

# How do historical narratives about white supremacy as a tool of class control influence working-class political attitudes and support for redistributive policies?

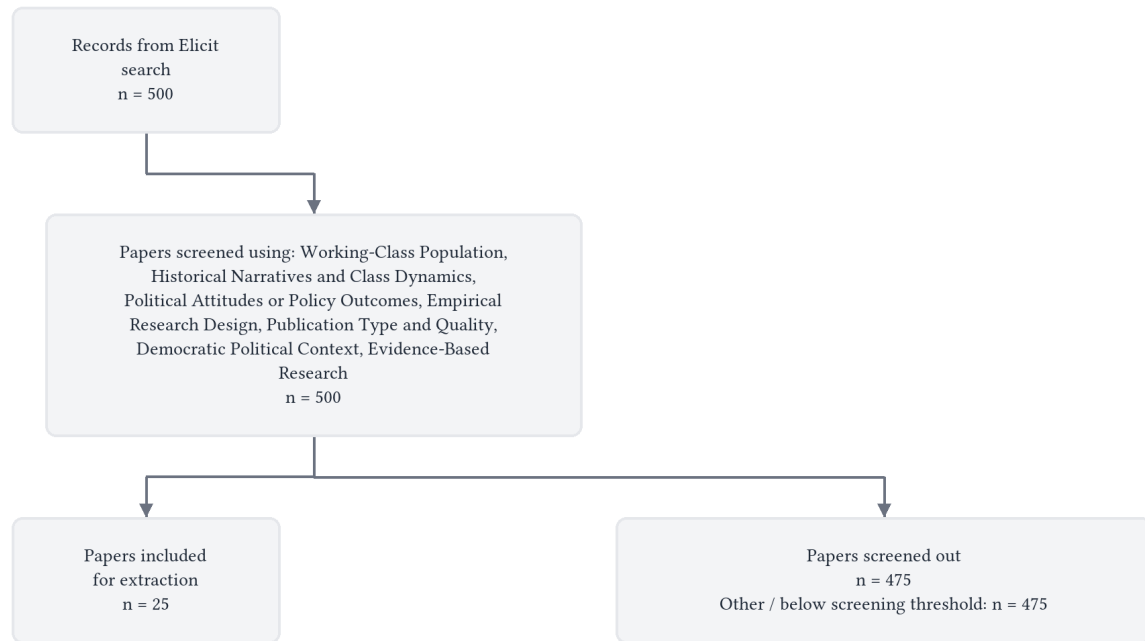
Historical narratives about white supremacy as a tool of class control channel white working-class economic grievances into racial resentment rather than support for redistribution, though this effect is moderated by class identity type, institutional membership in unions, and economic self-interest among lower-income whites.

## Abstract

Historical narratives about white supremacy as a tool of class control—most prominently the “wages of whiteness” framework—influence working-class political attitudes primarily through a channeling mechanism that converts economic grievances into racial resentment rather than demands for redistribution. Deindustrialization significantly increases racial resentment among whites without producing corresponding increases in support for redistributive policies [1], and racial and immigration attitudes rather than economic factors are the primary predictors of political realignment among white working-class voters [2]. Economic self-interest partially buffers lower-income whites against racial resentment's influence on redistribution preferences [3], but it also constrains the translation of racial sympathy into support for race-targeted policies [4]. Historical legacies of racial violence, such as lynchings and Klan mobilization, create path dependencies that continue to suppress Black political participation and reduce redistributive policy generosity in affected areas [5, 6].

However, the white working class is not monolithic in its susceptibility to these dynamics. Latent profile analyses and qualitative studies independently identify subgroups—Class Conflict Aware and Working Class Connected whites—who hold progressive attitudes on race and redistribution, contrasting sharply with Working Class Patriots who racialize working-class identity and oppose redistribution [7, 8]. Institutional membership also matters: gaining union membership reduces racial resentment among white workers [9], though political actors can weaponize racial narratives to undermine the very institutions that foster cross-racial solidarity [10]. These patterns appear across national contexts, with evidence from the UK and Quebec confirming that elite racialization of working-class identity as white serves to divide potential class-based coalitions [11, 12], though a substantial share of the public remains persuadable on these issues [11].

## Flow Diagram



## Paper search

We performed a semantic search across over 138 million academic papers from the Elicit search engine, which includes all of Semantic Scholar and OpenAlex.

We ran this query: "How do historical narratives about white supremacy as a tool of class control influence working-class political attitudes and support for redistributive policies?"

The search returned 500 total results from Elicit.

We retrieved 500 papers most relevant to the query for screening.

## Screening

We screened in sources based on their abstracts that met these criteria:

- **Working-Class Population:** Does this study focus on or include working-class participants (defined as those in manual labor, service jobs, or lower-income occupations)?
- **Historical Narratives and Class Dynamics:** Does this study investigate narratives, framings, or educational content that explicitly connects white supremacy to class control mechanisms?
- **Political Attitudes or Policy Outcomes:** Does this study measure outcomes related to political beliefs, voting behavior, support for redistributive policies, or attitudes toward economic inequality?

- **Empirical Research Design:** Does this study present original empirical data collection and analysis (through surveys, experiments, interviews, ethnographic methods, or other data collection approaches)?
- **Publication Type and Quality:** Is this study a peer-reviewed article, systematic review, or meta-analysis that has undergone scholarly review?
- **Democratic Political Context:** Was this study conducted in a democratic political system where redistributive policy preferences can meaningfully influence political outcomes?
- **Evidence-Based Research:** Is this study based on empirical findings rather than being purely theoretical, opinion-based, commentary, or editorial without supporting data?

We considered all screening questions together and made a holistic judgement about whether to screen in each paper.

At abstract screening, the number of papers excluded for each primary reason was:

- **Other / below screening threshold:** n = 475

## Data extraction

We asked a large language model to extract each data column below from each paper. We gave the model the extraction instructions shown below for each column.

- **Historical Narrative:**

Extract the specific historical narrative(s) about white supremacy as a tool of class control discussed in the study, including:

- Name or description of the narrative/framework (e.g., 'wages of whiteness', 'divide-and-rule')
- Key historical elements or time periods referenced
- How white supremacy is conceptualized as serving class control functions
- Whether the narrative is presented as established theory, new framework, or empirical finding
- Any variations or sub-narratives within the broader theme

- **Working Class Definition:**

Extract how the study defines and operationalizes 'working class' in relation to the historical narratives, including:

- Specific definition or criteria used for working class identification
- Whether working class is treated as racially homogeneous, multiracial, or specifically white
- Sample demographics relevant to working class identity (race, education, income, occupation)
- Geographic location and setting
- How class identity intersects with racial identity in the study

- **Political Attitudes Measured:**

Extract all political attitudes examined in relation to historical narratives about white supremacy and class control, including:

- Specific attitude domains (e.g., racial resentment, immigration attitudes, partisan identification)
- Measurement methods and scales used
- Target populations whose attitudes are assessed
- Whether attitudes are measured as outcomes, mediators, or predictors
- Any attitude changes over time or in response to narratives

- **Redistributive Policy Support:**

Extract details about support for redistributive policies as they relate to historical narratives and class control, including:

- Specific redistributive policies examined (welfare, taxation, social programs, etc.)
- How policy support is measured (surveys, voting behavior, stated preferences)
- Whether policy support increases, decreases, or remains unchanged in relation to historical narratives
- Any distinctions between universal vs. targeted redistributive policies
- If no redistributive policies are examined, state 'None examined'

- **Influence Mechanisms:**

Extract the proposed or demonstrated mechanisms by which historical narratives about white supremacy as class control influence working-class attitudes and policy support, including:

- Direction of influence (how narratives shape attitudes/policy support)
- Causal pathways or theoretical mechanisms proposed
- Mediating factors (e.g., economic insecurity, racial threat, group identity)
- Whether influence is direct, indirect, or conditional
- Any competing or alternative explanations considered
- Strength of evidence for the proposed mechanisms

- **Key Findings:**

Extract the main empirical findings about how historical narratives influence working-class political attitudes and redistributive policy support, including:

- Primary results with effect sizes, statistical significance, or qualitative themes
- Differential effects across racial, class, or other demographic groups
- Unexpected or counterintuitive findings
- Null results or lack of expected relationships
- Practical significance of the findings for understanding class-race-policy dynamics

- **Study Methodology:**

Extract methodological approach used to examine the relationship between historical narratives and working-class political attitudes, including:

- Research design (survey, experiment, ethnography, textual analysis, etc.)
- Data sources and time periods covered
- Sample size and selection methods
- Analytical techniques employed
- Any limitations that affect interpretation of findings about narrative influence
- Whether the study is empirical, theoretical, or mixed

- **Contextual Factors:**

Extract contextual factors that shape how historical narratives about white supremacy influence working-class attitudes, including:

- Geographic context (region, urban/rural, demographic change)
- Historical timing (election periods, social movements, economic conditions)

- Media environment or information sources
- Economic conditions (deindustrialization, unemployment, inequality)
- Other social or political events that interact with the narratives
- Factors that moderate or condition the influence of historical narratives

## Results

### Characteristics of Included Studies

The 25 included sources span a range of methodological approaches, geographic contexts, and disciplinary perspectives. They collectively address the intersection of racial narratives, class identity, and political attitudes, though they vary considerably in how directly they engage with historical narratives about white supremacy as a mechanism of class control. The table below summarizes the key characteristics of each study.

Study	Full text retrieved?	Study Type	Methodology	Geographic Focus	Working Class Definition	Primary Focus
Silva (2023)	Yes	Primary study [13]	Ethnography; 108 in-depth interviews (2015–2017) [13]	Declining coal town, northeastern Pennsylvania [13]	Less than a 4-year college degree; multiracial sample [13]	How working-class young adults construct political identities amid institutional decline [13]
Frymer & Grumbach (2020)	No	Primary study [9]	Cross-sectional and panel analyses (2010–2016) [9]	United States (national) [9]	White union and non-union members [9]	Union membership and white racial attitudes [9]
Williams et al. (2021)	Yes	Primary study [5]	Empirical; historical data and linear probability models [5]	Southern United States [5]	Multiracial; focus on Black-white labor competition [5]	Link between lynchings and political/economic outcomes for Black Americans [5]

Study	Full text retrieved?	Study Type	Methodology	Geographic Focus	Working Class Definition	Primary Focus
Bloeser & Williams (2020)	No	Primary study [3]	Survey; ANES 2004–2016 [3]	United States (national) [3]	Lower-income whites defined by income level [3]	Racial resentment and redistributive policy attitudes by income [3]
Knowles et al. (2021)	Yes	Primary study [7]	Survey; latent profile analysis; n = 2,044 [7]	50 U.S. states, 672 counties [7]	White Americans lacking a four-year college degree [7]	Varieties of white working-class identity and political attitudes [7]
Mcdermott et al. (2019)	No	Primary study [8]	Qualitative interviews; n = 77 [8]	Three majority-White Midwestern cities [8]	Self-identified working-class whites [8]	Class identity types and attitudes toward immigrants and racial minorities [8]
Drakulich et al. (2025)	No	Primary study [14]	Survey; ANES data [14]	United States (national) [14]	Economically insecure White Americans [14]	Opposition to teaching about racism, linked to Du Bois's "wages of whiteness" [14]
Thompson (2019)	Yes	Review [15]	Multinomial logistic regression and literature review; ANES 2016 [15]	United States (national) [15]	Income and education as predictors; white and native-born [15]	Explanatory accounts of Trump's white working-class support [15]
Thornton & Tischauser (2023)	No	Primary study [16]	Textual analysis; 727 articles [16]	United States (national media) [16]	Not explicitly defined; racialized differently across media [16]	Racial narratives in white leftist vs. Black newspaper reporting on working class [16]

Study	Full text retrieved?	Study Type	Methodology	Geographic Focus	Working Class Definition	Primary Focus
Smångs (2021)	No	Mixed [6]	Theoretical and empirical exploration [6]	Southern communities [6]	Specifically white [6]	Legacy of 1960s KKK on 2016 voting patterns [6]
Jesse (2023)	No	Primary study [11]	Textual analysis and national survey [11]	Britain [11]	Multi-ethnic but racialized as white in mainstream discourse [11]	Divide-and-rule narratives and counter-narratives for solidarity [11]
Du (2025)	No	Primary study [1]	Instrumental variables approach with survey data [1]	United States (local manufacturing areas) [1]	Implied through deindustrialization exposure; specifically white [1]	Deindustrialization, racial resentment, and redistribution preferences [1]
Witherspoon & Yushi (2024)	No	Mixed [17]	Interviews (n = 22), participatory observation, statistical analysis [17]	Michigan [17]	Marxist class analysis; multiracial [17]	Class dynamics in Michigan's electorate in the 2024 election [17]
Morgan & Lee (2017)	Yes	Primary study [18]	Survey analysis; CPS-VRS and GSS (2004–2016) [18]	Competitive U.S. states [18]	Lower-grade service and manual workers; white, non-Hispanic [18]	White working-class voter turnout and political attitudes, 2004–2016 [18]
Adjogatse & Miedema (2021)	No	Primary study [19]	Critical Frame Analysis of policy documents and newspaper responses [19]	Post-Brexit England [19]	Specifically white; focus on "white working-class" boys [19]	Framing of "white working-class" underachievement in education policy [19]

Study	Full text retrieved?	Study Type	Methodology	Geographic Focus	Working Class Definition	Primary Focus
Walker & Bennett (2015)	No	Mixed [10]	Multi-method: historical analysis and discourse analysis [10]	Wisconsin, especially Milwaukee [10]	Specifically white [10]	Racial symbolism in policy contest over public-sector unions [10]
Pied (2017)	No	Primary study [20]	Ethnography [20]	Predominantly white town, northeastern United States [20]	Implied through "white hard worker mythology"; specifically white [20]	Role of race and class in post-industrial decline and the "white worker myth" [20]
Williams & Bloeser (2024)	Yes	Primary study [4]	Survey; 2013 CCES; OLS and ordinal logistic regression [4]	United States (national) [4]	Income categories (high, medium, low); multiracial discussion [4]	Racial sympathy, economic position, and support for racial redistribution [4]
Macdonald (2020)	No	Primary study [21]	Survey; ANES 2012 and panel studies [21]	United States (national) [21]	Not explicitly defined [21]	Political knowledge as mediator of class attitudes and redistribution support [21]
Artz (2021)	No	Primary study [22]	Qualitative; archival research, historiography, oral testimony [22]	Southwestern Louisiana [22]	Workers previously considered white but racialized as "Redbone" [22]	Racialization of white workers during 1950s labor unrest [22]

Study	Full text retrieved?	Study Type	Methodology	Geographic Focus	Working Class Definition	Primary Focus
Gest (2016)	No	Primary study [23]	Ethnography and public opinion research [23]	United States and England [23]	Specifically white [23]	White working-class radicalization amid immigration and inequality [23]
Wilson & Maume (2016)	No	Primary study [24]	Survey; 2010 and 2012 NES [24]	United States (national) [24]	Not explicitly defined; differentiated by job authority [24]	Job authority and support for income redistributive policy [24]
Hübner (2022)	Yes	Primary study [12]	Intersectional narrative approach; 3 rounds of interviews, 1-year social media ethnography [12]	Quebec, Canada [12]	Low-status workers with scarce economic resources; specifically white francophone [12]	Whiteness and (a)political stances among Quebec's working class [12]
Leonard (2016)	No	Mixed [25]	Literature analysis with theoretical framework [25]	United States (national) [25]	Specifically white [25]	White racial attitudes and the decline of union power [25]
Reny et al. (2019)	Yes	Primary study [2]	Large national survey; logistic regression; n ≈ 64,600 [2]	United States (national) [2]	Without a four-year college degree; specifically white [2]	Racial and immigration attitudes as drivers of vote switching in 2016 [2]

Full texts were available for 7 of the 25 sources. The studies employ a wide array of methods, including large-scale surveys and panel analyses, ethnographic fieldwork, textual and discourse analysis, historical archival research, and instrumental variables estimation. Geographically, the majority focus on the United States, with two addressing the United Kingdom and one examining Quebec, Canada. Most studies treat the working class as specifically or predominantly white, though several adopt multiracial frameworks or explicitly challenge the racialization of the working class as white. The time periods covered range from the mid-nineteenth century through the 2024 U.S. election cycle, with a concentration of attention on the post-2008 period and the 2016 presidential election.

## Thematic Analysis

### Theme 1: Historical Frameworks of Racial Division as Class Control

A substantial subset of the literature draws on established theoretical frameworks—most prominently Du Bois's "wages of whiteness"—to explain how racial hierarchies have historically served class control functions. Drakulich et al. (2025) directly apply Du Bois's concept, describing how white laborers received a "bonus wage of sorts for being White" that, after the fall of Jim Crow, became less visible, producing resentment among economically insecure whites who felt they deserved privileges no longer delivered [14]. Thompson (2019) similarly traces the "wages of whiteness" to the Early Republic and mid-nineteenth century, arguing that white supremacy racialized class politics by fostering fear of competition from African Americans [15]. Artz (2021) provides a striking historical case study of a 1950s Louisiana labor strike in which white workers who resisted capitalist expansion were racialized as "mixed race" or "Redbone," illustrating how racialization functioned as a "technology of control" over workers who did not embrace the wages of whiteness [22].

Several studies extend these frameworks to contemporary settings. Silva (2023) situates her analysis within the breakdown of industrial capitalism, where white working-class men were offered a sense of racial superiority in exchange for accepting exploitation [13]. Walker and Bennett (2015) examine how Wisconsin politicians invoked racial symbolism during the 2011 fight over public-sector collective bargaining rights, activating racial animus among white workers to achieve state retrenchment [10]. Williams et al. (2021) document how lynching served as a form of labor control and political suppression in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, drawing on labor control, economic competition, and power-threat hypotheses [5]. Leonard (2016) traces how civil rights struggles within unions and investment in segregated homeownership shifted white working-class consciousness from a worker identity to a homeowner identity, enabling anti-union politicians to capitalize on racial fears [25].

Jesse (2023), writing from a UK context, identifies a "divide-and-rule playbook" in which elites weaponize working-class identity, racializing the working class as a "white cultural minority" victimized by immigration and racial equality advances [11]. Thornton and Tischauser (2023) find that white leftist media during the 2016 election used color-blind rhetoric that narrated a racially homogenized working class, failing to confront systemic racism, while Black newspapers described a multiracial working class actively resistant to structures of oppression [16]. This divergence illustrates how even ostensibly progressive media can reproduce erasures that serve class-control functions by obscuring racial dynamics within the working class.

### Theme 2: Racial Resentment, Economic Insecurity, and Their Interaction

A central finding across multiple studies is that racial resentment and economic insecurity interact in complex ways to shape political attitudes. Bloeser and Williams (2020) demonstrate that the relationship between racial resentment and opposition to redistribution is conditional on income: for lower-income whites, economic self-interest tempers the influence of racial resentment, while for higher-income whites, racial resentment exerts a significantly larger influence on redistributive preferences [3]. This pattern held across multiple ANES election cycles from 2004 to 2016 [3].

Du (2025) finds that deindustrialization significantly increases racial resentment among whites but does not produce comparable effects on non-whites, and critically, does not meaningfully increase support for redistribution or heighten partisan affective polarization [1]. This suggests that economic shocks are channeled primarily into symbolic racial politics rather than material policy demands [1]. Williams and Bloeser (2024) approach from the opposite direction, finding that racial sympathy increases support for race-targeted redistributive policies, but this relationship is strongest among more affluent whites and weaker among less affluent whites, likely due to concerns about relative economic status [4].

Drakulich et al. (2025) find that opposition to teaching about racism in schools is highest at the intersection Du Bois highlighted: economically insecure white Americans [14]. This finding directly connects the "wages of whiteness" framework to contemporary political attitudes, showing that those who most feel the absence of promised racial privileges are most resistant to knowledge that would challenge their racial worldview.

Reny et al. (2019) provide large-scale evidence that racial and immigration attitudes, rather than economic factors, were the primary correlates of vote switching in the 2016 election, and that this phenomenon occurred among both working-class and non-working-class whites, though more working-class whites switched [2]. Morgan and Lee (2017) corroborate this by finding that racial prejudice and anti-immigrant sentiment among the white working class were stable rather than newly activated by the 2016 campaign, suggesting these attitudes were exploited rather than created [18].

### **Theme 3: Heterogeneity Within the White Working Class**

Several studies challenge monolithic portrayals of the white working class. Knowles et al. (2021) identify three distinct identity profiles through latent profile analysis: Working Class Patriots, who valorize responsibility, embrace national identity, and disparage the poor; Class Conflict Aware, who see social class as structural and ascribe elitist attitudes to higher classes; and Working Class Connected, who embrace working-class identity and sympathize with the poor [7]. Class Conflict Aware and Working Class Connected whites are considerably more progressive on immigration, race, and politics than Working Class Patriots [7]. Mcdermott et al. (2019) independently identify a parallel three-part typology using qualitative interviews in Midwestern cities experiencing demographic change, finding that these differential reactions to diversity are organized by variation in class identity [8].

Witherspoon and Yushi (2024) adopt a Marxist class analysis to distinguish between downwardly mobile white workers who connect with Trump's populist message and upwardly mobile workers of all races who form the mass base of the Democratic coalition [17]. Silva (2023) documents how racial minorities within the working class construct different narratives about government corruption, viewing it as a historical constant rather than a recent decline, which reflects different histories of oppression [13]. Hübner (2022) finds that white francophone Québécois working-class participants avoid discussing politics publicly but engage in "them-us" rhetoric in private settings and on social media, revealing biases shaped by historical narratives of white supremacy [12].

### **Theme 4: Institutional Mediators—Unions, Media, and the State**

Labor unions emerge as a significant institutional mediator of the race-class nexus. Frymer and Grumbach (2020) demonstrate through panel analysis that gaining union membership between 2010 and 2016 reduced racial resentment among white workers, with cross-sectional analyses consistently showing that white union members have lower racial resentment and greater support for policies benefiting African Americans [9]. The mechanism operates through union leaders' ideological and strategic incentives to mitigate racial resentment and build interracial coalitions [9]. However, Leonard (2016) complicates this picture by finding a positive correlation between union membership and anti-Black racial attitudes, though this correlation exists only through the mediating pathway of income and homeownership [25]. Leonard recommends that unions engage in robust anti-racist organizing among white members [25].

Walker and Bennett (2015) illustrate how state actors can weaponize racial narratives against union interests, with Governor Walker's campaign activating racial animus among white workers to build support for eliminating public-sector collective bargaining rights [10]. This case demonstrates a direct mechanism by which racial narratives undermine class-based solidarity and institutional capacity for redistribution.

Media environments also play a conditioning role. Thornton and Tischauser (2023) find fundamentally divergent

patterns in how white leftist and Black newspapers narrate the working class, with the former using color-blind rhetoric that homogenizes the working class and the latter describing a multiracial working class resistant to oppression [16]. Jesse (2023) documents how dominant media narratives in Britain racialize the working class as white and present them as victims of immigration and equality advances, while failing to provide an alternative shared narrative [11]. Hübner (2022) shows how social media fragmentation reinforces conservative, white francophone political ideologies among Quebec's working class, with increased exposure to polarized messages during COVID-19 leading some participants to quit social media temporarily [12].

**Theme 5: Historical Legacies and Path Dependencies**

Several studies demonstrate the enduring influence of historical racial violence and mobilization on contemporary political outcomes. Smångs (2021) shows that the civil rights-era Klan's defense of Jim Crow created an enduring legacy of reactionary white collective identity that, together with contemporary economic and demographic conditions, shaped local-level 2016 voting patterns in Trump's favor [6]. Williams et al. (2021) document that historical lynchings continue to be associated with higher poverty, reduced Black voter registration, and lower investments in social and labor market policies, demonstrating that the goals of Southern Redemption violence persist in shaping Black American life in the twenty-first century [5].

These path dependencies extend to the political economy of redistribution. Williams et al. (2021) show that in areas with higher historical lynching rates, there is reduced policy generosity in cash assistance within welfare block grants, lower earned income tax credit participation, and weaker minimum wage policies [5]. This represents the most direct evidence in the reviewed literature that historical racial violence has lasting effects on redistributive policy outcomes, mediated through suppressed Black political participation and altered public finance decisions [5].

**Theme 6: Redistributive Policy Attitudes and the Race-Class Nexus**

Only a subset of the included studies directly examines redistributive policy support. The evidence consistently suggests that racial attitudes condition redistribution preferences, but the direction and strength depend on economic position and the type of policy under consideration.

Study	Policy Domain	Key Finding	Racial Attitude Measured	Conditioning Factor
Bloeser & Williams (2020)	Welfare and redistributive policies [3]	Racial resentment predicts opposition, but effect is weaker for lower-income whites [3]	Racial resentment [3]	Income level [3]
Williams & Bloeser (2024)	Race-targeted subsidies, school funding, scholarships, affirmative action [4]	Racial sympathy increases support, but effect is stronger among affluent whites [4]	Racial sympathy [4]	Income level [4]

Study	Policy Domain	Key Finding	Racial Attitude Measured	Conditioning Factor
Du (2025)	Redistribution preferences (general) [1]	Deindustrialization does not increase redistribution support despite raising racial resentment [1]	Racial resentment [1]	Deindustrialization exposure [1]
Williams et al. (2021)	EITC, minimum wage, cash welfare assistance [5]	Historical lynchings associated with reduced policy generosity [5]	Political suppression motives [5]	Historical lynching rates [5]
Wilson & Maume (2016)	Income redistribution policy (general) [24]	Job authority tasks inversely related to support; pattern does not hold for African Americans [24]	Not directly measured [24]	Job authority; race [24]
Macdonald (2020)	Redistributive spending, progressive taxation [21]	Political knowledge mediates connection between class attitudes and redistribution support [21]	Not directly measured [21]	Political knowledge [21]
Morgan & Lee (2017)	Trade agreements, Social Security, income differences, jobs programs [18]	Stability in working-class attitudes toward government responsibility [18]	Racial prejudice (as contextual factor) [18]	Class position [18]

Du's (2025) finding that deindustrialization channels economic grievances into racial resentment rather than redistributive demands is particularly significant for the research question, as it suggests a mechanism by which the "wages of whiteness" dynamic operates in contemporary settings: economic decline activates racial boundary-making rather than cross-racial class solidarity [1]. This is consistent with Pied's (2017) ethnographic finding that the "white worker myth" provides a symbolic escape from economic marginalization that reinforces hegemonic whiteness without delivering material benefits [20].

Macdonald (2020) identifies a cognitive mechanism that may partly explain why positive feelings toward the working class have not translated into redistribution support: individuals with low political knowledge fail to connect their class group attitudes to specific redistributive policies, even though their underlying class sympathies are stable [21]. This finding adds a political information dimension to the race-class-redistribution puzzle.

## Synthesis

The apparent tension in the literature—between studies finding that economic grievances drive white working-class political behavior and those emphasizing racial attitudes—can be substantially reconciled through attention to mech-

anisms, populations, and contextual conditions.

The evidence suggests that economic shocks and racial resentment are not competing explanations but linked through a channeling mechanism. Du (2025) demonstrates that deindustrialization increases racial resentment without increasing redistribution support [1], while Reny et al. (2019) show that racial and immigration attitudes, not economic factors, predict vote switching [2]. These findings are consistent with the "wages of whiteness" framework: when economic decline threatens the implicit bargain in which white workers accepted exploitation in exchange for racial status, the response is not class-based solidarity but intensified racial boundary-making. Pied (2017) documents this mechanism ethnographically, showing how economically marginal white workers cling to the "white worker myth" as a symbolic escape hatch rather than pursuing material redistribution [20].

However, the white working class is not monolithic, and the channeling mechanism does not operate uniformly. Knowles et al. (2021) and Mcdermott et al. (2019) independently identify three identity types among working-class whites, of which only Working Class Patriots conform to the narrative of racial resentment displacing class solidarity [7, 8]. Class Conflict Aware and Working Class Connected whites are considerably more progressive, suggesting that structural class consciousness can counteract the wages-of-whiteness dynamic for a significant portion of the white working class.

The income-conditioning findings from Bloeser and Williams (2020) and Williams and Bloeser (2024) further refine the picture. Lower-income whites are less susceptible to racial resentment's influence on redistribution preferences because economic self-interest provides a counterweight [3], yet they are also less likely to translate racial sympathy into support for race-targeted redistribution because of concerns about relative economic status [4]. This creates a narrow window in which economic self-interest both buffers against racial resentment and constrains racial solidarity—a finding consistent with group position theory's emphasis on perceived zero-sum competition over resources [4].

Institutional contexts also significantly moderate these dynamics. Frymer and Grumbach's (2020) panel evidence that union membership reduces racial resentment [9] suggests that organizational membership can disrupt the wages-of-whiteness mechanism. Conversely, Walker and Bennett (2015) demonstrate that political actors can weaponize racial narratives to undermine the very institutions—public-sector unions—that might otherwise build cross-racial solidarity [10]. The historical path dependencies documented by Smångs (2021) and Williams et al. (2021) indicate that these dynamics are not merely contemporary phenomena but are embedded in geographically specific legacies of racial violence and mobilization that continue to shape local political economies [5, 6].

The cross-national evidence from Jesse (2023) in Britain and Hübner (2022) in Quebec suggests that the racialization of working-class identity as white, and its deployment to divide potential class-based coalitions, is not unique to the United States but operates as a broader pattern in settler-colonial and post-imperial societies [11, 12]. Jesse's finding that approximately 60% of the British public is "persuadable" on race and class issues, with views that can toggle between progressive and regressive positions, indicates that these narratives are neither deterministic nor irresistible [11].

In sum, historical narratives about white supremacy as class control influence working-class political attitudes through a channeling mechanism that converts economic grievances into racial resentment rather than redistributive demands. This mechanism is strongest among whites who lack structural class consciousness (Working Class Patriots), who are not embedded in interracial institutions like unions, and who inhabit geographic and media environments that reinforce racial boundary-making. It is weakest among lower-income whites whose economic self-interest provides a partial buffer, among those with Class Conflict Aware or Working Class Connected identities, and in contexts where institutional or narrative alternatives to racial division are available.

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