The Campus Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict

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Racial conflict was becoming commonplace on American college campuses throughout the 1980s, with more than 100 college campuses reporting incidents of racial/ethnic harassment and violence in each of the last two years of the decade [42]. The most highly publicized racial incidents, ranging from verbal harassment to violent beatings, occurred at some of the most elite institutions in the country [56, 27]. Students organized demonstrations as a direct response to these problems, or to express solidarity with students facing similar problems at other institutions [60]. Although these events have provided the impetus for examining the quality of race relations on individual college campuses, researchers have not explored at any great length the nature of campus race relations across a variety of institutional contexts.

While the research on minorities in higher education is extensive, a surprisingly small number of empirical studies have focused on campus racial climates. Only a few researchers have used measures of campus race relations in their models of student persistence [54, 57, 58], academic achievement [3, 44, 43, 47], and social involvement [3]. While this is an important step toward developing appropriate models that describe the college experiences of minority students, these studies have revealed a conflicting pattern of relations between hostile racial climates and student outcomes [32]. We need a better understanding of what constitutes racially tense interpersonal environments before considering how these climates are related to student outcomes. This study offers a unique opportunity to examine racial tension on campus because it focuses on the experiences of a cohort of students who attended college from 1985 to 1989, a period when racial incidents and related student protests occurred on many college campuses. By drawing upon the
work from previous studies, the goal of the study is to examine comparative institutional data that may help identify contexts for racial conflict.

The research literature suggests that instances of overt racial conflict can no longer be viewed as aberrations or isolated incidents, but rather are indicators of a more general problem of unresolved racial issues in college environments and in society at large. Researchers investigating racial climates in the mid-1970s found that while college campuses exerted considerable energy in initiating programs and services in response to the initial entrance of black students, institutions did not attend to minority-majority relations or the psychological climate [50]. Recent studies have shown that, even on relatively calm campuses, there are differences in racial attitudes and considerable social distance among students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds [39, 40]. Alienation from the mainstream of campus life is also reported to be particularly acute among minority students on predominantly white campuses [4, 31, 47]. A recent survey of academic administrators revealed that only one in four felt their campus provided an "excellent" to "very good" climate for black students, and only 21% felt they provided a supportive climate for Hispanics [25]. If these issues have been left unattended since the influx of minorities into higher education in the 1960s, it is no wonder that campuses are dealing with racial tensions today.

The Social Context

External forces and the events of the past decade have helped to make these unresolved issues more salient. The resurgence of overt hostilities on campuses, reported as early as 1979 [54], accompanied events that signalled the questioning of affirmative action practices (e.g. Bakke), declining federal commitment to issues that affect minorities, renewed Ku Klux Klan activity, and reports of increasing racial discord in urban communities [35, 27, 59]. Significant policy trends that are connected with issues of racial inequality have directly affected institutions of higher education in the 1980s. For example, reductions in federal aid programs during the Reagan years resulted in changes in financial
aid packaging policy at the institutional level, which many contend have disproportionately affected blacks and Hispanics in their decisions to attend or remain in college [10, 22, 45, 46, 56]. Diminishing federal support for Pell grants and minority-targeted fellowships in the current administration promises to hasten the decline of college participation rates for low-income and minority groups [5, 20, 21].

The civil rights movement, the elimination of de jure segregation in the public sector (Brown v. the Board of Education [19]), litigation in areas related to the Civil Rights Law (Title VI), and a surge in minority enrollments up until the mid-1970s raised the level of public consciousness regarding inequalities in the education of minority groups. These events represented tremendous strides in progress toward eliminating overt aspects of discrimination in educational institutions, making such practices illegal and unethical in the public mind. However, scholars concede that institutional compliance with legal injunctions (e.g., Adams v. Richardson [2], Adams v. Califano [1]) for increased minority participation in higher education continues to be problematic [66, 61, 59], the system of higher education remains racially stratified [62], and vestiges of discrimination exist in everyday administrative practices [51].

Institutional Contexts

Early studies found that institutional selectivity and size were both positively associated with student unrest involving campus racial policies [7, 11]. Researchers offered two alternative interpretations: a) selective institutions and large campuses are environments that are more likely to attract protest-prone students, and b) large institutions are characterized by an impersonal atmosphere and lack of concern for the individual student, thereby promoting student discontent. The first interpretation suggests that conflict on campus is largely due to the types of students an institution recruits. Studies support the notion that elite institutions tend to attract students with strong ideological commitments [30] and foster political liberalism [9]. In contrast, the second interpretation states that institutional size may be a proxy for attention to students and posits that the extent to which
institutions are supportive of students helps maintain a conflict-free environment. Recent research shows that higher rates of institutional spending (per student) in the areas of student services and student aid (non-repayable grants and fellowships) are related to lower student perceptions of racial tension on campuses [32]. Although there is research support for both interpretations, one focuses on the individual as the source of conflict, while the other suggests that institutional contexts are largely responsible for setting the stage for conflict.

One of the most comprehensive studies of the racial climate, initiated on the campuses of 13 four-year institutions, systematically documented the historical and environmental forces that accompanied substantial increases in black student enrollment from 1968 to 1975 [50]. In addition to campus site visits, extensive surveys of administrators, faculty, and students at four of the large institutions explored three broad areas of institutional responsiveness to the entrance of black students: Institutional commitment, program responses, and the attitudinal or perceptual climate. Although the large institutions had invested a fair amount of time and funds in minority programs and services, researchers found that these institutions differed substantially in ratings of relative priorities placed on the recruitment of black students, provision for nonacademic support, and commitment to affirmative action. They also observed that campuses paid little attention to the interpersonal aspects of race relations, which were characterized by "voluntary segregation or by indifference thinly covering interracial conflicts and feelings of mistrust" [50, p. 319]. They concluded that a failure to deal with any of the issues at the institutional, programmatic, or individual level was "likely to become a source of difficulty at some point in these institutions' relationships with minorities" [50, p. 316]. Although researches "prophesied" problems with minority students, they did not foresee the extent to which an institution's relationship with majority students would become equally problematic in matters such as admissions (e.g., Bakke), student organizations (fraternities), student publications (e.g., Dartmouth Review). Still, these early findings
hold important implications for the examination of contemporary racial tension with regard to the role of institutional priorities and the impact of changing enrollments.

A 1989 survey [25] of academic administrators at 456 randomly selected institutions revealed distinct differences by institution type in their priorities for cultural diversity, programmatic activity, and the amount of racial tension reported on campus. Administrators at doctoral institutions reported the most programmatic activity to improve minority participation at all levels of the university, including efforts to increase the number of minority of faculty and "a lot" of activity to increase the enrollment of minority students at the undergraduate level. Comprehensive universities, were the next most active in this regard. At the same time, however, racial tensions were reported more often at comprehensive and doctoral institutions than at other types of institutions. In direct contrast, administrators from private baccalaureate institutions reported the least racial tension among the four-year institutions; but also gave their institutions the lowest ratings in their ability to attract black and Hispanic students. These ratings, from one of the top academic administrators at each campus, indicate distinct differences among four-year institutions that include both a public/private dichotomy and contradictions in campus racial climates.

Conducted some 14 years apart, both of these studies suggest that despite visible programmatic changes, institutions vary considerably both in their commitment to diversity and in the amount of racial conflict on campus. These findings run counter to the commonly held assumption that shifts in institutional priorities in favor of diversity would essentially lead to better racial climates. Apparently, a shift in institutional priorities is more difficult to achieve and may involve resolving a more complex set of institutional priorities or problems. Richardson and Skinner's [52] model of institutional adaptation to diversity proposes that quality and diversity may be seen as sources of conflict within institutions, and the extent to which institutional interventions can be developed to achieve a balance of the two goals results in equity of outcomes. While there has been substantial
debate regarding the relationship of these two priorities, there has been little concern about whether the quest for institutional quality or a shift in priorities of institutional commitment to diversity may be related to racial tensions on campus.

The adaptation model has several underlying premises that are reexamined here in relation to the campus climate. The model equates quality with individual achievement, suggesting that the focus of selective institutions is high on achievement and low on diversity while the reverse is true for open access institutions. The problem with this logic is that all educational institutions have a concern for individual achievement; the difference between these types of institutions is that student achievement must be proven prior to admission with selective institutions, while open access institutions are willing to allow students to prove achievement during college. Therefore, selective institutions may have less to do with improving individual achievement than with maintaining institutional status and reputation [8]. This forces us to reexamine the conflict in priorities: The source of conflict is not between diversity and achievement, but instead originates from differences in institutional priorities that work to preserve inequalities. For example, although campus race relations is not an aspect of the adaptation model, researchers acknowledge that "our society has historically treated minority populations as inferior" ([52], p.487) and report that the social environment of the large predominantly white universities has been problematic, even for minority students with strong academic preparation [53]. Traditional notions of quality are often linked to both selectivity and an institutional preoccupation with resource accumulation and reputation enhancement [8]. It may be that minority students are generally undervalued (regardless of their achievement characteristics), while high achieving white students are viewed as resources. Therefore, priorities that guide an institution and its members may have underlying ideological assumptions that are linked with racial issues.

A theoretical tradition supports the view that our institutions, particularly our schools, have embedded ideologies that work to preserve inequality [17, 16, 29]. Research
on racial inequality and attitudes have adopted a similar notion of dominant ideological interests. Arce [6] introduced the concept of "academic colonialism" when referring to Chicano participation in academe. Academic colonialism refers to the imposition of dominant ideologies (e.g. intellectual premises, concepts, practices, etc.) and/or the uncritical acceptance of these ideologies by subordinate groups. Similarly, others assert that dominant group interests are served in maintaining a status quo that justifies unequal social relations and achieves some level of consensus about such arrangements among subordinate groups [33, 34, 40]. Viewed from this perspective, the conflict between quality and diversity appears contrived and arguments for "quality" may be used as a way to uniformly exclude minorities (faculty and students) and their perspectives.

When "harmonious inequality" is challenged by subordinates, dominant groups are forced to defend their privilege [34]. This perspective suggests that mean-spirited acts of racial harassment on the part of white students may represent a reassertion of group dominance in an era when prevailing dominant group ideologies are in question. However, the defense of dominant group privilege is less often characterized by such acts of "traditional" racism on campus and more often takes on a sophisticated guise as an expressed concern for the individual that is consistent with prevailing democratic values--so long as one chooses to ignore both the historical and continuous disadvantages under which subordinate groups operate. As researchers [40] point out, this concern for individual privilege is at the heart of the meritocratic ethic in higher education. It is also at the center of contention with regards to virtually every institutional response to eliminate inequalities and discriminatory practices for various groups that include affirmative action, the development of disciplinary codes to prohibit harassment, and the practice of providing minority-targeted scholarships\(^1\). While these actions indicate white opposition to

\(^1\) In the case of minority-targeted scholarships, the defense of individual privilege ran counter to group norms. Bobo & Kluegel (1991) presented recent data from the General Social Survey that show as the federal administration launched an attack on minority-targeted scholarships, more than 80\% of the American public supported such a policy. The Administration chose to quickly reexamine the issue.
in institutional commitment to diversity, up until this point there has been no empirical proof that such a commitment is related to racial tension on campus.

Race relations theorists propose that racial conflict arises out of a sense of threat to group position, when the dominant group perceives the risk of losing power, resources, or other advantages [14, 64]. Work in the area of relative numbers of underrepresented groups suggests that the proportions of socially and culturally different people in a group are critical in shaping the dynamics of social interaction [37]. Blalock [13] hypothesized that "as the minority percentage increases, we would expect to find increasing discriminatory behavior" (p.148) because more members of the minority group will be in direct competition with someone from the dominant group. Recent research on racial attitudes show decreases in white support for integration and increases in perceived threat from blacks as the relative size of the black population increased in communities [28]. Thus, differences in minority enrollment may account for variations in racial tension and contradictions observed in studies of institution type and the racial climate. Faced with impending demographic changes [27], such effects may have important implications for college campuses.

**Student Perceptions and Ethnic Group Differences**

While researchers have found that student perceptions vary by race in college environments, only a handful of studies have compared perceptions of the racial climate among black, Chicano and white college students [65]. A study at one predominantly white university showed that although a higher percentage of blacks than Chicanos said they have personally experienced discrimination, these reports were positively related to feelings of alienation only among Chicano students [47]. Loo and Rolison [39] also found that the majority of white students (68 %) thought that the university was generally supportive of minority students, while only 28 % of the black and Chicano students expressed the same opinion. In the same study, certain behaviors (e.g., ethnic group
student perceptions of institutional priorities that reflect institutional commitment to cultural diversity, a resource/reputation orientation, and a student-centered orientation. Within this framework, the proximal measures (student perceptions of the environment) are hypothesized to have a greater influence than the distal measures of the environment on perceptions of racial tension.

Data Sources

This study draws upon several major sources of data. The primary source of student data came from responses to a four-year longitudinal survey, the 1989 Follow-up Survey (FUS) to the 1985 Freshman Survey, a project of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. The 1985 Freshman Survey was administered during freshman orientation and the FUS was sent to the student's home address in the summer and fall of 1989, four years after college entry. The FUS was administered according to two different sampling techniques to address the need for national normative data and to facilitate separate group analyses. The first student sample was drawn from the population of first-time, full-time freshmen responding to the 1985 Survey using a stratified, random procedure to ensure representation of the different types of institutions in higher education. (Stratification involved 23 cells reflecting institutional selectivity, control, race, sex, and the type of institution). Based on patterns of response observed in earlier FUS studies, a random sample (20,317) was selected to yield a minimal number (175) of respondents in each stratification cell. Although the response rate was 23%, the actual number of respondents (4,672) provided slightly more students in each category for analyses. National data presented from the stratified, random sample have been statistically adjusted for nonresponse and weighted to approximate the national population of students entering college for the first time in 1985. (The statistical weighting methodology used in all HERI Follow-up surveys can be found in Astin, Korn, Dey, & Hurtado [12]).
While this sampling procedure is well-suited for analyses of national normative data, the numbers of minority students drawn randomly across institutions remains extremely small for the purposes of separate group analyses. A second procedure was necessary to yield a sample more conducive to analyses on ethnic groups attending the same institution. A group of four-year institutions were selected to maximize variability according to student academic programs and minority enrollment in addition to institutional type, control, and selectivity. Full cohorts of students (34,323) were surveyed, yielding 10,640 respondents (31% response rate).

A secondary data sampling procedure was employed to select only those students representing three ethnic groups (black, Chicano, and white students) from among respondents attending 116 predominantly white institutions. Each institution was considered as a separate stratum with stratified random sampling conducted on a 3:1 white/minority ratio. The purpose of this procedure was to yield a sample of white students that was distributed across institutions in a manner similar to the distribution of minority students. This final selection criteria yielded a sample of 1,825 white students, 328 black, and 340 Chicano students. The major analyses for this study utilizes the data from this selected sample.

Basic institutional characteristics and undergraduate ethnic enrollments were also obtained from the data files of the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS, formerly HEGIS)\(^1\). Black, Hispanic, and white student enrollment data for 1982, 1986, and 1988 at each institution were obtained from this national source. Financial data on 1985 institutional expenditures, reported to the Department of Education, were similarly obtained and all institutional data were merged with student survey data for analyses.

\(^1\)The U.S. Department of Education IPEDS still collects and reported data on Chicanos under the umbrella category of 'Hispanic', even though census data and educational data show dramatic differences among Latino groups (Estrada, 1988; Astin, 1982). There is no support of breaking out the Hispanic category in ways that would enable us to understand the particular problems of Chicanos or other Latino groups.
Measures

A total of 21 independent variables were selected for the analyses. The dependent variable consisted of a factorially confirmed scale representing student perceptions of racial tension on campus [32]. Variable definitions are shown on Table A.1, along with coding schemes and scales. The theoretical rationale for each is described below.

Since the distribution of students across different college environments is never random, one of the basic features of any research design is to control for student characteristics at the point of initial exposure to the environment. For example, selective institutions tend to attract students who are more critical of their environments (e.g. liberal and protest “prone”), come from families with higher incomes, and have higher academic ability [7, 9]. Parental income and student academic ability (high school grade point average) were control variables, along with a number of self-rating and value measures on the 1985 Freshman Survey that helped to detect predispositions in student perceptions prior to any significant college influence. These latter measures included the student’s self-rating of their political view, the chances that they would become involved in campus protest, and the importance they attribute to the goal of helping to promote racial understanding. Aside from the need for statistical control, additional student background characteristics were selected for the analyses because they are established correlates of racial attitudes and perceptions. Females are generally more supportive of affirmative action and racial integration [15], the well-educated tend to be more supportive of principles of racial integration (but not decidedly more willing to support specific equity policies) [33, 34], and age is negatively associated with racial integration [28]. Previous research has also suggested that a sense of interpersonal accomplishment or social self-confidence may be an important precursor to social involvement among minorities [4] and perceptions of racial tension on campus among white students [32]. Thus, additional student background variables included a student’s social self-confidence, age, level of parent’s education, and gender.
Factor scales representing student perceptions of their environment included institutional commitment to diversity, and reputation/resource oriented or student-oriented priorities. To help identify institutional policies useful in improving racial climates, several measures were also obtained independent of student observation. These included institutional expenditures per student in student services and student aid (non-repayable grants and fellowships), the proportion of black and Hispanic undergraduate enrollment in 1986, and changes in black and Hispanic enrollment over a six year period (1982 - 1988) on each campus. These variables also served as parallel measures for student perceptions regarding an institution’s student-oriented priorities and commitment to diversity. Two additional college compositional variables included in the analyses, institutional size and selectivity, served to test alternative interpretations derived from previous work [7, 8].

Five factors derived from previous climate studies [32, 23] were used in the regression analyses of campus racial tension on student and institutional characteristics. Since items (Table A.2) were on similar scales, new variables were created by summing responses on each item to construct a factor scale. Table 1 shows that all the scales have fairly high reliabilities that are similar across groups. The range on reliabilities across groups for a sixth factor representing student socioeconomic status was too wide to be considered a generalizable construct in analyses across groups, therefore, multiple indicators (parental income and the level of mother’s and father’s education) were entered in the equation with full recognition that this practice may underestimate the effects of each indicator. The effects of these variables and other complex relationships among the independent variables were carefully monitored prior to and after entry into the equation using a computer software program, Betaview, designed for this purpose [24].
Table 1

Factor Scales
Estimates of Internal Consistencies (Alpha) by Student Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Scale</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Chicano</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus Racial Tension</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Self-Confidence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Commitment to Diversity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-oriented Emphasis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation Emphasis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyses

Group differences were assessed using two-tailed tests of significance on the means for each group in relation to another (three pair combinations for each variable). Separate group analyses were then conducted using multiple regression techniques. Variables were entered concurrently in three stages to observe changes in coefficients. The first stage explored the extent to which perceptions of racial tension were a function of the cultural and psychological baggage that students bring with them to college, including demographic attributes and tendencies that might suggest a precollapse bias in their views regarding the climate. Institutional priorities, hypothesized to be the primary explanatory variables that would diminish the impact of college composition variables (size and selectivity), were entered in the next stage. Composition variables were entered in the final stage to determine if these structural aspects of the environment remain central to shaping perceptions of the climate. Interaction terms representing 1) high reputation and institutional commitment to diversity and 2) high reputation and student-oriented priorities were forward entered in a second regression model for each group to determine if these combinations could account for a significant addition in the proportion of variance in perceptions of racial tension.
Results

Data from the national random survey is presented in Table 2 to provide an overview of students’ perceptions of racial climate issues at all four-year institutions. While the majority of undergraduates do not believe that racial discrimination is “a thing of the past,” approximately 12% of all four-year college students feel that racial discrimination is no longer a problem in America. Other items reflected a range of responses among institution types, suggesting that opinions may be partially due to their experiences in different college environments. Data show that while the phenomenon of racial conflict appears to be present on all college campuses, approximately one in three (34%) students who attended universities perceived a lot of racial conflict at their institution. Students at public and private universities were also more likely to report a lack of trust between minority student groups and administrators, and least likely to report that students of different ethnic origins get along well with one another, when compared with students at other types of institutions. These results appear to support accounts of racial harassment incidents occurring primarily at public and private universities from 1985 - 1989 [27]. Among the four-year colleges, private four-year institutions fared better than public-four year institutions on these race relation measures. Compared with all institutions, students at Catholic institutions are least likely to report racial conflict (12%), mistrust between minority groups and administrators (16%) and most likely to report good communication among ethnic groups (82%). A higher proportion of students at Protestant (81%) and nonsectarian (76%) institutions also reported that most faculty are sensitive to the issues of minorities at their institution than at other types of colleges. Responses on a general measure of curriculum integration varied the least across institution types; from 41 (private university) to 50% (nonsectarian) of undergraduates perceive that many courses at their institution include minority perspectives.
The data show considerably less institutional variation on items that reflect institutional priorities for cultural diversity than on measures of campus race-related behaviors. The priority "to recruit more minority students" showed the most institutional variation, with students at universities (40%) and public four-year colleges (46.9%) more likely to report this objective was a "high" or the "highest priority" of their institution. Students at public institutions were also more likely to feel that increasing the representation of minorities in the faculty and administration was a high priority (30 - 32%) than students at private institutions. Finally, given public statements regarding diversity goals and the general nature of items reflecting priorities to "create a diverse multicultural environment on campus" and "develop an appreciation for a multicultural society among faculty and students," one wonders why more students do not believe these are a higher priority on campuses (37-45% and 36-46%, respectively). To what extent are students' perception of racial tension on campus related to their view of institutional priorities for cultural diversity? What can explain the institutional contradictions between priorities and racial tension observed here and in previous studies [50, 25]? While immediate answers are not available, additional analyses begin to provide insights into the institutional contexts for conflict and contradiction.

Table 3 shows means, standard deviations, and tests of significance on selected demographic and perceptual measures for the three racial/ethnic groups. This table presents both a description of the sample of students selected from predominantly white institutions and results from analyses that assessed mean group differences. On the average, Chicano students were most likely to be first generation college students and come from families with lower incomes ($X = 27,850) than either their black or white classmates. They were also less likely to characterize themselves as politically liberal in 1985 and tended to be slightly older when they first entered college. Black students had
lower high school GPAs, a higher social self-confidence, expected to become involved in student protest, were slightly younger when they began college, were more likely to their views were politically liberal, and placed a higher value on helping to promote racial understanding than students in the other two groups. In contrast, white students were most likely to have higher GPAs, have college-educated parents, come from families with higher incomes (X = $42,100), and were least likely to place a high value on promoting racial understanding than the other student groups.

Given these initial differences in relative status and social views, we would expect their perceptions of the environment to vary considerably. Black students were most likely to perceive racial tension on their own campuses and least likely to perceive institutional commitment to diversity in comparison with the other student groups. Chicanos were also least likely to perceive that their institution had student-oriented priorities. However, there appeared to be consensus across all groups regarding perceptions of institutional priorities for resource and reputation enhancement, as there were no significant differences among groups. These results suggest that these are important student background characteristics to take into account in assessing institutional contexts that inform perceptions of campus racial tension.

---place Table 3 about here---

While institutional type and control are helpful in locating the problems within the higher education system, they are of limited practical significance to administrators in addressing problems within institutional settings. The regressions models, campus racial tension on student and institutional characteristics, help determine why we observe these institutional patterns. Table 4 shows beta coefficients at two steps: $\beta^1$ is the value of each regression coefficient at the step where all student characteristics are controlled, and $\beta^2$ represents the value of the coefficient at the final step of the equation. The $\beta^1$ coefficient represents the effect of a variable, net of student characteristics and prior to competing with other environmental variables in the equation. These coefficients are shown here to 1)
provide an idea of alternative interpretations that can be derived from other models that may exclude some of the environmental measures and 2) evaluate the performance of some of the data obtained independent of student observation (expenditures and enrollments) in comparison to student perceptions. T-ratios represent the magnitude of the coefficient, taking into account its standard error of estimate (based on sample size); these values are presented in lieu of unstandardized coefficients to compare effects across groups. Overall, the current model is most useful in explaining the perceptions of campus racial tension among minority students, accounting for 36% of the variance in campus racial tension in the Chicano, 24% in the black, and 19% in the white student samples.

Student Characteristics

Results on student characteristics show that white students who entered college expecting to become involved in campus protest, white females, and blacks students who characterize themselves as politically liberal are most inclined to perceive racial tension on their campuses. The significant betas of other student characteristics, prior to entry of all environmental variables ($\beta^1$), suggest that perceptions of racial tension are also prevalent among Chicanos who expect to become involved in campus protest and white students with a higher GPA, assessment of social self-confidence, level of parental income, and level of mother’s education. While these findings indicate that certain types of students are pre-disposed to view the climate critically, the majority of background characteristics were nonsignificant at the final step of the equation. This may indicate that perceptions of racial tension are less likely to be created solely in the minds of individuals and may be rooted in a shared institutional reality.

Institutional Characteristics

Across all groups, students perceive low racial tension at institutions with high student-oriented priorities. An examination of betas at the step where only student characteristics are controlled ($\beta^1$) also suggests that institutional spending priorities may play some role in relation to campus racial tension. High levels of per student expenditures
for student aid (fellowships and grants) among Chicano and white students, and for student services among black and white students, are negatively associated with perceptions of racial tension. Observed changes in the coefficients (Betaview) show that the perception of student-oriented priorities accounts for the effect of expenditure measures, indicating that such institutional spending priorities are associated with the perception of an overall environment of student support. The testing of these parallel measures confirm an earlier interpretation, derived from a model that used only the distal measures (expenditures), regarding the importance of student support in relation to low racial tension [32].

In both minority samples, perceptions of high institutional commitment to diversity were associated with perceptions of low racial tension. However, white students' perceptions of these racial climate dimensions showed either a minute ($\beta^1 = -.05$) or nonsignificant relationship. This difference among the ethnic groups is subject to several interpretations, which will be discussed in the latter part of this paper. Data support the notion that institutions that increase their commitment to diversity can substantially improve minority student perceptions of the climate, and this priority does not significantly contribute to white student perceptions of racial tension.

In contrast, institutional selectivity was the strongest indicator of racial tension among all ethnic groups. With the exception of the Chicano sample, it is also interesting to note that selectivity maintained a unique effect on perceptions of racial tension over and above the measure of institutional priorities for resources and reputation. Black and white students who perceive their institutions have high resource and reputation priorities perceive high racial tension. Results from models introducing interaction terms, representing 1) high reputation and institutional commitment to diversity and 2) high reputation and student-orientation, indicated that neither of these measures contributed significantly to the proportion of explained variance (not shown). This suggests that such dimensions of institutional priorities work independently and are not likely to have an
additive effect on perceptions of racial tension. Finally, institutional size maintains a positive association with perceptions of racial tension among white students.

Major differences among the ethnic groups are revealed in the relationship between minority enrollments and perceptions of racial tension. White students who attended institutions with a high percentage of black students, and/or increases in black enrollment in the last six years, perceived higher racial tension. On the other hand, white students at institutions with large percentages of Hispanic students were less likely to perceive racial tension. There are at least two possible explanations for this difference: 1) white students may feel less threatened by the presence of large numbers of Hispanic than by black students or, 2) the effects of the minority composition of a college may be nonlinear. The distribution of black and Hispanic students differed in this predominantly white institutional sample; no institution had a black student population higher than 26% and two institutions in the sample had a Hispanic student population approaching 30 and 50%, respectively. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether the differences in the effects of relative size of the two ethnic groups may be due to substantially different relations with white students or may be explained by differences in institutional variability. Institutions with adequate distributions of minority enrollments should be added to the sample in the future to settle the question of whether there is a “population threshold point” that determines differences in relations among various ethnic groups. In contrast, black student perceptions of racial tension are not significantly associated with the proportion of minority undergraduates, and the proportion of Hispanic students showed a negative association with perceptions of racial tension (see β) among Chicano students until selectivity was controlled. (Higher percentages of Hispanic students are attending low selectivity institutions, and Chicano students in these environments tend to perceive lower racial tension).

\footnote{To investigate nonlinear effects, vectors representing the quadratic and cubic terms of the proportion of black students were added hierarchically to the regression models for each group. Although the cubic term was significant in the white student sample, when compared with the linear model, there was no change in the direction of effects and the additional proportion of variance accounted for was too small to determine a trend in the data.}
Discussion

National data revealed several general patterns that supports related research on institutions and the racial climate [50, 25]. Both public and private universities have the highest proportion of students reporting racial tension. However, there also appears to be a public/private institutional dichotomy in both the quality of race relations and institutional commitment to diversity: private four-year colleges seem to have lower racial tension than public four-year institutions. At the same time, students perceive lower commitment to affirmative action goals (student recruitment and the recruitment of faculty) at private four-year institutions. Although the reasons for these institutional patterns are not immediately clear, several alternative explanations were explored in the study.

Particular institutions may foster racial tension because they support priorities that work against promoting a better climate. The question posed at the beginning of the study was whether an institution’s quest for quality and priorities for institutional commitment to diversity were associated with racial tension on campus. Results show that traditional notions of quality, selectivity and resource/reputation priorities, are associated with high racial tension. In retrospect, the narrow focus on reputation/resources and arguments for “quality” may have had more to do with maintaining inequalities than it had to do with actually improving environments. Selective institutions are unique environments because they are not just contexts of individual achievement [53], they represent an extreme in American wealth and privilege, are staunch promoters of tradition, and are the rungs to power in society. While resistance to change may be greatest at these institutions, they are also birthplaces for progressive thought. Racial tension may be highest in these environments because of these contradictions, as institutional action regarding commitment to diversity is often ambivalent, mitigated by other actions that systematically exclude minorities.

In contrast, institutions that increase their commitment to diversity can significantly improve their social environments for minorities. However, this relationship may not hold
true among white students. There are several plausible explanations: 1) racial tension is not as salient an issue for white students, particularly since they are a numerical majority and their contact is generally less frequent with minorities, or 2) white students are less likely to see an institutional basis (institutional commitment to diversity) for the resolution of interpersonal relations. The second interpretation merits an explanation: The history of minorities suggests that substantial barriers delayed their progress to attain full participation in American life, and removal of these barriers for racial integration and participation in education required collective action and institutional change [18]. Minorities continue to enter college from substantially different social backgrounds (income, parental education, etc.) compared to white classmates; they have come to understand that institutional initiatives can improve the condition of their daily lives. In any case, results indicate that institutional commitment to diversity is not likely to fuel perceptions of racial tension among the majority of white students. It appears that only a vocal minority of white students believe that racial discrimination is a “thing of the past” and may oppose measures designed to improve diversity on campus.

However, predominantly white campuses may be relatively unprepared for some of the problems accompanying change in their student bodies--particularly in the wake of impending demographic changes [27]. Results from the assessing the effect of ethnic composition of a college, or the “compositional hypothesis” [28], are mixed. Increases in black enrollment over the last six years and a high proportion of black students are associated with white students’ perception of racial tension; however, the proportion of Hispanic enrollment had the opposite effect. Race relations theorists would conclude that white students perceive black students (but perhaps not necessarily Hispanics) as a threat to their group position since they will be in direct competition for resources or advantages [13]. Although relative status differences among students of different racial/ethnic groups (social background and relative size of the groups) suggest structural conditions that may inform a sense of group position, it not clear whether white students feel they are in
competition with black students for limited institutional resources. The actual motivations for racial tension are remain an area for future research. However, these findings do indicate, and reports of racial incidents confirm [27], that black-white relations are generally in need of improvement on college campuses where enrollment shifts are occurring.

Perhaps one of the most important findings regarding institutional contexts is that racial tension may arise where there is a lack of concern for individual students. Across all groups, student-oriented institutional priorities were perhaps the most important predictors of perceptions of low racial tension. These results provide empirical support for the importance of “setting a ‘tone’ that is congenial to all students” [48, p. 645]. The impersonal environment of large campuses was once thought to be the primary explanation for the effect of size in research on campus protest and racial policies [7]. These conclusions are only partially supported. While results show that an environment of support is critical, institutional size remains a significant predictor of perceptions of racial tension among white students. This suggests that there is more to large campus environments and their differential impact on racial/ethnic groups than we understand.

This study has shown that perhaps no single element of the environment may work to produce racial tension on college campuses, it is a configuration of external influences (historical and contemporary), structural characteristics of institutions and group relations, and institutionalized ideologies. Each of these areas requires our attention in efforts to promote civility and foster values in students that will serve them in a current multicultural society.
References


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Source: Higher Education Research Institute, unpublished tabulations.
### Differences Among Groups

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<th>Black (n=325)</th>
<th>Chicago (n=340)</th>
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<td>Mean S.D.</td>
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<td>Mean S.D.</td>
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### Note:
- Differences among groups are reported in Table A.1. Significance Group differences, *p < .05*, **p < .01*, (two-tailed probability).
- A = white-black difference, B = black-white difference, C = Chicago difference.
- Significant differences in Table A.1. Significant Group differences, *p < .05*, **p < .01*, (two-tailed probability).

### Significant Characteristics

#### Educational Attainment
- College completion
- College grades
- High school grade point average
- High school GPA

#### Psychological Characteristics
- Perceived self-confidence
- Self-esteem
- Job satisaction

#### Economic Characteristics
- Income
- Employment status

#### Psychological Characteristics
- Expectations of environment
- Environmental perceptions and demographics

#### Behavioral Characteristics
- Smoking habits
- Alcohol consumption

#### Environmental Conditions
- Urban vs. rural

#### Demographic Characteristics
- Race
- Gender
- Age

#### Table 3

### Differences Among Groups

- College completion
- College grades
- High school grade point average
- High school GPA

### Significant Characteristics

- Educational Attainment
  - College completion
  - College grades
  - High school grade point average
  - High school GPA

- Psychological Characteristics
  - Perceived self-confidence
  - Self-esteem
  - Job satisaction

- Economic Characteristics
  - Income
  - Employment status

- Psychological Characteristics
  - Expectations of environment
  - Environmental perceptions and demographics

- Behavioral Characteristics
  - Smoking habits
  - Alcohol consumption

- Environmental Conditions
  - Urban vs. rural

- Demographic Characteristics
  - Race
  - Gender
  - Age
Table 4
Regression of Campus Racial Tension on Student and Institutional Characteristics by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White (n=1821)</th>
<th>Black (n=325)</th>
<th>Chicano (n=340)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \beta^1 )</td>
<td>( \beta^2 )</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985 Student Characteristics</td>
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<td>Sex (female)</td>
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<td>.06</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
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<td>High School GPA</td>
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<td>.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social self-confidence</td>
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<td>1.55</td>
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<td>Expect to protest</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>5.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political view (liberal)</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote racial understanding</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.68</td>
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<td>Institutional Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional Priorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expenditures:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student services</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-oriented</td>
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<td>-.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource/reputation-oriented</td>
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<td>.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment to diversity</td>
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<td>College composition:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selectivity (Average SAT)</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.19</td>
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<td>Enrollment:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size (total FTE)</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>3.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black percent in 1986</td>
<td>.07**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>5.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic percent in 1986</td>
<td>-.08**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.215</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black increase (1982-88)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic increase (1982-88)</td>
<td>.07**</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.66</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\( R^2 = .19 \)  \( .24 \)  \( .36 \)

Note: \( \beta^1 \) reported at the step where all student characteristics are controlled, \(* p \leq .05, ** p \leq .01\); \( \beta^2 \) reported at final step of the equation. Betas with t ratios of approximately 1.96 or greater are significant at the .05 level, and 2.59 or greater are significant at the .01 level.
## Table A.1
### Variable Definition and Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Four-item factor scale, (see Table A.2 for items).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus Racial Tension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1985 Student Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Dichotomous: 1 = “male”; 2 = “female.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Ten-point scale: 1= “16 or younger,” to 10 = “55 or older.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School GPA (self-reported)</td>
<td>Eight-point scale: 1 = “D,” to 8 = “A or A+.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
<td>Eight-point scale: 1 = “grammar school or less,” to 8 = “graduate degree.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td>Eight-point scale: 1 = “grammar school or less,” to 8 = “graduate degree.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Income</td>
<td>Fourteen point scale: 1 = “less than $6000,” to 14 = “$150,000 or more.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social self-confidence</td>
<td>Three-item factor scale based on student self ratings (see Table A.2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect to protest in college</td>
<td>Four-point scale: 1 = “very little chance,” to 4 = “very good chance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political view (self-rating)</td>
<td>Five-point scale: 1 = “far right,” to 5 = “far left.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping to promote racial understanding</td>
<td>Four-point scale: 1 = “not important,” to 4 = “essential.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Institutional Characteristics

#### Institutional Priorities

| Student services (per student) | Expenditures for admissions and all activities designed to contribute to the emotional, physical, intellectual, cultural, and social development of students outside the formal educational program |
| Non-repayable aid (per student) | Monies given in the form of grants and scholarships to students enrolled in formal coursework. Extends college work study and Pell grants. |

#### Student Perceptions:

| Student-oriented | Five-item factor scale, (see Table A-2 for item scales). |
| Resource/reputation-oriented | Five-item factor scale, (see Table A-2 for item scales). |
| Commitment to diversity | Four-item factor scale, (see Table A-2 for item scales). |

#### College composition: Selectivity

Average SAT of entering freshmen divided by 10 (ACT converted to SAT equivalents using Astin & Henson, 1977).

#### Enrollment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size (total FTE)(^1)</th>
<th>Total graduate and undergraduate FTE.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black percent in 1986</td>
<td>Black undergraduate FTE divided by total undergraduate FTE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic percent in 1986</td>
<td>Hispanic undergraduate FTE divided by total undergraduate FTE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black increase (1982-88)(^2)</td>
<td>Dichotomous: 1 = “decrease,” 2 = “increase” (absolute numbers of undergraduate FTE).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic increase (1982-88)</td>
<td>Three-point scale: 1 = “decrease,” 2 = “no change,” 3 = “increase” (absolute numbers of undergraduate FTE).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^1\)Three part-time students are equivalent to one FTE.

\(^2\)All institutions in the sample experienced change in black undergraduate enrollment over six years.
Table A.2
Items Constituting Factor Scales

Social self-confidence factor
(Student self-rating compared to the average person his/her age)
- Leadership ability\textsuperscript{a}
- Popularity\textsuperscript{a}
- Self-Confidence (social)\textsuperscript{a}

Campus racial tension factor
(Statements about the freshman college)
- There is a lot of campus racial conflict here\textsuperscript{b}
- Students of different racial/ethnic origins communicate well with one another\textsuperscript{c}
- There is little trust between minority student groups and campus administrators\textsuperscript{b}

Institutional Priority: Commitment to cultural diversity factor
(Priorities of the freshman college)
- Increase the representation of minorities in the faculty and administration\textsuperscript{d}
- Develop among students and faculty an appreciation for a multicultural society\textsuperscript{d}
- Recruit more minority students\textsuperscript{d}
- Create a diverse multicultural environment on campus\textsuperscript{d}

Institutional Priority: Resource/reputation factor
(Priorities of the freshman college)
- Increase or maintain institutional prestige\textsuperscript{d}
- Enhance the institution's national image\textsuperscript{d}
- Hire faculty "stars"\textsuperscript{d}
- Raise money for the institution\textsuperscript{d}
- Conduct basic and applied research\textsuperscript{d}

Institutional Priority: Student-oriented factor
(Statements about the freshman college)
- It is easy to see faculty outside of office hours\textsuperscript{e}
- Most students are treated like "numbers in a book"\textsuperscript{f}
- Faculty here are interested in students' personal problems\textsuperscript{b}
- Faculty here are strongly interested in the academic problems of undergraduates\textsuperscript{b}

Note: Full details of the exploratory and confirmatory procedures used to develop factors are reported in Hurtado (1990) and Dey (1991).
\textsuperscript{a}Five-point scale: 1 = "bottom 10%" to 5 = "highest 10%.
\textsuperscript{b}Four-point scale: 1 = "Disagree strongly" to 4 = "Agree strongly."
\textsuperscript{c}Four-point scale: 1 = "Agree strongly" to 4 = "Disagree strongly" (reversed for analyses).
\textsuperscript{d}Four-point scale: 1 = "Low Priority" to 4 = "Highest priority."
\textsuperscript{e}Three-point scale: 1 = "Not descriptive" to 3 = "Very descriptive."
\textsuperscript{f}Three-point scale: 1 = "Very descriptive" to 3 = "Not descriptive" (reversed for analyses).