Uncensored:
Reducing Social Desirability in the Expression of Racial Attitudes

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1 Paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association,
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There is almost a consensus among scholars that the old days of expressing overt racial beliefs have greatly diminished. This is not to say that racial prejudice has disappeared. Rather, individuals are more likely to express their beliefs in race-neutral terms\(^2\) or censor themselves altogether. This is due to a shift in norms that now deems the expression of racial prejudice politically incorrect. In other words, “new, post-civil-rights-era, normative prescriptions now mute [racism’s] overt expression. That is, even those with underlying prejudiced beliefs understand that the public expression of racism is no longer acceptable in most circles and usually comply with that norm, at least overtly” (Sears et al. 2000, 21).

Nevertheless, racially conservative ideologies rest just below the surface. Whether overtly or covertly expressed, attitudes towards race and perceptions of African Americans predict support for candidates (Reeves 1997; Berinsky 1999; Terkildsen 1993; Williams 1990), issues (Mendelberg 2001; Valentino 1999; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Gilens 1999; White 2007), and political parties (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989; Philpot 2004). Yet, the extent to which race matters in politics is systematically underestimated because of the censoring of individuals racial beliefs. Rather than express racially conservative attitudes, individuals will often mark “don’t know” when asked in surveys about their racial attitudes (Berinsky 1999) or indicate that they are undecided when asked about voting for a black candidate (Reeves 1997).

\(^2\) By race-neutral terms, we mean the expression of prejudice based on principled conservatism or racial resentment rather than overt disenchantment for racial minorities.
as Kuklinski et al. (1997) argue “[v]alidly measuring racial attitudes is one of the most difficult tasks that social scientists face. As long as people know they are being asked to express their beliefs and feelings about race, the investigator cannot dismiss the possibility that desirability effects—people giving an insincere, ‘right’ answer” (324).

This leads us to our research question: Under what circumstances are people comfortable expressing politically incorrect sentiments about race? While there has been an extensive amount of research on how to reduce or measure social desirability effects—the extent to which people alter their opinions to comply with social norms—most of this discussion has been confined to methodological issues related to survey design and implementation. Social desirability effects and the willingness to express “true” attitudes are phenomena that plague public opinion absent survey research, especially when it comes to articulating attitudes about race.

Duly noted but less explored is the notion that reducing the pressure to conform to social norms can also be achieved by receiving external justification from everyday sources (Aronson 1984). Therefore, we examine the extent to which events in white American’s everyday lives can make them feel more comfortable expressing racially conservative attitudes. Specifically, we examine the role the media play in releasing the pressure to censor the expression of racially conservative sentiments. The media provide the perfect opportunity to examine the research question because it is an institution to which most Americans are exposed. We argue that, when people encounter others who are willing to espouse a racially conservative position on an issue via the media, they will be more likely to express racially conservative attitudes as well. We also argue that the
willingness to express these beliefs will be greater when the conservative position has been validated by an African American.

Identifying the circumstances that reduce social desirability pressure is important given the implications this phenomenon has on American society. Individuals’ self-censorship masks the extent to which the United States has progressed on the road to universal equality. Moreover, it calls to question the need for affirmative action, majority-minority districts and the renewal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965—policies that have a direct impact on a significant segment of the American population. Thus, addressing this problem is not only of interest to scholars in the areas of race and public opinion, but also decision-makers who determine the fate of race-related policies.

Expressing Race

Since the early part of the 20th century there has been a steady decline in the expression white supremacist ideology. Only a handful of whites now believe that blacks are innately inferior and that racial differences in socioeconomic status or behavior result from genetic differences between the races. Likewise, support among whites for formal segregation of the races and legalized discrimination of blacks has also declined (Sears et al. 2000). While some take this as a hopeful sign that racism has all but disappeared, others argue that manifestations of prejudice and racial animus have transferred to more subtle expressions of racial attitudes (Sears 2004; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Dovidio et al. 2002). Scholars have even gone so far as to argue that it is not so much that people no longer hold racist beliefs as it is that people recognize that it is taboo to express them (Fazio et al. 1995; Crosby et al. 1980). Hence, the observed downward trend in the
expression of racially conservative viewpoints is at least in part the result of a censoring process among survey respondents.

While there is debate about the magnitude of this problem (see Sears 2004), there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the degree of racial tolerance among white Americans is overestimated. A review of the early literature on studies involving unobtrusive measures of racism indicates that whites consistently exhibit anti-black discrimination in the form of non-verbal behavior like body language and facial expressions, aggression, and willingness to assist others, despite their self-reported level of racial animus (Crosby et al. 1980). In a more recent study, Kuklinski et al. (1997) found that using an unobtrusive measure of racial attitudes in the form of a list experiment yielded much higher levels of expressed prejudice than more obtrusive, but comparable survey questions which asked respondents directly about their racial attitudes. Berinsky argues that “this gap between private opinion and public utterance most likely results from ‘social desirability’ concerns, a desire to cloak attitudes that society as a whole might deem unacceptable for fear of social sanctions” (Berinsky 1999, 1211).

Studies have examined the conditions under which people censor themselves when asked to express their attitudes towards race. For instance, Berinsky (1999) finds that survey respondents are less willing to express their attitudes towards school integration, thereby creating an underestimation of opposition to this issue. Berinsky also finds that this same censoring occurs in pre-election polling data measuring support for a black candidate in a biracial mayoral race. Scholars (Campbell 1981; Hatchett and Schuman 1975; Finkel et al. 1991; Cotter et al. 1982) have also examined the extent to
which race-of-interviewer bias existed in the expression of racial attitudes among whites. Hatchett and Schumann (1975) found that whites interviewed by blacks were more likely to express “more liberal or pro-black opinions” (525), suggesting that white survey respondents further censor themselves in the presence of blacks.

But while considerable attention has been paid to identifying the conditions that lead to self-censorship of racial attitudes, less work has been devoted to gauging the circumstances that allow individuals to be more candid about racial views. What we do know about reducing social desirability has largely been confined to tweaking elements of the survey environment. Within the context of survey response, scholars have examined the willingness to answer racially-sensitive questions when surveys are self-administered versus face-to-face with an interviewer. Krysan (1998) found that as privacy increased, in other words when respondents received a mail survey instead of a face-to-face interview, attitudes were less favorable towards blacks. But are there other circumstances, beyond increasing the level of privacy in which a survey is administered, that allow individuals to feel more comfortable expressing racial preferences that do not conform to current societal perceptions of political correctness?

**Releasing the Pressure to Conform**

To answer the question posed above, we draw inspiration from Leon Festinger’s (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. According to this theory, people will experience discomfort when they experience two cognitions that are logically inconsistent (Festinger 1957). The existence of a norm of equality coinciding with conservative racial beliefs causes dissonance among many. One way to resolve the dissonance is to suppress one of
the two beliefs, usually the racial conservatism since it is the one least socially acceptable (Mendelberg 2001). Another way to resolve the conflict is to justify having attitudes that contradict the norm. In other words, people can reduce the discomfort caused by holding conflicting beliefs by reconciling the two. For instance, throughout slavery and Jim Crow, whites justified the oppression of blacks by creating a unifying legitimizing myth known as white supremacy that established the inherent inferiority of blacks (Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Walton and Smith 2000). Since it was thought that blacks were incapable achieving the same level of intellectual ability and social responsibility, they were not included in the notion that “All men are created equal.”

At the heart of the reconciliation process is the need for justification as seen in the above example. On the one hand, a person can reduce their level of dissonance by convincing herself that her beliefs are not out of the norm. Dissonance occurs when individuals do something or believe something that contradicts that which is considered appropriate. To overcome the dissonance, the individual will convince herself that her action or belief is not violating the norm. As Figure 1 illustrates, we argue that belief reconciliation can also occur when individuals encounter outside sources that have concurring opinions. In other words, rather than internally forming justification for the conflicting behaviors or attitudes, the individual receives validation from others that she is vindicated in her position.

[Figure 1 About Here]

We argue that two conditions must be met in order for the theory to hold. First, there must be agreement between the opinions voiced by the external source and the individual. Second, the external source must be perceived as an expert. With respect to
racial attitudes, this means encountering another person considered an authority on the subject who echoes racially conservative positions. Support for our argument can be found in discussions of political learning. Scholars studying source credibility suggest that persuasive communication will have more of an impact if the source is perceived as an expert in that area (Druckman 2001). Moreover, a source will be more credible when it is perceived as having common interests with the recipient of information (see Lupia and McCubbins 1998 for a broader discussion of political learning and persuasion).

When it comes to the pros and cons of racial issues, African Americans signal expertise since they are most directly impacted by and therefore more invested in racial policies. To be sure, race is one of the strongest cues in the political environment. Race cues in the form of candidates’ race can influence citizens’ perceptions of where candidates stand on issues. All else being equal, citizens are more likely to identify black candidates as liberal and presume they support policies designed to ameliorate economic inequality more so than similar white candidates (Williams 1990). Likewise, black candidates are also perceived to be more interested in racial issues than their white counterparts (McDermott 1998). More directly related to the current study, the visual presentation of African Americans in conjunction with outside groups can create an associative link between blacks and that entity. For instance, Philpot (2007) found that the presence of blacks at the 2000 Republican National Convention increased the

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3 As evidence to this latter point, blacks tend to be more attentive to local politics when they are represented by a black mayor who presumably will be more responsive to racial issues (Bobo and Gilliam 1990). Moreover, the information gap in political knowledge between blacks and whites all but disappears on racial issues (Hutchings 2003).
probability that whites perceived the Republican Party as better able to represent blacks and other minorities. Thus, we argue that a similar associative link will be formed when individuals encounter African Americans expressing racially conservative opinions. Connecting blacks to a racially conservative viewpoint will lead to the perception that that point of view is more socially acceptable. Consequently, individuals will be more likely to express racially conservative attitudes than they otherwise would have had an African American not endorsed that standpoint.

**Data and Methodology**

This study requires answering two questions. First, how prevalent are racially conservative African Americans in the media? Second, do whites make inferences based on perceptions of black public opinion?

To answer the first question, we conduct a systematic analysis of the extent to which the racially conservative view is expressed in the media when a racially-charged incident occurs. As Graber (1989) explains, “News stories often play a crucial part in shaping the perceptions of reality of millions of people in all walks of life…They [news stories] provide the nation with shared political experiences, such as watching presidential election debates or congressional investigations, that then form a basis for public opinions and for uniting people for political actions” (Graber 1989, 3). Given its importance, the media’s transmission of different perspectives seems like the ideal backdrop by which to examine the circumstances that reduce social desirability. In doing so, we identified an incident that was well publicized and called to question the issue of racial equality. This incident occurred on December 5, 2002, when former Senate
Majority Leader Trent Lott remarked that the country would have been better off if J. Strom Thurmond had been successful in his 1948 bid for the presidency. Since Thurmond was an ardent segregationist, Lott’s endorsement of his presidential candidacy indicated to some that Lott advocated a return to Jim Crow segregation.

We conducted a content analysis of television news transcripts from six sources: CNBC, Fox News, ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN. These transcripts were obtained using Lexis-Nexis. Transcripts were included if they contained the name “Trent Lott.” The sample frame ranged from the date of the incident to one month after the incident. Then, for each transcript, the race, gender, and party identification of the persons appearing during the newscast were coded. Finally, we coded whether these individuals took a racially conservative or racially liberal position on the issue at hand. We hypothesize that, in order to appear balanced and unbiased, the media will give equal time to both the conservative and liberal position on each issue and will feature as many black conservatives as it does black liberals.

We then turn our attention to assessing the effects that these media norms have on white’s attitudes about race. We argue that the media’s effort to appear unbiased by disproportionately featuring black conservatives in discussions of race skews the extent to which the public believes African Americans support a conservative point of view, thereby increasing willingness to express racially conservative beliefs. To test this idea, we conducted an experiment where subjects are exposed to different perspectives of the Trent Lott incident. Experiments provide an “unrivaled capacity to provide decisive tests of causal propositions” (Kinder and Palfrey 1993, 11).
By creating the treatments of interest, the experimenter holds extraneous factors constant and ensures that subjects encounter treatments that differ only in designated ways. By assigning subjects to treatments randomly, the experimenter can be confident (within the limitations established by statistical inference) that any differences observed between subjects assigned treatment conditions must be caused by differences in the treatments themselves (Kinder and Palfrey 1993, 11).

Thus, by replicating news coverage of this incident and manipulating not only the perspective of the speaker but the race of the speaker, we can examine whether subtle changes in the message affect the expression of racial attitudes.

Using data from the content analysis, the experiment incorporates versions of the issue individuals might have encountered in the media. The experiment required subjects to read a newspaper article that they were told had originally appeared in the *New York Times*. The article that the subjects read was one of several contrived articles that discussed some aspect of the debate surrounding the Trent Lott incident.

For each experimental condition, subjects were exposed to one of four scenarios: a group of African Americans taking the conservative position by expressing support for Lott, a group of racially ambiguous persons taking the same position, a group African Americans taking the liberal position by expressing opposition to Lott, or a group of racially ambiguous persons taking the same liberal position. The scenario which expressed opposition to Lott, criticized the Senator’s comments praising Senator Thurmond’s 1948 presidential bid. Opposition to Lott is captured by statements such as:

*Senator Lott’s comments were a "callous, calculated, endorsement of racial segregation that has no place in the halls of Congress."*
Lott's remarks were "divisive" and fit the "definition of a racist comment."

The scenario which expresses support for Lott attempts to remove any racial meaning from Lott’s statements about Thurmond and redefine the comments as a simple jocular celebration of a legendary man. Support for Lott in this condition is captured by the following statements:

\[
\text{Senator Lott's comments were simply a “lighthearted celebration of the 100th birthday of legendary Senator Strom Thurmond and not an endorsement of Senator Thurmond's positions of over 50 years ago, but of the man and his life.”}
\]

...to label him a racist is wrong.

The racially ambiguous condition featured statements being made by individuals described as attending a conference of state leaders. The African-American condition featured comments made by individuals described as attending the “54th annual Black Leadership Conference” (See Appendix C for actual manipulations). We also include a control condition in which subjects were not exposed to any political message (See Appendix C for actual story). The purpose of the control is to establish a baseline for gauging what attitudes are when subjects are not primed to think about race.

The experiment was carried out using Introduction to American Government students from the University of Texas at Austin. One-hundred and sixty-three self-identified white subjects participated in the experiment. The experiment was conducted from July 14, 2005 to August 1, 2005. Upon being administered the questionnaire, respondents answered a short set of questions about their media habits and were then
asked to read a short newspaper story which was described as appearing in the *New York Times* on December 10, 2002. After reading the story, respondents then answered an extensive battery of post-test questions that included questions about their political interest, party identification, and ideological orientation. Respondents were also asked to answer questions about their racial attitudes and policy preferences. Finally, the subjects were asked to provide standard demographic information such as education, age, gender, race, and religion.\(^4\)

### Results

*Content Analysis*

Of the news transcripts examined, the majority of people asked to speak on the Trent Lott issue were white. Specifically, 77 percent were white, 20 percent were black, and 3 percent of the speakers did not have their race identified. With respect to party identification, 41.2 percent were Republicans, 51.0 percent were Democrats, and 7.8 percent were unidentified.

[Figure 2 About Here]

\(^4\) Analysis of variance indicated no statistically significant differences in partisanship, ideology or age across the various conditions. Sex did, however, vary somewhat across conditions. Slightly more women were in the Black Support Condition and Black Opposition Condition. As a result all analysis was conducted controlling for the sex of the respondent.
Figure 2 presents the breakdown of speakers by race and party identification. Of the white speakers whose party identification could be determined, 50.7 percent were Republican and 49.3 were Democrats. Among the African American speakers, 22.5 percent were Republican and 77.5 percent were Democrat.

While the distribution of speakers is more balanced among whites, the representation of black opinion is skewed when compared to the proportion of black Democrats and Republicans in the general population. Using the 2002 American National Election Study (ANES), Figure 3 presents the breakdown of black party identification. In the ANES sample, the overwhelming majority of blacks identify with the Democratic Party. Even when we lump Republican-leaning Independents with the self-identified Republicans, the percentage of black Republicans does not exceed 10 percent. This is less than half of what was represented on television. Moreover, the black Republicans and black Democrats asked to comment on the Lott incident had qualitatively different viewpoints on the matter. For instance, black Democrats were more likely indicate that Trent Lott was a racist while black Republicans were more likely to come to Lott’s defense. Thus, the representation of black public opinion on this issue was distorted in the news.

Experiment

The origins of opinion or behavior can sometimes be traced back to a particular communicator; the person from whom information is delivered or the person who subsequently influences how individuals interpret events in the political sphere. Our analysis, then, involves understanding how the racial background of a communicator in
varied news frames shapes white Americans’ feelings toward the Senator, their perception of black public opinion and more generally their racial attitudes. Specifically, we are interested in whether the presence of a black Republican who supports Lott will diminish any racial censors employed by whites, subsequently encouraging them to take more racially conservative positions. Our expectation is that once an African American leader has validated racially conservative views, whites would be more willing to express similar sentiments.

To begin, we look at feelings toward Senator Lott with a battery of attitudinal questions across each of the experimental conditions and control. Again, our argument is that when whites encounter African Americans endorsing racially conservative views, they, themselves, will be more likely to express a similar perspective. Unlike the case of another white person espousing racially conservative sentiments, sharing consensus with an African American (Republican) ostensibly lends credibility to that view and thus affording some whites the opportunity to embrace their cloaked conservatism on issues of race. Looking at the experimental data presented in Table 1, we find support for this hypothesis.

[Table 1 About Here]

Here we examine whites’ interpretation of the controversy surrounding Trent Lott’s December 2002 comments. As we can see, it is only when an African-American leader is seen supporting Lott that white subjects also become more supportive of Lott. Whites in the control condition, for instance, give Lott a slightly below average feeling thermometer score of .33 (on a 0 to 1 scale), indicating somewhat cool feelings toward him. When exposed to a Black support frame, however, support for Lott increases to .43,
an increase of eleven percentage points. While we observe similar (although smaller) increases in the racially ambiguous support condition, it does not reach statistical significance. What is more, exposure to the opposition frames featuring black opponents led to a slight decrease in support for Lott, and the racially ambiguous opposition frame led to an increase, yet neither was statistically significant.

We see similar results for respondents’ belief that Lott’s comments were racist against African Americans and reflected racial insensitivity. Consider the control as a starting point, where 50 percent of whites agreed that Lott’s comments were racist against African Americans. As we move to the Black support condition, this number drops ten percentage points, to 40 percent. Although support is diminished across all of the experimental conditions (relative to the control), with the exception of the black opposition frame where there is a slight increase, none of the changes approach statistical significance. Even when whites were asked about whether they believed Thurmond--the avowed segregationist about whom Lott’s comments sought to compliment--was a racist we could not find any statistically significant change in white attitudes.

When we consider the question of racial insensitivity, however, we observe large significant differences across the experimental conditions. In the control condition, for example, 79 percent of whites agreed that Lott’s comments were racially insensitive. But when exposed to the black support frame, white respondents became much less likely to agree with this interpretation, dropping to only 25 percent of respondents. No statically distinguishable changes were observed across any of the other experimental conditions. The magnitude of this change compared to the lack of change on the measure of racism is perhaps the best demonstration of how selective Americans have become in how they are
willing to talk about race. While subjects seem anchored in their interpretations of whether or not Lott is a racist their opinions are much more malleable when it comes to claims of racial insensitivity particularly when a black person is denying the racial significance of a situation.

[Table 2 About Here]

While exposure to these messages, particularly the frame featuring black supporters, seemed to powerfully predict whites’ opinions about the controversy surrounding Senator Trent Lott, we also find they can shape other racial attitudes as well. As is presented in Table 2, we see that exposure to the black supporter frame also influences whites’ perceptions of where they think blacks stand on important racial matters. We find that not only does the black support frame cause whites to become increasingly supportive of Lott, it also leads them to believe that blacks as a group also feel similarly warm toward the Senator. Looking at whites’ assessment of where they think blacks would rate Lott on the feeling thermometer measure, we see that subjects exposed to any of the experimental conditions, with the exception of the black opposition condition, become more likely to believe that blacks would rate Lott much more warmly than subjects in the control condition. For example, subjects in the control condition gave an average score of .13 on a 0 to 1 scale. However, when exposed to the support frame featuring an African American, the mean score of the feeling thermometer more than doubles moving to .30. We also observe similar statistically significant increases in perception of black’s warmth towards Lott in the “racially ambiguous support” and, interestingly, the “racially ambiguous opposition” conditions; whites perceive blacks as feeling almost 13 points warmer toward Lott when presented with a news frame of a
racially unidentified state leader condemning Lott’s comments. We see similar patterns when we focus our attention to whites’ perception of the extent to which Blacks think that Lott is a racist. As we expected, exposure to the black support frame reduces the percentage of whites who believe that most blacks think that Lott is a racist, moving from 65 percent in the control to 54 percent in the black support condition. Note that this difference is statistically significant.

[Table 3 About Here]

Thus far, we have shown that when whites’ interpretation and evaluation of Senator Lott varies significantly by experimental treatment. But our theory suggests that the expression of racial attitudes more generally will be affected by exposure to blacks espousing racially conservative viewpoints. Therefore, we examine the effects of the experimental conditions of whites’ responses to three different racial attitudes scales: Racial Resentment, Racial Attribution, and Racial Stereotype. In Table 3, we see that across these three indices, whites generally do exhibit a greater willingness to express racially conservative views subsequent to a black endorsement of the same view.

Looking first at Racial Resentment in Table 3, we find that whites tend to express more racially conservative views when exposed to a black support frame. More specifically, we see a 14 point increase, relative to the control in the expression of racial resentment (on a 0 to 1 scale). Not only was this result statistically significant, but it was the only condition to garner a substantial increase. The other conditions were indistinguishable from the control. Similarly, whites’ willingness to attribute responsibility for racial differences in African Americans’ success also changed with exposure to the black
support frame. Here, with Racial Attribution, we see a 15-point statistically significant increase in whites’ attitudes of attribution of success, moving from .26 to .41 mean score.

Finally, turning our attention to racial stereotypes, we find that much like the measure assessing whether or not subjects thought Lott was a racist, the expression of whites’ willingness to express racially stereotypical attitudes is not significantly shaped by their exposure to any of the frames. This is consistent with previous research on the explicit nature of racial antipathy (see Mendelberg 2001). Racial resentment and racial attribution, for instance, are viewed as more acceptable means to expressing disapproval of Blacks because of their subtle manifestations, while subscribing to stereotypes violates the norm of equality.

Thus, these data largely confirm our expectations that messages which feature a denial of racial discrimination coming from an African-American source appear to be highly effective at encouraging the expression of racially conservative attitudes among whites. We saw that not only were whites more likely to rate Lott warmly and less likely to see his comments as racially insensitive when they were exposed to a denial of racial discrimination coming from a African American source but they also appeared to be more willing to express racially conservative attitudes in the form of racial resentment and racial attribution. However, this effect did have its limits. When it comes to the explicit expressions of racism whites seems to be more anchored in their views and not as susceptible to such simple source primes. Messages featuring an African American source denying racial discrimination failed to influence explicit expressions of racism such as explicit accusations of racism or the expression of racial stereotypes. Further,
ambiguous source cues and frames that highlight the racial discrimination were essentially ineffective at changing white attitudes.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps in their attempt to present a balanced picture of political events, the media over-represent the opinions of black Republicans. The proportion of black Republicans in the news is twice the proportion of black Republicans in the electorate. As the content analysis reveals, the opinions of black Republicans and black Democrats diverge, at least with respect to the Trent Lott issue.

We believe that the over-representation of black Republicans in the media has consequences for the expression of racial attitudes. While this media bias mischaracterizes the variance of opinion within the black community, we believe that it creates an environment in which it is okay to not be politically correct. By presenting a counter-stereotypical view of black opinion, the media are able to redefine societal norms, at least with respect to the expression of racial attitudes. By having their views validated by a perceived expert, the presentation of black conservatives in the news creates an environment in which whites feel more comfortable articulating a racially unpopular viewpoint. Further, the presence of black conservatives also alters the willingness of whites to attribute blame to blacks for their subordinate position in American society. Finally, the media’s portrayal of events affects whether whites’ will even interpret events through a racial lens and recognize the racial motivation behind elite behavior.

Our findings help explain why there is a gap between what people say and what they are willing to do with respect to racial inequality. To be sure, support for egalitarian
ideals is overwhelming among white Americans. Nevertheless, support for policies aimed at addressing racial disparities is more tenuous. Granted, some opposition to these programs is a function of non-racial considerations. But racial attitudes consistently predict racial policies (Sears 2004). How can these two things coexist? Crudely put, they don’t. A proportion of those who say they believe in equality still harbor anti-black prejudice. We suspect that when racial attitudes are accurately measured, the difference between those who claim to adhere to egalitarian ideals and those who support racial policies disappears.

Of course we would be remiss if we did not address some of the limitations of our study. Since we did not administer a pretest to assess baseline racial attitudes we are unable to make definitive claims about what the “true” racial attitudes of our respondents actually were. One can make the claim that the more liberal attitudes expressed in the control group are the actual attitudes and those observed in the experimental condition have conformed to social desirability. We think this unlikely. We also face the same constraint on generalizability that all studies which rely on undergraduate studies do.

Nevertheless, these findings have profound implications for the way we think about race relations in the United States. It is easy to dismiss the argument that there is a need for race-targeted public policy in the post-civil rights era in light of a decrease in racially conservative ideals among the populace. If, however, these ideals still exist and indeed are just below the surface, than there is sufficient justification for the continuance of affirmative action and other programs that seek to close the racial gap in society. In this paper, we have demonstrated that subtle variations in media messages can serve to
scratch the surface that conceals racially conservative public opinion that otherwise would go unexpressed. Thus, the struggle for racial equality continues.
Bibliography


Individual’s Racial Beliefs

Societal Pressure

Censors Racial Beliefs

Expresses Racial Beliefs

Third-Party Reinforcement

Figure 1
Figure 2

Party Identification of Speaker, by Race

Source: Trent Lott Content Analysis Study
Figure 3

African-American Party Identification

Source: American National Election Study, 2008: Pre- and Post-Election Survey
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings About Lott</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Support Frame, Black Supporters</th>
<th>Support Frame, Racially Ambiguous Supporters</th>
<th>Opposition Frame, Black Opponents</th>
<th>Opposition Frame, Racially Ambiguous Opponents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lott Feeling Thermometer (1=Warm)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.43*</td>
<td>0.37</td>
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<td>0.39</td>
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<td>Lott Should Resign Senate Seat (1=Yes)</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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<td>Lott's Remarks Racially Insensitive (1=Agree)</td>
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<td>0.25*</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.67</td>
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Note: *=p<.05 two-tailed test of statistical significance
Table 2. Mean Attitude Differences for Perception of Blacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Blacks</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Support Frame, Black Supporters</th>
<th>Support Frame, Racially Ambiguous Supporters</th>
<th>Opposition Frame, Black Opponents</th>
<th>Opposition Frame, Racially Ambiguous Opponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lott Feeling Thermometer (1=Warm)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Blacks Think Lott is a Racist (1=Most)</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.54*</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most Blacks Think Thurmond is a Racist (1=Most)</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.85*</td>
<td>0.74</td>
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</table>

Note: * = p < .05 two-tailed test of statistical significance.
Table 3. Mean Attitude Difference for Racial Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Attitudes</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Support Frame, Black Supporters</th>
<th>Support Frame, Racially Ambiguous Supporters</th>
<th>Opposition Frame, Black Opponents</th>
<th>Opposition Frame, Racially Ambiguous Opponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial Resentment Scale (1=Racially Conservative)</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.58*</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Success Attributions Scale (1=Racially Conservative)</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.41*</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Affect Scale (1=Racially Conservative)</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.57*</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Stereotype Scale (1=Racially Conservative)</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.00 [TPI]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<.05 two-tailed test of statistical significance
### APPENDIX A
List of Black Speakers, by Party Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Republican</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al Sharpton</td>
<td>Armstrong Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthel Neville</td>
<td>Colin Powell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Watson</td>
<td>Deroy Murdock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curley Clark</td>
<td>J.C. Watts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Watson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Gordon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elenor Holmes Norton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah Cummings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Meredith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Jackson</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joe Johns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Lewis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian Bond</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kweisi Mfume</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon Harris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine Waters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Dyson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Daniels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Jackson Lee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Trent Lott Content Analysis Study*
APPENDIX B

Racial Resentment Scale

People have different opinions about groups in society. Here are a few opinions others have expressed. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

- Irish, Italians, Jews, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.
- Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve.
- Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class.
- It is really a matter of people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites.

Racial Attribution Scale

Most people in this country agree that the average White person in America is more likely to have a good income, get a good education, and have a regular job than the average Black person is. Here are some of the reasons that have been given for why the average Black person is not as well off as the average White American. Please say whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with each statement.

- Blacks are less well off because most Blacks just don’t have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves out of poverty.
• Blacks are less well off because most Blacks have less in-born ability to lean.

• Blacks are less well off mainly because of discrimination.

• Blacks are less well off because most Blacks don’t have access to the educational opportunities that it takes to rise out of poverty.

Racial Stereotypes Scale

Now we have some questions about different groups in our society. Here we will ask you to rate the characteristics of people in each group. Simply circle the number that corresponds with how you feel.

• Generally speaking do you think Black people tend to be hard-working or do they tend to be lazy?

• Generally speaking do you think Black people tend to be prone to violence or do they tend not to be prone to violence?

• Generally speaking do you think Black people tend to be unintelligent or do they tend to be intelligent?
Black Leaders Speak out in Support of Lott

By CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON, Dec. 10, The comments of Senator Trent Lott (R-MS), praising fellow Senator Strom Thurmond, were the topic of discussion at the 54th annual Black Leadership Conference meeting held in Washington, D.C. this weekend. Many of the participants voiced concern that Lott’s critics were rushing too quickly to find racial meaning in what was said.

Lott came under fire last week after remarking at Thurmond’s 100th birthday party that Lott’s home state of Mississippi was “proud” to have backed Thurmond’s presidential bid -- “and if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn’t have had all these problems over all these years, either.”

Some have interpreted these remarks as an endorsement of the segregationist messages of Thurmond’s 1948 campaign. Thurmond’s Dixiecrat Party’s platform declared in part: "We stand for the segregation of the races and the racial integrity of each race." He carried Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and his home state of South Carolina, of which he was governor at the time.

Thurmond eventually distanced himself from this segregationist position, and went on to the longest career in Senate history. Now a Republican representing South Carolina, he is retiring from the Senate when his term ends in January.

While Lott’s comments have prompted some calls for his resignation, many of the black leaders gathered in Washington this weekend argued that the comments were taken out of context.

Frank Wright, a black community leader from Richmond, Virginia argued that Senator Lott’s comments were simply a “lighthearted celebration of the 100th birthday of legendary Senator Strom Thurmond and not an endorsement of Senator Thurmond’s positions of over 50 years ago, but of the man and his life.”

A.J. Jefferson, an African-American Congressman from Alabama, also defended Lott and said that he was most off put by accusations that Lott’s comments were “somehow racist.”

"There are a lot of times when he and I go to the mike and would like to say things we meant to say differently, and I’m sure this is one of those cases for him as well. Senator Lott is a good man and although he may have misspoke to label him a racist is wrong," Jefferson said.

Although Lott has since apologized for his comments, he has not indicated any intention to step down from his senate seat.
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