Seeing Us in Them: Social Divisions and the Politics of Group Empathy

By Cigdem V. Sirin, Nicholas Valentino and Jose Villalobos. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021

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The racial reckoning of the summer of 2020 exemplified a rising phenomenon of outgroup empathy, with multiethnic droves braving the streets in protest to denounce the systemic oppression of Black Americans. Despite this, group empathy in the political arena has been overlooked. In *Seeing Us in Them: Social Divisions and the Politics of Group Empathy,* Cigdem V. Sirin, Nicholas Valentino, and Jose Villalobos remedy this lacuna in political science through their Group Empathy Theory and Group Empathy Index (GEI). Across multiple studies, they find that Latino and Black Americans exhibit more empathy toward minority groups experiencing discriminatory treatment than do Whites.

In the Prologue and Chapter 1, the authors lay out the book's central puzzle: why do some speak up for those who are unfairly targeted, even at the price of personal sacrifice? They begin uncovering this mystery in Chapter 2, proposing their Group Empathy Theory. The theory holds that those who have experienced discrimination, as have racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States, experience stronger levels of empathy toward groups distinct from their own. Group Empathy Theory is a novel rift in social psychology and political science, contradicting Tajfel and Turner's seminal Social Identity Theory (SIT). While SIT predicts that those with a deeper sense of ingroup identification will more often reject for outgroupsGroup Empathy Theory incorporates minority groups' political surroundings into their sociopsychological beliefs and decision making. The authors posit that through Group Empathy, individuals who more closely identify with *their own* racial or ethnic group identity will have a heightened ability and motivation to take other groups' perspectives and feel an emotional connection to their struggles and welfare (p. 22).

In Chapter 3, the authors expand on their main methodological contribution, their GEI. The authors found that social psychology literature limited empathy to situations between individuals rather than toward entire groups. Using Gleichgerrcht and Decety 2014 as a jumping point for their GEI, the authors sought to measure its multidimensional aspects of empathy, targeting the affective motivational and cognitive components (p. 43). Through attitudinal surveys, they evidenced the content validity of the GEI and its distinction from measures of racial resentment, social dominance orientation, and individual reactivity. Their preliminary results find that, as hypothesized, Latinos and African Americans feel the most

empathy toward oppressed outgroups. Through these tests, group empathy stands out from previous notions as a sustained emotional and political investment in another group's cause.

Chapter 4 bookends their theoretical chapters, uncovering the roots of group empathy. To this end, they explore levels in group empathy among demographic characteristics, such as race, gender, age, and income. Mechanisms such as personal experiences with discrimination, amount and quality of contact with outgroups, and perceptions of economic competition can underline views toward outgroups. Even so, their analyses demonstrate that identification as a racial or ethnic minority is the greatest predictor of group empathy among the demographics. Racial and ethnic background is a strong predictor of group empathy, yet not for its interpersonal counterpart (p. 81), further delineating the difference between the two. Their results show that racial and ethnic consciousness fosters increased sensibility toward all racial and ethnic groups; Latinos and Blacks who identify strongly with their group identity are more empathetic toward Whites than Whites are toward themselves.

The book's second half robustly tests the authors' GEI across contexts through survey experiments. Chapter 5 examines group empathy in the context of homeland security, using a brilliant vignette paralleling a real-life discriminatory incident of a Muslim individual being escorted off a plane due to profiling. Chapter 6 covers the arena of undocumented immigration, using vignettes of Hispanic, Black, and White undocumented immigrants. In Chapter 7, the GEI is introduced to internationalization, asking respondents whether the United States has a responsibility to protect those in other countries. Chapter 8 addresses the policy debacles of the Trump administration, from building the border wall to the Muslim travel ban. Chapter 9 takes the proof of concept abroad, exploring the predictive power of the GEI in surveys of policy considerations in the United Kingdom, addressing Brexit, equal opportunity, and foreign aid in these European countries. The GEI proved to be an unwavering measure predicting empathy in policy attitudes across contexts and geographic spaces. Supporting the authors' hypotheses, Black and Latino respondents displayed the most concern toward groups in duress.

Like any new academic venture, this piece left some queries unanswered. In designing and analyzing their surveys, the authors could have benefitted from a more nuanced in determining racial and ethnic categories. For instance, theory and analyses do not consider race within Latinos, excluding Afro-Latinos from this important conversation. Additionally, not distinguishing between the terms "Black" and "African American" undermines the diversity of the Black diaspora in the U.S. With Black Muslims making up around 20% of the American Muslim population (Pew Research 2019), consideration for diverse Black ethnic groups is necessary to better evaluate attitudes on outgroup discrimination among minorities. The book also lacks an intersectional lens, leaving the reader to wonder if women of color and/or queer people of color have an even heightened sense of empathy through secondary marginalization (Cohen 1999). Notwithstanding these concerns, *Seeing Us in Them* covers substantial ground and has blazed a trail for budding scholars to further studies of group empathy through a perspicacious lens.

The book concludes with a prescription for the future, providing considerations for the study of empathy in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world experiences collective trauma and immeasurable loss, and as the effects of the pandemic

continue to disproportionately burden those of the global majority, the study of outgroup empathy becomes all the more central in politics. With *Seeing Us in Them,* political science as a discipline has a foundation through which we can begin understanding the contours of our interconnectedness.

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Policing the Second Amendment: Guns, Law Enforcement, and the Politics of Race

By Jennifer Carlson. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 296 pp., $19.95 Cloth

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Following the horrendous mass shooting of 21 children and teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, the U.S. Congress finally passed some "common sense" gun reforms expanding red flag laws and requiring stricter background checks, especially for those ages 18–21. Perhaps the recorded voices of 10-year-olds begging for help before they died could not be spun by National Rifle Association (NRA)-pocketed politicians?

But is this legislation really "common sense" and can it possibly make a dent in our nation's fetish for firearms? Jennifer Carlson suggests a resounding no on both accounts. In her book, *Policing the Second Amendment: Guns, Law Enforcement, and the Politics of Race,* Carlson argues that only a reckoning with racial oppression's role in protecting and promoting mass gun ownership can we meaningfully "advance public debates and public policy about the place of gun violence . . . in American Society" (p.180).

To help us reach this reckoning, Carlson gives us a grand narrative about the history and politics of firearms in the USA. She argues that guns historically occupied an important pivot point between formal and informal policing. While white plantation owners originally handled their own armed policing, increased rebellions and escapes by enslaved workers encouraged 19th Century white southerners to formalize militias and "slave patrols." "Eventually," writes Carlson, "these brutal slave patrols worked alongside, and to some degree became institutionalized as, some of the earliest public law enforcement entities in the United States, including the New Orleans Police Department in 1853" (p.28).

In the North, elite urban political machines deployed armed officers to regulate the political and social behavior of ethnic workers. In the West, General Washington ordered the obliteration of the Iroquois people; but eventually, *posse comitatus*

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