ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Racism mitigates concern

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Political ideology has emerged as a distinct factor and even driver in how individuals develop their environmental beliefs, but the effect of racist beliefs on one's concerns about the environment, and willingness to act for environmental benefits, had not been isolated within larger sets of demographic predictors.

Jesse Chanin at Tulane University analysed the 2010 General Social Survey in the United States to gauge the impacts of two different types of racist beliefs that can affect how individuals think about both environmental risks and sustainability. Innate racism is based on beliefs that black people are inherently inferior, while symbolic racism draws upon more abstract notions that black Americans are responsible for their own inequality. Regression models find that both types of racism correlate with lower levels of concern for the environment; while political conservatism remains the most significant negative predictor of concern, education does have a positive effect on attitudes for environmental action. The study lacks a longitudinal axis to fully determine causal mechanisms, but when ideology is held constant for individuals, racism still shows a marked difference in environmental concerns and actions, transcending party or other political beliefs and illustrating an in-built obstacle to more sustainable policies.

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