predictor of endorsing individualistic frames to explain DMC. This conclusion is not an artifact of using arbitrary significance cutoffs; the coefficient for race is close to zero ($b = .067$, $p = .413$). Non-White and White JCJW thus have similar likelihoods of attributing DMC to minorities' criminality, gang membership, disrespect for authority, and propensity for aggression. This evidence suggests that the foremost racial divide among JCJW is *not* in their perceptions of racial differences in antisocial behavior, but rather is in their beliefs about discrimination.

Table 3. OLS Regressions Predicting Endorsement of Attributional Frames for DMC

Variables	Model 1: Criminal Injustice			Model 2: Individualistic		
	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.
Non-White	.585***	.085	.279	.067	.082	.037
Sworn L.E. officer	-.351***	.074	-.199	-.065	.078	-.042
JS career length	-.010*	.005	-.106	-.001	.005	-.008
Male	-.135	.070	-.076	-.004	.073	-.002
Age	.006	.004	.062	.004	.004	.048
Education	.029	.024	.040	-.046	.027	-.073
Conservatism	-.223***	.041	-.210	.111*	.044	.120
Punitiveness	-.165***	.042	-.156	.130**	.045	.140
Victimization risk	-.000	.042	-.000	.083*	.037	.086
Crime increasing	.073	.042	.065	.106*	.046	.107
Crime victim	-.098	.064	-.055	-.054	.068	-.034
Southern	-.040	.067	-.022	.044	.072	.027
After Ferguson	-.099	.062	-.056	.023	.069	.015
<i>R</i> -squared		.403			.096	
<i>N</i>		543			543	

ABBREVIATIONS: *b* = unstandardized coefficient; JS = justice system; LE = law enforcement; SE = robust standard error; St. Coef. = standardized coefficient.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

Next, we analyze endorsement of motivational frames—or vocabularies of motive—to challenge DMC. The variables measuring endorsement of motivational frames are either binary (severity) or ordinal (urgency, propriety); thus, we estimate the models using logistic or ordinal logistic regression. Tables 4–6, respectively, display the results for the severity, urgency, and propriety frames. There are two regression equations for each motivational frame, which are identical with the exception that the indices measuring endorsement of attributional frames are excluded from model 1, but are included in model 2. We use the KHB method (Karlson et al., 2012; Kohler et al., 2011) to test for mediation for these binary and ordinal outcomes; the method accounts for coefficient rescaling in nonlinear probability models due to changes in residual variability.

We first focus on the results for the severity frame, which are presented in Table 4. The coefficients for model 1 show that race has a large and statistically significant effect ($b = .885$, $p < .001$) on endorsement of the severity frame—the belief that DMC increases socioeconomic disadvantage in minority communities. The odds of endorsing this motivational frame are 142% higher for non-White than White JCJW (odds ratio = 2.423). The coefficients in model 2 reveal that including attributional frames in the equation reduces the coefficient for race substantially and renders it nonsignificant ($b = .211$, $p = .452$). The attributional frames endorsed by JCJW to explain DMC are the strongest predictors of whether they endorse the severity frame. Endorsing criminal injustice frames is positively related ($b = 1.475$, $p < .001$) and endorsing individualistic frames is negatively related ($b = -.581$, $p < .001$) to endorsing the severity frame. However, the former relationship is much more pronounced than the latter. A one-unit increase in endorsement of criminal injustice frames is associated with a 337% increase in the odds of endorsing the severity frame (odds ratio = 4.370).

Table 4. Logistic Regressions Predicting Endorsement of Severity Frame for DMC

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.
Criminal injustice	—	—	—	1.475***	.163	.533
Individualistic	—	—	—	-.581***	.165	-.183
Non-White	.885***	.227	.179	.211	.281	.036
Sworn L.E. officer	-.400	.245	-.096	.085	.282	.017
JS career length	.021	.016	.093	.038*	.019	.143
Male	-.118	.230	-.028	.109	.263	.022
Age	-.029*	.015	-.133	-.041*	.017	-.160
Education	.262**	.085	.154	.269**	.095	.135
Conservatism	-.629***	.142	-.252	-.379*	.164	-.129
Punitiveness	-.323*	.128	-.129	-.057	.142	-.019
Victimization risk	.038	.132	.015	.082	.156	.027
Crime increasing	.119	.135	.044	.107	.158	.034
Crime victim	.020	.212	.005	.177	.238	.036
Southern	-.148	.227	-.034	-.074	.258	-.014
After Ferguson	-.108	.212	-.026	.071	.238	.014
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> -squared		.243			.430	
<i>N</i>		543			543	

ABBREVIATIONS: *b* = unstandardized coefficient; JS = justice system; LE = law enforcement; SE = robust standard error; St. Coef. = standardized coefficient.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

The formal KHB test for mediation shows that JCJW's race has a large indirect effect ($b = .823$, $p < .001$) on whether they endorse the severity frame via their endorsement of criminal injustice frames.

Table 5 presents the results for the urgency frame—the belief that DMC is increasing. As with the severity frame, race has a statistically significant effect ($b = .481$, $p = .019$) on endorsing the urgency frame (model 1). The odds of endorsing this motivational frame are 62% higher for non-White than White JCJW (odds ratio = 1.618). However, the coefficient for race is reduced in size and rendered nonsignificant once attributional frames are included in the equation (model 2). There are statistically significant positive associations ($b = .372$, $p < .01$; $b = .237$, $p = .042$, respectively) between endorsing criminal injustice and individualistic frames to explain DMC and endorsing the urgency frame. However, the former is much more pronounced than the latter. A one-unit increase in endorsement of criminal injustice frames is associated with a 45% increase in the odds of endorsing this motivational frame (odds ratio = 1.451). A formal test for mediation using the KHB method shows that race has a significant indirect effect ($b = .233$, $p < .01$) on endorsement of the urgency frame via endorsement of criminal injustice frames.

The results for the propriety frame—the belief that one has a personal obligation or duty to respond to DMC—are displayed in Table 6. As with the other motivational frames, race has a sizable and statistically significant effect ($b = 1.133$, $p < .001$) on endorsing the propriety frame (model 1). The odds of endorsing this motivational frame are 210% higher for non-White than White JCJW (odds ratio = 3.104). The coefficient for race is reduced substantially in size, although it remains significant

Table 5. Ordinal Regressions Predicting Endorsement of Urgency Frame for DMC

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.
Criminal injustice	—	—	—	.372**	.125	.165
Individualistic	—	—	—	.237*	.117	.091
Non-White	.481*	.205	.103	.268	.213	.057
Sworn L.E. officer	-.273	.231	-.069	-.122	.241	-.031
JS career length	-.015	.013	-.072	-.011	.013	-.054
Male	-.087	.212	-.022	-.049	.213	-.012
Age	-.006	.012	-.031	-.009	.012	-.044
Education	-.042	.068	-.026	-.037	.069	-.023
Conservatism	-.210	.109	-.089	-.151	.112	-.063
Punitiveness	-.211	.116	-.090	-.180	.117	-.075
Victimization risk	.173	.117	.070	.154	.116	.062
Crime increasing	.668***	.127	.264	.632***	.127	.246
Crime victim	-.469*	.185	-.117	-.430*	.185	-.106
Southern	.026	.201	-.006	.033	.202	.008
After Ferguson	-.213	.180	-.054	-.188	.182	-.047
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> -squared		.146			.169	
<i>N</i>		543			543	

ABBREVIATIONS: *b* = unstandardized coefficient; JS = justice system; LE = law enforcement; SE = robust standard error; St. Coef. = standardized coefficient.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

(*b* = .648, *p* < .01), once attributional frames are included in the equation (model 2). Endorsing criminal injustice frames is positively related (*b* = 1.033, *p* < .001) and endorsing individualistic frames is negatively related (*b* = -.230, *p* = .042) to endorsing the propriety frame. The standardized coefficients indicate that endorsing criminal justice frames is by far the strongest predictor of endorsing the propriety frame. A one-unit increase in endorsement of criminal injustice frames is associated with a 181% increase in the odds of endorsing the propriety frame (odds ratio = 2.809). As before, the results from the KHB test for mediation reveal that JCJW's race has a large significant indirect effect (*b* = .588, *p* < .001) on whether they endorse the propriety frame via their endorsement of criminal injustice frames.

The final portion of the analysis examines the endorsement of policy frames about DMC. Table 7 presents four regression equations with the two separate policy frames specified as the dependent variables. There are two equations for each dependent variable; one includes and the other excludes the measures of attributional frames. The results from these equations are easily summarized. First, JCJW's race strongly predicts both policy frames (*b* = .725, *p* < .001; *b* = .355, *p* < .001, respectively). Non-White JCJW are much more likely than their White counterparts to believe that DMC should be a policy priority and to support police racial diversification and cultural training. Second, in both cases, the coefficient for race is reduced substantially after including the measures of attributional frames. Third, criminal injustice frames are positively related to both policy frames (*b* = 1.651, *p* < .001; *b* = .325, *p* < .001, respectively), whereas individualistic frames are negatively related to both frames (*b* = -.320, *p* < .01; *b* = -.127, *p* < .001, respectively). Fourth, endorsing criminal injustice

Table 6. Ordinal Regressions Predicting Endorsement of Propriety Frame for DMC

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.
Criminal injustice	—	—	—	1.033***	.132	.404
Individualistic	—	—	—	-.230*	.113	-.079
Non-White	1.133***	.228	.229	.648**	.229	.121
Sworn L.E. officer	-.250	.206	-.060	.012	.206	.003
JS career length	.015	.013	.065	.028	.014	.114
Male	-.425*	.202	-.102	-.324	.197	-.072
Age	.008	.013	.037	.001	.013	.004
Education	-.033	.075	-.019	-.071	.076	-.039
Conservatism	-.622***	.124	-.249	-.388**	.126	-.143
Punitiveness	-.360**	.113	-.144	-.209	.112	-.077
Victimization risk	-.007	.111	-.003	-.009	.112	-.003
Crime increasing	.047	.117	.018	.029	.114	.010
Crime victim	-.165	.171	-.039	-.105	.169	-.023
Southern	.102	.184	.023	.138	.181	.029
After Ferguson	-.331	.168	-.079	-.257	.172	-.057
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> -squared		.247			.352	
<i>N</i>		543			543	

ABBREVIATIONS: *b* = unstandardized coefficient; JS = justice system; LE = law enforcement; SE = robust standard error; St. Coef. = standardized coefficient.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

frames is by far the strongest predictor for both policy frames. For example, in model 4, which predicts support for police racial diversification and cultural training, the standardized coefficient for criminal injustice frames (Beta = .380) is more than twice as large as that for any other variable, including race (Beta = .097) and conservatism (Beta = -.160). Fifth, JCJW's race has a large and statistically significant indirect effect on whether they endorse the policy frames through their endorsement of criminal injustice frames (*b* = .944, *p* < .001; *b* = .190, *p* < .001, respectively).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Racial caste systems do not require racial hostility or overt bigotry to thrive. They need only racial indifference.

—Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2010, p. 14)

Our study sought to understand indifference to carceral inequality among JCJW. Less than 20% of the JCJW in our sample believed that reducing carceral inequality in the juvenile justice system (or DMC) should be a high or very high priority for policy makers and practitioners; 45% thought it should be a low or very low priority. Prior studies have also documented low levels of concern about DMC among JCJW (Talley et al., 2005; Ward et al., 2011). Yet, the explanations for this indifference have thus far remained elusive.

Table 7. Ordinal and OLS Regressions Predicting Endorsement of Policy Frames for DMC

Variables	DV = Make Priority						DV = Police Diversification and Training					
	Model 1 ^a			Model 2 ^a			Model 3 ^b			Model 4 ^b		
	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.	<i>b</i>	SE	St. Coef.
Criminal injustice	—	—	—	1.651***	.141	.586	—	—	—	.325***	.038	.380
Individualistic	—	—	—	-.320**	.110	-.099	—	—	—	-.127**	.037	-.130
Non-White	.725***	.199	.147	-.098	.212	-.017	.355***	.072	.199	.174**	.064	.097
Sworn L.E. officer	-.579**	.208	-.139	-.147	.218	-.029	-.177*	.069	-.117	-.071	.065	-.047
JS career length	.002	.013	.007	.015	.013	.054	-.001	.004	-.009	.003	.004	.031
Male	-.182	.194	-.044	-.011	.194	.002	-.200**	.066	-.132	-.157*	.061	-.103
Age	.001	.011	.006	-.003	.011	-.013	.007	.004	.084	.005	.004	.066
Education	.095	.067	.056	.069	.069	.034	.059*	.024	.095	.043	.022	.070
Conservatism	-.379**	.110	-.152	-.047	.107	-.016	-.231***	.040	-.255	-.145***	.039	-.160
Punitiveness	-.584***	.112	-.234	-.415***	.104	-.139	-.159***	.038	-.176	-.089*	.035	-.098
Victimization risk	-.078	.096	-.030	-.083	.099	-.027	.001	.040	.001	.012	.038	.012
Crime increasing	.113	.117	.042	.059	.114	.019	-.008	.037	-.009	-.019	.033	-.019
Crime victim	-.272	.168	-.064	-.142	.169	-.028	-.099	.056	-.064	-.074	.050	-.048
Southern	.009	.175	.002	.101	.188	.019	.028	.062	.017	.046	.055	.029
After Ferguson	-.289	.163	-.069	-.158	.171	-.032	-.023	.060	-.015	.012	.055	.008
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> -squared		.247			.467			—			—	
<i>R</i> -squared		—			—			.342			.445	
<i>N</i>		543			543			543			543	

NOTES: ^aOrdinal logistic regression; ^blinear regression.

ABBREVIATIONS: *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient; JS = justice system; DV = dependent variable; LE = law enforcement; SE = standard error; St. Coef. = standardized coefficient.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

Drawing on insights from the framing perspective, comparative conflict theory, and group position theory, we theorized that criminal injustice frames fail to resonate with many JCJW, especially Whites, and that this explains why JCJW often dismiss the argument that carceral inequality is a social problem that warrants ameliorative action. The evidence from our analysis of JCJW's views about DMC strongly supports our theory. Across the different outcomes examined, three findings emerged consistently: 1) JCJW's race had a strong effect on their endorsement of motivational and policy frames challenging DMC; 2) this effect reflected the heavy influence of race on the resonance of criminal injustice frames about DMC; and 3) criminal injustice frames were more strongly related than race, individualistic frames, and most other variables to endorsement of each of the motivational and policy frames about DMC.

Our findings strongly support the framing perspective, which holds that endorsement of an injustice frame "is the seedling for the development of a [complete] *collective action frame*" (Benford 1997, p. 416, emphasis in original). A collective action frame is the full set of "action-oriented ... beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate" ameliorative mobilization (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614). More generally, the findings are consistent with the theoretical argument that a sense of injustice facilitates endorsement of motivational and policy frames by increasing attention to relevant framing activities and personal identification with the victims of injustice (Gamson 1992). Additional research is needed, however, to test these hypothesized mediating mechanisms.

Our study also shows that many of the key conclusions from research on public opinion about Black-White socioeconomic inequality generalize to JCJW's views about carceral inequality. First, similar to attributions for socioeconomic disparities (Bobo 1991; Hunt 2007; Kluegel 1990), we find that structural and individualistic attributions for racial disparities in justice system involvement are not opposites, but rather constitute distinct attitudes. The evidence herein thus strongly supports the notion that "ambivalence or inconsistency is an important hallmark of contemporary racial attitudes" (Kluegel 1990, p. 512). Second, we show that perceived discrimination is far more important than individualistic attributions for explaining policy attitudes about carceral inequality, which parallels findings for attitudes about policies to reduce socioeconomic disparities (Bobo and Kluegel, 1997; Kluegel 1990).

The results herein are also similar to findings from the literature on public support for punitive crime policies. That research has found that race plays a large role in shaping attitudes toward policies like the death penalty (Bobo and Johnson, 2004; Peffley and Hurwitz, 2010). Further, those studies have shown that the effect of race on punitiveness is largely explained by racial attitudes, especially views about the presence and importance of racial discrimination (modern racism, symbolic racism) (Brown and Socia, 2016; Unnever and Cullen, 2007; Unnever et al., 2008). Similarly, in our study, the relationship between race and endorsement of severity, urgency, propriety, and policy frames was largely indirect through beliefs about discrimination in the criminal justice system—or criminal injustice frames.

Although the relationship between endorsing criminal injustice frames (or perceiving discrimination by legal actors) and JCJW's beliefs about the importance of addressing carceral inequality may seem commonsensical, it has substantial implications. Racial disparities in justice system involvement sustain the vast socioeconomic inequalities that exist between racial groups in America (Pager 2007; Western 2006). Alexander warns that the current racial caste system—racialized mass incarceration—"may prove to be more durable than its predecessors," precisely because it "is not explicitly based on race" (2010, p. 179). That is, the fact that the system is formally colorblind vindicates its racialized nature and consequences in the eyes of many JCJW and citizens.

An important policy question, then, is how to break this “spell of callous colorblindness” (Alexander 2010, p. 228) among JCJW as well as members of the public?

Naomi Murakawa and Katherine Beckett (2010) suggest that what allowed racialized mass incarceration to occur even as explicit prejudice declined—or what they label the “post-civil rights paradox”—was a narrowing of definitions of racism and discrimination, particularly among Whites, to focus only on intentional bias that causes specific instances of inequality. Theoretically, a narrow ideological understanding of what constitutes racial bias should reduce the narrative fidelity of criminal injustice frames (Benford and Snow, 2000). This likely explains, in part, the low resonance of criminal injustice frames among White JCJW. However, if interventions could be designed to broaden definitions of racial bias, we would expect an increase in concern among JCJW about carceral inequality. Prior research suggests that attitudes toward racial issues are “strikingly pliable” (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993, p. 143). Indeed, Glen Adams and colleagues (2008) reported experimental evidence that tutorials on the systemic nature of racism can cause lasting changes in individuals’ definitions and perceptions of racial bias. Future studies are therefore needed that examine whether similar interventions can increase JCJW’s concern about carceral inequality and support for policies aimed at reducing it.

Our study is not without limitations, which provide opportunities for future research. Most notably, similar to previous research with justice system actors (Bridges and Steen, 1998; Nix and Pickett, 2017; Tyler et al., 2007), we analyze data from a nonprobability, albeit nationwide, sample of JCJW. As a result, we simply cannot be sure that our findings will generalize to any broader population. We do anticipate that our results will generalize given that they are consistent with extant theory, and are also very similar to those observed in prior research examining related topics (Bobo 1991; Bobo and Kluegel, 1997; Kluegel 1990; Unnever 2008; Ward et al., 2011). Nonetheless, future research is needed that attempts to replicate our findings using representative samples of JCJW, as well as representative samples of specific types of JCJW, such as police officers or juvenile probation officers.

Additionally, our data did not include measures of the empirical credibility of injustice frames or the adoption of vocabularies of efficacy for addressing carceral inequality. There is thus a need for additional studies that explore the factors that impact the empirical credibility of injustice frames, and whether endorsement of injustice frames can, in turn, help to explain adoption of efficacy frames. More generally, we advocate for devoting greater empirical attention to views about racial disparities in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Given that carceral inequality has profound social effects (Western 2006), and is a linchpin of America’s new racial caste system (Alexander 2010), the paucity of research on views about the causes, consequences, and policy importance of racial disparities in justice system involvement is startling (Unnever 2008; Ward et al., 2011).

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NOTES

1. There are growing legislative and professional efforts to reduce mass incarceration in the United States. However, the movement to reduce mass incarceration is not the same as advocacy against carceral inequality (Alexander 2010; Gottschalk 2015). Rather, efforts to reduce mass incarceration often focus on the costs of imprisonment, rather than the race question. Indeed, scholars have lamented that the movement against mass incarceration often deemphasizes the issue of minority overrepresentation (Alexander 2010). An exception was

the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, which reduced sentencing disparities for possessing crack versus powder cocaine (Hyser 2012).

2. In 2002, the language in the DMC mandate was changed to focus more broadly on “disproportionate minority contact,” instead of “disproportionate minority confinement.”
3. Implicit and explicit racial bias should further reduce the cultural resonance of criminal injustice frames among Whites (Drakulich 2015a, 2015b).
4. Although the NCJTC Listserv contained roughly 50,000 email addresses at the time of the survey, it is not clear how many of these email addresses were still in use. Individuals sometimes change their email addresses, close their email accounts, open new accounts, or use multiple accounts, but check each account only occasionally (Fricker 2008). It is therefore unclear how many individuals actually received the invitation to participate in the survey.
5. Krosnick and colleagues explained in their report on survey research to the National Science Foundation that “nonresponse bias is rarely notably related to [the] nonresponse rate” (2015, p. 6).
6. For example, in our study we know the findings are not limited to JCJP from any specific state or agency precisely because the sample includes JCJP from different states and agencies.
7. The item nonresponse was not limited to any specific variable. In supplementary models (available upon request), we reestimated the models after using multiple imputation to impute missing data for the ninety-three persons who completed the questionnaire but had item non-response on one or more of the variables used in the analysis. We generated twenty-five complete data sets using the “mi impute mvn” command in Stata 14 with an imputation equation that included all of the variables used in our analysis (Allison 2001). The subsequent models were estimated separately for each of these complete datasets, and results were pooled using Rubin’s (1987) combination rules, which adjust estimates to account for between imputation-variability. The results from these models were substantively identical to those obtained using listwise deletion.
8. We provided respondents with the following description of DMC: “The term ‘DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY CONTACT’ refers to the overrepresentation of minority (i.e., nonwhite) youth in the juvenile justice system. Statistics show that although minority youth account for only a small proportion of the total youth population, they account for a large proportion of the youth who come into contact with the justice system. Put simply, minority youth are MORE LIKELY TO BE ARRESTED AND INCARCERATED than are white youth.”
9. There are certainly other outcomes of DMC. Our goal with this question was simply to measure whether respondents tended to believe that DMC had positive or negative social outcomes. We phrased the question as we did because prior interviews with JCJW led us to believe that many of them perceive that DMC mainly functions to remove criminals and those with criminal values from communities, thus making the communities safer.
10. The correlation between personal importance (propriety) and policy importance is $r = .558$.
11. Substantively identical findings are obtained when each policy item is analyzed as a separate dependent variable, instead of combining the three items into an index.
12. The non-Whites in our sample constituted a diverse group, including African Americans (21%), Hispanics (25%), Asians (10%), American Indians (38%), and others (e.g., mixed race) (6%).
13. We estimated supplementary models excluding the measure of punitiveness (available upon request). The results were substantively identical to those from the models in which punitiveness is included as a control.

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