

Chapter 3 When White Southerners Converse About Race

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Like other authors in this volume, we examine white Americans' attitudes toward African-Americans. Unlike the other chapters, this one focuses on one region of the country: the South. Whereas the other authors use time-tested, individual-level measures of prejudice and racial attitudes, we employ a new and thus untested methodology that is best suited for group comparisons such as those commonly found in psychology. We seek an answer to one question: How much racial prejudice is there in the South these days?

Others have asked the same question, of course; as we outline below, there are good reasons to pose it yet again. First, although researchers have presented considerable evidence in support of their answers, the evidence itself has been contradictory. Second, and more crucial, much of the evidence has taken the form of responses to directly asked survey questions: "Do you favor or oppose black people living next door?" "Do you favor or oppose interracial marriages?" Answering such questions, we argue, is akin to participating in a two-way conversation. Just as people anticipate what to say and what not to say in everyday conversation, so do respondents often account for