

# Whites for racial justice: How contact with Black Americans predicts support for collective action among White Americans

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## Abstract

Advantaged group members have an important role to play in creating social change, and intergroup contact has tremendous implications in shaping intergroup relations. However, little research has examined how intergroup contact predicts advantaged group members' inclinations toward collective action to support the interests of disadvantaged groups. The present research investigates how contact with Black Americans shapes White Americans' willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice and support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Three studies of White Americans (total  $N = 821$ ) consistently reveal that positive contact with Black Americans predicts greater support for collective action through a sequential process of fostering greater feelings of empathy for Black Americans and anger over injustice. These findings hold even when taking into account other relevant psychological factors (i.e., White guilt and identification, negative contact, group efficacy, and moral convictions). The present research contributes to our understanding of how advantaged group members come to engage in social change efforts.

## Keywords

anger, collective action, empathy, intergroup contact, social change

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The Black Lives Matter movement has drawn thousands of people to the streets to protest against the continued oppression of Black people. In many of these protests, Whites have joined Blacks in collective action for racial justice. What compels advantaged group members to engage in action on behalf of a disadvantaged group? A range of narratives suggests that the contact experiences members of advantaged groups have with members of disadvantaged groups can play

an important role. Indeed, White historical figures such as Anne Braden, Eleanor Roosevelt,

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and Abraham Joshua Heschel engaged in meaningful interactions and developed friendships with prominent Black Americans, which fueled their ongoing commitment to the fight for racial justice (Drick, 2015). Qualitative research complements these historical examples, by showing that Whites who have had contact with racial minorities report that this contact encouraged their involvement in activism for racial justice (O'Brien, 2001; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005).

Decades of quantitative research have shown that positive contact between advantaged and disadvantaged groups can have tremendous influence on how members of advantaged groups approach intergroup relations, for example by reducing their prejudices (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and enhancing their support for policies that would promote greater equality between the groups (Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2010; Lewis, 2011). Nonetheless, there is relatively little research investigating whether contact compels members of advantaged groups to take action to promote the interests of the disadvantaged group. Most research examining the link between contact and collective action outcomes has focused on contact's effects among *disadvantaged* group members (Becker, Wright, Lubensky, & Zhou, 2013; Reicher, 2007; Tausch, Saguy, & Bryson, 2015; Tropp, Hawi, van Laar, & Levin, 2012). This line of research has generally found that intergroup contact diminishes disadvantaged group members' interest in collective action. However, contact among members of disadvantaged groups can increase disadvantaged group members' collective action intentions (Cakal, Eller, Sirlopu, & Perez, 2016); therefore, it is specifically contact *between advantaged and disadvantaged* groups that may weaken disadvantaged group members' collective action intentions. Thus, scholars have suggested that intergroup contact, a prominent prejudice reduction technique, may be in direct challenge to processes that promote collective action (Becker et al., 2013; Dixon et al., 2010; Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2009).

More broadly, the collective action literature has traditionally focused on factors that motivate

members of *disadvantaged* groups to engage in collective action on behalf of their own groups (e.g., Simon & Klandermans, 2001; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; Wright & Tropp, 2002). However, there is growing interest in understanding the factors that motivate members of the *advantaged* group to engage in collective action on behalf of the disadvantaged group (e.g., Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006; Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009; van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears, & Bettache, 2011), or what has been called solidarity-based collective action (Saab, Tausch, Spears, & Cheung, 2015). While contact with the advantaged group can weaken disadvantaged group members' willingness to engage in collective action to benefit their *own* group (see also Cakal, Hewstone, Schwär, & Heath, 2011), advantaged group members' contact with disadvantaged groups can enhance their willingness to engage in collective action to benefit the disadvantaged group (Fingerhut, 2011; Reimer et al., 2017); indeed, both Fingerhut (2011) and Reimer et al. (2017) found evidence that contact between heterosexuals and members of LGBT communities promoted greater LGBT activism among heterosexuals.

The present research adds to this emerging literature within the context of race relations in the United States, by testing whether and how Whites' contact with Blacks may enhance Whites' willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice. Specifically, the present research examines the emotional processes through which intergroup contact may encourage Whites to become involved in collective action for racial justice.

## Emotional Mediators Between Contact and Collective Action

Emotions that are derived from belonging to a particular group can guide intergroup behavior (Mackie, Smith, & Ray, 2008; Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007), and past research has shown that group-based emotions can shape advantaged group members' political actions (see Thomas et al., 2009, for a review). The current research

focuses on how the emotions advantaged group members feel regarding how disadvantaged group members are treated can help to explain the link between intergroup contact and collective action.

### *Empathy*

Broadly speaking, empathy has been conceptualized as taking the perspective of the other (cognitive empathy) and having concern for others and their experiences (affective empathy; see Davis, 1994; Fingerhut, 2011; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). Of particular relevance to the present research, Batson et al. (1997) demonstrated that empathy for a member of an outgroup can generalize to improve attitudes toward the whole group. As such, empathy has been identified as a key mediator of intergroup contact effects in the realm of prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Swart, Hewstone, Christ, & Voci, 2011), such that contact with members of an outgroup typically improves attitudes toward the outgroup as a whole (Pettigrew, 1997), in part through increasing empathy (Pagotto, Voci, & Maculan, 2010).

In the present research, we focus on affective empathy (as opposed to cognitive empathy or perspective-taking), given that prior research provides strong evidence for the link between contact and affective empathy (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Swart et al., 2011; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005), and because perspective-taking can promote affective empathy, which in turn improves intergroup attitudes (Batson et al., 1997; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Affective empathy can be further broken down into parallel empathy and reactive empathy. *Parallel empathy* refers to when people feel emotions similar to those experienced by others, which may include feelings of sadness or distress (see Davis, 2004; Stephan & Finlay, 1999); *reactive empathy* refers to when people feel empathic concern and compassion upon learning about the experiences of others (Batson, Eklund, Chermok, Hoyt, & Ortiz, 2007; Davis, 2004; Finlay & Stephan, 2000; Johnson, Ashburn-Nardo, Spicer, & Dovidio, 2008). Since both parallel and reactive empathy have been found to predict prosocial outcomes (e.g., Swart et al., 2011), we expect that both

dimensions of affective empathy will function similarly in mediating the relationship between intergroup contact and collective action.

Beyond reducing prejudice and promoting harmonious intergroup relations, dimensions of empathy have also been shown to predict political outcomes (Abbott & Cameron, 2014; Mallett, Huntsinger, Sinclair, & Swim, 2008). For example, Mallett et al. (2008) found that taking the perspective of a disadvantaged group (i.e., sexual minorities and Blacks) increased collective action on behalf of the specified outgroups. Relatedly, Abbott and Cameron (2014) found that trait levels of empathy mediated the relationship between intergroup contact and self-reported intentions to intervene when an immigrant was bullied (e.g., called offensive names). Similarly, we expect that affective empathy will contribute to mediating the relationship between intergroup contact and collective action, such that Whites who have more positive contact with Black Americans will feel more affective empathy towards Black Americans in general, and through greater affective empathy, will be more inclined to support collective action for racial justice.

We note, however, that while Fingerhut (2011) had similarly predicted that affective empathy would mediate the effect of intergroup contact on collective action to benefit a disadvantaged group, it did not emerge as a significant mediator in his study of heterosexuals' contact experiences with sexual minorities and LGBT activism. Although a wealth of research suggests that empathy promotes prosocial behaviors (e.g., Batson & Powell, 2003; Davis, 1983, 2004; Dovidio, Allen, & Schroeder, 1990), empathy alone may fall short in creating a long-term commitment to social change, or in encouraging advantaged group members to actively challenge inequality (Thomas et al., 2009). Indeed, Boler (1997) has warned against promoting empathy without other feelings in response to injustice, such as anger, which can be effectively harnessed to promote social action.

### *Anger*

In the broader literature on social change, anger in response to injustice is a powerful motivator of

political action (e.g., Batson, Kennedy, et al., 2007; Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007; Leach et al., 2006; Montada & Schneider, 1989; Thomas & McGarty, 2009; Thomas et al., 2009; Wakslak, Jost, Tyler, & Chen, 2007). Anger has been shown to predict advantaged group members' intentions to help the disadvantaged (Montada & Schneider, 1989), as well as support for redistributive policies (Wakslak et al., 2007), and willingness to engage in antipoverty social action (Thomas & McGarty, 2009). Consistent with past research, we conceptualize anger as arising from the mistreatment of a disadvantaged outgroup, which some refer to as moral outrage (e.g., Montada & Schneider, 1989; Thomas & McGarty, 2009); this form of anger is directed toward social agents, policies, or systems that perpetuate mistreatment of the disadvantaged, and as such, it is to be distinguished from self- or ingroup-focused anger, which is directed towards one's self or one's own group (e.g., Iyer et al., 2007; Leach et al., 2006).

Some scholars have asserted that empathy tends to promote social cohesion and prosocial behaviors, whereas anger promotes social change strategies such as collective action (Thomas et al., 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Indeed, Pagano and Huo (2007) found that empathy predicted behaviors aimed at alleviating suffering (e.g., providing humanitarian aid), but was less predictive of political actions aimed at changing unjust systems; instead, anger was more strongly predictive of political actions aimed at seeking justice. In addition, Fernando, Kashima, and Laham (2014) have found that empathy alone does not predict actions aimed at addressing inequality, but a combination of empathy and other emotions, such as anger, predict political action intentions (e.g., signing petitions).

Additional work supports the association between empathy and anger in shaping intentions toward social and political action. For example, concern for the disadvantaged group and anger about injustice, in parallel, predicted (a) men's collective action intentions against gender discrimination in the workplace (Iyer & Ryan, 2009), (b) non-Indigenous Australians' intentions to repair past wrongdoings against

Indigenous people (Feather, Woodyatt, & McKee, 2012), and (c) uninvolved group members' collective action in solidarity with disadvantaged groups (e.g., protests in Britain supporting Palestine, vigils in Hong Kong to commemorate the Tiananmen Square massacre in China; Saab et al., 2015). Thus, we propose that both empathy and anger will predict collective action, yet we further suggest that this occurs through a *sequential process*, whereby advantaged group members' empathy for the disadvantaged group will promote anger over the mistreatment of the disadvantaged group.

To our knowledge, prior work has not taken into account how empathy and anger may work sequentially to explain how advantaged group members come to support social change; however, we are not the first to propose that empathy may promote anger, and that anger may in turn promote action. Research on interpersonal relations suggests that feeling empathy may be necessary to produce anger over the unfair treatment of another individual (Batson, Kennedy, et al., 2007), and that empathy may promote prosocial behavior to the extent that it motivates other emotions such as anger (Kasperbauer, 2015). Moreover, given that anger is an approach-oriented emotion that is closely linked to action tendencies (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), we predict that anger will be a more proximal predictor of collective action than empathy.

## The Present Research

Across three survey studies, we investigate how White Americans' contact experiences with Black Americans predict their feelings of empathy and in turn anger, and finally their inclinations toward collective action for racial justice. Specifically, we propose that (a) Whites' contact with Blacks will predict greater empathy toward Blacks, (b) greater empathy toward Blacks will predict greater anger about the injustice Blacks face, and (c) greater anger about injustice will in turn predict Whites' willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice and support for the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement. Across the studies, we

operationalize empathy in terms of both parallel empathy (Studies 1 and 2) and reactive empathy (Study 3), and anger in terms of responses to racial injustices (Study 1), injustice in general (Study 2), and specifically in response to the discrimination that Black people face (Study 3), to demonstrate consistent support for the proposed model.

Given that past research has identified many other relevant variables as predictors of collective action, we also seek to control for the possible effects of additional factors when testing empathy and anger as mediators of the effect of intergroup contact on collective action.

### *White Guilt and Identification*

In thinking about how Whites respond to racial injustice, past research has shown that *guilt* is a common reaction that advantaged group members have towards their own position of privilege in society (e.g., Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003), which can promote intentions to repair status relations (Mallett et al., 2008; Swim & Miller, 1999). Thus, it is possible that greater feelings of guilt will predict greater support for collective action for racial justice among Whites. In addition, *identification* with one's advantaged group can also structure the effects of intergroup contact (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005). For instance, higher identification with the advantaged group can predict less investment in the disadvantaged (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998), and greater opposition to policies that benefit the disadvantaged (Cakal et al., 2011). Thus, the more that Whites identify with their advantaged group, the less willing they may be to support collective action for the disadvantaged. In Study 1, we take into account both White identification and White guilt while testing our proposed model. Specifically, we propose that intergroup contact will promote support for collective action through empathy and anger, even after accounting for any possible effects of White guilt and/or White identification on support for collective action.

### *Experiences of Negative Contact*

While most prior research has focused on the effects of positive contact on intergroup attitudes and relations (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), recent work has emphasized the need to also consider how negative contact affects intergroup attitudes and relations (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010). Although negative contact tends to be less frequent than positive contact (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014), negative contact has the potential to contribute to more negative intergroup outcomes (Barlow et al., 2012; Techakesari et al., 2015). Nonetheless, Reimer et al. (2017) have shown that positive contact is more predictive of advantaged group members' intentions to engage in collective action than negative contact. Thus, in Study 2, we examine how negative contact with Blacks affects Whites' willingness to support collective action for racial justice. Consistent with Reimer et al.'s (2017) findings, we expect that positive contact will predict greater support for collective action; we further expect that positive contact will predict greater support for collective action through the mechanisms of empathy and anger, beyond any effect of negative contact on support for collective action.

### *Beliefs About Group Efficacy and Moral Convictions*

While our proposed model focuses on an emotion-focused route to collective action through empathy and anger, beliefs about the efficacy of group action to challenge inequality is another central predictor of support for collective action (Glasford & Pratto, 2014; Thomas & McGarty, 2009; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). Additionally, past research has considered how collective action can be rooted in moral convictions against inequality, which are absolute beliefs of whether something is right or wrong (Skitka & Morgan, 2014; van Zomeren et al., 2011; see also Zaal, van Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, & Derks, 2011). In Study 3, we therefore measure both group efficacy and moral convictions and expect that these will meaningfully predict collective action outcomes;

yet we further expect that intergroup contact will predict support for collective action through greater empathy and anger, even when accounting for the effects of group efficacy and moral convictions on support for collective action.

## Study 1

Study 1 examines whether intergroup contact predicts support for collective action, and how the empathy-to-anger pathway explains this relationship. Study 1 also tests whether these effects emerge when taking into account White guilt and identification.

### Method

*Participants and procedure.* Participants were 273 self-identified White American participants (139 females, 112 males, 22 did not report gender;  $M_{age} = 35.14$  years,  $SD = 11.51$ ) who were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk to complete online surveys. Participants were told that they would be asked to respond to a series of questions about their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes in the context of intergroup relations and social change. All measures were assessed on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) unless stated otherwise.

#### Measures of predictor variables and mediators

*Intergroup contact.* To assess both the quantity and quality of intergroup contact, participants responded to two items frequently used in prior research (see Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). The items were "How often do you come into contact with Blacks?" on a scale from 1 (*almost never*) to 9 (*extremely frequently*), and "Of the Black people you know, how many would you consider to be friends?" on a scale from 1 (*none*) to 7 (*six or more*). Responses to these items were highly correlated ( $r = .60, p < .001$ ), and were therefore standardized and combined to create a composite measure of intergroup contact ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

*Empathy.* Participants responded to two items assessing affective empathy adapted from Swart

et al. (2011), and scores on these items were averaged. The items were "If I saw a Black person being treated unfairly because of their race, I would feel angry at the way they were being treated" and "If I heard that a Black person was upset suffering from racial injustice, I would also feel upset" ( $r = .61$ ).

*Anger.* Participants responded to five items adapted from Pagano and Huo (2007) to assess anger in the context of racial injustice (e.g., "Thinking about the racism that Black communities endure on a daily basis makes me angry at the justice system";  $\alpha = .94$ ).<sup>1</sup>

#### Measures of control variables

*White guilt.* Participants responded to three items from Swim and Miller (1999) to assess guilt White participants might feel when faced with racial inequality (e.g., "When I learn about racism, I feel guilty due to my association with the White race";  $\alpha = .91$ ).

*White identification.* Participants responded to four items adapted from Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears (1995) to assess identification with Whites (e.g., "Being White is an important part of how I see myself";  $\alpha = .91$ ).

#### Measures of outcome variables

*Willingness to engage in collective action.* Using items adapted from Kelly and Breinlinger (1995; see also Tropp & Brown, 2004), participants were asked how willing they are to engage in five different collective action behaviors (i.e., attend demonstrations, protests, or rallies against racial injustice; attend meetings or workshops on racial issues; write letters to public officials or other people of influence to protest against racial injustice; vote for political candidates who support racial equality; sign a petition to support racial justice) on a scale from 1 (*not at all willing*) to 9 (*extremely willing*;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

*Support for Black Lives Matter.* To provide greater external validity in relation to recent events, three items were developed to assess

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among variables (Study 1).

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Intergroup contact	5.18 (2.07)	–						
2. Empathy	6.88 (1.87)	.24***	–					
3. Anger	5.78 (2.25)	.16*	.69***	–				
4. White guilt	3.76 (2.44)	.04	.32***	.55***	–			
5. White identification	6.08 (2.03)	.02	-.18**	-.30***	-.34***	–		
6. Willingness to engage in collective action	5.35 (2.12)	.20**	.58***	.75***	.52***	-.24***	–	
7. Support for Black Lives Matter	3.61 (1.88)	.17**	.38***	.65***	.51***	-.31***	.71***	–

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

support for protests associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. Specifically, participants were asked to think about Black Lives Matter protests and indicate (a) “To what extent do you support or oppose these kinds of protests, to support racial justice for Blacks?” on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 9 (*strongly support*); (b) “How often have you shown your support for these kinds of protests through social media? (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.)” with scale responses of 1 (*never*), 2 (*at least once*), 3 (*two or three times*), 4 (*four or five times*), and 5 (*more than five times*); and (c) “How likely are you to participate in these kinds of protests in the future?” on a scale ranging from 1 (*extremely unlikely*) to 9 (*extremely likely*). The items were averaged to create a composite measure of support for the Black Lives Matter movement ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Correlations among the variables, as well as their means and standard deviations, are presented in Table 1. As predicted, intergroup contact, empathy, and anger, were all positively associated with willingness for collective action for racial justice and support for Black Lives Matter. As expected, White guilt was positively associated with the collective action outcomes (Mallett et al., 2008),<sup>2</sup> and White identification was negatively associated with the collective action outcomes (Cakal et al., 2011). It also is, however, important to note that neither White

guilt nor White identification correlated significantly with intergroup contact, thus they could not be possible mediators of the relationship between intergroup contact and collective action.<sup>3</sup>

### Mediation Analyses

To test our hypothesis that empathy and anger will act as sequential mediators of the relationship between intergroup contact and support for collective action, we conducted two separate sequential mediation analyses with empathy (Step 1) and anger (Step 2) as mediators to predict either willingness for collective action or support for Black Lives Matter. These analyses were conducted using Hayes’s (2013) PROCESS Model 6 with 10,000 bootstrapped samples.

As seen in Table 2, the sequential indirect effect of intergroup contact via empathy and anger was significant for both willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice and support for the Black Lives Matter movement. We then tested whether the hypothesized indirect effect of intergroup contact via empathy and anger would remain significant after controlling for the effects of White guilt and White identification on the collective action outcomes. Results of these analyses showed that the predicted sequential indirect effect remained significant for both collective action outcomes: willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice,  $b = .07$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.12], and support for the Black Lives Matter

**Table 2.** Unstandardized total, direct, and indirect effects from sequential mediation model (Study 1).

Effects	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
<u>Willingness to engage in collective action</u>				
Total effect	.21	0.06	0.09	0.33
Direct effect	.08	0.04	-0.01	0.16
Indirect effects				
Via empathy only	.02	0.02	-0.00	0.06
Via anger only	-.01	0.03	-0.07	0.06
<b>Via empathy and anger</b>	<b>.12</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.19</b>
<u>Support for Black Lives Matter</u>				
Total effect	.15	0.06	0.04	0.26
Direct effect	.08	0.04	-0.00	0.17
Indirect effects				
Via empathy only	-.03	0.02	-0.07	-0.01
Via anger only	-.01	0.03	-0.07	0.05
<b>Via empathy and anger</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.18</b>

Note. Hypothesized sequential indirect effects are in bold.

movement,  $b = .07$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.12]. Thus, Study 1 found initial support for our proposition that prior contact with Blacks would predict greater support for collective action among Whites through the pathways of greater empathy for Blacks and greater anger over racial injustice. Additionally, we found that these effects held even after accounting for White guilt and White identification. As such, we do not test White guilt and White identification as control variables in Studies 2 or 3, instead we test alternate control variables.

## Study 2

Study 2 aims to replicate and extend the findings of Study 1 by examining how positive contact predicts support for collective action, while also taking into account the negative intergroup encounters people may experience. Additionally, since empathy and anger about racial injustice were highly correlated in Study 1 ( $r = .69$ ), in Study 2 we employed a different measure of anger in the hopes of distinguishing more clearly between empathy and anger when testing these emotions as sequential mediators between positive intergroup contact and collective action.

## Method

*Participants and procedure.* Participants were 240 self-identified White American participants (142 males, 94 females, and four others;  $M_{age} = 34.84$  years,  $SD = 12.04$ ) who were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk to complete online surveys on "intergroup relations in the United States." All measures were assessed on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) unless stated otherwise.

### *Measures of predictor variables and mediators*

*Positive and negative contact.* Participants indicated the frequency of their positive contact with Blacks by responding to four items representing expanded measures contained within Barlow et al. (2012), concerning how often they have had positive, good, pleasant, and friendly interactions with Blacks on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*extremely frequently*;  $\alpha = .97$ ). Similarly, participants indicated the frequency of their negative contact with Blacks by responding to four items concerning how often they have had negative, bad, unfriendly, and unpleasant interactions with Blacks on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*extremely frequently*;  $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Table 3.** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among variables (Study 2).

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Positive contact	5.26 (1.37)	–					
2. Negative contact	2.61 (1.34)	–.38***	–				
3. Empathy	5.23 (1.35)	.38***	–.27***	–			
4. Anger	5.34 (1.36)	.38***	–.31***	.76***	–		
5. Willingness for collective action	3.60 (1.71)	.31***	–.10	.41***	.52***	–	
6. Support for Black Lives Matter	3.60 (1.94)	.22**	–.08	.38***	.44***	.72***	–

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

*Empathy.* Similar to Study 1, participants responded to three affective empathy items from Swart et al. (2011; e.g., “If a Black person I knew was feeling sad, I think that I would also feel sad”;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

*Anger.* Participants responded to six items assessing anger in response to injustice using items developed by Wakslak et al. (2007; e.g., “I feel angry when I learn about people who are suffering from injustice”;  $\alpha = .94$ ).<sup>4</sup>

#### *Measures of outcome variables*

*Willingness to engage in collective action.* To enhance our measurement from Study 1, we added five more items to include a total of 10 items assessing participants’ willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice (i.e., join a group aimed at raising awareness about racial inequality, donate money to an organization dedicated to fighting for racial justice, act as a spokesperson for racial justice issues, raise racial justice issues in groups or organizations, spend time working on a racial justice campaign; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Tropp & Brown, 2004). All 10 items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all willing*) to 7 (*extremely willing*;  $\alpha = .96$ ).

*Support for Black Lives Matter.* Participants were asked to think about protests associated with the Black Lives Matter movement and to indicate the extent to which they (a) “support these protests,” (b) “think these protests should continue,” and are (c) “willing to participate in these protests in the future.” The items were averaged to create a composite score of support for Black Lives Matter protests ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Correlations among the variables, as well as their means and standard deviations, are presented in Table 3. As in Study 1, positive contact, empathy, and anger were all positively correlated with both collective action outcomes. Additionally, negative contact did not correlate significantly with either collective action outcome, and positive and negative contact were negatively correlated. Consistent with prior research (Graf et al., 2014), participants reported greater positive contact ( $M = 5.26$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) than negative contact ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ),  $t(239) = 18.32$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### *Mediation Analyses*

To test whether empathy and anger act as sequential mediators of the relationship between positive contact and collective action, we entered empathy (Step 1) and anger (Step 2) as mediators, to predict each of the collective action outcomes. These analyses were conducted using Hayes’s (2013) PROCESS Model 6 with 10,000 bootstrapped samples, as in Study 1.

As seen in Table 4, the sequential indirect effect of positive contact via empathy and anger was significant for both willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice and support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Indirect effects remained significant and in the same direction when controlling for negative contact, both when predicting willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice,  $b = .14$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.26] and support for the Black Lives Matter movement,  $b = .13$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95% CI [0.06, 0.24].

**Table 4.** Unstandardized total, direct, and indirect effects from sequential mediation model (Study 2).

Effects	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
<u>Willingness to engage in collective action</u>				
Total effect	.39	0.08	0.24	0.55
Direct effect	.17	0.08	0.02	0.32
Indirect effects				
Via empathy only	-.00	0.05	-0.09	0.09
Via anger only	.06	0.03	0.00	0.14
<b>Via empathy and anger</b>	<b>.16</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>0.28</b>
<u>Support for Black Lives Matter</u>				
Total effect	.31	0.09	0.13	0.49
Direct effect	.07	0.09	-0.11	0.25
Indirect effects				
Via empathy only	.04	0.06	-0.06	0.16
Via anger only	.05	0.03	0.00	0.13
<b>Via empathy and anger</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.26</b>

*Note.* Hypothesized sequential indirect effects are in bold.

Taken together, Study 2 replicated and extended the findings from Study 1 by showing that positive intergroup contact predicted greater support for collective action through the sequential processes of enhancing empathy for Blacks and anger over injustice. These positive mediated effects of contact on collective action held beyond any effects that might be associated with people's negative intergroup contact experiences. The relatively weak effects of negative contact are also consistent with other work showing that prior positive contact can encourage positive intergroup outcomes even in light of negative intergroup experiences (Paolini et al., 2014; Reimer et al., 2017). Given that we have taken into account the role of negative contact in Study 2, we no longer examine negative contact in Study 3.

### Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 show that positive intergroup contact predicts greater support for collective action through the pathways of building empathy toward the disadvantaged and anger about injustice. In both studies we measured empathy in terms of what is known as *parallel empathy*. In Study 3, we instead measure empathy in terms of *reactive empathy* by including a range of emotion terms based on the various ways researchers have conceptualized and measured the

concept (e.g., Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Davis, 2004; Dovidio et al., 2004; Finlay & Stephan, 2000) to test for consistency in results using different indicators of affective empathy. Similarly, in Study 3 we measure anger using emotion terms based on how this concept has been conceptualized and measured in prior work (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2004; Leach et al., 2006; van Zomeren et al., 2004). Thus, in Study 3, both empathy and anger are assessed by presenting participants with a list of emotions and asking them to rate the extent to which they felt each emotion in response to the inequality that Black people have faced, using the same scoring scale for each emotion. Compared to Studies 1 and 2, this measurement approach offers a more direct and rigorous test of whether empathy and anger represent separate constructs or whether emotion items assessing empathy and anger represent a single factor. In addition, as noted earlier in the introduction, Study 3 examines whether our model still holds when important predictors derived from the collective action literature are taken into account—group efficacy and moral convictions.

### Method

*Participants and procedure.* Participants were 308 self-identified White American participants (123

males, 181 females, and four did not specify gender;  $M_{age} = 38.37$  years,  $SD = 13.13$ ) who were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk to complete online surveys. Participants were told that they would be asked to respond to a survey about their social experiences and attitudes related to current social issues. All measures were assessed on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) unless stated otherwise.

#### Measures of predictor variables and mediators

*Positive contact.* Participants indicated the frequency of their positive contact experiences with Black people by responding to the same items used in Study 2 (Barlow et al., 2012;  $\alpha = .99$ ).

*Empathy and anger.* Participants were asked to think about the inequality that Black people have faced and to report how strongly they feel each of 20 emotions, on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*). Ten items assessed empathy (*sympathetic, soft-hearted, tender, touched, compassion, warmth, moved, understanding, empathy, and concern*; see Coke et al., 1978; Dovidio et al., 2004; Finlay & Stephan, 2000; Johnson et al., 2008; Matthews, Batson, Horn, & Rosenman, 1981;  $\alpha = .97$ ). Another 10 items assessed anger (*angered, annoyed, alarmed, bothered, outraged, furious, hostile, indignant, irritated, and displeased*; see Dovidio et al., 2004; Leach et al., 2006; van Zomeren et al., 2004;  $\alpha = .95$ ). As expected, a principal components analysis with oblimin rotation revealed two factors representing empathy and anger (eigenvalues  $> 1$ ; see Table 5 for factor loadings) that accounted for 74.99% of the variance.<sup>5</sup>

#### Measures of control variables

*Group efficacy.* Participants responded to three items to assess group efficacy adapted from Cakal et al. (2011; e.g., "Whites as a group can change the conditions of Blacks in the United States";  $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Moral convictions.* Participants responded to three items measuring moral convictions adapted from van Zomeren et al. (2011; e.g., "My opinion about discrimination of Blacks is an important part of my moral norms and values";  $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Table 5.** Principal components exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation (Study 3).

	Factor 1 (Empathy)	Factor 2 (Anger)
Tender	<b>0.95</b>	-0.07
Touched	<b>0.91</b>	-0.02
Soft-hearted	<b>0.90</b>	0.02
Compassion	<b>0.90</b>	0.02
Moved	<b>0.89</b>	0.03
Warmth	<b>0.87</b>	-0.11
Sympathetic	<b>0.80</b>	-0.15
Empathy	<b>0.73</b>	0.22
Understanding	<b>0.71</b>	0.08
Concern	<b>0.66</b>	0.34
Annoyed	-0.16	<b>0.93</b>
Irritated	-0.06	<b>0.91</b>
Hostile	-0.12	<b>0.80</b>
Furious	0.24	<b>0.71</b>
Outraged	0.27	<b>0.69</b>
Angered	0.32	<b>0.68</b>
Alarmed	0.33	<b>0.63</b>
Indignant	0.21	<b>0.63</b>
Bothered	0.27	<b>0.61</b>
Displeased	0.37	<b>0.59</b>

*Note:* Factor loadings that represent each factor are in bold.

#### Measures of outcome variables

*Willingness to engage in collective action.* Participants responded to the same five items assessing participants' willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice that were used in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .91$ ; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Tropp & Brown, 2004).

*Support for Black Lives Matter.* Participants also responded to the same items assessing support for the Black Lives Matter movement used in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Correlations among the variables, as well as their means and standard deviations, are presented in Table 6. Replicating the findings from Studies 1 and 2, positive contact was positively correlated with empathy, anger, and the collective action outcomes. Consistent with prior research, group efficacy and moral convictions were positively

**Table 6.** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among variables (Study 3).

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Positive contact	6.92 (2.16)	–						
2. Empathy	5.53 (2.13)	.47***	–					
3. Anger	5.24 (2.12)	.40***	.79***	–				
4. Group efficacy	6.22 (2.19)	.41***	.67***	.58***	–			
5. Moral convictions	6.44 (2.20)	.33***	.46***	.48***	.52***	–		
6. Willingness for collective action	5.09 (2.46)	.42***	.70***	.67***	.66***	.50***	–	
7. Support for Black Lives Matter	3.64 (1.95)	.33***	.65***	.63***	.64***	.49***	.82***	–

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 7.** Unstandardized total, direct, and indirect effects of sequential mediation model (Study 3).

Effects	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
<u>Willingness to engage in collective action</u>				
Via anger only	.01	0.01	–0.01	0.05
Total effect	.47	0.06	0.36	0.59
Direct effect	.12	0.05	0.02	0.22
Indirect effects				
Via empathy only	.22	0.05	0.13	0.32
<b>Via empathy and anger</b>	<b>.13</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.20</b>
<u>Support for Black Lives Matter</u>				
Total effect	.30	0.05	0.20	0.39
Direct effect	.02	0.04	–0.07	0.10
Indirect effects				
Via empathy only	.17	0.04	0.09	0.26
Via anger only	.01	0.01	–0.01	0.04
<b>Via empathy and anger</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.16</b>

Note: Hypothesized sequential indirect effects are in bold.

correlated with the collective action outcomes as well (e.g., Glasford & Pratto, 2014; van Zomeren et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2004).

### Mediation Analyses

To test our central hypothesis that empathy and anger act as sequential mediators of the relationship between positive contact and collective action, analyses were conducted using Hayes's (2013) PROCESS Model 6 as in Studies 1 and 2.

As seen in Table 7, the sequential indirect effect of positive contact via empathy and anger was significant for both willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice and support for

the Black Lives Matter movement. Thus, using different measures of empathy and anger than the previous studies, Study 3 replicated the finding that positive contact with Blacks predicts greater collective action for racial justice through greater empathy and anger regarding the injustice that Black people face.

We then conducted the mediation analyses again while including group efficacy and moral convictions as covariates. Results of these analyses showed that the predicted sequential indirect effect of positive contact via empathy and anger remained significant when predicting both willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice,  $b = .04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.08],

and support for the Black Lives Matter movement,  $b = .03$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.06].

## General Discussion

Findings across three studies indicate that Whites' positive contact with Blacks predicts greater support for collective action to address injustices faced by Blacks through a sequential pathway of greater empathy toward Blacks and anger over how Blacks are treated.<sup>6</sup> These findings extend prior work by suggesting that contact not only encourages support for more egalitarian racial policy attitudes (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2007), but that it can also enhance Whites' willingness to engage in collective action for racial justice and support for the Black Lives Matter movement. These results are consistent with Fingerhut's (2011) and Reimer et al.'s (2017) findings in the context of heterosexuals' LGBT activism, while extending this research to the realm of race relations in the United States.

We further integrate the literature on intergroup contact and collective action by identifying the underlying emotional processes through which intergroup contact promotes collective action. Specifically, while prior work has shown that intergroup contact encourages greater empathy for outgroup members (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Swart et al., 2011), and that anger is a proximal predictor of efforts toward social change (e.g., Pagano & Huo, 2007; Wakslak et al., 2007), the present research suggests that both empathy and anger work together in sequence, such that empathy promotes anger, to explain how intergroup contact predicts collective action among members of advantaged groups. These findings extend prior research on the role of emotional reactions in motivating advantaged group members to engage in social change behaviors (Thomas et al., 2009).

Moreover, we show that our proposed model holds even when taking into account other factors that are relevant to unequal status relations and collective action, including White guilt and White identification (Study 1), negative contact (Study 2), and group efficacy and moral convictions (Study 3). While our studies highlight how

contact predicts greater collective action through the pathways of empathy and anger, by no means do we discount the important roles that these other factors play. Rather, we aim to add to the extant literature by elucidating the role that intergroup contact can have in shaping advantaged group members' intentions to engage in collective action to support the disadvantaged.

While the present research tested the role of White identification in relation to advantaged group's contact with and collective action on behalf of the disadvantaged group, there may be other relevant group identities that can predict related group-based responses (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In thinking about advantaged group members' acting on behalf of the disadvantaged group, there could be several relevant group identities which can become politicized (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), such as identifying as an advocate for racial justice (Bluic, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007), identifying with a movement for racial justice (Stürmer & Simon, 2004), or identifying with the disadvantaged group directly (van Zomeren et al., 2011). Thus, future research may delineate how other relevant group identities can shape the effect of intergroup contact on collective action for the disadvantaged.

There are also some limitations to the present research that we wish to acknowledge. One limitation involves the cross-sectional, correlational nature of the data, which inhibits our ability to make firm conclusions about causal relationships among the relevant variables (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005; Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). We address this limitation by testing several alternative models across the three studies, in which we reverse the order of explanatory variables (see supplementary material). For example, it is possible that the experience of participating in collective action for racial justice could provoke further anger over injustice, and such anger may promote empathy for Blacks, which then encourages Whites to engage in positive contact with Blacks in the future; such an approach would be consistent with self-perception theory (Bem, 1967), which posits that people may come to hold certain emotions and attitudes by observing or

rationalizing their own behaviors. However, when we tested the reverse causal model (i.e., collective action predicting intergroup contact, via anger and empathy), we found that the reverse paths did not show consistent effects across the studies. We also tested models in which we reversed the sequential order of the mediators to examine the effects of intergroup contact on collective action first through anger (Step 1) and then through empathy (Step 2); again, we found inconsistent effects. Taken together, the alternative models offer further evidence for the hypothesized model of intergroup contact to collective action via empathy and anger; still, further experimental and longitudinal research is needed to provide more conclusive support for a causal psychological process.

Additionally, across the studies, empathy and anger were highly correlated, which suggests that there is considerable overlap between these emotional processes, at least in the context of examining advantaged group members' emotional responses to injustices faced by the disadvantaged. For each study, we performed confirmatory factor analyses (see endnotes 1, 4 and 5) and found that empathy and anger are distinguishable, though highly correlated, constructs. On the one hand, given that the fit of the two-factor models could be enhanced, future research should seek to improve upon the measurement of these constructs. On the other hand, prior research suggests that it is not unusual for both empathy and anger to be evoked in response to injustice (Batson, Kennedy, et al., 2007; Hoffman, 1989; Montada & Schneider, 1989; Neto & Pedersen, 2013; Pagano & Huo, 2007). In retrospect, perhaps a strong association between empathy and anger was to be expected. If advantaged group members truly experience empathy toward the disadvantaged group, then a component of this emotional response should involve a shared anger about the injustice disadvantaged group members face. In line with this proposition, Batson, Kennedy, et al. (2007) found at the interpersonal level that when someone is treated unfairly, those who also feel empathic concern for the person are especially likely to display

anger at the injustice—or what they refer to as *empathic anger*. It makes sense, then, that the anger at injustice advantaged group members feel would be tightly linked to their empathy toward the disadvantaged group. Within the current context of White Americans' attitudes toward collective action for racial justice, both being able to empathize with the experiences of Black Americans and getting angry about the mistreatment of Black Americans, are vital. Nevertheless, further research is required to tease apart these emotional reactions, by examining whether feeling empathy for a group *causes* anger when that group is harmed, and whether it is possible to feel angry *without* feeling empathy for the harmed group.

In sum, the present research offers compelling initial evidence of the processes through which intergroup contact predicts willingness to engage in and support for collective action among members of an advantaged group. Given that advantaged group members hold tremendous power and privilege in society, they have an important role to play in advancing efforts toward social change. Thus, in the context of race relations in the United States, it is crucial to understand what motivates Whites to commit to the fight for racial justice, and the present findings provide important insights regarding the role of intergroup contact in these efforts, as well as the underlying mechanisms involved.

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### Notes

1. Given that empathy and anger were highly correlated ( $r = .69$ ), we performed a confirmatory factor analysis to examine whether items comprising

- these measures should be conceived of as a single measure (i.e., empathy and anger items loading onto only one factor) or as separate measures (i.e., empathy and anger items loading onto two factors). In the one-factor solution model, all the empathy and anger items were entered to load onto one factor,  $\chi^2 = 195.25, p < .001, CFI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.22, SRMR = 0.27$ . In the two-factor solution model, the empathy items and anger items were entered to load onto separate factors,  $\chi^2 = 106.58, p < .001, CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.17, SRMR = 0.04$ . Although the fit of the model could be improved, a chi-square difference test between these models showed that the two-factor solution was the better fitting model,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 88.67, p < .001$ .
2. Mallett et al. (2008) also found that anger predicted collective action, however it was guilt that mediated the effect of perspective-taking (or empathy) on collective action on behalf of an outgroup. We do not find guilt to be a mediator of the relationship between intergroup contact and collective action. However, we are able to replicate Mallett et al.'s (2008) central finding, which is that guilt mediates the relationship between empathy and willingness to engage in collective action (e.g.,  $b = .12, SE = 0.03, 95\% CI [0.07, 0.18]$ ). Nevertheless, since guilt is not significantly associated with intergroup contact, we rule it out as a potential alternative pathway.
  3. Given other research showing that those who strongly identify with their advantaged group are more likely to experience positive outcomes of intergroup contact (e.g., Voci, Hewstone, Swart, & Veneziani, 2015), we also tested whether highly identified Whites might be more willing to engage in collective action when they have positive intergroup contact experiences. Results showed no significant interaction between White identification and intergroup contact in predicting willingness to engage in collective action.
  4. As in Study 1, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis on the empathy and anger items to examine whether the empathy and anger items would load onto only one factor ( $\chi^2 = 109.97, p < .001, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.11, SRMR = 0.12$ ) or onto two factors ( $\chi^2 = 104.43, p < .001, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.11, SRMR = 0.04$ ). A chi-square difference test between these models showed that the two-factor solution was the better fitting model,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 5.54, p = .02$ .
  5. Additionally, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis on the empathy and anger items in Study 3 to examine whether these items should be conceived of as a single measure (i.e., empathy and anger items loading onto only one factor) or as separate measures (i.e., empathy and anger items loading onto two factors). In the one-factor solution model, all the empathy and anger items were entered to load onto one factor,  $\chi^2 = 1159.24, p < .001, CFI = 0.85, RMSEA = 0.14, SRMR = 0.36$ . In the two-factor solution model, the empathy items and anger items were entered to load onto separate factors,  $\chi^2 = 963.58, p < .001, CFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.13, SRMR = 0.05$ . A chi-square difference test between these models showed that the two-factor solution was the better fitting model,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 195.66, p < .001$ , thus providing some support for the notion that empathy and anger are indeed distinct constructs; still, we acknowledge that the fit of the model could be improved further, and we return to this point in the general discussion.
  6. Across Studies 1–3 we also included measures of reported actual participation in collective action for racial justice—that is, how often participants have actually engaged in the same collective action behaviors used to assess willingness for collective action;  $\alpha_1 = .82, M_1 = 3.40; \alpha_2 = .95, M_2 = 2.26; \alpha_3 = .82, M_3 = 3.55$ ), and how often participants have actually participated in Black Lives Matter protests (single item;  $M_1 = 1.35; M_2 = 2.03; M_3 = 1.32$ ). We found nearly identical patterns of results when using actual involvement in collective action or participation in Black Lives Matter as outcomes, as compared to the results for willingness to engage in collective action or support for Black Lives Matter. The sequential indirect effect of intergroup contact via empathy and anger was significant in predicting actual participation in collective action for racial justice in Study 1,  $b = .09, SE = 0.03, 95\% CI [0.04, 0.15]$ ; Study 2,  $b = .06, SE = 0.03, 95\% CI [0.01, 0.14]$ ; and in Study 3,  $b = .09, SE = 0.04, 95\% CI [0.03, 0.17]$ . Similarly, the sequential indirect effect of positive contact via empathy and anger was significant in predicting actual participation in Black Lives Matter in Study 1,  $b = .03, SE = 0.01, 95\% CI [0.01, 0.06]$ , yet it was not significant in Study 2,  $b = .01, SE = 0.03, 95\% CI [-0.05, 0.08]$ , and weak in Study 3,  $b = .02, SE = 0.01, 95\% CI [0.01, 0.04]$ .

Additionally, we ran analyses using actual involvement in collective action as a control variable when testing relationships between intergroup contact and willingness for collective action or support for Black Lives Matter, and the patterns of results were virtually identical. Specifically, the indirect effect of intergroup contact via empathy and anger remained significant in predicting willingness for collective action, even after controlling for actual participation in collective action (Study 1:  $b = .05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.10]; Study 2:  $b = .12$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ , 95% CI [0.06, 0.20]; Study 3:  $b = .05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.09]). Similarly, the indirect effect of intergroup contact via empathy and anger remained significant in predicting support for Black Lives Matter, even after controlling for participation in Black Lives Matter (Study 1:  $b = .09$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ , 95% CI [0.04, 0.14]; Study 2:  $b = .14$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.24]; Study 3:  $b = .07$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.13]). These findings suggest that intergroup contact predicts support for collective action via empathy and anger, beyond the effects of prior actual participation in collective action.

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