RACIAL DISCOURSE AND PARTISANSHIP IN POLITICIZED CYBERSPACE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Sociology

Written under the direction of

Paul McLean

And approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

OCTOBER, 2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Racial Discourse and Partisanship in Politicized Cyberspace

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This dissertation investigates conceptualizations of race and discourses around the topic of race in contemporary America. I examine how the internal interaction between non-elite partisans (i.e. not party officials, politicians, or media celebrities) preserves partisan racial discourses. I specifically focus on how commenters on partisan political blogs discuss racial controversies. I observed the interaction dynamics of partisans as I analyzed reactions that comments elicit among other participants. This focus allows me to move beyond a conventional content analysis that others have done via surveys, interviews, and more recently, analyses of blog posts, toward a deeper understanding of how partisans maintain the partisan divide on race. My dissertation concentrates on two controversies in the news. Drawing on the sociological literatures on "colorblindness," framing, and interaction rituals, as well as the political science literature on racial polarization, I argue that, during such controversies, the interactions between commenters on right and left blogs focus discourse on different aspects of a controversy, establish the boundaries of legitimate debate, and manage the ambiguity around racial claims that periodically arises during internal debate. Furthermore, I contend that understanding the processes by which partisans co-produce discourses helps explain the durability of the partisan divide on race.

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Introduction

Nearly two years after the election of America's first black president, a reporter remarked that the historic event, "was supposed to usher in a post-racial era in America" (Mullen 2010). Pundits from across the political spectrum employed the phrase "post-racial" to predict a society where our politics had "moved beyond" race. Part of the promise of a post-racial America, in the words of one reporter, is that "we just don't have to talk about this stuff anymore" (Dvorak 2010). Since Obama's election, we did, however, continue to talk about it. Throughout Obama's first term (and beyond), Americans continued to employ the term "racism" to argue over a wide variety of behaviors, beliefs, and social conditions. Instead of a racial détente, by 2010 the cross-partisan agreement was limited to the acknowledgement that our society was not post-racial (Herbert 2010; Neal 2010; Blow 2010).

Despite rosy predictions, a post-racial politics was always unlikely because racial ideas constitute the larger ideological and partisan divides that animate American politics. In recent years, as partisans have become more polarized (Pew Research Center 2014; Pew Research Center 2012), or better sorted (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Levendusky 2009),[1] partisan divides over racial issues have been particularly polarizing (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008, King and Smith 2008; King and Smith 2011; Edsall 2012). For example, Tesler and Sears (2010) found that "party attachments have become increasingly polarized by both racial attitudes and race as a result of Obama's rise to prominence within the Democratic Party" (26).[2] The myriad of racial controversies have, if anything, contributed to the

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[1] Polarization and party sorting are sometimes presented as synonyms and indeed do look similar in some polls. Polarization, however, refers to more extreme views on one or both sides, whereas party sorting means that either people switch parties to affiliate with those who share their beliefs or change their views to fit with their party. The effect of sorting is that the parties are more internally consistent (even while their members may not be more extreme in their views).

[2] While some measures of overt prejudice declined during the 2008 campaign (Goldman 2012), other studies have found increased anti-black attitudes among Republicans during the Obama presidency (Pasek et al. 2012).

increasing polarization and further entrenched the partisan divide on race. In short, the so-called

Age of Obama has not led to a post-racial politics (Pasek and Thompson 2012; Pasek, Tahk,

Lelkes, Krosnick, Payne, Akhtar, and Thompson 2009).

Much of the attempt to track our distance from a post-racial dream surfaces during one of

the many ephemeral racial controversies that dominate media attention. Whether the focus is on

a shock-jock's coarse commentary or a deadly shooting the public debate reveals a society that is

far from somehow leaving behind its racial past (Coates 2012). A controversy becomes a racial

controversy when social actors employ competing racial frames to make sense of an incident.

Indeed, I contend that the explicit racialization of events/issues defines a racial controversy. How

and why these public debates end up not only highlighting but also recharging partisan racial

divides rather than bridging those divides is the subject of this study.

During Obama's presidency, the American public debated or witnessed debates about

accusations of racism directed at Obama, his Republican rivals, Democrats, Conservatives,

Liberals, and all manner of political designations. While these debates happened in a diverse set

of public and private arenas – as have discussions/debates on racism since America's foundation

– I focus on the relatively new and unexplored arena of online partisan political blogs.

This study examines how the interaction dynamics between non-elite partisans (i.e. not

party officials, politicians, or media celebrities) preserves partisan racial frameworks. I look at

how commenters on partisan blogs[3] use racial controversies to reinforce liberal conceptions of

"racism" and conservative conceptions of "racism." I focus on the kind of reactions that

comments elicit among participants on the same blog (i.e. within party). My focus on

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Furthermore, Tesler (2013) found that "old fashioned racist attitudes were a significant predicator of white
American's partisan preferences…" from 2008-2011.

[3] Here political blogs refers to blogs that are explicitly aligned with a political ideology/party rather than blogs that
simply discuss politics.

interactions allows me to move beyond a conventional content analysis that others have done via surveys, interviews, and more recently, analyses of blog posts, toward a deeper understanding of how partisans maintain group-defining discourses and, ultimately, the partisan divide on race.

The contemporary partisan divide on race is often attributed to elite political actors (Lopez 2014). However, explicit racetalk is uncommon among elite actors. Instead, elite political actors often use implicit racial messages (Mendelberg 2001) or engage in dog-whistle politics (Lopez 2014) that play upon racial frameworks. While these phenomena are indeed important, someone (or some group of people) not only receives these messages but also manages and preserves racial frameworks. Private conversations seem a likely space where groups of individuals interpret elite messages and sustain the racial frameworks that give implicit messages their racial impact. Previous research has found that private (or backstage) interactions contain more explicit expressions of racial frameworks as well as racetalk that would be taboo in public settings (Myers 2005; Bush 2004; Eliasoph 1996). However, this research has not detailed how non-elites sustain the partisan alignment of racial frameworks.

My research examines partisan blogs as a space between the public areas of elite implicit racializations and the private conversations where more explicit racetalk takes place. Partisan blogs share the more explicit racetalk of private settings due to the semi-anonymity of their users. In addition, while partisan blogs are public spaces, they do not contain the direct debate with political opponents of elite discourse as they primarily contain interactions among like-minded individuals that are more common to private settings. However, because these blogs are partisan spaces, participants share a political identity and a sense of political community not always present in private conversations. As such I see partisan blogs as an ideal place to examine

how people not only sustain the divides on race in contemporary America but also sustain the partisan nature of those divides.

Political Blogs

Internet blogs are a form of media culture. As Kellner (2003) writes, "media culture functions as an arena where social conflicts are fought out, dominant values are negotiated, role models are produced, debates are generated and politics takes explosive form" (96). Since the blogs I examine are political and engage in political contests, this is an arena designed for these social conflicts.

A growing body of research has sought to understand the role of political blogs (Garrett, Carnahan, and Lynch 2013; Serfaty 2011; Dreznel and Farrell 2008; Hargittai, Gallo, and Kane 2007; McKenna and Pole 2007). Partisan political blogs have become important to candidates and the media environment (Olasky 2004; Bloom 2003). They have become sources of fundraising for their respective parties. They track political polls (even conducting their own) and provide up to the minute election coverage. These blogs also serve as means to disseminate campaign messages, provide politicians direct access to voters, allow citizens to track legislation, and build community around a political identity. Besides providing a space for democratic participation, partisan political blogs also epitomize much of the public and academic concerns regarding polarization and political extremism.

Blogs, and comments sections in particular, have been cited as the cause of hyper-partisanship and the politicization of many issues (Warner 2010). This is true of even non-political blogs. For example, the magazine *Popular Mechanics* recently ended the comments sections on its blogs due to the politicization of science that took place in those comments. They wrote, "we are as committed to fostering lively, intellectual debate as we are to spreading the

word of science far and wide. The problem is when trolls and spambots overwhelm the former, diminishing our ability to do the latter" (LaBarre 2013). Large news sites, like the Huffington Post now employ a team of moderators and sophisticated algorithms to police comments sections to stop trolls from hijacking debate and turning the comments sections into, in the words of one writer from *The Atlantic*, "cesspools of vitriol, magnets for haters and trolls and spammers" (Greenfield 2013). Recent studies show that such problems are not easily ignored by more well-behaved commenters. Brossard and Scheufele (2013) found that "Uncivil comments not only polarized readers, but they often changed a participant's interpretation of the news story itself." It seems the Internet has advanced a "democratization" of the ability to encumber nuanced discourse.

Part of the reason why on-line commenters engage in such vitriol may be because they are not as ideologically segregated as some imagine (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010; Garett et al. 2013). Most blog readers are somewhat omnivorous in their news consumption[4] (Lawrence et al. 2010). However, this doesn't create better understandings or sympathy for the other side's positions. Viewing counterattitudinal news programming does not decrease oppositional media hostility. In fact, as Arceneaux et al. (2012) found, those who view counter-attitudinal programming were more likely to engage in oppositional media hostility towards balanced reporting on political controversies than those who view pro-attitudinal programming.

The public and some academics argue that political blogs and particularly the comment sections on political blogs are unproductive spaces that increase political polarization (Warner 2010; Grossman 2004). It is true that, participants on political blogs are more partisan, more ideological and more politically engaged than non-participants and liberals do tend not to visit conservative blogs or vice-versa (Lawrence, Sides, and Farrell 2010). However, it is not clear

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[4] Cross partisan consumption does not extend to blog readers.

whether partisan blogs cause polarization (Maratea 2008). In addition, some cross-ideological discussion is evident among bloggers (Hargittai et al. 2007).

Still, there is no lack of extremist (and racist) vitriol on the internet. The ability of racists to harness both the organizing power of the internet and to hide behind the anonymity of the internet to voice views that modern social conventions have virtually eliminated from public space has provoked justifiable concern (Daniels 2009). Others have argued that the line between backstage or private settings and frontstage and public settings is somewhat blurred in on-line forums and therefore reveals more overt forms of racialized discourse (Steinfeldt, Foltz, Kaladow, Carlson, Pagano Jr., Benton, and Steinfeldt 2010). Still, it is not accurate to paint all Internet commenters and in particular, participants on partisan blogs as extremists. Indeed, a plurality of political blog readers self-identify as moderates and only a small minority define themselves as very liberal or very conservative (Lawrence et al. 2010). Despite the semi-anonymity of commenters, researchers have found that dominant (i.e. the same ones found in interview research) racial frameworks structure on-line discussion (Hughey 2012; Steinfedlt et al. 2010). These same researchers have also noted how certain virtual spaces can limit expressions of overt racism (Hughey 2012; Steinfeldt et al. 2010).

The particular blogs I examine contain little of the kind of extremist vitriol that might be found elsewhere on the Internet. These partisan blogs contain few trolls because they require log-ins in order to comment, site monitors moderate discussions, and posts rarely go viral (none of the posts I found contained an imported community). In addition, while partisan blogs exist in a space between public and private, participants voice awareness that they represent not just themselves, but a partisan/ideological identity.

While the blogs I examine identify as either liberal democrat or conservative republican, political blogs are not simply a collection of liberals or a collection of conservatives but a group with its own set of interaction rituals that limit discursive opportunities. For example, no one could use the n-word on any of the blogs without getting banned and most overt racism would be met with community sanction (anything from informing the commenter that what they said was inappropriate to casting them as a troll and urging the site monitor to ban them).

This study focuses on what gets produced in these spaces (i.e. what work gets done beyond simply polarizing the citizenry). I examine how the political blogs serve to not only reinforce and amplify differences between the two parties but also to constrain some of the speech on each blog. I examine how certain kinds of speech are encouraged on each blog through formal and informal rules (or interaction norms). I pay special attention to the concessions/qualifications that those engaged in debate make. On the right and left blogs participants work to produce acceptable, unacceptable and contestable discourses. This process creates dominant ideas, themes, and analysis of these events, which emerge alongside the depictions of what exactly is at stake (e.g. what the controversy is about). I argue that participants co-produce racial frameworks on these blogs and that ideologies are not simply hardened but developed. I also conclude that the partisan divide on race will likely remain for the foreseeable future.

My Study

I focus on two key events in the first year of Obama's presidency. Specifically, I look at the "Skip Gates" incident, where noted Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested after an altercation with police at his home and President Obama made unflattering comments about the police. This incident sparked accusations of racism against the police and against

President Obama. I also look at the discourse surrounding Supreme Court nominee Sonya Sotomayor's comment about "a wise Latina woman" and the ensuing accusation of racism, which began on the political right. These events sparked rounds of accusations, dismissals, denials, and counter accusations of racism. Since the discourse surrounding some of these phenomena is expansive, I limit my data to key moments in the debate.

These cases represent key subjects covered on political blogs. The Sotomayor case involves direct party politics (e.g. an election, an appointment, a contentious vote) and the Gates case involves an anecdotal incident, which is perhaps the most common form (or locus) of racial controversy in the larger media. These kinds of cases are the most likely to provoke discussions of race and racism on political blogs. In other words, sustained discussions of racism do not regularly take place outside of these kinds of specific incidents. For example, a report documenting the shifting racial demographics of the United States or a news report about the rising wealth gap between whites and blacks generates far less discussion (if brought up at all).

I also look at different cases because discourses vary by issues and events. In other words, to the extent that common or divergent discourses on racism emerge either within blogs or across blogs, these particular discourses on racism may be incident/issue specific. For example, a drunken rant from an actor (e.g. Mel Gibson) may lead to one universal discourse, while the disparate racial impact of Hurricane Katrina leads to another or perhaps several distinct discourses on racism. Blog participants on both the right and the left may apply similar discourses to one controversy but diverge on another.

I chose these two particular cases because both took place during a time when the media widely employed the term post-racial to describe Obama's election and Presidency. These were the two biggest cases involving President Obama during that time. More importantly, these two

cases are situated at the extremes of several facets of racial controversies. The Gates case is ephemeral, about a single event, ambiguous in its racial import, unclear regarding the facts of the case, and the outcome was largely inconsequential. Indeed the charges against Gates were already dropped by the time the President commented on it. As such, there wasn't anything concrete to settle. This is one extreme because racial controversies that stem from individual criminal cases usually involve a trial and hence, some kind of concrete outcome. Even speech related ones like those involving Donald Sterling, Don Imus, or Paula Dean were waiting on some outcome although they were also rather ephemeral, especially regarding their outcomes. For example, Imus just ended up with a new and very similar job. The facts of these three cases were also a bit clearer. So in terms of long-lasting import, the singularity of the event, it's racial meaning, the clarity of the facts of the case, and finally the importance of the outcome – the Gates case lies at one extreme. The Sotomayor case lies at the other. The Sotomayor case is long-lasting (her views on race still very much matter), this was about her and not necessarily one speech, it's racial import was pretty clear as the controversy focused on a speech she gave on diversity, the facts of the case were, as I show in Chapter 7, clear and largely agreed upon – i.e. no one needed to speculate about what happened, and the outcome – a lifetime appointment to the highest court in the land – was certainly consequential. As such these two cases allow me to move from one extreme to the other and thus look at the range of racial discourse among partisans.

That being said, I don't view these cases as wholly distinct conversations on race. Instead, I argue that together they reveal our national conversation on race as it unfolds among partisans. The cases need to be addressed separately but then brought together in order to fully understand the (seemingly intractable) partisan divide on race and the corresponding polarization and hyper-

partisanship. Put another way, my goal is not to contrast the two cases. Instead, I use their differences to grasp the full range of racial discourse on partisan blogs. However, I don't believe that I do so in such way that warrants mixing the cases within chapters. In other words, when I talk about discerning importance through the distraction critique in Chapter 3, I am looking at a kind of controversy where this feature of racial controversies, which I believe is present in all controversies, is most pronounced and accessible for study. In the first Sotomayor chapter (Chapter 6), I am not focusing on this theme because it is much less pronounced (for reasons stated in the dissertation and above – basically the case matters). Instead, the first Sotomayor chapter focuses on racial orders because a case about a Presidential appointment will have a more pronounced discussion regarding the two political parties and therefore is a good place to look at how each side conceptualizes the racial order.   Lastly, my project hopes to make a methodological contribution to the analysis of blog comments. I argue that we should not examine blog comments as atomized opinions but instead situate those comments in their larger context. In others words, I do not simply code individual comments and count them as if they were answers to survey prompts. At first glance, such a recommendation may seem obvious – at least to sociologists who stress the role of social context and interactional dynamics. However, exactly how we determine context and systemically examine such context in blogs is something that hasn't been well-researched as of yet.

Plan of the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I lay out the literature that guides my analysis. Much has been written about the partisan divide in American politics and the relationship of that divide to racial issues. I review the research on the origin of the divide, the extent of the divide, and how politicians communicate racial positions to voters as well as use subtle racial cues to influence voters. Since

my research seeks to understand how partisans maintain partisan racial frameworks during racial

controversies I look to how interactions produce racial discourses. I begin here by reviewing

research on the partisan racial divide (i.e. what is preserved). I then look to research on how

racial discourse operates in contemporary politics as well as within interpersonal interaction for

clues on how the racial divide is preserved.

In Chapter 2, I detail the methodology of this study. I review the specific blogs I have

chosen as well as the criteria for choosing those blogs. I then describe how I narrowed the data

down to a total of forty blog posts. From there I detail how I have operationalized a study of blog

posts and the hundreds of comments that follow such posts.

Chapters 3 through 5 examine different themes from the Gates case. Each chapter

highlights a different feature of on-line racial discourse. Chapters 6 through 8 deal with a

different but related set of themes using the Sotomayor case. The two different cases provide

different opportunities to highlight common aspects of racial controversies and how they unfold

on partisan blogs.

In Chapter 3, I begin by looking at how partisans establish a racial controversy. Here I

look at how partisans employed the term "distraction" to sort out how race mattered in

accounting for the controversy. I detail how partisans discerned not only what was racially

important about the case, but also preserved space for unique racial frameworks. This chapter

demonstrates how the participants discern importance by engaging in a selective dismissal of the

controversy. I argue that this process preserves space for partisan racial frameworks.

In Chapter 4, I look at how the sides depicted the racial peace – i.e. the absence of racial

tension that the controversy seemingly ended. In the Gates case, unlike the Sotomayor case, there

was a question regarding whether or not there should have been a racial controversy in the first

place. In some ways, each side needed to account for the existence of the controversy. They often did so by blaming the other side for creating the racial controversy. In this way, each side accused the other of violating the racial peace. While this would seem to be in line with colorblind ideology, I found that each side strategically employed both colorblind and colorconscious discourses to promote their partisan-specific racial frameworks. In other words, CB and CC were accessible discursive tools for each side, which they used, in order to preserve their respective ideology – i.e. CB for the right and CC for the left. Through the clarification and interpretation of one another's comments, partisans agreed upon a racial context and the interpretative frameworks to be employed for understanding universal discourses.

In Chapter 5, I address how participants dealt with ambiguous comments – i.e. those that did not necessarily support the blog's racial perspective. These comments were rarely direct challenges, but instead, were disagreements over some aspect of the case. By challenging the majority stance on the particular case, these commenters created ambiguity with regard to the racial frameworks adhered to on each side. As such other's challenged these errant commenters. In doing so, they racialized or deracialized the case in order to ensure the preservation of partisan specific racial frameworks. Here I use two terms to explain how partisans preserved distinct racial frames. Participants engaged in "promotive racialization" – using the case to promote a racial frame and "protective deracialization" – deracializing the case in order to protect a racial frame from a possibly disconfirming anecdote. I argue that these are flexible strategies that ensure the resilience of partisan racial frameworks.

Chapter 6 further develops some of the themes regarding the racial order that I touched upon in previous chapters. In this first chapter, I shift the focus toward looking at how participants construct the divide itself. The posts I selected here directly addressed how

participants saw the two sides. While this happened to some extent in the Gates case, unlike the Gates case, the Sotomayor case was a political battle between Republicans and Democrats – someone was going to win and someone was going to lose. The case could not be dismissed as a distraction. However participants did discern importance and decided what was at stake in the controversy. In doing so, I show how they create a misaligned politicization, where each side linked their political opponents to universally derided ideals.

Chapter 7 shows how conversations around identity politics further demonstrated distinct interpretative frameworks. Here, however, there was not discussion about what might have happened as there was in the Gates case or in other cases involves potential criminal prosecution where guilt and innocence are far from established. Here there was a set of agreed upon facts. As such, we can more clearly see how each side operates with different interpretative frameworks.

Chapter 8 deals directly with the issue of diversity. Here the participants are not talking around a racial issue or whether race belongs in the discussion but directly addressing the role of diversity and indeed the role of race in modern society. This theme presents an opportunity not as present in the Gates case. So, while policing of errant comments takes place, the strategies of deracialization and racialization are not present. Here the issue was race. There was no avoiding it. This chapter focuses on one of the more direct debates around a racial concept – i.e. diversity. This didn't comprise the focus on any posts in the Gates case, the way it did in the Sotomayor case. Here we can see how different conceptions of what race is condition the partisan divide on race.

I conclude with a summary of these findings and discussion. "Racism," as it now stands, is in danger of becoming a highly unstable and ambiguous claim susceptible to personal whims, while racism remains a real and enduring feature of our society. As Omi and Winant noted in

1994, "…the absence of a clear 'common sense' understanding of what racism means has become a significant obstacle to efforts aimed at challenging it" (70). This reality will likely hobble attempts at a "post-racial" future. As such, scholarly research requires a better understanding of how people navigate this terrain during racial controversies.

Chapter 1: Partisan Divides and Racial Discourse in "Post-Racial" America

Origin of Contemporary Partisan Divide

In American politics, race is "a divide without peer" (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 27). Racial attitudes predict political attitudes (Sidanius et al. 2000) including opinions on public policies ranging from welfare to taxation (Gilens 1999; Hasenfeld and Rafferty 1989; Edsall and Edsall 1991:53-86). Race has shaped political campaigns, organized political alignment and the political parties.

The contemporary partisan divide is, in many ways, a disagreement over the legacy of the rights movements of the 1960s (Self 2013; Perlstein 2008). While Americans have always been divided on issues of race and gender – in the 1960s these divisions became the key divide between the political parties. I begin this section with how the partisan divide on race developed and then I look to the stability of that divide, its impact, and its current form.

During the Jim Crow era (roughly 1890s-1950s or from the end of Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Act), the two major political parties were made up of coalitions that were divided on issues of race (Dray 2008; Loewen 2005, 31-33; Foner 1990). As such, the parties, especially the Democratic Party, had to bind together political supporters with opposed ideas about racism to keep their coalitions together. These within party divisions became acute for the Democrats after the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.[5] The turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s eventually

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[5] This situation was not without strife. In the 1930s, New Deal programs like the Wagner Act and the Social Security Act were limited and did not apply to farm workers and domestics. This qualification was meant to appease Southern Democrats who did not want to empower black workers – workers who were disproportionately represented in these occupations (Lipsitz 1995). In 1948, delegations from the South

ripped apart the New Deal coalition that had maintained Democratic Party strength since the 1930s (Fraser and Gerstle 1989).

In the 1960s, the United States political party system realigned after Democratic President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. While blacks, along with other part of the "new left," moved en masse to the Democratic Party, many whites resented the loss of their standing. As Sokol (2006) notes, many "[whites] thought in terms of white supremacy and black supremacy" (80). This sentiment provided support for arch-segregationist Alabama Governor George Wallace who played to the white South's openly segregationist and anti-civil rights demographic when he ran for president as an independent in 1968.[6]

While Wallace garnered substantial support in 1968, the racial discourses of many the Jim Crow era were drained of their power by the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent Civil Rights legislation. As such, overt racism of the Wallace variety lost promise as a useful political strategy to win over whites disaffected by the victories of the Civil Rights Movement. Richard Nixon, in contrast to Wallace, used race implicitly (Beckett and Sasson 2000). Most historians refer to Richard Nixon's 1968 "Southern Strategy" as a defining moment (Perlstein 2008) for the post-Civil Rights alignment. Nixon (and later Reagan) appealed to white racial resentment while largely avoiding overt anti-Civil Rights language. Using this strategy, Nixon and the Republican Party were able to turn White southerners from reliable Democrats who previously comprised a "solid South" to reliable Republicans[7] while maintaining broad appeal.

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walked out of the Democratic Convention to protest the inclusion of a civil rights plank and eventually split off to run their own "Dixiecrat" candidate in the 1948 election (Dray 2008, 356).

[6] While Wallace was unable to win any states outside of the South, George Wallace's 1968 campaign and his support in all-white "sundown" towns in the North would demonstrate support for such racial rhetoric outside of the South (Loewen 2005). Still, Wallace's overt defense of Jim Crow America could not win a national election

[7] This shift was national in scope. While its impact is most largely felt in what was formerly the solidly democratic south, Gerstle (1995) shows that Northerners in the 1960s used similar frames as Wallace to oppose housing desegregation. The idea that "liberal elites were conspiring with dangerous Black poor to undermine the right of the

The alliances and polarizations begun in the 1960s have been fairly stable for the last 50 years. King and Smith (2008) argue that the post-civil rights racial orders (one color-blind and one race conscious)[8] split the vast majority of Republican and Democratic office holders. Indeed, King and Smith (2008) find that "…modern America exhibits consistent alliances of political actors, groups, and institutions that have become more cohesive since the mid-1970s and more polarized around ideologies of color-blind or race-conscious policies" (700). Today, those orders largely define the ideological and partisan divide in America (Edsall 2012).[9]

While this research explains the partisan divide, it does not tell us how rigidly partisans adhere to respective discourses or how partisans see this divide. In other words, do partisans see the divide as one between color-consciousness and color-blindness or simply as racist v. anti- (or non-) racist? In the next section, I detail the post-civil rights norms and the dominant color blind ideology to demonstrate that both sides make claims to anti-racism while implying that the other side supports (perhaps unwittingly) racism.

Racism and the Norm of Equality

Despite the partisan divide, on the surface, America has a broad anti-racist consensus accompanied by a definition of racism that addresses inequality, unfairness, American ideals, and the role of history. Americans agree that "racism" is a term reserved for those times when ideas, actions, or social arrangements conflict with the American Creed and the associated norms of equality established by the Civil Rights Movement. Overt racism, characteristic of the Jim Crow era, is now taboo in public and most of the claims of biological inferiority that once

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'people' – the people understood to include only white homeowners…" was common across the north (Gerstle 1995, 582). Northern politicians would later temper their discourses to be more in line with Nixon's implicit appeals.

[8] King and Smith (2008) argue that, "In every period, one order has promoted arrangements thought to advantage those then labeled "whites." A rival order has sought to end many of those advantages." (686).

[9] As King and Smith (2008) note,"…modern polarized ideologies are constituted by opposing stances on race-conscious aid specifically, as well as redistribution more generally." (689).

supported it are widely recognized as racist[10] (Schuman et al. 1997). Today, the vast majority of Americans consider themselves not racist. In addition, no politician whose opponents successfully label her or him a racist could expect to win any electoral contest.[11] Americans of all political stripes are likely to adhere to the post-Civil Rights norms of equality when talking about racism.

American discourses on racism cast certain forms of inequality as alien to American ideals. Inequality, by itself, does not immediately conflict with American ideals. Here, reference to inequality is not the notation of apolitical advantages and disadvantages. For example, racism does not refer to unequal susceptibility to sunburn, but rather *unfair* inequality, i.e. inequality that is the result of human action and human institutions. When Americans describe something as racism they mark a form of unfairness where one or more persons unjustly gains or loses something because of their racial membership.

Americans largely support the principle, set forth in the Declaration of Independence, of equitable access to justice, freedom, and opportunity for all people.[12] Robert Merton (1949) called this the American Creed. Both conservatives and liberals condemn perceived violations of the American Creed and express their positions on racial issues in terms of egalitarian values (Sears et al. 2000). In effect, each side's position implies that the other side promotes inegalitarian values.

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[10] While *The Bell Curve* (1996) is an important exception here, the authors somewhat backed away from the notion of racial differences.

[11] Even David Duke, former leader in the Ku Klux Klan and now head of the National Association for the Advancement of White People, claimed he was not a racist when he ran for Governor of Louisiana.

[12] According to a September 1998 Public Agenda Foundation Poll, 88% of Americans say that the idea that 'there should be equal opportunity for people regardless of their race, religion or sex' is 'absolutely essential' to American Ideals – of all statements this was the highest rated. Again in December 2004, an NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll found that 88% of Americans cited "ensuring that everyone is given an equal opportunity to succeed in life, regardless of race or gender" as a 'major part' of their personal definition of values. This was also the highest rated statement in the survey.

The Creed is now associated with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Reference to the Civil Rights Movement provides the historical grounding for claims about racism (Hall 2005). Americans agree on the existence of an undesirable discriminatory past that created unfairness based on ascribed group membership and unsettled ideas about America as a level playing field or "the land of opportunity." Most view the Civil Rights Movement as a challenge to racism and a defense of American ideals. Politicians and media figures from across the political spectrum cite the Civil Rights Movement as a source of legal and moral guidance on race relations. The Civil Rights Movement has taken on a constitutional stature, like the United States Constitution, interpretation provokes a variety of conflicting claims. Each side then seeks to align itself with the Civil Rights Movement while casting their political opponents as violators of the standards enshrined by the Civil Rights Movement (Perlman 2012). The debate around the dominant racial framework of colorblindness makes this facet of the partisan divide clearer.

While a consensus that racism is unfair and thoroughly un-American is a positive achievement of the Civil Rights Movement, that consensus has led to some unintended and problematic outcomes. Not only do most Americans vociferously deny that they are racist, but even those who use and believe racial stereotypes (Myers 2005, 105) or engage in behaviors formerly labeled racism (Brewster et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2000, 103)[13] deny they, their beliefs, or behaviors are racist. As opposed to previous periods, most Americans exhibit a desire for racial innocence. As Novkov (2008) writes, "with the abandonment of punitive state-

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[13] Johnson et al. (2000) note, ""What was once considered overtly racist 'white flight' to avoid desegregated schools and neighborhoods has now been reconceptualized, as socially conscious attempts of white parents to build a 'better' life for their children. But, often what makes this life 'better' is their limited contact with people of color." This kind of race-neutral language evicts discussion about inequality and presupposes a kind of hyper-individualism in order to maintain a non-racist identity. The person can say that they are just concerned about their kids and not about race or politics etc. Those with white privilege can take this tack because of race and simultaneously deny that race has anything to do with their decisions as well as their ability to make such decisions and have such options.The claim of racial innocence is not unique to the post-Civil Rights era, although the current discourse may be. See Brown (1933, 305).

supported and state-enforced white supremacy by most mainstream actors, the ground was clear

for cultural and political claims about white racial innocence" (650). The quest for racial

innocence is not limited to those on the right. Srivastava (2005) finds that white progressive

women tend to describe racism "as a personal trait rather than as a practice or relation of power"

(46). She then notes that her subjects, "struggle to maintain a good, innocent, and egalitarian

moral identity" (46). However, in doing so, they support a "liberalist discourse that frames

racism as done by ignorant or bad people" (57). She contrasts this by asking, "could we not

imagine discussions of racism as collective political and social analyses rather than as individual

preoccupations with morality?" (57).

Due to the focus on individual morality Americans are sensitive to accusations of racism,

often interpreting them as depictions of individual morality or personal feelings. As Brown et al.

(2005) notes, "Today, many white Americans are concerned only with whether they are,

individually, guilty of something called racism (4). In other words, accusations of racism often

seem that they are directed at individual racists, rather than racist speech, behavior, ideas,

practices, structures, or policies. Under such a construction, if there is white racism, white

supremacy, or just white privilege then whites must be racists. This flawed construction is the

source of much denial about racism in the United States.[14] The denial of white privilege also

forms one of the key pillars of the dominant racial framework of colorblindness.

Dominant Racial Frameworks: Colorblindness

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[14] Recently this denial has reached new heights (or lows) with the organized celebrations of the anniversary of South
Carolina secession, which began the Civil War. These celebrations of Confederate History have, at best
downplayed, at worst dismissed slavery as the cause of the Civil War. As eminent historian Eric Foner recently
wrote in an op-ed for the Guardian, "A century and a half after the civil war, many white Americans, especially in
the South, seem to take the idea that slavery caused the war as a personal accusation. The point, however, is not to
condemn individuals or an entire region of the country, but to face candidly the central role of slavery in our national
history. Only in this way can Americans arrive at a deeper, more nuanced understanding of our past." [December 20,
2010]

Much like how Jim Crow ideas were the dominant racial ideas pre-Civil Rights, colorblindness[15] is now the dominant framework. Today, colorblindness is associated with conservatism rather than liberalism. Research points to a tendency for those on the right to align with colorblind ideology, while those on the left tend to either oppose or express skepticism toward the idea. Here I will describe colorblindness and its relationship to the post-Civil Rights norms of equality and in doing so, demonstrate how proponents and opponents of this view might view the partisan divide.

CB ideology depicts race as a mere illusion, denies both white privilege and the role of past discrimination in creating contemporary inequality, and insists on formal fairness (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Gallagher 2003; Guinier and Torres 2002; Brown et al. 2005). CB claims about race, inequality, opportunity, and the past, though inaccurate, function to allow colorblind discourses to rhetorically appeal to fairness and claim allegiance to American ideals, including the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement (Gallagher 2003).

Relying on the dismissal of most structural and historical factors, CB frameworks provide space for individualistic and ultimately cultural explanations for racial inequality[16] (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011). Supporters of CB frameworks usually cite poor individual choices as the source of racial inequality and disembody those choices from the social context. This phenomenon has been common, especially among whites, for decades. For example, Kluegal and Smith (1982) found that "The importance white Americans give to individualist causes of poverty… strongly influence[s] the perceived extent of current structural limits to blacks'

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[15] Other theorists have used different terms to differentiate the era from Jim Crow frameworks. For example, Omi and Winant cite "neoconservatism" as do others (see Blaine 1999, 266) and Bobo, Kluegal and Smith (1997) refer to "laissez-faire racism" (also see Bobo and Smith 1998; Bobo 1999; Bobo 2004). These theorists refer to similar ideas and discourses and are critical of the dominant racial framework.

[16] Carter (1996) described the shift from "crude notions of genetic inferiority with equally crude generalizations about cultural degradation" which he called "…a distinction without a difference" (24).

opportunity" (529). In other words, Americans often see structural constraints and individual attributes as competing factors explaining racial inequality.[17]

Most Americans, including the proponents of CB frameworks, do not argue that there are no racists and hence zero racism in contemporary American society. Instead, the key insistence of colorblind discourses is that anti-black racism and white privilege is limited to isolated incidents, and therefore cannot explain broad based inequality (Brown et al. 2005).[18] CB discourse conforms to the American tendency, common across the political spectrum, to see racism as solely individual acts and individual attitudes (Guinier and Torres 2002; Ford 2008).

The CB framework's notion of fairness derives from this individualistic analysis. CB insists on a standard of "formal fairness" (Bobo and Smith 1998). By this standard, only at the moment of conscious decision-making should people be treated without regard to skin color, especially by the government. The only inequality that could exist under this framework is that

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[17] While CB frameworks avoid claims of natural ability, the reliance on 'bad' individual choices requires an explanation for the nonrandom aspects of racial inequality. In other words, CB discourses must explain why blacks are more likely to engage in bad individual choices. Today, Americans are more likely to cite black culture, as opposed to structure or biology (Bobo, Kluegal and Smith 1997; Bush 2004). Virtanen and Huddy (1998) found that white respondents relied on cultural rather than biological explanations for inequality. "Instead of debating blacks' innate ability and intelligence, racial policy elicited concerns about black deservingness and explanations for persistent black poverty. This brought stereotypic views about blacks' unwillingness to work to the forefront of debate" (313). Similarly, Bush (2004) found that "Racial inequality is most frequently believed to be the fault of unmotivated individuals and culturally weak groups" (214). Popular explanations include: the family values of blacks, specifically attitudes toward marriage among black women and attitudes toward child-rearing among black males (Ledger 2009), a culture of victimization (D'Souza 1995) which neoconservatives argue creates an inferiority complex and degrades personal responsibility (Steele 1998; McWhorter 2000) and finally the pseudo-structural claim of welfare dependency which is also cast as degrading personal responsibility (Murray 1984; Smith 1999; Somers and Block 2005). Most academics refer to this portion of CB frameworks as blaming the victim and criticize the embrace of discredited culture of poverty arguments. Most scholars note that culture of poverty arguments are a misreading of the original research from which the phrase springs (See Ledger 2009 and Cohen 2010).

[18] Conservative authors often cite a decline in racial prejudice on surveys (Brown et al. 2005) as evidence of a corresponding decline in discrimination and therefore racism in contemporary American society. Academics, but not necessarily the general public have long rejected a direct link between prejudice and discrimination (Merton 1949) and have proven that racial intent is not necessary for racially discriminatory behavior (Pager and Quillian 2005; Pager 2005).

which individually discriminates as opposed to a legacy of wealth accumulation (Shapiro 2004) or the effect of residential segregation on employment (Turner 2008).

Much of this research deals with American's positions on race-targeting polices like Affirmative Action, which are, by definition, discrimination on the basis of race (Ford 2008). Proponents of Affirmative Action policies, however, reject the conflation of this form of discrimination (designed to ameliorate structural disadvantages) and racism (a system that creates different opportunities and constraints for members of different racial groups).[19]

In sum, colorblindness describes a public discourse and ideology that rejects Jim Crow Era racism while denying the role of white privilege in contemporary society – prompting one book to call it "racism blindness" (Brown et al. 2005). Still, the basic tenets of colorblindness provide a popular framework that references American ideals. As such, each side can claim a non-racist identity while accusing the other side of promoting racism.

Colorblindness, while perhaps hegemonic, is not totalizing (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Studies that reveal a dominant colorblind discourse or ideology also note that the general public does not universally adhere to the tenets of this framework. Instead, alternative public discourses offer challenges to the CB framework.[20] Colorblind ideology while dominant exists amidst alternative public discourses sometimes called color-conscious (Bush 2004:157-60; Bonilla-Silva 2003:131-49). A color-conscious framework views race as socially-real even if not biologically derived, acknowledges the existence of white privilege, and supports race-targeting in order to combat inequality and discrimination.

While researchers will sometimes label those who reject tenets of colorblindness as "racial progressives" (Bonilla-Silva 2003) or "racial liberals" (Olson 2008; Winter 2008) or

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[19] Poly sci research on symbolic racism, racial resentment scales etc.
[20] Bush (2004) finds that college students contrast colorblindness with structural explanations for inequality and with diversity and identity politics.

"color-conscious" (Appiah and Gutmann 1996), they also note that individuals cannot be divided into conservatives and liberals or pro and anti-colorblindness camps (Winter 2008). Most individuals do not rigidly adhere to colorblindness or conversely, a wholesale rejection of its tenets. While Bonilla-Silva (2003) notes that the dominant narrative is more coherent than what he calls counter narratives that challenge colorblindness, most responses on surveys and in interviews demonstrate inconsistent and sometimes contradictory views. For example, Americans demonstrate an ability to switch between systemic and individualistic conceptions of racism (Scott 2000). Respondents also voice a good deal of ambiguity when conceptualizing race, alternating between biological, cultural and structural definitions (Morning 2009).

Each political party, then, must deal with a variety of orientations toward colorblindness. While Republicans are more likely to embrace colorblindness some will reject all or part of the ideology. Similarly, while Democrats are more likely to reject colorblind ideology, some members will embrace all or parts of it. This political reality is why most politicians avoid overt racial appeals and instead talk about race implicitly (Mendelberg 2001). What follows addresses how racial ideas are discussed by politicians, how people receive those messages, and how they talk among themselves. The next section will detail how politicians talk about (or around) race as well as the effect implicit racial cues have on voters. In the final section, I address how people talk amongst themselves in private settings in order to shed light on how interactions produce racial frameworks.

Political Debates

Race does not need to be explicit for racial frames to matter. Racialized discourses in contemporary America often take the form of subtle cues and/or cloaked racial messages – especially in politics. Since, individuals (unlike political parties) cannot be neatly divided into

pro and anti-colorblindness camps (Pope 2012; Hillygus and Shields 2008; Winter 2008).

Politicians often employ implicit racial appeals to mobilize parts of the electorate without

offending other parts of a winning coalition (Mendelberg 2001).

As a political strategy racial framing is not always successful in an individual campaign

(Mendelberg 2001). However, overtime, the cumulative effect can merge racial issues with

economic and social issues in order to prime individuals to use racial frames in evaluations of

policies like welfare (Gilens 1999) or use race to interpret ambiguous information (Pager 2003).

In other words, people may employ racial frames without explicit instruction or even fully

conscious deliberation. For example, Hurwitz and Peffley (2005) found that the inclusion of the

phrase "inner-city" in a question about crime made racial liberals less punitive and racial

conservatives more punitive. Hurwitz and Peffley (2005) note that, "framing not only creates a

tighter linkage between the consideration and the policy attitude, but it also elevates the

importance of the consideration as a decisional criterion" (102). In other words, racial framing

can both link the issue to racial attitudes and increase the importance of racial attitudes (109). To

some extent racial "code-words" are no longer necessary as certain "racial scripts" can impact

evaluations of policies not normally associated with race, like Social Security (Winter 2008).

Because so many issues carry racial meanings, much of our political discourse is, in some ways,

racial discourse.

While pervasive, racial framing effects are not automatic. For example, Transue (2007)

found that highlighting national identity reverses the idea that only one group benefits from a

specific policy and thus reduces the effect of racial frames. How dog-whistles, implicit appeals,

code-words, and racial scripts retain their potency depends on their ability to evoke racial

frameworks, with in turn, requires that such frameworks are sustained among the public. To

understand both how racial frameworks are sustained and how their partisan alignment is sustained we need to explore how racial discourses work within social interactions.

Social Interaction

Racial discourses are not simply windows into racial ideology of individuals but products of interaction rituals (Goffman 1967) and group dynamics (Eliasoph 1996). A specific social context, like a blog, will dictate both how an issue or event is framed and the discursive opportunities and constraints individuals will encounter.

While some groups readily engage in racial discourse, other groups avoid the subject. In general, Americans also experience discomfort when the issue of racism arises, or when inequality (Bell and Hartman 2007) or power (Zajicek 2002:167) comes up alongside race. While individuals may have opinions about racial issues they are often reluctant to express them for fear of offending others (Pollock 2005). Most Americans are reluctant to talk about race, especially when not among close family and friends.

Racetalk, therefore, is more common in private speech. Indeed, private speech often yields a discourse peppered with overt racism that is taboo in public settings (Myers 2005; Bush 2004; Eliasoph 1996). Here, Picca and Feagin (2007) found that "the majority of whites still participate in openly racist performances in the backstage arena" (22). Public speech, however, is not necessarily a more polite way of saying things, which would be said more bluntly in private speech. Americans are not simply private racists and public egalitarians. Instead, group dynamics affect the outcome of discourse. In some cases a group may appear through its discourse to be more overtly racist than the individuals that make up the group (Eliasoph 1996). In other cases, those who would challenge or condemn racist speech are discouraged by the interaction rituals of a certain setting (Bush 2004; Eliasoph 1996). Conversely, those who would make overtly racist

remarks are constrained by other social settings.

Racial controversies bring what Edsall (1991) called "the subtext of American politics" to the foreground. During a racial controversy those interested in promoting one racial framework over another are provided space to explicitly do so. Controversies always carry some degree of ambiguity regarding larger meanings. This study, therefore, considers interaction on blogs as a form of joint labor (Steinberg 1999), which co-produces discourses and ultimately preserves a set of frameworks. Furthermore, the presence of a racial controversy means that even those who do not wish to discuss race will have to contend with racial frameworks. In other words, the opportunity to simultaneously discuss the case and avoid race is limited. How partisans, immersed in this milieu and faced with ambiguity, preserve the racial divide is what I explore with my examination of the comment sections of partisan political blogs.

Chapter 2: Examining Blogs

Since American politics revolves primarily around two political parties, I examine the discourse on two liberal blogs (aligned with the Democratic Party) and two conservative blogs (aligned with the Republican Party) as potentially different sites of meaning construction. I also focus on the comment sections of these blogs because I am looking at how partisans interact to co-produce racial frameworks.

Here I detail why I selected the four blogs, my selection criteria for selecting relevant posts and comments. I also detail how I will proceed with the analysis of blog posts and comments. I begin by noting a few relevant terms for those unfamiliar with blogs. I also describe how the political blogs function.

Posts are entries written by site administrators (or bloggers) and sometimes select participants. The comment sections and the discussions that ensue therein are linked to individual posts and are responses to either the post or other comments. Comments on most sites require little more than a login. In other words, virtually anyone can comment on a site. However, a commenter that goes against the dominant politics of a blog is often called a "troll" – i.e. someone "trolling" a blog they do not agree with just to start trouble and argue. A variation of this theme is the accusation of "concern troll" – this is someone who disagrees with the political perspective of the blog but seeks to hide that disagreement behind a veil of pseudo-concern.

Different blogs have different features to deal with errant comments. On some blogs

users can vote down comments that become hidden after a number of negative votes, others

allow users to report a comment to the moderator who will delete it if it violates blog policy –

this is significant because most blogs have some form of prohibition against "racist" speech.

The following sections detail how I selected the four blogs, how I narrowed down the

posts to a manageable number (five for each blog per controversy), and how I selected comments

to present. From there I explain the methods I employed to analyze this data.

Selecting the Blogs

In order to select prominent political blogs, I sought out rankings for top political blogs. I

used the websites wikio.com, technocrati.com, and ebizmba.com. I used multiple time points

(from 2009 to 2011) to ensure that I did not pick a blog with little relevance that may have seen a

daily or monthly spike. I then chose the highest rated political blogs that both identified with a

specific party/ideology and were not connected to "mainstream media" (i.e. not MSNBC or Fox

News blog). On the right I choose the blogs hotair.com and redstate.org. On the left I choose

dailykos.com and crooksandliars.com. I chose 5 posts for each case from each of the four blogs

for a total of 40 posts.

Selecting Posts and Establishing Relevancy

After an initial site search using several key words for each event, I reviewed all the posts

and looked over comments for each of the cases during a designated two week time period. I was

able to dismiss a lot of the posts returned by my searches because they were not relevant to my

purposes. I deemed posts not relevant for several reasons. First, I rejected posts where the main

issue was not the case I was interested in. In other words, there may have been brief mention in

some kind of news roundup (which all blogs regularly did) and a "tag" Sotomayor or Gates was

applied which trigged the return of the search term. Comments for these posts were largely not about the specific case. Second, I rejected posts that were largely about political strategy. For example, during the Sotomayor hearings there were many posts updating the shifting votes of key senators. The ensuing comments of these posts related to political strategy and attacks (mostly name-calling) of a senator who had betrayed their party by suggesting they may vote against the majority of their party. A few of these comments did address race and Sotomayor but they were not qualitatively different from ones found on posts that more directly addressed Sotomayor and questions of race. Other posts I deemed non-relevant were about issues unrelated to race (for the most part) like, in the case of Sotomayor, abortion or gun control.[21]

I then selected the posts, for each blog, with the highest number of comments. I did so because posts with a lot of comments contained more interactions between commenters. Debates usually drove the comments count. In other words, posts typically move off of the "front page" of a website after new posts come in. As such, there is a limit to how many new commenters will find the post and join the discussion after a certain time period. Those who were engaged in debate with others (long after the post moved from the front page) tended to drive long comment sections. The only adjustment I made to this rule was discarding posts that were too similar. In other words, if there were two posts from dailykos.com on Gibb's press conference and both got a lot of comments, I picked the higher one and moved onto the sixth most commented on post. In this way I had a better chance of covering all aspects of the controversy that emerged in the studied time period.

Here I list the posts for each case and each blog.

Gates Case

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[21] However, it is noteworthy that a Supreme Court confirmation had so few posts on issues like gun control and abortion, which usually dominate discussion of the Supreme Court.

Dailykos.com
1. Obama stands by his assessment of Gates incident 7/23/09
    a. Susan Gardner (564)
2. Cambridge Police Union: Put Prof. Gates on trail 7/24/09
    a. Jed Lewison (495)
3. Pres. Obama remarks on arrest of Prof. Gates 7/24/09
    a. Jed Lewison (303)
4. Gates arrest: GOP congressman still on political warpath 7/25/09
    a. Jed Lewison (176)
5. The Stupidest Criticism of Obama (Democratic Division) 7/30/09
    a. Steve Singiser (248)

Crooksandliars.com
1. Actual Facts About The Henry Louis Gates Case 7/24/09
    a. Dday (243)
2. The Chris Matthews Show: Media Decides It Was Right to Ask About Gates Arrest 7/26/09
    a. Nicole Belle (75)
3. Boston Police Officer Suspended For Sending E-mail Calling Professor Gates a "Jungle Monkey" 7/29/09
    a. Logan Murphy (189)
4. Gerald Seib: WSJ poll proves the elderly, Republicans and the South thought President Obama was wrong in Gates story 8/4/09
    a. John Amato (130)
5. Officer Justin "Jungle Monkey" Barrett is Now Playing the Victim 8/6/09
    a. Logan Murphy (102)

Redstate.com
1. Outrage: President Obama Owes Sgt. James Crowley an Apology 7/23/09
    a. Swamp_Yankee (112)
2. Release the Crowley/Gates tapes 7/27/09
    a. Moe Lane (205)
3. Yes "More" on the Crowley/Gates Thing 7/28/09
    a. Moe Lane (33)
4. Road from Gates of PC Hell Paved by Obama's Election 7/29/09
    a. Mike gamecock DeVine (33)
5. Crowley's Camp Delivers One Last Body Shot to the Obama Legacy 7/30/09
    a. Swamp_Yankee (34)

Hotair.com
1. How not to win support from police unions 7/23/09
    a. Ed Morrissey (915)
2. Obama: The Gates Clusterfark is a "teachable moment" or something 7/24/09
    a. Allahpundit (359)
3. Colin Powell to Skip Gates: "You don't argue with a police officer" 7/28/09
    a. Allahpundit (134)
4. Gates 911 caller: Um, why am I a racist for reporting a possible crime in progress? 7/29/09
    a. Allahpundit (212)

5. Disaster strikes beer summit 7/30/09
    a. Allahpundit (315)

Sotomayor Case

Dailykos.com
1. Predictable Attacks Against Sotomayor Begin 5/26/09
    a. BarbinMD (284)
2. Republicans Continue To Project 5/28/09
        BarbinMD (213)
3. To Robert Gibbs: Don't Apologize And Get Your Facts Straight 5/29/09
    a. BabrinMD (409)
4. Tom "KKK" Trancredo vs. Bush and McCain on La Raza 5/29/09
    a. Jed Lewison (142)
5. Racist Attacks Ramp Up Against Sotomayor 6/2/09
    a. BarbinMD (252)
Crooksandliars.com
1. Obama Announces SCOTUS Pick: Sonia Sotomayor. Now Let The Games Begin! 5/26/09
    a. Susie Madrak (96)
2. Gee, what a surprise: The right-wing talking points on Sotomayor are misleading distortions 5/26/09
    a. David Neiwert (64)
3. Look who's calling Sonia Sotomayor a 'racist': The Right's leading bigots 5/27/09
    a. David Neiwert (97)
4. Right-wing claim that "La Raza = the Klan" insults not just Latinos, but the Klan's many victims 5/26/09
    a. David Neiwert (60)
5. Bob Shrum explodes over Pat Buchanan's racism as Limbaugh uses MLK against Sotomayor 5/30/09
    a. John Amato (113)
Hotair.com
1. Obama picks Sotomayor for SCOTUS slot 5/26/09
    a. Ed Morrissey (253)
2. Tancredo: Sotomayor's a member of the "Latino KKK" 5/28/09
    a. Allahpundit (403)
3. Gibbs on Sotomayor's "wise Latina" comment: Here word choice was "poor" 5/29/09
    a. Allahpundit (count)
4. Newt: Sorry about the "racist" allegation
    a. Ed Morrissey (count)
5. CQ: Sotomayor repeatedly made "wise woman"/"wise Latina" remarks in speeches
    a. Allahpundit (count)
Redstate.org
1. Breaking: Obama Picks Sotomayor 5/26/09
    a. Erick Erickson (131)
2. Lindsey Graham wounded by Sotomayor's hurtful remarks 5/31/09

      a.   Moe Lane (90)
3. Conservatives: Oppose Sotomayor at Your Own Risk? 5/27/09
      a.   Warner Todd Huston (50)
4. A logical exercise on the issue of racism 6/1/09
      a.   Mike gamecock Devine (174)
5. Peggy Noonan Is Wrong…Again 5/31/09
      a.   Tsquare (36)

Relevant Comments and Threads

I deemed a good deal of the comments non-relevant for this study. From the selected

posts, I read all of the comments and pulled out comments that dealt with race. Obviously

comments that mentioned race explicitly were pulled but I also read all comments and pulled out

other relevant comments. For example, here are two comments from hotair.com that I deemed

relevant:

> "Affirmative action at even the highest levels."
> - Alden Pyle[22]
>
> I am glad that the Supreme Court will not be denied their bigot.
> Lady Justice, you can now take off the blindfold.
> - tarpon

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[22] I use the actual screen names rather than pseudonyms throughout the paper. I do this for several reasons. First, screen names often identify something significant about one's ideology. Second, I see no ethical problem with presenting what is, of this writing, publicly available data. All of these comments are still available on-line. Lastly, none of these blogs were, at the time of this writing, linked to social media, where true identities might be revealed. In other words, screen names are already pseudonyms or at least self-chosen public identities.

      Still, there has been a long debate regarding the public/private nature of online forums that I must address. Hookway (2008) lays out the debate as follows and is worth quoting at length. Hookway (2008) writes, "First, there are researchers who argue that archived material on the Internet is publicly available and therefore participant consent is not necessary (Sudweeks and Rafaeli, 1995; Waltehr, 2002). This position often rests on an analogy between online forums and public space, where the observation and recoding of publicly accessible Internet content, a piece of art in a public gallery or letters to the editor. Second, some researchers claim that online postings, through publicly accessible, are written with an expectation of privacy and should be treated as such (Elgesem, 2002; King, 1996; Scharf, 1999)." This debate came into full view after a study of facebook at Harvard. While the researchers initially took the former position, Zimmer (2010) argued that facebook data constituted a "cultural fingerprint." Zimmer (2010) argued that data on facebook reveals a lot of personal information and personal information that is used by people not "specifically authorized to have access" to the data. While I understand these concerns, I think data on political blogs clearly falls into the "letter to the editor" category. First, as I said this is not a social networking site where users construct their own semi-private networks with the expectation (even if that is not real) of privacy. Secondly, most facebook users employ their real names and attach a slew of personal data to their pages. Political blogs do not share any of these features.

While this one from hotair.com I deemed not relevant:

> Make no mistake. We will rue this day.
> - enoughalready

I did a similar sorting for dailykos.com. Here is an example of relevant comments from

dailykos.com:

> **Anyone who says**
> "Some of my best friends are x" hates whatever x is.
> - skywaker9
>
> **They just CAN'T help themselves**
> When offered the opportunity to be racist assholes, they fall all over themselves.
> - slippytoad

The following I deemed non-relevant for dailykos.com. These are from a post referring to

republican complaints about Sotomayor's "wise Latina" comment.

> **I think it's the "wise" part that bothers them.**
> Republicans cherish stupidity.
> - Kaili Joy Gray
>
> Sometimes the jokes just write themselves
> You know, like whenever you're talking about Republicans.
> - Kaili Joy Gray

Once I had marked relevant comments I can then look to the comments within the same

thread. So that comments that don't mention racially-loaded terms like "Affirmative Action",

"Bigot", or "racist" but are replies to that term can also be examined. My analysis proceeds from

not just looking at the surrounding context of each comment but taking that context as the subject

of my analysis. I will use some examples in this next section to clarify what I mean. In this way,

a seemingly non-relevant comment examined in isolation might be relevant in context.

Data Analysis

The context of an individual comment, for the commenter, is unknown. The possible

context of a single comment is everything that preceded it in time and the post itself. It is highly

unlikely that most commenters have read through the post, thought about it, read all the comments, and then offered their own. In addition, we do not know, looking at a comment in isolation, what criteria any individual commenter employed to label someone or something racist. I also don't know how much thought was put into this categorization, nor how strongly held the opinion was, or how temporary or long-standing this belief was for this participant. In other words, unlike survey or interview research, participants did not respond to the same prompt.

While these limitations make it difficult to discern individual meaning from single comments, I am not interested in a single participant's opinion but rather how a political blog established common discourses. Comments sections on blogs are collections of sometimes overlapping conversations. The data, therefore, is comprised of interactions. As such, I examined comments as a multidirectional (e.g. directed at allies and opponents) and as a dialogic process of framing (Steinberg 1999).

I provide overviews of frequencies but I caution against reading too much into these numbers. For example, a post might only contain 10 percent of commenters who engage with race. This doesn't mean that race was unimportant to commenters, but perhaps that another topic sparked a series of debates. Instead of comparing percentages from blog to blog or post to post, I note those arguments that are unique to either the right or left (i.e. if they do appear on the other side, the commenter is marked as a troll).[23] And I note that a sentiment was common – i.e. it was repeated and approved of by others.

For example, I consider how blog posts and comments attempt to appropriate a word or phrase and imbue it with a meaning which benefits the arguments of "their side" and simultaneously attempt to deprive the "other side" of the use of a word or phrase. On blogs this

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[23] Again, trolls were rare on these posts.

is not always straightforward or narrowly instrumental and strategic. In most cases, the appropriation of a code word is reinforced implicitly. For example, blog comments are sometimes attempts at humor. In this way, participants engage in a kind of "loaded play" where jokes or sarcastic quips rely upon an implied meaning.

The co-production of racial meanings is a complex process on political blogs. For example, if we consider the comment cited earlier from hotair.com:

> "I am glad that the Supreme Court will not be denied their bigot.
> Lady Justice, you can now take off the blindfold.
> - tarpon

The commenter expressly claimed that Sotomayor is a bigot, while the underlying frame implies a definition of racism. However, this meaning is not readily discernible from a single comment. We do not know, looking at this comment in isolation, what criteria "tarpon"[24] has employed to evaluate Justice Sotomayor. We also don't know how much thought was put into this categorization, nor how strongly held the opinion is, or how temporary or long-standing this belief is for this participant. These limitations make it difficult to discern individual meaning from single blog comments.

Again, I am not interested in "tarpon's" opinion but rather the public discourse on the blog as a whole. So, I look at what kind of discourse surrounds these comments, whether or not someone challenges this kind of characterizations and what kind of evidence, either in the initial posts or other comments qualifies or defines this kind of comment. For if a single definition or charge against Sotomayor appears alongside the assertion that she is racist (or the implication that she is by using words like racial bias etc.) we can, I believe, assume that the commenter seconds that definition. In other words, if a site defines a claim (like Racism) and then members

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[24] I feel like I should mention that virtually everyone sounds like an idiot when referred to be their login name.

of that virtual community use the claim without redefinition they are in effect, even if not in intent, seconding that definition.

While I focus on controversial issues with opposing sides within the contentious field of public discourse on race, in many ways commenters, "Rather than engaging in the wholesale process of pitting one discursive construction of social life and politics against a completely different alternative, challengers generally engage in a more piecemeal process of questioning certain meanings contained within a genre as the opportunity to problematize words and other representations presents itself" (Steinberg 1999, 747). In this way, commenters were actively engaged in the production of meaning rather than simply defending their side.

The process Steinberg details played out as participants applied and indeed developed site-specific or ideology-specific meanings regarding certain words and phrases. For example, in the Sotomayor case the word "empathy" was defined differently on each site and then employed without redefinition by commenters on each site. For the right "empathy" meant bias. For the left it meant an ability to see all sides of an issue. Some posts and comments explicitly state this on each side and once the meaning was established the word was then picked up and used without repeating the definition.

Identifying Conversations

Comments sections on blogs are collections of sometimes overlapping conversations. The data, therefore, is comprised of interactions. I do not consider the interactions that form a conversation as discreet and objective units. Roughly an interaction or conversation adhered to the following: An observable response to other comments, a common focus of attention, and participation of two or more commenters.

The following is the beginning of a comment section for a post entitled "Obama Stands

by his Assessment of the Gates Incident" from the liberal dailykos.com. This is an example of a

common focus of attention. This is almost how it appears on screen.[25]

Thank you National Media (31+ / 0-)
For putting this crap up on the airwaves and ignoring the Health Care Crisis.
by Timroff on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:35:14 AM PDT

     o   **And Afghanistan (18+ / 0-)**
         by Timroff on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:35:32 AM PDT
         [Parent]

               ▪   **And Global Warming (17+ / 0-)**
                   by Timroff on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:35:45 AM PDT
                   [Parent]

… [cut]

                         ▪   **and Iraq (9+ / 0-)**
                             by Treg on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:39:41 AM PDT
                             [Parent]

… [cut]

                         ▪   **And poverty. (8+ / 0-)**
                             by Fabienne on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at
                             11:42:32 AM PDT
                             [Parent]

These comments form a conversation. These comments have a common focus – the

media's obsession with controversy to the exclusion of important issues. While this would be

identifiable as a common focus, many of these threads contained subthreads that shifted focus

and formed new conversations, but often ones that responded to something from the previous

conversation. As such, pulling out discrete conversations and coding them was not feasible.

The different format of the blogs also worked against clearly marked conversational or

interactional units. Of primary importance here is that some blogs have threads and others are

non-threaded. Threads (like the one above) allow for the clear identification of responses (most

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[25] I have deleted the handles attached to some of the commenters. Handles or taglines are quotes that appear above someone's screen name. When pasted from the site they appear as comment text but they are clearly not part of the comments on screen. So for example, someone might have a quote from Jefferson or Obama or MLK at the bottom of all his or her comments – these are rarely mentioned and not relevant here.

of the time). Of course, it is possible to put a reply in the wrong place, but users will usually identify their mistake noting in an additional comment – "I meant to reply to x, sorry." Threads have a clear starting point but many subthreads can develop. For example, a "no parent" thread is only a reply to the original post and does not appear indented on the web page. Subsequent replies to that original comment are indented under the original comment. Replies to the subsequent replies are indented and appear under the subsequent replies and so on. An entire thread can span over 100 individual comments. However, these threads usually veer off into distinct conversational units as I define them – in other words, they shift their focus.

On non-threaded blogs commenters can cut and paste sections from other comments and reply to them that way. Or they can directly address someone else by replying to their screen name such as, "yop123, what you said is racist!" Here there will be errant comments interspersed within the conversation as the comments are simply in time order. As such someone who reads the post and wants to make a comment will have his or her comment appear, perhaps, in the middle of a conversation. Despite the different formats, the same principles are used to establish conversational units.

Types of Interactions/Conversations

I identify three types of conversations/interactions. I call the first type "additive". These conversations usually come directly after the post and most are not sustained interaction. They tended to reinforce the main points of the post itself. The above thread about the media is an example of an additive conversation because subsequent commenters offered no new information – the commenters agree and offer no more reasons why the media ignores important issues. If they had it would fall into the second type – a "clarifying" conversation.

Clarifying conversation involve interpretation of the preceding comments or rather reading into the preceding comments an assumed meaning and then pulling forth that meaning. In other words, the response is not arguing with the original commenter but unpacking the assumptions of the quote.

The second type look like this:

They Have Nothing To Lose
With these lame, old, tricks,and the base loves it.
- Animayhem

> o **it's all about holding**
> the angry white male vote
> - aaraujo

Here the second commenter clarified who "the base" was. The original commenter again commented by clarifying who angry male voters were. In this way, participants form a sort of clarifying chain where they unpack each other's comments.

Finally debate conversations are marked by clear disagreements. While these can often involve personal attacks, frequently they also involve reinterpretations of other's comments. The difference is that the reinterpretation is not meant as helpful or complimentary but a way of drawing out an implied meaning in order to debate.

The following comment begins a point of contention. This is, of course, relevant because it is about the specific incident and the conversation will involve race and the issue is racialized and deracialized, the next comment begins a sustained interaction between a number of commenters debating the incident.

Perhaps
But how can any REASONABLE person take the side of the police on this issue? Heck, any libertarian must find it bizarre that the GOP is defending the police arresting someone in their own home...
- mnguy66
-
Police officers, for starters
Police unions are already starting to question Obama's comments.
And, to the extent that facts come out to back up the officer's version of events, I think a lot of people could view this as another "elitist" who thinks he deserves "special treatment." Is that

> reasonable? The reality is that more people can probably identify with a police officer than a Harvard professor who called in his interview from Martha's Vineyard.
> - Darmok

The comment is, of course, interesting because s/he uses class markers like Harvard, but somewhat mocks elitist and special treatment by putting them in quotes. In a sense, he does perhaps, although, it is unclear at this point if he is voicing his own opinion or noting how others will see this – acting, as so many on these blogs do, as a political analyst.

The types of conversations matter because they get at the connections between arguments and explanations. Additive conversations reinforce ideas. Clarifying conversations modify ideas with seeming consent. Debate conversations offer challenges to ideas. Identifying these types of conversations points to what is going on in the conversation. I believe this is methodologically important. I also think the different types of conversations further moves away from the kind of counting that typifies other content analysis. Here I can't look at specific comments in isolation and categorize them. Instead, I (we) need to understand the kind of interactions these comments elicit.

Inter-coder reliability

I performed inter-coder reliability tests for the above types of conversations. The coding was as follows:

Any comment that responds to another comment can be coded as:

1. additive – if it adds nothing new and just seconds the rationale from the comment it responds to

2. clarifying – if it adds something new, such as a definition of racism to an undefined comment or a different definition of racism or links a target to the GOP/Dems or some larger group

3. debate – if it contests something about the comment (e.g. the target of a racial accusation, the definition of racism etc.)

The coder examined a sample of comments and agreed with 63 out of 68 responses for a reliability rate of 93%.

In addition, to testing my interaction interpretation, I also tested one of my substantive interpretations for reliability. Chapter 6 focuses on accusations of racism and how those accusations are employed to define political opponents during a racial controversy. I argue that accusations dependent on a Jim Crow era depiction of the divide on race distort the contemporary partisan divide on race – a process I call "misaligned politicization." My evidence for these assertions rests on two findings:

1. Participants, regularly and without significant dissent, use accusations against individuals or single incidents to categorize the opposing party (politicization)

2. Participants, regularly and without significant dissent, employ Jim Crow definitions of racism to make the above claim (misalignment)

As such, there are essentially three kinds of accusations participants can make:

1. Jim Crow Era based

2. Contemporary Era based

3. Undefined

4. And, no accusation

For the left, the coding looks like this:

1. Any accusation of racism against the GOP or any figure who was associated with the GOP in the comments section (e.g. Buchanan) that accuses the target of [hatred, bigotry, belief in categorical inferiority or racial supremacy] is Jim Crow racism.

2. Any accusation of racism against the GOP or any figure who was associated with the GOP in the comments section (e.g. Buchanan) that offers any explanation not covered above (e.g. minimizing racism against minorities, ignoring white privilege/entitlements etc.) is CB racism.

3. Accusations of racism without any explanation are undefined.

4. Comments that don't make an accusation of racism (but could still be critical – like calling the GOP or Buchanan stupid).

I pulled out 68 comments and the coder agreed with my interpretations 66 times for an inter-coder reliability of 97%.

To sum up, one of my main findings from Chapter 6 will be how Jim Crow accusations were seamlessly interjected into the discourse that defined the opposing party. In other words, my claim does not rest on a finding that 45% of those who made an accusation used a Jim Crow definition of racism, 22% a contemporary form of "racism," and 11% were undefined. I do see value in reporting these #'s to show that the phenomenon exists and the accusations are regularly made. However, my claim that participants see the partisan divide on race as one between an illegitimate and immoral racist party and a legitimate and moral non-racist party AND that they do so hampered by a "misaligned politicization" that distorts the actual ideological divides found in scholarly research rests on my finding that Jim Crow definitions are not displaced by engagement with the contemporary CB/CC divide on race but instead seamlessly weaved throughout the discourse. In other words, the interactions with these accusations matters more than the frequency of particular accusations.

Part of the goal of this study is to explore some of the methodological considerations regarding blogs. To this end I will incorporate some of the methodology in the analysis section. I

do this for two reasons. First, there is no readily established methodology for examining discourse on blogs – so I think keeping the methods close to the analysis is important for the reader. Secondly, I want to demonstrate how the kind of analysis I perform yields certain answers and ensure the reader that I am aware that alternative analysis are possible. This approach, I hope, clarifies the research methods and provides transparency.

Lastly, I don't mean to suggest my methods as a universal tool for examination of comments sections. The blogs I am looking at have some features that are unique to real-time commenting. For example, *The New York Times* has a comment section for their articles. However, these comments are not threaded and commenters rarely respond to one another. Part of the reason is that comments are moderated and don't immediately appear. Therefore, commenters can't really have a sustained interaction. Second, moderation is much more strict at the Times so that many comments are discarded. Finally, the *New York Times* does allow people to recommend comments as well as selects it's own *NYTimes* picks. However, counting recommends would involve a sophisticated algorithm to deal with the time the comment was posted (not written) and the time until it was pushed off the first page when comments are sorted by time. I bring this last point up to argue that there will not likely be nor should there be one methodology for Internet comments. Instead, each type of comments section will require it's own methodology. That said, doing a count of the sentiment on a *NYTimes* blog might be useful but such counts do not mean the same thing as on a real-time commenting section like the ones I examine. On the ones I examine, all of the comments are not responding to the same prompt. Indeed, sometimes it is difficult to see just what they are responding to on non-threaded versions of these blogs. While this is true to some extent on the *NYTimes* blog, on non-real time type of

comment sections, this is a much bigger factor here. This is why I have chosen to reproduce and

analyze the interactions between commenters rather than rely on quantitative measures.

PART I: THE GATES CASE

the guy forgot his keys, jimmied his way to get into the house; there was a report called into the police station that there might be a burglary taking place…

My understanding is, at that point, Professor Gates is already in his house. The police officer comes in. I'm sure there's some exchange of words. But my understanding is -- is that Professor Gates then shows his ID to show that this is his house, and at that point he gets arrested for disorderly conduct, charges which are later dropped.

Now, I've -- I don't know, not having been there and not seeing all the facts, what role race played in that. But I think it's fair to say, number one, any of us would be pretty angry; number two, that the Cambridge police acted stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home.

And number three, what I think we know separate and apart from this Incident is that there is a long history in this country of African-Americans and Latinos being stopped by law enforcing disproportionately. That's just a fact. – *President Barack Obama*

The above exchange came at the end of a press conference regarding President Obama's health care initiatives on July 22, 2009. Obama's comments were the focus of one of the first racial controversies of his presidency.[26] The Gates case generated a lot of racial commentary regarding the arrest itself and race relations in contemporary America. All of the selected blogs covered the controversy. Shortly after the press conference, commenters on right and left blogs took divergent stances on the controversy. For example, below are two comments responding to Obama's subsequent handling of the controversy - one from a left blog (dailykos.com) and one from a right blog (hotair.com).

- And that's the way it is with Obama, who would rather work with people to solve a problem instead of demonize his opponents. - BronxInTN (dailykos.com)

- I knew Obama would start a race war when his poll numbers dropped. Here goes. – faraway (hotair.com)

Along with contrasting evaluations of President Obama, right and left commenters adhered to conservative and liberal racial frameworks respectively. Those on the left adhered to the idea that racism is a problem requiring attention per a color conscious perspective. And, in contrast to right participants, those on the left assumed that racism primarily affects minority groups. Those on the right denied the existence of significant racism but promoted conservative

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[26] "According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism, coverage of the Gates arrest and President Obama's comments consumed nearly one-fifth of all coverage relating to African-American issues in major news outlets in 2009, and almost 25 percent of all talk radio segments on race issues – a big portion of an admittedly small number." (Deggans 2012)

ideas of "reverse racism" per a colorblind perspective. Within blogs there was little explicit argument about these broad ideas about race. In general, those on the right adhered to key aspects of colorblind ideology, while many on the left rejected such ideas. Some specific racial claims, evoked by the case, were made by each side as well. Those on the right argued that racial profiling and racial discrimination against blacks were not serious problems that required attention – especially from the President. Conversely, those on the left argued that racial profiling and racial discrimination were serious problems that negatively affected blacks.

Despite within blog consensus, partisan blogs featured (sometimes fierce) debates within blogs as well as similar comments about the case across blogs. For example, participants on both sides argued that the arrest was a violation of civil liberties and/or an abuse of police power. While this view was in the minority on the right blogs and in the majority on the left blogs, the similarity of the view pushes against the idea that partisan blogs are a non-deliberative space where rigid ideologies are repeated without challenge. Indeed, debate often consumed the majority of comments for each post.

While I often found the aforementioned blog consensus, these agreed upon frameworks were flushed out in debate and clarifying interactions. Participants interpreted similar sounding comments differently within blogs. In this way, participants maintained partisan and ideological boundaries within blogs while engaging in internal debates. The interpretations of other's comments maintained (or perhaps produced) the rules of acceptable racial discourses for each blog. The conversations on these blogs show less overlap across the partisan divide than appears from a look at individual comments.

I searched each blog using the key word "Gates" from 7/23/09 – 8/6/09. I chose 5 posts from each of the four blogs for a total of 20 posts. The selected posts focus on the key points of

contention from the case. Twenty posts yielded 4,877 comments (2,525 on the left and 2352 on the right) to review.

I focus on three significant conversational themes for my analysis: Distraction, The Racial Peace, and Civil Liberties/Racial Profiling. In the following chapters, I explain how participants on political blogs shape the boundaries of racial discourses and racial ideas within each blog vis-à-vis these three conversational themes.

I begin this analysis by looking at how each side argued that the controversy was a distraction while maintaining adherence to their respective racial ideologies. Here, participants sorted out what was important about the controversy regarding race and in many ways, how race matters in contemporary America. The Racial Peace chapter looks at how each side works within an agreed upon racial context (i.e. a unique social reality with regard to race) while wielding tools that draw upon both colorblind and colorconscious discourses. In the last chapter here, I show how debates over Civil Liberties and Racial Profiling demonstrate how each side manages racially ambiguous comments. I argue that participants employ flexible strategies to deal with the evidentiary value of the specific case and ultimately preserve partisan racial claims. I term these strategies "protective deracialization" and "promotive racialization." These three processes; discerning importance, agreeing upon context, and managing potential challenges to a blog's racial perspective perpetuate liberal and conservative racial discourses in these partisan spaces. In the conclusion of this section, I argue that understanding these processes are crucial to understanding the partisan divide on race.

To be clear, I first examine the racial discourses on each blog with an eye toward their coherence and alignment with what other studies have found are liberal and conservative racial discourses. Secondly, I ask how participants on each blog shape these discourses. Finally, I

summarize these findings. I argue that it remains plausible that individual commenters might find some common ground across the partisan divide. I find that the processes outlined here create a somewhat unified and unique racial framework for the controversy for each side.

Chapter 3: Distraction

Calling a racial controversy a distraction could serve to simply avoid discussion of race altogether. In general, Americans exhibit discomfort when discussing race (Bell and Hartman 2007; Zajicek 2002) and often avoid the topic (DiTomaso 2013;Pollock 2005). In part, Americans avoid discussions of race when inequality comes up (Bell and Hartmann 2007) or when racetalk shifts to structural rather than individual manifestations of racism (Ford 2008). In addition, this discomfort is due, in part, to American's concern with whether they can be labeled racist (Brown et al. 2005) and as such, Americans work to avoid that possibility (Srivastava 2005). Furthermore, the dominant racial framework of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva 2003: Gallagher 2003) minimizes the importance of racism.

Here, I found that participants on both sides neither avoided discussion of race nor minimized the importance of racism. While some individual commenters explicitly wanted to avoid discussion of race, in the context of the comments sections this was not feasible. Comments calling the incident (or some aspect of the incident) a distraction provoked responses that invoked race to interpret the meaning of distraction. My contention is that, during a racial controversy, partisans on political blogs cannot simply dismiss race without pushback. Instead, partisans managed whatever discomfort arose from the discussion of race not by shying away

from the issue but by discerning what is and is not racially important. Indeed, the dismissal of race during a racial controversy provoked it's own anxiety and discomfort for each side.

Distractions are by definition problematic. In this case, who is doing the distracting[27] and for what reasons was an issue. For the left, the right and their media allies distracted the public from the important issue of the health care bill. Many on the right shared the notion that the controversy distracted from health care but believed that Obama and his allies were doing the distracting. Underlying the debate, about who distracted whom from what, was the question of exactly what about the ensuing racial discourse was a distraction. In this way, participants worked to shift attention away from certain topics and towards others.

A distraction is significant (i.e. worth posting about and/or commenting on) so far as it moves attention away from something the writer deems more important. Here I look at how the commenters collectively decide what is important about the case in terms of race. However, when I say "decide" I don't mean that they came up with a stated conclusion that is then voted into some kind of blog platform. I mean that within interactions, participants agreed on some common point. In this case, the commenters came to some basic agreement with regard to what is important when it comes to race. As commenters delineate what is important about the case through the distraction critique, they shape the boundaries of racial discourse on the blog. In other words, commenters ensure that if a racial controversy is the topic, "we" (participants on the blog) must acknowledge some key racial point. The use of "distraction" around a case prompts this process because it threatens the space for a key racial point. While commenters on both sides employed the term "distraction" in the service of partisanship, the relationship (or potential

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[27] To be clear, distraction is an evaluation of the event by the commenter not a tactic of the commenter. In other words, here I am not referring to attempts by commenters to distract from the issue under discussion, but instead their conversations regarding the whether the incident (or some aspect of the incident) is a public distraction from something more important.

relationship) to racial meanings mattered to other commenters who responded in ways that preserved space for the blog's racial perspective.

Each side engaged in a selective dismissal of the controversy and thereby ignored or deemed irrelevant aspects of the controversy that their political opponents considered important. However, it is noteworthy that each side did this in conversation with like-minded partisans. They were not engaged in debate across partisan lines. As such, this process of selective dismissal and simultaneous preservation of a racial perspective served to bring partisan claims into clearer focus rather than simply bash political opponents – who, after all, weren't present.

Racial controversies produce an accusation of racism that each side must contend with. In this case, and I believe many others, participants on each side behaved as if they cannot afford to simply dismiss the controversy lest they cede ground politically. When someone cast the controversy as a distraction, others reacted to the potential that their side risked ceding ground within the larger public debate on racism. In the face of these dismissals, participants collectively preserved space for their side's position on race. So, even a controversy that both sides might be inclined to dismiss, the right because of their denial of claims of anti-black racism and the left because their President, in his initial remarks cited earlier and in subsequent statements, defined the case as racially ambiguous, became a source of tension over racial ideas.

This first empirical chapter also demonstrates how participants on each side created and/or enforced acceptable, unacceptable, and contestable racial discourses. An acceptable discourse is one that is unchallenged. Participant established unacceptable discourses when someone conceded a point or someone made an accusation (or interpretation) of someone else's comments. In doing so, they were, in effect, saying, "Surely, you are not saying this…?" to which someone responded, "of course, I am not saying that." In this way (and some others)

participants worked together to deem certain discourses about racism as unacceptable. Lastly, some discourses remained contestable. In other words, there was no agreement reached. In addition, as I mentioned in the methods section, conversations are not neatly delineated pieces of data. Instead, these terms I employ to identify types of interactions (debate, clarify, additive) between participants point to specific moments in the comments sections.

Distraction on the Left: "Crap … On the Airwaves"

Particpants on the left were attuned to the possible racial meanings of seemingly non-racial dismissals of the controversy. While many on the left called the controversy a distraction from more important issues, some took umbrage with the notion that the controversy was a distraction. Most participants agreed that the media created the controversy; first by asking Obama about the case and then by making too much of Obama's answer. Commenters didn't necessarily disagree with the media critique but instead reacted to the potential dismissal of the larger racial claims. These commenters reacted to the possibility that discussion of racism might be deemed a distraction. Here I look at the comments from three of the left posts (two from dailykos.com and one from crooksandliars.com).

This following thread is from dailykos.com. The post entitled: "Cambridge Police Union: Put Prof. Gates on Trial" had 495 comments and 185 unique commenters. Six commenters provoked interactions with other commenters when they called the controversy a distraction or strongly implied that it was. In five of the six cases subsequent commenters agreed with the initial assessment or offered subtle clarifications (i.e. the conversations were additive or clarifying rather than debates). In one case, dismissing the controversy resulted in a debate between participants. On this post, and other posts, the small number of distraction comments that resulted in debate were different then those that did not. The comments that garnered

agreement were directed at the media, while those that sparked debate were directed at Obama.

For many, comments directed at Obama threatened to dismiss issues of racism and moved

beyond an agreeable media critique towards removing concern over racism.

The thread here is primarily from one commenter but gets a lot of "recommends"[28] from

others. In other words, most just second the assertion. The initial comments offered no challenge

to liberal racial ideology. For this first chapter, I have left the thread in the format it appears on

the blog.

> **Thank you National Media (31+ / 0-)**
> For putting this crap up on the airwaves and ignoring the Health Care Crisis.
> by Timroff on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:35:14 AM PDT
>
>   o   **And Afghanistan (18+ / 0-)**
>   by Timroff on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:35:32 AM PDT
>
>   ▪   **And Global Warming (17+ / 0-)**
>   by Timroff on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:35:45 AM PDT
>
>   ▪   **And Unemployment (14+ / 0-)**
>   by Timroff on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:36:04 AM PDT
>
>   ▪   **And the Credit Crisis (15+ / 0-)**
>   by Timroff on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:36:15 AM PDT
>
>   … [cut]
>
>   ▪   **and Iraq (9+ / 0-)**
>   by Treg on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:39:41 AM PDT
>
>   … [cut]
>   ▪   **And poverty. (8+ / 0-)**
>   by Fabienne on Fri Jul 24, 2009 at 11:42:32 AM PDT

Timroff's reference to "this crap" could mean only media coverage rather than the issues

of racism and racial profiling. S/he stated that the news media was responsible for creating a

controversy and avoiding important issues. The media critique did not necessarily imply that

racism or racial profiling is not a problem but instead criticized the way the media handled the

story. Still, even here some were not willing to broadly call the controversy a distraction. The

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[28] Dailykos.com has a feature where members (i.e. those who have signed up for the blog and received a log in) can voice approval or disapproval for a comment.

following comment is a response to the first comment. While agreeing with the media critique, joanneleon also guarded against the dismissal of racial issues and the minimization of racism in general.

> I'm glad the issue was brought to light
> because it is something that people really need to be aware of. I really think there are people who don't believe this stuff really happens, because they've never experienced it…
> - joanneleon

joanneleon somewhat disagreed with Timroff sentiment, but exactly how s/he disagreed is significant. The comment shifted the focus off of the media and onto whether "the issue" was important. All the blogs projected a negative assessment of what they call the mainstream media or MSM for short.[29] As such, attacks on the media were acceptable, but for some those critiques contained implicit dismissals of key parts of the blog's racial ideology. While Timroff did not say that racism is unimportant, joanneleon preemptively guarded against this reading of the blog position.

Since some on the left viewed calling the incident a "distraction" as an attempt to say that racial profiling or racism is unimportant, how other participants could frame their characterization of a distraction, without substantial pushback, was limited. As I mentioned earlier, those who implied the controversy was a distraction got much more pushback when the blame was leveled at Obama and not the media. Criticism of Obama or his statement provoked a debate on left blogs, while criticism of the media generally did not. This is partly due to pro-Obama sentiment on the left, but also because many read criticism of Obama's comments as an attempt to minimize the importance of racism. In effect, participant's ability to simply dismiss the racial controversy and thereby avoid discussions of race were limited.

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[29] This attitude mirrors a growing public perception of media bias. http://www.people-press.org/2011/09/22/press-widely-criticized-but-trusted-more-than-other-institutions/

A debate began on another post form dailykos.com when someone made a similar point about the case as the above thread. However, this comment made a mild criticism of Obama. Rather than a largely additive conversation a debate broke out between participants. The post entitled, "Pres. Obama remarks on arrest of Prof. Gates" had 303 comments (and y unique commenters). Three comments that called the incident a distraction sparked additive or clarifying conversations, while the one below sparked a debate.

Here I think I need to address the small number of interactions I am looking at to make these conclusions. After all, four comments out of 303 might seem miniscule. However, these four comments began threads that encompassed a total of 73 comments from 50 different participants. The thread below had 40 comments from 25 commenters (abbreviated here).

The first comment did not use the word distraction but it was as dismissive of the controversy as the first thread I presented.

> He [Obama] shouldn't have said anything to begin with
> Just give a non-committal answer and move along to healthcare.
> Ah well.
> - drmonkey

>> Why not?
>> I'm glad to here the president speak out against racial profiling and injustice. Why aren't you?
>> - Futuristic Dreamer

>>> Cause it's needless drama
>>> Look, healthcare is a big deal, and he needs to devote as much of his political capital and skill to it as possible - giving the dumbshit media the ability to pay attention to meaningless things just makes the important work he's doing harder.
>>> - drmonkey

>>>> Using words
>>>> like "needless drama" and "meaningless things" when referring to the racism that people of color in this country deal with on a daily basis demonstrates your lack of awareness of what this issue is all about.
>>>> - NLinStPaul

>>>>> I know exactly what the issue is about
>>>>> Look the president is engaged in a massive policy fight that's 1) critical to our future as a country, and 2) not exactly doing super well with it. He needs to focus on that. I don't mean that there's no point in ever calling out racism and police profiling. I mean that when you've got a bunch of things going that are risky and possibly in danger, saying stuff

that will distract the fools you're trying to get to pay attention isn't helpful.
- drmonkey

Isn't ending the oppression
of people based on race, etc. also critical to our future as a country? Or is that only important to us people of color?
- Tired of the Bull

As opposed to the last thread from dailykos.com this one began with criticism of Obama when drmonkey wrote, "he [Obama] shouldn't have said…" drmonkey's comment provoked a debate with Futuristic Dreamers who read drmonkey's critique of Obama as an attempt to minimize the importance of racism when s/he replied that s/he was "glad to the president speak out against racial profiling and injustice." Here Futuristic Dreamer reinterpreted drmonkey's comment. In doing so, s/he eventually, with the help of another commenter, pushed drmonkey to qualify her or his statement by writing "I don't mean…" and thereby confirming that "racism and police profiling" were important social problems.

The argument over whether the incident constitutes "needless drama" also demonstrates how the two commenters placed the blame for the controversy in different places. drmonkey blamed "the dumbshit media" while NLin StPaul argued against "Using words like "needless drama" and "meaningless things" when referring to the racism that people of color in this country deal with…" Here NLinStPaul argued with drmonkey but in doing so reinterpreted drmonkey stated meaning. Drmonkey's criticism was aimed at the media and the controversy in the media and not definitively at racism. drmonkey's reply did not argue that racism is meaningless or drama.

Through this process, debate participants unpacked assumptions (or read assumptions into) other's comments. As a result, the distraction theme was refined to mean that this specific case and the specific reaction to it were perhaps not well-suited to addressing racism. Whereas, the possibility that "distraction" might mean that all accusations of racism or racism itself are

distractions was moved into the realm of unacceptable discourse, while the former achieved the status of legitimate debate.

A similar conversation happened on the other left blog, crooksandliars.com. Here a thread began with a complaint about calling the controversy a distraction. The post entitled "The Chris Matthews Show: Media Decides it was right to ask Obama about Gates' Arrest to make White America Feel Better" had 75 comments from 33 commenters. Three comments and the post made reference to a distraction and garnered interaction from other commenters. A total of 18 comments were part of these threads and involved 8 different participants. The thread below was a response to the post and some other commenters.

Here, one commenter took offense to the idea that the incident was a distraction.

A "Distraction"?
David Ehrenstein — 7/26/09 11:57am
Oh WHATEVER!

David, you know I respect you...
Nicole Belle — 7/26/09 12:06pm
But four news cycles on whether Obama is an angry black man and a cop-hater IS a distraction and prevents us from getting real work done.

Dealing with racism is getting work done
David Ehrenstein — 7/26/09 12:10pm
PERIOD!

Do you honestly think having
Nicole Belle — 7/26/09 12:18pm
Tweety [Chris Matthews], Howard Fineman, et al., discussing race and talking about how Obama needs to make the white community feel comfortable again actually advances the racism discussion at all?
I'd love an honest discussion of race on TV, which (IMO) would include a big fat "White people, get over yourselves" statement, but the mainstream media isn't interested in doing that.
Look at the "Black in America II" on CNN last week. They specifically said they would not deal with racism.

Work didn't get done
NoBuddy — 7/26/09 12:23pm
…
Obama backtracked on what he said. The headline might as well read "Whoops - Obama puts foot in mouth".
…
Meanwhile, the matter harmed the health care reform effort. The big winners was the health insurance industries. If you support that win, then indeed work did get done. But that's the only work that got done.

The above conversation demonstrates that while most considered racism to be a serious problem (and no one on the left argued that racism itself was not a serious issue), there was disagreement about its applicability to this particular incident as well as the efficacy of racial progress through racial controversies. David argued that it was directed at the President's remarks, while Nicole refocused the criticism on the media while acknowledging that racism is a real problem. Lastly, NoBuddy argues that the case was not well suited to talking about race and nothing got accomplished. NoBuddy turned the focus to the efficacy of Obama's remarks rather than refute claims about racism more broadly. Together these conversations reached a kind of unstated agreement that racism is important but disagreed over when and how to address it. Thus they maintain the boundary of the distraction critique so that it did not include saying that concern about racism is a distraction.

On left blogs, the interactions around "distraction" worked out what could be dismissed and how one could call some aspect of the case a distraction whilst preserving the blog's racial perspective. Of course, "the preservation of a blog's racial perspective" was likely not a conscious goal of any commenter. Indeed, that such preservation was unintentional points to the power of site-specific discursive norms and the importance of internal debate for maintaining such discourses. While these kinds of debate conversations could sometimes become heated, the commenters co-produced boundaries for acceptable racial discourse. On the left, the claim that racism is an important problem in contemporary America maintained its place in discussion about racism on left blogs. These interactions, therefore, established (or reinforced) acceptable discourse (criticism of media coverage of racial issues), unacceptable discourse (assertions that racism is unimportant), and contestable discourses on racism (the efficacy of certain challenges to racism) for the left blogs.

Distraction on the Right: "Race-Baiting Ploy"

Commenters on the right focused on who was to blame for the controversy and why. While commenters were critical of the media, many on hotair.com and redstate.org believed that Obama purposely used the incident to distract Americans from healthcare. Some even went as far as to say that Obama staged the reporter's question or that Gates staged the arrest. For most, the real controversy was Gates implied accusation of racial bias and Obama's comments about racial profiling. For those on the right, Obama's "race-baiting" and/or Obama's racism, in general, was the problem that a focus on the arrest itself, attempted to distract from.

While we might expect the right to insist that the whole thing was a distraction given the right's association with colorblind frameworks that minimize racism, the distraction theme was less prevalent on the right. Unlike the left blogs, few here were willing to dismiss the entire event as a media created controversy. Here I focus on one post from hotair.com and one from redstate.org. The distraction theme came up briefly in the comments sections of these posts and on one other post from hotair.com. On the other three posts from hotair.com and the other four from redstate.org this theme did not arise.

On dailykos.com, drmonkey wrote, "He shouldn't have said anything to begin with, Just give a non-committal answer and move along to healthcare." On hotair.com one commenter expressed a sentiment similar to drmonkey: Rob Verdi wrote on hotair.com, "it was a mistake on his part [Obama], he should have used some political skills to dance around any answer, instead he made himself appear foolish." While these two comments were similar, the reactions to these were very different. Any cross-partisan agreement that Obama made a mistake in addressing the case proved to be a limited agreement as those on the left and right preserved space for their racial critique.

On the first post from hotair.com, "How Not to Win Support From Police Unions…", comments citing a distraction were peppered throughout the comments section. While this post contained a total of 915 comments from 254 commenters (and was by far the largest comment section on the right blogs), only a few comments dealt with distraction. Similarly, on the hotair.com post entitled, "Obama: The Gates Clusterfark is a 'teachable moment' or Something" out of 359 comments and 198 unique commenters only 14 comments dealt with distraction. These comments[30] garnered little interaction and those that did were additive or clarifying.

These comments, from the first post, accused Obama of creating a distraction, which commenters interpreted to mean that Obama had brought forward something that was irrelevant or unimportant. While not every commenter explicitly marked a particular racial analysis as irrelevant or unimportant, subsequent clarifying comments made these meanings clear.

> Does anyone else think that situation might have been a set-up?
> kg598301 on July 23, 2009 at 1:21 PM
>
Obama needs all race baiting distraction he can get.
the_nile on July 23, 2009 at 1:25 PM

> This was a planted question used to garner racial sympathy for "health care reform" that ultimately backfired. Politics as usual, perhaps?
> d-mitch on July 23, 2009 at 1:39 PM
>
I don't doubt that, but the problem is that now people are tired of just sitting around being accused of being racists by black racists. Those days are over. The chickens have come home to rooooooooooooooooost.
SouthernGent on July 23, 2009 at 1:41 PM

The clarifications added to these comments made the racial dimensions of the distraction critique clear. Almost all of the comments involving distraction mentioned race or if they didn't someone responded to clarify the racial meaning. As such, participants preserved space for the racial critique rather than added to a dismissal of the entire controversy. In a way, subsequent commenters were saying, "not so fast, there is a problem here. You are right to dismiss part of it "but…" as SouthernGent wrote, "…the problem is that now people are tied of just sitting around

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[30] I have left these non-threaded comments in the format that they appear on the blog. Here, indented comments are those cited by the non-indented commenter. In other words, commenters could cut and paste part or all of a comment in order to directly respond to it.

being accused of being racists by black racists." Here the commenter ensured that the race-

baiting critique was not lost in the dismissal of the incident.

Later in the comment section, a few others commented on Obama's alleged distraction

attempt. Here the commenters were not directly interacting with one another by cutting and

pasting each other's comments, but the interaction seems clear.

> At this point, I'm convinced that it was the O-bots who scripted the question, which tells me that Obama intended to cap off his presser by stirring the race pot. Hence the intemperate comment.
> It was a community organizer's premeditated race baiting ploy that went awry. Serve up the crow.
> petefrt on July 23, 2009 at 2:03 PM
>
> And instead of talking about obama the idiot today, we are talking about obama the racist cop hater……
> You know, Lynn Sweet was planted, her question was planted, and in reality, the trash that voted for obama ATE HIS ANSWER UP!
> HornetSting on July 23, 2009 at 2:20 PM
>
> The only short answer last night was the one prior to the race baiting question. BO wanted to make sure he had time for it, yes it was staged.
> farright on July 23, 2009 at 2:27 PM

petefrt described Obama's "race-baiting ploy" as one, which "went awry." S/he, in

essence, saw the controversy as orchestrated by Obama. HornetSting and farright concurred but

HornetSting added that Obama's comments played to his base (which s/he dismissed as "trash").

There was no disagreement here about who was to blame for the controversy. However, there

was a potential disagreement here regarding whether it was a ploy "that went awry" as petefrt

claimed or a successful appeal to Obama's base as HornetSting claimed. The distinction between

the two claims was unacknowledged as a point of contention on this blog. Indeed, read in the

larger context the point of HornetSting's comment seems to be the moral illegitimacy of

Obama's supporters rather than any political prediction.

Moreover, these comments suggested that casting Obama's assessment as a distraction

did not challenge anything on the right. In other words, these conversations were

additive/clarifying rather than debate-oriented because the comments did not violate partisan

boundaries (as they are all critical of Obama) nor did they violate any racial boundaries as each

comment shifts attention away from racial profiling in order to draw attention to "race-baiting." Here, unlike on the left, no one argued that calling the controversy a distraction constituted an inaccurate dismissal of racism. Participants could freely call the incident a distraction without any substantial pushback on points regarding racism. Indeed, the only pushback regarding Obama's racism (which I examine in the next section) was from one commenter who argued that Obama did not call the police officer a racist.

Since there was little debate about the distraction, the kind of concessions and reinterpretations of comments that I found on the left blogs did not appear. However, even from these additive/clarifying conversations we can discern the formation of acceptable and unacceptable racial discourses. For example, that Obama created the racial controversy was acceptable but any assertion that racism might have played a role in the arrest was unacceptable. On redstate.org a post entitled, "Outrage: President Obama Owes Sgt. Crowley an Apology" garnered 112 comments from [y] unique commenters. Here the distraction critique comes up a few times. The comment below was typical of the tone on redstate.org.

> It seems to me that the Gates question was a setup,
> The_Rebel (Diary) Thursday, July 23rd at 10:52PM EDT (link)
> co-ordinated by that Obama stooge from Chicago, Lynn Sweet of the Sun-Times. It was a simple question, so why did she have to read it from a notepad word for word? What kind of a journalist is she?
> As for Gates playing the victim, on the contrary, he should be given administrative leave from his Harvard position for such an outburst. Do the parents of students attending his classes want their children to be indoctrinated with this racist, anti-American professor? Are they paying attention? Probably not.

Here, like on hotair.com the commenter speculated about a conspiracy but presented that analysis alongside the non-controversial (on redstate.org) description of Gates as a racist. While not everyone explicitly agreed with the assertion that the whole thing was a set up, no one bothered to disagree. The next commenter wrote, "At the very least it was anticipated…" S/he then went on to criticize Obama. Despite the dismissals of Obama and Gates's statements on

race, few considered the incident unimportant. On redstate.org, like on hotair.com, there was talk of impeachment and description of the incident as Obama's "Waterloo."

The comments invoking "distraction" on the right blogs implied that everything that was racial about the event stemmed from the discourse of President Obama and Professor Gates. The distraction theme on the right, therefore, served to drain race from all other aspects of the case. Virtually all on the right maintained that race played no role in the officer's behavior or any of the police, that race played no role in the witness and the 911 call, and that race played no role in the media story except at Obama's direction. Since racial controversy, by definition, creates some measure of racial discord, those on the right argued that Obama created the controversy and hence the discord. While criticism of the media existed on the right blogs, here even the reporter was under the control of Obama. By removing race from the other aspects of the case, Obama and Gates became solely blameworthy for the controversy and hence guilty of racism. In other words, the accusation of racism (produced by the controversy) was not dismissed but refocused. As we shall see in the next chapter, those on the right did not move the discussion away from racism as an important social problem with unequal impacts on different racial groups. Indeed, they made this point rather explicit. Instead of a dismissal the conversations here moved the discourse away from uncomfortable ground and toward the evidence for conservative critiques.

Conclusion: Legitimate Racial Aspects

At first glance, the distraction topic might seem non-relevant for understanding how racial discourse develops on political blogs. Indeed, commenters that cast the controversy as a distraction could be those who don't want to talk about race. This may be true on an individual basis, but within the context of a racial controversy such discourse carried deeper meanings.

Calling a news story a distraction is another way of saying that it is unimportant. However, those posting and commenting on the controversy believed that something important was at stake in the evaluation of the incident. In other words, the term distraction was not simply a means to avoid discussion of race but rather a way of delineating what was important about the larger racial issues the case called forth. Looking at how the different sides used "distraction" as they engaged in a sustained evaluation of the story is a way of understanding what each side deemed relevant in a racial controversy.

Debates over racial controversies involve focusing the racial discussion rather than highlighting it or dismissing it. "Distraction" served as a tool for a selective dismissal of the controversy. Both sides removed a racial analysis from certain aspects of the case, while preserving a racial analysis for other aspects of the case. For the left, participants worked to preserve a larger racial claim about discrimination and racial profiling, while on the right, participants worked to preserve a racial claim about false accusations.

What underlie the different reactions from left to right was partly different levels of support for Obama. However, the divergent reactions also stemmed from two different ideas about racism. The debate was not, as I further demonstrate in the next chapter, "there is no racism" v. "there is racism." If that were the case, one side would have dismissed the controversy, while the other would have embraced it. While racism was assumed important on the left and racism (at least anti-black racism) was assumed unimportant on the right, the two sides did not develop arguments centered on whether racism exists. Nor was the argument across blogs a disagreement of the extent/importance of racism. Instead, both sides agreed that racism existed and that it mattered. "Distraction" helped each side preserve space for its version racism. The discourse focused attention by deeming some things racially important and other things

irrelevant to a discussion about racism. A selective dismissal of the controversy ensured that each side would remain on comfortable terrain whilst preserving their unique racial frameworks.

Chapter 4: The Racial Peace

Racial controversies provoke an accounting for the controversy itself. Despite disagreements over the term "post-racial," partisans across the political divide claim to desire a society that has "moved beyond race." Since racial controversies bring tensions over race to the foreground, such controversies violate a racial peace that would seem a cornerstone of a post-racial society. The mere existence of a racial controversy proves, for many, that we have not moved beyond race. Why and how controversies arise and who or what is to blame for this often divides right and left.

The racial peace is also a way of talking about colorconsiousness and colorblindness. Orientation toward racial controversies is one way to distinguish CB from CC (and modern conservative from modern liberal racial discourses). In other words, CB proponents should value the racial peace, while opponents should not. However, as I will show CB and CC are both discursive strategies, which can cross the partisan divide and intereptive frameworks, which are partisan specific.

While scholars and activists on both the right and the left have noted that, at least some, racial controversies are counterproductive as they serve primarily to heighten racial tensions (Ford 2008), right and left generally assign different evaluations to violations of the racial peace. The left has a legacy of challenges to the racial peace as exemplified by the perennial protest call and response, "No Justice, No Peace." On the left, violations of the racial peace (i.e. racial controversies) are sometimes viewed as a necessary tactic to address persistent yet often ignored racial injustices. In accounting for a racial controversy, those on the left tend to point to

underlying racial tensions inherent in racialized social systems. For those on the left, the shared

goal of a racial peace requires some racial contestation to first establish equality. This orientation

toward racial discord is part of the left-aligned colorconsciuos perspective that views race as an

important determinant of life chances and a relevant feature of the social system.

Historically, racial conservatives accused civil rights proponents of violating the racial

peace and called for "law and order" in the face of racial discord (Perlstein 2008). The right

maintained (and still maintains) that, with regard to racism, there is no status quo injustice that

legitimates protest on racial issues (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011). In particular, some cite

Obama's election to deny the existence of contemporary racism (Edge 2010). In accounting for a

racial controversy, these sentiments often culminate in the accusation, from conservatives, that

racial controversies arise from someone "playing the race card." This orientation toward racial

discord is part of a right-aligned colorblind perspective. In a recent article, Bonilla-Silva and

Dietrich (2011) cite three basic frames of what they term "color-blind racism": abstract

liberalism, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism. They argue that three frames are

"unacknowledged, contextual standpoints that provide the intellectual (and moral) building

blocks whites use to explain racial matters" (192). The racial framework of colorblindness

asserts that our society would be "post-racial" if only Americans would stop talking about race[31]

(Deggans 2012:12; Gallagher 2003). Figures on the right have cited racial tensions in and of

themselves as the root cause of racial problems (D'Souza 1995).

However, as I pointed out in the last chapter, the story is more complicated than one side

ignoring racism and the other attending to racism. Both right and left employ CB and CC

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[31] As Bush (2004) notes that "the argument for colorblindness…is framed in the notion that the problem of racism is that we keep talking about it." For an example of this discourse see Clegg (2000).

discourses without embracing the underlying ideologies that separate right and left on maters of race.

For example, the right's claim of "reverse racism," complicates a simple "defense of the status quo v. challenge to the status quo" description of the ideological racial divide. While charges of "reverse racism" and "playing the race card" could be admonishments against disturbing the racial peace, which supposedly rests upon a fair status quo and therefore be in line with abstract liberalism and the minimization of racism, I will show that those on the right pointed to an unjust status quo with regard to race highlighted the importance of race in contemporary society, and made race-based claims.

Others have noted the tendency for those who adhere to colorblind ideology to discuss race in non-colorblind terms. In other words, colorblind ideology's disattention to the economic, historical, and political factors that create and perpetuate racial inequality is not the same as ignoring race altogether. Proponents of CB may perceive an overly color-conscious society (i.e. one that focuses on minority disadvantages) as a form of persistent injustice that calls for vocal challenge. Norton and Sommers (2011) found that whites, but not blacks (and presumably white liberals), view racism as a zero-sum game – one in which, whites now believe they are losing to the point where anti-white bias is today a more significant problem than anti-black bias. Indeed, Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) argue that colorblind "racism" serves to "defend and justify the contemporary racial order" (page). As a result, conservatives might violate the colorblind principle of not talking about race or making race-based claims.

Those on the left may engage in colorblind style discourse by citing race-baiting and often reading racist motivations into the racial discourse of conservatives. While such a tactic does not minimize racism, it does rely on similar rhetoric as colorblind ideology.

Those on the left accused individuals on the right of racism and making racist appeals –

i.e. playing the race card by bringing race into the controversy and overstating the role of race.

They also criticized those on the right for fomenting racial discord. In this way, those on the left

criticized racial discord by citing those who injected race into the controversy.

Research shows that liberals embrace some aspects of colorblindness. Indeed, researchers

point out that colorblindness is not simply one half of the racial divide but the dominant racial

framework. Figures associated with the left, like President Obama in particular, have been

criticized for downplaying race (Wise 2010).

The above tendencies (promiscuousness) found expression on right and left blogs during

the Gates case, but the interpretative frameworks held the two sides apart. The key underlying

assumption dividing right and left, however, has to do with the definition of racism that stems

from colorblind and colorconscious ideologies. I found that, on the right, the minimization of

racism sometimes yielded a denial of the existence of racism, but more often replacement with

"reverse racism" or just a distorted version of racism. The version of racism on the right is one of

individual-level bias, often motivated by hatred, and perpetuated by morally responsible

individuals (i.e. racists). This view means that if someone claims that there is racism than there

must be a blameworthy racist (see Ford 2008). The right's key political opponent, the then

recently elected President Obama largely played this role. On the left, however, there was a

distinction between racism as a cultural or structural feature of society and racism as individual

racial bias. As such, on the left, a claim that there is racism did not mean that there needed to be

an identifiable racist. This fundamental difference in the link between racism and racists

underlies much of the divide I found from right to left. This distinction helps us to understand

what often appears to be similar rhetoric on race across the partisan divide. To some extent both

sides criticized those who brought race into the case. At the same time, each side also critiqued colorblindness (at least in so far as CB manifests as a reluctance to bring up race, make race-based complaints/demands, and challenge the racial status quo) and in doing so, engaged in CC discourse. However, both sides did so without embracing the underlying ideology and indeed while rejecting the racial frameworks of their political opponents. This can be clearly demonstrated by looking at interactions among partisans.

The blurring of color-conscious and color-blind rhetoric may represent an ideological promiscuousness among blog participants or divergent views among the individual participants within each blog. However, I think that the rhetoric from both CB and CC form part of a universal cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986) that each side can use to support their underlying ideologies. These discourses don't threaten those ideologies as the widely understood background assumptions/interpretative frameworks in each space guarded against such interpretations. CB and CC are rhetorical tools/strategies on the one hand, and interpretive frameworks on the other hand. A focus on the interactions among partisans reveals relationships between discourse and interpretative frameworks that might be missed in surveys or interviews.

Racial Peace on the Right: "It is about race."

Commenters on the right not only asserted that Obama "injected race" into the national discourse and created a racial controversy, but that he called the officer a racist. On the right blogs, Professor Gates was also guilty of making, what all on the right deemed a false accusation of racism. Claims regarding false accusations were in line with colorblind discourse that minimizes racism. However, such "false accusations" of racism, on the right, were not merely wrong but such accusations constituted racism and systemic discrimination against whites. This was a form of colorconscious race-based claims making. However, the oft-repeated claim that

Obama was a racist and that "race-baiting" was an endemic problem superseding any anti-black

racism did not cross over into left-aligned colorconsciousness as it did not allow for race-based

claims making on behalf of minorities.

Here I look at comments from three of the hotair.com posts and two of the redstate.org

posts. All posts, on the right, garnered comments that called Obama or Gates a racist. The

following comments are from the large hotair.com post entitled "How Not to Win…" Comments

citing Obama's "racism" were peppered throughout the comment section. In addition, the term

race-baiter, race-hustler, and racist were used almost as synonyms. Comments like these

maintained that Obama was to blame for the racial controversy through his violation of the racial

peace.

> O is nothing more than a knee-jerk racist and can't help himself but to throw down the race card. –
> Sporty1946
>
> People that see racism under every rock, behind every tree, often go off half cocked and expose themselves
> for the racists they are. They tell all in their hope to show all.
> Any decent president would have said I don't know the details and moved on … But Obama took the bait.
> – tarpon
>
> It *is* about race. Only it's loud-mouth Gates, and his supporters including Obama, who are the racists.
> Picking on a white officer for simply doing his job — disgraceful. – starboardhelm

These commenters, like almost all on the right blogs, depicted racism as an active and

willful violation of some social compact. Sporty1946 wrote that Obama "can't help but throw

down the race card," tarpon describes Obama and Gates as "going off half cocked," and

starboardhelm depicts Gates as "loud-mouth." These depictions of racism are in line with

colorblind ideology, particularly the assumption that racism is a problem of people creating

racial strife from nothing.

Few challenged the idea that Obama created the racial controversy and did so willingly. I

could find only one commenter on this post and (the same commenter) on another post who

disagreed with this assessment. On a hotair.com post entitled "Colin Powell to Skip Gates: 'You

don't argue with a police officer," a participant, orange, created the only real debate on the issue

of Obama's racism. The post contained 134 comments, from 96 commenters. The majority of

commenters explicitly endorsed the idea that Obama was a racist and/or engaged in "race-

baiting." Often this assertion was made without any explanation. The challenge to this assertion

here provides an opportunity to understand why the accusation seems so certain on the right.

No prominent media figure, Gates, or anyone in the Obama administration ever called

Officer Crowley a racist. Still the idea that Obama called Officer Crowley a racist was almost

uncontested on the right blogs. Here orange argued that Obama did not call Crowley a racist.

Orange quoted some of the language from the post and then took a contrary position.

> …our Post-Racial President assumed bad faith and demagogued the race angle by
> suggesting it was a case of profiling when it almost certainly wasn't.[from post]
> Absolutely false. Show me the quote where Obama said that the cop was racist. He didnt say it.
> He explicitly avoided saying it. - orange

First, orange interpreted "demagogued the race angle" to mean that Obama called the cop

a racist. The post doesn't say this, but subsequent commenters have acted as if it did. Second, the

comment goes against the dominant racial point of the post regarding Obama's race-baiting.

Orange's comments could have served to put Obama's racism in the sphere of legitimate debate

and/or to set a boundary at calling the President racist, rather than racially-motivated, racially-

biased, or just wrong in his assessment of the case. Instead, other commenters insisted that

Obama implied that Crowley was a racist because "he brought race into it." Obama's reference

to the larger issue of racial profiling was deemed a false accusation of racism directed at the

officer.

> Absolutely false. Show me the quote where Obama said that the cop was racist. He didnt say it. He
> explicitly avoided saying it. [from orange]
> Of course not – all Obama said was that the police had acted stupidly, and then on a completely unrelated
> topic, mentioned that "Hey, you know what I read the other day? Seems there is a long history of racial
> profiling of black people by police! Get. Out! I mean, WTF?!" – drunyan8315

Orange as the above quote clearly stated Obama absolutely suggests the race angle. And if you ever bothered to read Obama's words he not only suggested race was a cause, but a primary cause.
Obama: "Now, I don't know, not having been there and not seeing all the facts, what role race played in that," Mr. Obama continued.
"But I think it's fair to say, number one, any of us would be pretty angry; number two, that the Cambridge police acted stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home; and, number three, what I think we know separate and apart from this incident is that there's a long history in this country of African-Americans and Latinos being stopped by law enforcement disproportionately. That's just a fact."
The president then said that a racial profiling bill he worked on in the Illinois state legislature, which was prompted by "indisputable evidence that blacks and Hispanics were being stopped disproportionately," was a sign of how "race remains a factor in the society."
After admitting Obama had "NO FACTS" to go on he Obama pulled the race card. "what role race played" "African-Americans and Latinos being" "racial profiling bill he worked on in the Illinois" If he wasn't calling the cop racist then why did he bring race up?... – Dschoen

drunyan8315 and DSchoen offered no concession here. While, orange, used Obama's actual words to support his claim that Obama did not call anyone a racist, Dschoen uses the same words to make a different interpretation. In another comment, orange bolded where Obama said "separate and apart from this incident" to support his point. DSchoen, on the other hand, implied that bringing up race was an accusation of racism. While Obama did not bring up race, (the reporter did) the evidence for the claim of Obama "pulling the race card" is, generously read here, that Obama contextualized the arrest in the larger racial environment. As such, Obama's remarks perhaps asked Americans to evaluate the case in the larger racial context. That context, i.e. one where racial profiling exists, was both an illegitimate claim for those on the right and deemed an accusation of racism leveled against individuals. In other words, the interpretation of Obama's comments rested on two colorblind assumptions. First, that there is no status quo injustice against blacks and second, that the existence of racism means that a morally blameworthy racist must be present.

Participants, on the right, moved beyond the one incident to assert that no meaningful racial disadvantage exists for blacks in contemporary America from which to reasonably suspect that race was a factor in the Gates arrest. Here the discredited individual (Obama or Gates)

became a route to make larger ideological claims about racism. These comments, from the first

post, "How Not to Win…" were largely additive/clarifying as each commenter built on the

others claims.

> … In the meantime, Gates is doing the talk show circuit portraying himself as a martyr and making all sorts of wild accusations about how black men are discriminated against in America. A viewpoint the filthy liar seemed to support in his comments last night. - highhopes

oooo, I'll donate to give Gates a bigger soap box. I think he should bring Rev. Wright on the tour with him. Or perhaps he could invite Mike Nifong so their appearances could be more diverse. – funky chicken

> I think he should bring Rev. Wright on the tour with him. Or perhaps he could invite Mike Nifong so their appearances could be more diverse. – funky chicken

That's the part that bothers me the most. Gates didn't see a police officer he saw a white man and, being the racist he is, reacted to a white person being in his house. - highhopes

The first comment here highlights a false accusation of racism regarding the incident. The

reply then broadens this critique beyond the individual incident. Here, highhopes addressed

racism in America by criticizing "all sorts of wild accusations about how black men are

discriminated against in America." The commenter was not specific about what constituted "a

wild accusation," but the comment points to a minimization of racism. Other commenters second

this idea by pointing to figures that are reviled on the right for their views on race.

People like Rev. Wright, Al Sharpton, and Jesse Jackson were frequently invoked on the

right blogs to signal false accusations of racism. These figures were used as proof of not only

false accusations of racism but so-called "reverse-racism." Highhopes second comment makes

this claim when responding to the invocation of Rev. Wright. Participants argued that statements

about racism were accusations against individual whites. And since such statements targeted a

racial group, they were then racist. Here commenters moved beyond colorblind discourse

towards a depiction of an unjust status quo.

Again, these comments asserted that there is no, at least no anti-black, status-quo injustice from which the President or Gates could credibly or justifiably assume that race was a factor in the arrest. But this goes further toward race-based claims. This uncontested assumption meant that claims of black racial disadvantage were demands upon or attacks upon whites. As such, these demands could constitute a basis for race-based claims making from whites. While those on right blogs expressed the belief that blacks did not face disadvantage, they did not necessarily claim that a fair racial system currently exists for everyone. Saying that blacks don't face unfair advantages is not the same thing as saying the whole system is fair toward everyone and minimizing all racism via a colorblind critique. Race-based claims and particularly claims of systemic victimization mimic the rhetoric of the colorconscious camp. However, here they were based on CB ideological.

Many asserted that a tyranny of racism accusations – where anyone can be accused and all are vulnerable by virtue of their race (i.e. whiteness) now constitutes the primary racial disadvantage – a disadvantage that requires action to ameliorate. As such accusations of racism from the left weren't depicted as simply wrong, or for political gain, or motivated by individual elite racists but as part of a racial power structure of sorts. In this scenario, whites simply going about their jobs are oppressed and targeted by ruinous accusations of racism as the earlier comment claimed. The following comments, from hotair.com, were representative of the view on both hotair.com and redstate.org. These depictions of the status-quo did not provoke any disagreement.

> …
> Gates should apologize for taking a salary from Harvard.
> His "academic discipline" is **reparations disguised as an actual course of study. - NoDonkey**
>
> 40 years after the civil rights act and reparations are **still being paid. When is enough enough??? - ndulik**
>
> Never, it's a business for a few high profile individuals and groups that **needs the racism call as fuel.**
> No doubt there is racism at various levels in our society but it's not pervasive as the Sharptons and his ilk

have you believing - FireBlogger

The vast majority of racism in this country **COMES from race baiting poverty pimps like Sharpton**, that's where their bread is buttered.
If it were acknowledged that racism against blacks is a minor issue in this country, what would Sharpton do for money? – NoDonkey

While FireBlogger conceded that maybe there is some racism from which to make claims about, NoDonkey clarified this statement by asserting that "racism against blacks is a minor issue" compared to "race baiting." Those on the right insisted that "race-baiters" have amassed a level of power that has now created an underlying racial injustice in need of challenge. In this view, race-baiters are not irrelevant or easily ignored troublemakers but fierce opponents of racial justice. Race-baiters have significant effects on society beyond the individual wrong doing of a partisan opponent and instead, constitute a social problem in need of challenge. Commenters on the right could then argue that invoking race and/or making accusations of racism is sometimes acceptable, because maintaining silence would distort an important reality or mask an important racial injustice. In this way, they adopted a colorconscious discourse and argued against colorblind discourse. This phenomenon was most apparent in the comments section of a hotair.com post entitled, "Gates 911 Caller: Um, why am I a racist for reporting a possible crime in progress?" which garnered 212 comments from 117 unique commenters. Many referred to a "race hustler industry," which others maintain is a powerful and widespread phenomenon. Commenters repeated the assertion that such accusations of racism are part of an anti-white bias. Other commenters on this post also made this assertion which subsequent commenters added to.

It's obvious: Everyone who is white is a racist and regardless how much the white liberals bend over to show that it's not true we are going to have race hustlers like Sharpton and Jackson profiting from it. Eventually people are going to be cowed in enough fear that at least on the surface racism will be washed away be some utopian PC world, but under the skin all these things do is turn normal people into quiet racists.
Actually thinking about it: Obama is probably the #1 race hustler we have right now. - dpierson

You know, in many ways this incident will do much good.

The more the race hustler industry cries "RAAAACIST" when it is demonstrably provable that the racism was by the race hustler, the more the charge of "RAAAACIST" loses it's sting. - wildcat84

Actually thinking about it: Obama is probably the #1 race hustler we have right now. dpierson on July 29, 2009 at 6:51 PM

You hit the nail on the head. Since his election, Sharpton and Jackson have been sidelined so obama will now carry their torch. He's taken over all other industries within 6 months, so why not take over the racism industry as well?

/No wonder Jesse Jackson wanted to cut off his nads - Key West Reader

President Obama acted like a racist. Whelan didn't. But leave it to blacks and liberals to cry racism every damn chance they get! The American people had better start to pay attention and get sick and tired of it! -

afotia

These comments demonstrate a perception that a "race hustler industry" of powerful

activists, media personalities and the president sought to provoke racial strife for either political

or financial gain. Again, these comments did not just assert that a powerful status quo injustice

exists but that violations of the racial peace can be positive as "wildcat84" does when s/he

argued that "the incident will do much good" because the charge of racist will lose it's sting.

Later "afotia" urges the "American people" to "pay attention and get sick and tired of it." The

last comment again asserts a status-quo injustice that must be corrected.

A similar set of comments appeared on redstate.org as well. Here they accuse Gates of

being a racist and an elitist.

It's pretty clear.
The racist in this story is Gates…
But Gates could not do that because he is a racist, cop-hating polemicist. His entire professional career is based on propagating the argument that white people oppress blacks. Gates and Obama both owe Crowley an apology…
Obama's immediate and complete repudiation of Crowley is an indication of his own latent racist feelings about white people in general and the activities of cops in particular. - Big Apple Infidel

Not Only Are They The Racists; They Are The Powerful
Its the abuse of power that is giving this story legs.
To think Obama co-opted primetime television in the name of health care and the press used that time to bash one lone honest cop about one small local case without the facts is an outrage.
Gates, playing the victim, represents the powerful here. He abused his power. Obama, eternally playing the black card, is the powerful here and he abused his power. They are so wrapped up playing the victims, they fail to see their own abuses of power and acts of elitism and oppression.
Crowley is the honest victim of their collusion and he was almost destroyed because of it. -
Swamp_Yankee

Again, here we see not simply a refutation of claims of racism, but a reversal of the claims associated with colorconsciousness. Here race mattered. These commenters depicted race as factor determining life chances of Americans.

On the post regarding the 911 caller from hotair.com, many complained that an extreme form of colorblindness doesn't allow them to address race or anything that might have something to do with race. In effect, they lamented the inability to discuss race without being called racists.

> This political correct, fear of racism thing has done several things. First, it empowers tools like Gates economically, socially and politically. Second, it has now scared the daylights out of citizens who are doing the right thing. So, Ms. Whalen did the right thing—and she's called a racist. Then, SGT Gates [sic – he means Crowley] does the right thing–his job–and he's called a racist. Heck, I speak the truth here, and someone out there is going to say—raaacist… am I wrong here? – ted c

> Let me make sure I've got this straight:
> Racial slurs against Whites and Jews: Fine.
> Racial slurs against other races: Racist.
> All-Black organizations: Fine.
> All-White organizations: Racist.
> Reporting a break-in by a White person: Fine.
> Reporting a break-in by a Black person: Racist. - jazz_piano

> This is what will happen when Obama takes over police and emergency services:
> Operator: 911 what is your emergency?
> Caller: There's a man chasing me.
> Operator: Can you see what he looks like?
> Caller: Well, he's black…
> Operator: Ma'am, I think this is a teachable moment. It is incredibly racist of you to call this man black. We live in a post-racial era, and to identify people on the basis of their race is not something we should stand for in Obama's America…
> Caller: …
> Operator: Ma'am? – Sir Corky

This state of affairs justified a challenge to the status quo – perhaps even one that violates a racial peace. ted c argued that "it empowers tools…" (i.e. the incompetent) and disempowers or "scares the daylights out of" people "doing the right thing." The other commenters agreed and added scenarios to demonstrate their points. Sir Corky"s comment is significant because it posited that an extreme form of colorblindness now governs "Obama's America." Sir Corky even references "post-racial era." S/he mocked Obama's supposed interpretation of post-racial

by saying that "to identify people on the basis of their race is not something we should stand

for." Of course, those on the right have long argued for colorblindness but here these comments

reveal the limits of that support. The above comment is interesting because it mocks the notion

of post-racial by arguing that it represents an extreme form of colorblindness enforced by

empowered blacks and liberals.

Again a similar conversation can be found on redstate.org. The same basic idea is brought

up on both of these blogs. These comments suggest that a new racial reality has emerged that

does not allow for the mere mention of race.

> We are truly in a post-racial society...
> **…when a major newspaper in a city in the deep South describes the** color of perpetrators' clothing **and the** color of their guns, **but not the color of their skin:**
> **The three victims described the suspects as two men — one about 6 feet tall, the other about 5-foot-5** — wearing dark clothing and using dark-colored guns, **Fortunato said. No specific suspects have been named.**
> **Political correctness run amok. -** Steve Maley
>
> Thats common here in AZ too.
> **Except the AZ Republic will not publish their characteristics if they are Hispanic.**
> **Also, if the story is about a non-Hispanic, comments are opened, but most times when it's about a Hispanic, they close the comments section.**
> **Complacency with illegal immigration is the name of the media game here in AZ. -** phxg

The lack of discourse about race or rather the treating of race as irrelevant is a key feature

of colorblindness. Indeed, it's where the term comes from. However, in this case, partipants

replaced one racial analysis with another racial analysis and filtered events through this

alternative racial lens. In other words, colorblindness functioned as the active dismissal of certain

racial accusations and the promotion of other accusations of racism. Here colorblind proponents

(or conservatives) are not so much minimizing racism as they are engaging in a racial battle –

full of accusations of racism and calls to alter an unjust status quo.

The "racist" accusation that the community felt tarred with stems from the CB

assumption that claims about racism are statements about the morality of whites (i.e. that racism

means that a critical mass of whites must be racist). According to this view, the designation of

racist and the existence of racism are inextricably linked. They seem unwilling to imagine a

racism without racists (see Bonilla-Silva 2003) or a racist ideology without hatred.

However, when those on the right attacked the left, they did not just designate a "them"

to contrast a moral "us," but a threatening "them" to contrast a victimized "us." Furthermore,

those on the right asserted that the left adhered to an extreme form of colorblindness, which

prevented them from addressing racial injustice. This is a CC discourse, but one embedded

within CB ideology.

Racial Peace on the Left: "Obama must obviously answer for all things black"

Those on the left rejected the right's reading of the racial status quo. No one on the left

blogs voiced the idea that whites are currently disadvantaged or suggested that there is a pro-

black power structure in American society. Some commenters on the left also rejected the idea

that violating the racial peace is a problem. They did so by pointing to an unjust racial status quo.

However, despite this expected ideological alignment, those on the left, while not agreeing with

the key points on the right blogs, did, at times, express a similar orientation toward the racial

peace. In other words, commenters often valued the racial peace and criticized those who they

believed had violated that peace. Mirroring those on the right, left blogs criticized those on the

right for stoking racial discord for political gain, but they also criticized each other for certain

accusations of racism. A key difference, however, was the definition of racism I mentioned in the

last section. Amidst accusations of racism, those on left distinguished racial bias from racism,

especially a willful and active individual-level racism.

Here I begin with instances of colorblind discourse. I do this for two reasons. First, the

left discourse began with these kinds of comments – like the ones we saw in the last chapter.

Second, both sides end up making race-based claims in the end. Part of my argument here is in

line with (Brown et al. 2005) who argue that colorblindness is really racism blindness. In other words, it does not ignore race but only racism – and really only racism against blacks. And this also corresponds with Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) use of the term colorblind racism to agree that colorblindness is an ideology of race-based claims on behalf of white privilege.

Instead of largely additive interactions labeling political opponents racist, as I found on the right, the left blogs contained considerable clarification and debate regarding accusations of racism. For example, on the dailkos.com post, "Obama Stands behind his assessment…" commenters argued about whether Obama had made a mistake by invoking race in reference to the Gates case. Participants, however, did not see "injecting race" as an unambiguous wrong. In the thread below, smallgal argued that Obama did not create any racial controversy or even if he did the speech just drew attention to an important problem. Here some still consider the injection of race a problem but there was debate about whether that was Obama's fault or not.

> I didn't know there was controversy
> Why is it a problem when someone speaks the truth, *even if it is* the President?
> People ought to be pleased. – smallgal

>> A number of Kossacks believe that Obama ruined
>> the healthcare debate by injecting race into the presser yesterday.
>> I, on the other hand, was extremely proud of him. – TenthMuse

>>> He didn't inject race ...Lynn Sweet did, if we're going to be fair about it, by posing the query. – vcthree

>>>> Asking The Question Wasn't 'Injecting Racism'
>>>> But a lot of people can interpret Obama's answer in different ways. It's a reporters JOB to ask questions, even ones you aren't prepared to answer. - IndianaDemocrat

>>>>> No?
>>>>> I'm guessing that nobody would have asked Bush about the incident. But because Obama's black (and because it's a whole lot less threatening to corporate interests than talking about health insurance) ... – Bearpaw

>>>>> would she have asked John McCain that question?
>>>>> No. President Obama must obviously answer for all things Black. – lpeggy

The debate over who "injected race" suggests that "they" violated the racial peace. But everyone on this thread seemed to agree that race coming up in the scenario might be a problem. However, to the extent that Obama was blamed for this it is not because he is a race-baiter as was declared on the right but because he made a mistake. Still, the orientation toward the racial peace was similar to the CB discourse we often saw on the right as both sides lent credence to the idea that whoever brought up race first was, at least, suspect.

Indeed, those on the left also criticized what they saw as the willful creation of racial discord. On another dailykos.com post entitled, "Gates arrest: GOP congressman still on political warpath" the poster accused Republicans of stoking racial discord. After noting that Gates and Crowley were willing to talk things out and the issue was being resolved amicably, the poster wrote, "while everybody else is working to come together and reduce the heat, he is stepping forward to try to crank up the flame"

One way to look at this is to say that Obama was praised for keeping the racial peace rather than actually solving a social problem that deals with race. Another way to consider the reaction is that restoring the racial peace is akin to solving a problem about racism. Commenters on left blogs, some who applauded Obama bringing up the serious problem of racial profiling, also saw the "beer summit," where Obama, Crowley, and Gates met privately at the White House to discuss the situation over beer, as Obama handling the situation and settling the matter.

While few accusations of racism were directed at the principle players of the case, one related incident did spark such accusations. When a Boston police officer sent out an email calling Skip Gates a "jungle monkey," crooksandliars.com highlighted the incident with a post entitled, "Officer Justin "Jungle Monkey" Barrett Is Now Playing The Victim." Those on the left employed a depiction of racists as those holding on to old ideas. Such a discourse is frequently

employed by CB proponents to safely quarantine racism in the past and sanitize contemporary institutions (Brown et al. 2005).

Participants intention in casting racism as in the past was likely to cast the other side (and the other party) as stuck in the past and thus on their way to defeat. In this way, a conservative racial point – about racism as something of the past or the province of people stuck in the past was useful for liberals to present themselves as forward looking and on what will eventually be the winning side. However, the notion that racism is the province of an outdated and powerless numerical minority is more in line with colorblind notions of race in contemporary America.

Colorblind ideology often reduces racism to individual irrational hatred. Many on the right used this definition of racism when they accused Obama and Gates of racism. Those on the left also employed this somewhat universal definition of racism. For example, rgnewton wrote "He [The Officer] clearly outed himself as a racist…" This is a similar sentiment that the right threw out Obama. The phrasing was also the same. The idea is that racists secretly hide their racist views. Barely submerged hatred seems to be a universal standard by which one is labeled a racist. In other words, the ideas about race or ideas about inequality regarding crime and race don't get debated in this conversation. Later, and in other places on the left blogs, there was some discussion that expanded the definition of racist beyond this. Here someone can use the word racist and racism without challenge and add descriptions about racists.

> This Political correctness shit must be giving bigots ulcers
> Barrett was just longing for those **good ole days** when red blooded American racists could do and say whatever they wanted. - LeftandLeft
>
> I was talking to a guy online who was
> insisting that minorities are genetically inferior to whites, are born sociopathic and violent, and should be removed from society and banished to their own locked off societies. In those specific words... no allusions or inferences
> Completely denied he was a racist when confronted by me.
> These people are-- **beyond hateful morons and low-rent intellects**-- complete cowards who can't own their own word's and actions if they're lives depended on it. - wastelandusa
>
> Re: Officer Justin "Jungle Monkey" Barrett Is Now Playing The V

You were talking to him online? I didn't think **trailer parks in rural Kentucky had access to the internets.** - sixandseveneights

Maybe
this intellectual pygmy could be directed to some of Dawkin's scribblings (and throw in a little Stephen Gould and E. O. Wilson as chasers). Ah. forget it . . . . my guess is the **ignorant rube stopped reading when he was challenged by "The Cat in the Hat". – Sec Humanist**

Here racism is the province of the uneducated "low-rent intellects," and "ignorant rubes," who are stuck in the "good ole days" before "access to the internet." The characterization of racists as an ignorant minority stuck in the past was one that got no pushback on the left. Again, the above is not simply additive insults but the participants are performing work by reinforcing and shaping the larger point about the GOP and racism. The original comment did not do this alone. Each comment builds off the previous one and helps further define the preceding comment. Thus, this constitutes a clarifying chain that allows researchers to discern the meaning-making process. Participants unpacked the meaning of other comments and engaged in a kind of loaded play that both contained joking and meaning making.

The characterization of racists here was racially-coded toward whiteness with the references to "red-blooded American" and "rural Kentucky." However, the explicit connection with whiteness was tempered by class, region, and party markings. When commenters made explicit accusations of white racism or suggested (or explicitly stated) that racism is solely the province of whites they often met resistance. Unproven individual accusations, like accusations directed at the police in general or the Cambridge police department and Officer Crowley in particular also provoked debate.

The following comments are also from the post entitled, "Boston Police Officer Suspended for Sending E-mail Calling Professor Gates as 'Jungle Monkey.'" While calling this particular officer a racist was acceptable, when some extended that critique to the Cambridge Police (who had arrested Gates) or to police in general there was substantial pushback.

when all the chubby faced, red-neck, white boys
in the Cambridge force lined up in front of the cameras to condemn Obama for speaking the truth, this is
the exact belief system they were endorsing; that racism was acceptable, tolerable and the norm.
… just the tip of a big white racist iceberg on the police force.
…
Every real cop there knew that they were doing to a black man what they would not have done to a white
man. Period. … - roooth

> Every real cop there knew that they were doing to a black...
Which real cop are you referring to? The Hispanic officer that was present during the confrontation and
arrest, or the Black officer that was present during the confrontation and arrest? - Protect1Amend

>)O(
That's largely irrelevant since the police tend to have an insular culture of their own; it's based on extreme
and irrational self-preservation, not the race of the officers. - ysbaddaden

> Are black police racist?
Are you claiming that black police officers are so insular that they are racist against other black people? I
don't think you intended this, but whether because of an insular culture or blatant racism, if a black police
man is complicit to racist acts, that too makes him racist. This in my experience is just not how black or
white policemen behave. - Protect1Amend

>)O(
Actually, yes, they either adopt to the larger culture, rebel and often be ridiculed by conservates for doing
so, or just stay quiet and stew.
And my point wasn't racism of officers against others, but rather bigotry, us against them mentality, typical
of solidiers and those under high scrutiny; it's called the Fishbowl Effect. - ysbaddaden

Here the first commenter marked racism as a problem of whites. The next commenter did

not refute this larger racial theme but instead directed the accusation toward the specific incident

by pointing to the racial makeup of the officers. When confronted with this reality, those who

made such claims about the race of the officers said things similar to ysbadaden – that it is the

police, in general, not race that causes their behavior – whether racist or just boorish. From here

a debate about the police in general began. Finally, Hieronymus Braintree argued that the

accusation against the police was itself a form of prejudice. This last comment comes close to the

accusation that race-baiting or false accusations of racism are themselves racist. This debate

demonstrates the disagreements over accusations of racism on the left. Much of these

disagreements are about designating groups or individuals as racist rather than the existence of racism as a systemic structure.

On another post on crooksandliars.com one commenter wrote a comment that is very similar to the race baiting accusations on the right. Here, someone responds by pointing to racism in the larger society. The response to this comment then attempted to temper this claim and deracialized the incident and the issue to some extent. However, the commenter does not challenge the claim that blacks face racism in the United States, nor does s/he assert that whites face racism (but does accuse the original commenter or perhaps being prejudiced by citing white people). While criticism of racial accusations were present here, the larger claims about racism in society were not violated in that criticism.

The post entitled, "Chris Matthews Show: Media Decides It Was Right to Ask About Gates Arrest," garnered 75 comments and 35 unique commenters (including the poster). About 12 commenters did not engage in relevant discussion regarding the racial peace theme. The first comment began with a critique of Obama. The sentiment expressed by foxhunter was similar to those expressed on the right. The response, however, was one that would not appear on the right.

> Appearances
> … it certainly appears that Obama was reacting from the **standpoint of a black man with a chip on his shoulder** when he said the cop acted stupidly. I was hoping he was above that kind of insecurity (**Not that the insecurity is not understandable in many cases**). He has taken the high road in so many other cases. - Foxhunter
>
> African-Americans Have Every Right to Distrust Cops!!!
> …
> Stop this glorification of police officers and the automatic hate of blacks whom have every right to distrust police officers across the country....
> Read your American History and understand that African-Americans Have Every Right to Distrust Cops!!! Name one case where a white person was arrested under such circumstances?
> …
> COPS ACT WITH IMPUNITY AND CONTINUE TO HAVE THEIR SYMPATHIZERS, EVEN WHEN THEY KILL INNOCENT BLACK MEN LIKE DIALLO IN NYC!!!!! - WizardLeft1

Re: The Chris Matthews Show: Media Decides It Was Right To Ask
"Name one case where a white person was arrested under such circumstances? "
In another thread about Gates, someone posted that the same thing happened to them - and he was white.
I've been arrested for asking a police officer why he was calling me a moron, and I'm white.
… If it happens and racism is brought up in a public way, then we hear about it.
Don't kid yourself, this stuff happens to all sorts of people. It has to do with a lot of cops mentalities. - chaking

Oh, Okay....Tell me another B.S. Line....
It ROUTINELY HAPPENS TO BLACK PEOPLE....
There is no quantative data that white people are targeted or profiled like Black people, whatsoever, in the least, or, at all.
For every one instance of mistreatment of whites by cops there are 200 examples of blacks facing equal or worse treatment....So, I don't want to hear that one or two instances where whites get taken down.....
Cops routinely plant drugs on young black men and get away with because police officers are "holier than thou" in American society and questioning their behavior is practically forbidden....
So, tell me another B.S. Line!!!! - WizardLeft1

Re: The Chris Matthews Show: Media Decides It Was Right To Ask
Another BS Line eh? You acted as if you didn't believe it was even possible that it could happen to white people. …
Get a grip. You use assumptions as facts "Whites are more likely to get the benefit of the doubt too"...
"Edit: **Yes it's an assumption, but yeah, I would probably agree. But the problem is that it's not universally true, and there are cases to prove that. So it's a form of prejudice, just like anything else where you use race and say something applies to the entirety of the race"…** - chaking

No....No....No.....
you are trying to diminish the historical experience of what has happened to blacks in America regarding police officers and police brutality....
You are making a cute attempt to diminish the black experience at the hands of racist cops in America.
I am surprised at your inability to understand the black experience as it relates to cops as you selfishly and typically inject phony comparative examples….
I will stand by my original post and say that African-Americans Have Every Right to
Distrust Cops!!!
Moroever and again, I must repeat----there is no quantative data that white people are targeted or profiled like Black people, whatsoever, in the least, or, at all… - WizardLeft1

Re: The Chris Matthews Show: Media Decides It Was
"you are trying to diminish the historical experience of what has happened to blacks in America regarding police officers and police brutality...."
And that little blurb of yours is the problem. I say something about how the police abuse needs to stop totally, and because I tie it in to my experiences and say I think it happens to all sorts of people, all the sudden I'm trying to diminish the historical experience of blacks in America?
wow...
Since when does saying "Hey, that happened to me too!" ever diminish someone else's experience? … I merely cited something that happened to me by the police which you cited as happening to black people all the time, and I'm inferring, apparently you didn't believe happened to white people ever.

… **I absolutely agree that a lot of our history has been racist and prejudiced**. I absolutely agree a lot of
cops have used prejudice in what they do…
Again, I'm absolutely astounded that you respond so angrily at me suggesting that a lot of cops hurt a lot of
people and it needs to be stopped. Unbelievable… - chaking

The conversation mainly involves Chaking and WizardLeft1 with a few others who

support chaking's view. Chaking deracialized the incident by pointing to police abuse rather than

simply focus on the racial angle. WizardLeft1 accused her or him of diminishing racism. While

chaking continued to argue with WizardLeft1, s/he conceded that "whites are more likely to get

the benefit of the doubt" and "absolutely agree[s] that a lot of our history has been racist and

prejudiced…a lot of cops have used prejudice…" Despite the vitriol between the two here, they

do form a consensus and establish boundaries regarding race. Even in this heated debate where

someone is "yelling about racism" (i.e. using all caps is considered yelling on the internet), there

is no rejection of black racial disadvantage. There was debate, however, about whether the larger

reality means this specific case fits as either anecdotal evidence or an illustrative example of that

larger claim. Depsite the ferocity of this debate, WizardLeft1's insistence on the inclusion of the

instutional context of racism was conceded by chaking. In this way, the two commenters

revealed both the limits of CB-style discourse and the acceptable underlying frameworks (i.e. a

CC acknowledgment that racism if prevalent in modern society.

In the Gates case, there was a good deal of ambiguity regarding the role that racism

played. The original comment on this thread did not mention race or racism but rather dismisses

the controversy itself. The first comment reproduced here suggested that the arresting officer was

racist or at least dismissed the contrary evidence. The exchange prompted by this comment

reveals why the left did not need a definitive racist to declare the existence of racism in

contemporary America. As such, the following interaction demonstrates how a CB warning not

to inject race might be read on the left. On the left participants created distinctions between morally responsible individual racism and individual racial bias.

> But this cop said he's not a racist
> because he once gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to Reggie Lewis. – Nespolo

>> He probably isn't
>> in the real sense of the word. He's just an American with the usual set of core impulses and biases. Gates was almost certainly reacting based on his own view of what was going on. This whole trivial pursuit did force me to look at my ever-so-liberal self and to admit that I probably would have been more likely to call the cops if I saw a black guy apparently breaking into a house (assuming this was a "white neighborhood") and gone slower if it was a white guy.
>> It's quite reasonable to think the cop isn't a racist as generally defined. It's also reasonable to think he wouldn't have behaved the same way if the guy had been white. And that that's the way Gates saw it, too. – DaveW

>>> I agree
>>> I think he's conquered the "easy" things (doesn't use the N-word, has some black friends, etc), but he hasn't confronted the difficult, hidden prejudices that -- let's face it -- we all have. And that's at the root of this incident. – Nespolo

Here commenters refer to a "set of core biases" and "hidden prejudices that we all have." Commenters on the left distinguished between racial bias and active and willful individual racism. Secondly, the admission of one's own racial bias exists exclusively on the left and does not come up at all on the right. The reason may be grounded in the distinction between morally responsible individual racist and individual racial bias stemming from society – a distinction that underpins CC ideology.

On this next thread, from this same post, the first comment asserted that Crowley was wrong but not necessarily racist. Some on the right shared this view by arguing against the arrest but without accusing the police of racism. Here, however, those on the left explored what was meant by racism in the first place. Here, unlike on the right, what the accusation of racism means was under discussion.

> Maybe Crowley isn't a racist
> Maybe he's just a jerk. – sapper

>> He may not hate black people
>> ...but it's difficult to conclude that his actions were not influenced by race.... – Giles Goat Boy

A lot of white people find it difficult
to understand why anyone would be angry at the cop. In their world, and the cop's world,
black men do not teach at Harvard or live in nice homes in Cambridge. Black men sing
gangsta rap and tote big guns.
The media's as complicit as anyone else in this. What positive images of black men do
most people ever see? - dotalbon

c'mon
The officer in question grew up in Cambridge, went to public high school there.
What do you know about his "world" whatever that means? – Marek

I can't believe you're even asking the question
do you know NOTHING about the history of racism in America?
I suggest you get educated. - dotalbon

thanks for the suggestion
I am pretty well educated already. The comment I responded
to was directed at the Cambridge police officer, and seemed to
make assumptions about him. Obviously America has a
history, and present, of racism. – Marek

Here, dotalbon pointed to culture and later history. Marek argued that racism may or may

not be suitable to this specific controversy or to the specific officer. However, Marek ensured

that s/he is aware of the role of racism in our society. S/he then points out that they were talking

about the case and not more broadly. Here whether or not individual accusations flow directly

from statements about the role of race is part of the debate. In this interaction, Marek confirms

this backdrop amidst his or her caution against labeling an individual racist.

The left continually produced a discourse that placed accusations of racism within the

sphere of legitimate debate. Such assertions pushed back against notions of the racial peace,

which appear elsewhere on the left and dominate assertions on the right. However, the accusation

of racism on the left was more constrained than on the right. This was due in part to a more

nuanced view of racism, and that the target (the officer) was not a political target. Instead,

discourse on the left preserved a racial lens to evaluate the incident. However, because that lens

was more complex than on the right so that the discourse here did not lead to definitive

conclusions regarding the role of race in the specific incident – even as it did confirm the validity

of a liberal racial lens (i.e. CC).

Conclusion: Discursive Promiscuity/Ideological Rigidity

Those on the left and the right depicted a status-quo injustice of racial inequality. Neither side deracialized the status quo. How, not whether, race matters was the central question that distinguished right and left. Racial controversies violate a post-racial consensus. One possible reason why participants seem to violate CB and CC lines is that the accusations of racism may suspend the rules regarding racial etiquette. People are freer to bring up race and accusations of racism in this space because they can claim that others provoked the discussion of race.

On the right, little was said that was unacceptable regarding racism. The closest the right blogs come to a legitimate debate on racism is whether or not Obama called Crowley a racist and hence engaged in race-baiting. Even here only one commenter really argued that this is the case. The assumption that racial disadvantages were nonexistent/unimportant for blacks and real/important regarding whites underlay much of the discourse.

On the left, in contrast, the existence of racial disadvantage against blacks was virtually uncontested, while the applicability of the charge of racism to the specific situation or to the police in general was a subject of considerable debate. Here the meaning of racism was also part of clarifying conversations. Conversely, the distinction between racial bias and racism was virtually non-existent on the right. In this way the right and left blogs were spaces where the basis for discussion of the controversy between the two blogs was not aligned.

The discursive "creation" of racism or "playing the race card" as it is known in politics is an accusation that partisans employed to target anyone who mentions race or racism. There was widespread use of this colorblind-derived critique. Each side also accused the other of heightening racial tensions. This accusation was often accompanying by an accusation of racism. Racism in this construction, employed in varying degrees by both sides, becomes something

others bring up and create rather than shed light on or illuminate. Indeed each side saw themselves as illuminating existing racism while the other side was creating racism out of thin air to make baseless characterizations of their political enemies or to grandstand against imaginary threats. In this way, each employed CC and CB discourses.

Universally adaptable weapons are perhaps well suited to partisan conflict. However, the undefined and decontextualized notions of race and racism that sometimes animated discussion of this case (and indeed most debate about racism in contemporary America) are tools poorly equipped to address the enduring racial problems of American society. This study aims to clearly identify the conceptual and discursive problems that arise in these racial debates and in doing so, clarify the actual disagreements and hopefully lead to a more accurate view of social reality.

I found that while partisans on the right and on the left use similar racial discourses to make their points, the meanings of the discourses are context-dependent. In other words, what appears to be common ground is not in the context of the conversations on each blog. Instead of shared discourses across the political divide attached to shared meanings, fellow partisans made sure that possibly ideologically promiscuous comments adhere to key features of the racial divide.

Perhaps another way to look at this is how right and left define racism as either narrow or broad. The left would seem to have a more expansive version of racism than on the right. But, I think both CB and CC offer narrow and broad versions of racism. The literature points out conservatives have not accepted the late 1960s inflation of the term racism to include what liberals call "institutional racism." One commenter, on the right, actually mocked the concept by name. Instead, conservatives argue, as I've pointed out, that racism is motivated by individual intent and harms a specific individual. This is a narrow view of racism and a limited view of its

effects on society. However, at the same time, this allows for a broad application of the term racism. On the right, all racial bias deserved moral condemnation. Conservatives on these blogs asserted that the President is a racist, most of his supporters, a serious of powerful actors forming an industry of race-baiting etc. On the left, however, race can matter without the morality of the individual being implicated. This is also both a narrow and broad form of racism. It is narrow in the sense that it may reserve the label racist (at least for individuals) to only those individuals who express overt racial hatred. It is broad because it saw the role of race (and racism) as encompassing far more than overt racial hatred.

In the next chapter, I show how commenters on each blog made statements that were construed as going against the racial perspective of the blog when engaged in debate about the case itself (rather than racism more broadly). In the next chapter I focus on interactions centered on the arrest, civil liberties, or the role of police in society. Such comments provoked fierce debates on each of the blogs. As such, I explain a seeming paradox where partisan blogs allow for and exhibit a lot of within party debate on racial issues ended up preserving the distance between the two sides. In the next chapter, I focus particularly on how participants dealt with comments that provided ambiguous, with regard to the racial perspectives of the blog, depictions of the case.

Chapter 5: Racial Profiling and Civil Liberties

Controversial news stories are often the sites of ideological battles that extend beyond the individual incident that created the news story. Racial controversies are of interest to those, like political partisans, who have a stake in the supremacy of one ideology or political identity over another. As controversies gain media coverage, social actors (moral entrepreneurs etc.) invest considerable energy into the interpretation of the specific event. Controversies encourage the use of anecdotal evidence, i.e. a single case, for (often unsubstantiated) claims about society (Glassner 1999). Which claim defines an event is often hotly debated. For example, Chancer (2005) finds that high profile crimes become "provoking assaults" that merge case outcomes with social causes and "stimulate discussions of simultaneously general and particular issues" (8). The interplay between a single case and a larger social claim often defines a controversy.

The general validity of an interpretive framework rather than its application to a specific case (or the outcome of a specific case) animates most controversies. Controversial news stories are often the sites of ideological battles that extend beyond the individual incident that created the news story. For example, Chancer (2005) finds that high profile crimes become "provoking assaults" that merge case outcomes with social causes and "stimulate discussions of simultaneously general and particular issues" (8). The interplay between a single case and a larger social claim often defines a controversy. As controversies gain media coverage, social actors (e.g. moral entrepreneurs etc.) invest considerable energy into the interpretation of the specific event. The controversy, then, becomes a stage upon which to battle over, what are often, frameworks aligned with the two major political parties.

With regard to race, interpretive frameworks are partisan specific. Those on the right have a tendency to align with colorblind ideology, while those on the left tend to either oppose or

express skepticism toward the idea. Besides their alignment with the two parties, such frameworks are also inherently divisive. Each framework provides a rationale for viewing the other as racist. For example, CB is a framework that interprets Affirmative Action programs and the color-conscious framework that justifies race-targeting as racist. On the other hand, colorblind proponents's denial of the existence of contemporary racism prompted Brown et al. (2005) to recast the ideology as "racism blindness," while Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) called the framework "colorblind racism."

In the Chapter 3, we saw the selective dismissal of a controversy and how others managed those dismissals so that they were selective. In Chapter 4, we saw how partisans are adept at using the tools of CB and CC discourse to make racial claims and support divergent ideologies. In this chapter my focus shifts to how participants use the case itself to preserve or reinforce racial frameworks. A racial controversy could be used as anecdotal evidence, an illustrative example, or one that has little bearing on larger racial issues. I argue that preserving/reinforcing racial frameworks prompts participants to employ a set of flexible strategies to deal with the challenge of a racial controversy.

Here, I pay special attention to the concessions/qualifications that those engaged in debate make. I argue that participants on partisan blogs work together in order to preserve those racial claims that constitute colorblind or color-conscious ideologies. They do so, partly, by managing the ambiguity of comments. I found strategies for managing this ambiguity involve racializing and deracializing the case in order to protect or promote a racial framework.

Those on the left blogs adhered to the idea that racism (e.g. racial profiling) is a problem requiring attention per a color conscious framework. And, in contrast to right participants, those on the left assumed that racism primarily, if not exclusively, negatively affects minority groups.

Those on the right blogs denied the existence of significant racism but voiced conservative ideas

of "reverse racism" and "the race card" per a colorblind framework. Within blogs there was little

explicit argument about these broad racial frameworks.

Despite within blog consensus, both sets of blogs featured (sometimes fierce) debates

within blogs as well as similar comments about the case across blogs. Participants on both sides

argued that the arrest was a violation of civil liberties and/or an abuse of police power. This view

was in the minority on the right blogs. On hotair.com the percentage of commenters who argued

that the arrest was wrong ranged from 0% to 2.5%. on the 5 posts. On redstate.org the range was

0% to 10.3%. While these numbers were small, such commenters often provoked and helped

sustain debate that took up a substantial portion of the comments section. For example, the two

largest comments sections (and the ones I focus on here) on the right were also those with the

largest percentage of commenters with minority views. On the left, those who argued that the

arrest was just were in the minority ranging from 2% to 6.2% on dailykos.com and 0% to 18%

on crooksandliars.com. Again, the small percentages are deceptive because they do not measure

the scale of the debate. In addition, while the disparity in views from right to left was expected,

even the small overlap from right to left regarding the arrest pushes against the idea that partisan

blogs are a non-deliberative space where rigid discursive scripts (or "talking points") are

repeated and amplified without challenge. Since some used the case to support a larger racial

framework, whether the officer or Gates was wrong or right, potentially undermined the larger

racial framework and provoked debate.

While virtually all debate began with arguments about who was wrong regarding the

arrest, questions about race entered these debates. Participants racialized or deracialized the case

in two distinct ways. On the one hand, participants racialized the case in order to use the case to

promote a larger racial frame, what I call "promotive racialization." This process was characterized by the majority of participants applying a racial frame to the case and resisting attempts to delink the case from the larger racial frame. In doing so, they ensured promotion of the racial frame and preserved the evidential value of the anecdote.

On the other hand, participants also deracialized the case in order to protect the larger racial claim from a possible implication of the case, what I call "protective deracialization." This was characterized by a majority of participants avoiding using the anecdote to support a racial frame and/or agreeing to delink the single case from the larger racial frame. Indeed, those supporting the larger social claim sometimes pushed to delink the case in order to protect the larger racial frame from a possibly disconfirming anecdote. In this way, the larger racial frame was protected and existed alongside the case rather than as an explanation for the case.

As I stated earlier, these strategies were prompted by debates over the specifics of the case or disagreements about the issue of civil liberties. These debates often contained comments that created ambiguity regarding whether or not everyone supported the racial frame. Participants challenged ambiguous comments and prompted concessions from those who made them. I argue that the above processes are key to understanding how participants preserved distinct racial frames while engaged in internal debates. In this context, "promotive racialization" and "protective deracialization" emerged as strategies for maintaining the partisan divide on race during the controversy. In this specific case, a promotive racialization was dominant on the right, while a protective deracialization dominated discourse on the left.

The Right and Promotive Racialization: "Racists see racism behind every rock"

Most on the right used the case as evidence of pervasive false claims of racial profiling/discrimination against blacks. In doing so, they applied a CB frame that minimized

racism and cast accusations of racism as the key racial problem. While commenters on the right

blogs exhibited little sympathy for Gates, a few commenters invoked civil liberties to cast the

arrest as wrong. A comment that argued the officer was wrong or linked the case to a civil

liberties claim threatened to undermine the evidentiary value of the anecdote and thereby created

ambiguity with regard to the racial frames that participants on right blogs were promoting via the

case.

This process happened in the comments section of a redstate.org post entitled, "Release

the Crowley/Gates Tapes." For this post there were 205 comments from 29 commenters. Only

three out of twenty-nine commenters argued that Gates did not deserve arrest. Out of the 26

commenters who argued the arrest was correct, most invoked race. Six of them wrote something

like "I agree" as a title for their comment with no additional text. This leaves 20 participants, of

which 15 mention race. Of the 13 of these participants who commented more than once 10

mentioned race. All three of the commenters in the minority were accused of supporting an

accusation of racism against the officer, though none of them said this. Debate with these three

commenters consumed virtually the entire comment section as this debate began after the second

comment. Below is an interaction that begins with one of the three commenters who criticized

the arrest.

> …Why should any citizen give more information than what is required? …Many police use intimidation and lie to coerce people into giving them information allowing them to searching their cars or property… - *mom2oneson*

> …The officer was responding to a breaking and entering call. That gives him the right…As to this being racial profiling- I am sick of hearing about this… - *drquido*

> …I agree with you about being sick of racial profiling stuff. What is needed is education on how to treat people like citizens… - *mom2oneson*

mom2oneson's reference to a non-racial frame might be a move toward deracialization of

the case. Still, she never mentioned race, and indeed no one in the comments section had yet

done so. As a result, this framing did not preclude a complementary racial frame. However, it did create ambiguity. In other words, it was unclear to others whether this comment was arguing against the claim that false accusations of racial profiling are pervasive and therefore the larger racial framework that minimizes racism. drquido interpreted this comment as possibly rebuking that a key racial framework on the right. drquido implied that mom2oneson had accused Crowley of racial profiling and said that s/he was "sick of hearing about this [racial profiling]." Drquido did not challenge the larger civil liberties framework, but like some others, delinked that framework from the case. While drquido disagreed with mom2oneson on the case, s/he also informed mom2oneson of the possible reading of her or his comment and prompted mom2oneson to clarify her potentially ambiguous statement by conceding the larger racial frame concerning racial profiling.

Throughout the comments section, participants largely maintained a strategy of promotive racialization of the controversy (i.e. using the case to promote a racial frame). The majority pushed for and received admission, from the three commenters who took a divergent stance on the case, that Gates was racist and/or received confirmation of the larger racial framework that racial profiling was not a serious problem. Since the majority of participants linked the anecdote to the larger racial frame and used the anecdote to promote a racial framework, disagreement on the case could undermine the value of the anecdote. While this led to, sometimes fierce, debates over the case specifics and the larger issue of civil liberties, the racial framework was preserved as others confronted and worked with challengers to manage any ambiguity with regard to the racial frame.

Similar debates developed on hotair.com post "How Not to Win the Support of Police Unions…" This comment section was, by far, the largest on the right. There were 915 comments

from 254 commenters. While only 6 commenters argued against the arrest, the ensuing debates

consumed 47.1% of all comments. 48.8% of commenters brought up race. Race was mentioned

in 21.1% of all comments. Despite the prominence of race in the comments section, each of

those who argued the arrest was wrong did not initially mention race. Instead, each made a point

about civil liberties or a negative statement about the police. The first comment here referenced

others who had criticized the police. Here the commenter again linked the case to a larger civil

liberties framework.

> I'm glad to see … commenters … don't simply give a knee-jerk "don't question cops" reaction. …Crowley did arrest Gates because Gates hurt his feelings. … - *Ahh a Lion*

> Glad to see you've got the knee jerk "cops are racist pigs" comment going. – *Esthier*

> It's pretty obvious the only racist in this situation was Gates… questioning the cop's motivations and actions is… an important part of maintaining a society based on liberty - *Ahh a Lion*

Again, Ahh a Lion did not mention race in the initial comment. In fact, s/he previously

referred to Gates as "a racist dick." Ahh a Lion used a reading of the case to promote a non-racial

frame about civil liberties. Such a frame involved disagreeing on the specifics of the case (i.e.

who was wrong) that others had employed to promote a racial frame. In doing so, Ahh a Lion

potentially undermined promotive racialization of the controversy and created ambiguity with

regard to the racial frame itself.

The response from Esthier used an accusatory interpretation of Ahh a Lion's comment.

Esthier accused Ahh a Lion of saying that the police are racists. The use of an accusatory

interpretation was often employed in order to force a concession. Ahh a Lion took a slightly

different tact than mom2oneson, by confirming the racial framework as useful for understanding

the case rather than explicitly agreeing to the general claim about racial profiling. Ahh a Lion

conceded (again) that Gates was "the only racist" in this specific case, before reiterating his or

her general civil liberties frame. Gates's racism (now uncontested in this interaction) could still be employed to promote the racial frame.

All of those who made civil liberties claims, or argued about the case specifics in a way that interfered with the promotive racialization of the case, made concessions. In other words, those who created ambiguity were asked by others to solve it. Commenters were unable to assert civil liberty frames that undermined the value of the anecdote without addressing the larger racial framework and, as above, preserving the link between the case and the larger frame – here by agreeing that Gates was a racist.

Not everyone who argued against the arrest asserted a civil liberties framework. Below is an example of a counter claim that remains at the level of the case rather than a larger civil liberties framework. Here a commenter argued that Crowley was wrong to arrest Gates. Subsequent commenters implored this commenter to address Gates's racial claims. I argue that this was an attempt to gain acknowledgement of the evidence for the racial framework.

> Can anyone explain how it was wise for Crowley to arrest Gates rather than just go on his way? Surely we can all agree that everybody would be better off if Crowley had let it slide off his back and went off to do some real police business. – *orange*

> As soon as you explain how it was wise for Gates to scream racist at the police who came to protect his home from a potential break-in. – *Scrappy*

> Huh? What's the logic there? If Gates does something unwise, that gives the police free reign to be as unwise as they want? Bad idea. – *orange*

Here "orange" delinked the racial accusation from the other specifics of the case. orange did not acknowledge the use value of the anecdote, and the potentially ambiguous, with regard to the larger racial frame, meaning of her or his comment. Orange, however, conceded that Gates was wrong, which confirmed a false accusation of racism in the case. Others responded to ensure that the frame was confirmed.

As noted, some, like orange questioned the specifics of the case, while others, like rokemronnie (below) made general claims. While the focus of these two commenters was distinct (as well as their tone), the possible racial implications of their positions allowed others to group them together. While there were only a handful of "trolls" on all of the posts I examined, some sought to cast those who contested the promotive racialization of the controversy as outside the bounds of acceptable discourse. One commenter, for example, called rokemronnie and orange racists and others charged them with supporting leftist ideas. Both responded to this by denying that they had suggested anything racial about the case. Here, faraway accused those who said that the arrest was unjust of making false accusations of racism. The civil liberties claim was somewhat temporarily racialized – linked to the false accusation of racism. In other words, to apply a civil liberties frame to the arrest potentially confirmed the racial accusation.

> Proven: racists see racism behind every rock. Gates, orange, Ronnie – *faraway*

> Where have I said that racism was involved in this situation? - *orange*

> … you're a libelous idiot. I haven't said a word about race, other than to say that I didn't think the cop was acting on race and that Gates was wrong to so quickly deal the race card. See, now you're acting exactly in a manner that you say was wrong for Gates, you're falsely accusing someone of racism. – *rokemronnie*

Again these two commenters, rokemronnie and orange, both denied supporting Gates's claim of racism – confirming it as "falsely accusing someone of racism." They both somewhat confirmed the blog's racial analysis of the specific case and agreed that Gates was wrong to make false accusations of racism, and they further denied any association with a larger racial framework associated with the left.

A series of arguments created ambiguity in the context of promotive racialization of a controversy. Whether a commenter employed a general civil liberties frame, disputed the majority reading of the case, or threatened the link to a larger racial frame, all of these kinds of comments created ambiguity and prompted others to challenge these comments. Those

challenges created a discourse that ultimately confirmed a distinctly conservative racial frame and removed obstacles to a promotive racialization of the case.

The Left and Protective Deracialization: "This wasn't a racial thing."

On the left, the majority sided with Gates and argued that the arrest was wrong. Those arguing that the arrest was wrong often moved the discussion from racial profiling to civil liberties and deracialized the incident. For the minority of commenters who argued that the arrest was just, part of their evidence was the assertion that Gates's racial analysis was wrong. Few on the left defended Gates racial analysis, although some did grant him the license to misperceive the situation. Most, however, when challenged on the accuracy of Gates's racial accusation dismissed the racial angle and moved to debating civil liberties. The dynamics, at first, seem very similar to those on the right. Only the frequency of each kind of comment and the relative sizes of competing camps differs. However, I argue that the left, also worked together to preserve a distinctly partisan racial frame.

On the left, a protective deracialization of the case was evident. In other words, many protected a racial frame from the case rather than promoted a racial frame via the case. Here I show interactions that stemmed from commenters challenging the majority opinion on the case. In each of these interactions, the initial commenter created some ambiguity with regard to their support for the larger racial frame As such, others worked to manage this ambiguity in order to preserve the racial frame via a protective deracialization of the case.

A post from crooksandliars.com entitled, "Actual Facts About the Henry Louis Gates Case," which contained 243 comments from 84 commenters, had substantial discussion of the arrest. Most of the commenters (75%) argued that Gates didn't deserve arrest, while a minority (18%) argued that the officer was right to arrest Gates. The majority who argued that the arrest

was wrong deracialized rather than racialized the incident. Of the 17 commenters who mentioned race, 9 deracialized the incident, and 2 engaged in protective deracialization. Still, when faced with a commenter who threatened to undermine a color conscious framework, participants on the left were not willing to abandon the larger racial frame. Even if they delinked the specific case from larger racial frames (i.e. that blacks face disproportionate police misconduct), participants worked to protect the framework that acknowledged a context of racism involving minority interactions with police.

No one on the left called Gates or those who criticized the police. However, saying that Officer Crowley (the arresting officer) was wrong could mean, potentially, that the officer was a racist and saying that the officer was wrong could mean that Gates was right about racial bias. But such case-specific claims were ambiguous both regarding the framing of the case itself and the support for the larger racial frames employed for understanding the context of the case. In the first interaction here, a commenter began with a case-specific comment that went against the majority.

> The officer did not arrest him simply because he was upset, the officer arrested him for violation of a law… - *Timjoebillybob*

> This case sure smokes out the Authoritarians… - *bad_robbie*

> …Screaming at a cop and calling him a racist is a pretty good way for them to … charge you with anything… - *Timjoebillybob*

> …I don't think any party is yelling racist…This is now about the boundaries of the law and a man's castle, that's all… - *Ape-Man*

> Gates is… - *Timjoebillybob*

Arguing the arrest was just, Timjoebillybob stuck with the case itself rather than larger claims about race. In other words, s/he did not employ the case to promote a racial frame. bad_robbie challenged Timjoebillybob by invoking a larger civil liberties frame rather than asserting a promotive racialization of the case as we saw on the right. Timjoebillybob then

brought up race by implying that Gates made false charges of racism. At this point, the

interaction is somewhat similar to what takes place on the right. However, while individual

comments appeared similar across blogs, the interactions were distinct because they preserved

distinct racial frames, and in this case, used distinct processes to preserve those distinct racial

frames. So, instead of a confirmation of the right's racial framework, Ape-Man deracialized the

case. While timjoebillybob still disagreed, s/he did not invoke a colorblind framework that would

refute a liberal stance on racial profiling. Instead, they agreed that race was not a suitable

framework for this particular case (i.e. deracialization).

Another conversation from this post cautioned against siding too quickly with Gates and

argued against the accusation of racist cops - an accusation that no one on the blog had yet made.

Here we see a preemptive deracialization.

> I think everyone here needs to read the reports … before passing such critical judgments…too many potential witnesses to …rant and rave about racist cops – *sugarbiscuit*

> … [the officer] could have defused this … And, I do believe Crowley when he says he isn't a racist. I think this was less about racism on Crowley's part than it was about teaching this professor a little respect. – *TreadingWater*

While sugarbiscuit's comment would not be out of place on the right, here the

commenters focused on the applicability of racism to the individual incident. While

TreadingWater seemed to believe that the racial accusation against the officer was wrong or at

least unproven, the commenters above stuck to the specifics of the case, and together while

arguing about the case dismissed the racial claims concerning the case itself. For many on the

left, this single case had little value as an anecdote to promote a color conscious racial

framework. However, a CC framework was not absent nor was it replaced with a CB framework.

Instead a CC framework often appeared alongside the analysis of the case. So while there is

simultaneous discussion of the single case and larger racial issues the anecdote was sometimes

delinked from a CC framework.

The interaction below demonstrates this phenomenon. Here sugarbiscuit was debating the

specifics of the case with several other commenters. S/he again invoked race before anyone else

did.

> …again, I'm a defense attorney. I spend every day trying to beat cops. But running around screaming that all cops are lying fascist racists isn't going to win my clients anything… - *sugarbiscuit*

> …Fair enough. But my … beef is not with racism. It's about how cops can pretty much use their discretion when arresting… - *debaser71*

> …I agree with you wholeheartedly…but…how many criminal defendants get a platform to talk about the unfairness of their arrest?…Particularly Black criminal defendants? – *sugarbiscuit*

After talking about rights and the victories of the Warren court, sugarbiscuit called Gates

behavior imprudent. But s/he acknowledged rather than dismissed a CC framework by pointing

to racial bias in the criminal justice system. Again there was a deracialization of the incident but

not a denial of the larger social problem. Sugarbiscuit and debaser71 worked to protect the racial

frame by disassociating it from the potentially threatening anecdote. In other words, sugarbiscuit

acknowledged that it was still a valid framework for understanding police interactions with

blacks.

As noted earlier, race was less prominent on the left blogs. Most commenters did not

firmly take a stance with regard to the role of race in the particular situation. This thread, from

the dailykos.com post, "Cambridge Police Union: Put Prof. Gates on Trial." This post garnered

495 comments from 185 commenters. The comments section featured a good deal of argument

about the facts of the case, which facts were relevant, and the plausibility of different scenarios.

Only 30.8% of commenters on this post mentioned race, while only 13% marked the case itself

as racial. Others called the GOP racist (6.5%), while 4.9% engaged in what I call protective

deracialization. While race was not always the dominant topic of discussion, underlying these disagreements were deeper points about race and racism.

The following thread began when someone brought up the presence of a black officer who agreed with the arrest. The commenter didn't explain what s/he thought that meant – so others were left to address the meaning. Faced with a potentially disconfirming anecdote, 4 out of 10 of those who responded to this comment deracialized the incident and 3 of them worked to simultaneously protect a CC framework, while only 1 commenter racialized the case.

> Here's something to chew on…. CAMBRIDGE, Mass. - A black police officer who was at Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s home when the black Harvard scholar was arrested says he fully supports how his white fellow officer handled the situation. – *C Barr*

> I'm willing to stop making this a race thing and start making it a police in this country are freaking gestapo thing. – *Hunter Huxley*

> Good, 'cause that's what it is. No question that black and brown people get the gestapo treatment more often than white people do, but the point is that *nobody* should get that treatment. Nobody. – *sierrak9s*

The next comment is a response to the original comment about the black officer. The one below that is a response to that comment.

> It doesn't matter. This wasn't a racial thing. This is an out of control cop thing. – *Skex*

> That happens to people of color 1000 times the rate it happens to white folk. Yep, not a racial thing. Not at all. Nothing to see here, move on. – *samddoermann*

Faced with the implication that the incident was not racial, Hunter Huxley agreed to deracialize the incident and presumably protect the larger racial framework from a possibly threatening anecdote. The interaction, however, did not end there, as sierrak9s recognized the possible reading of this interaction as a dismissal of racism. As such, sierrak9s noted the discriminatory treatment that "blacks and brown people" face. The racial frame exists alongside the case, while the civil liberties frame was reasserted. Later in the thread, when Skex deracialized the controversy, another commenter seized on the omission of the larger racial context to mock the deracialization by sarcastically remarking, "Yep, not a racial thing. Not al

all. Nothing to see here, move on." Here we see pushback against deracialization and the limits

of the strategy for some. Samdobermann responded to a commenter, who unlike the others, did

not accompany his or her deracialization with an acknowledgement of a color conscious racial

framework that views racial profiling as a serious social problem.

At times more developed ideas about race grew out of deracializations of the incident.

Here the first commenter criticized racial accusations directed at the incident. All of the

subsequent commenters (5) on this thread offered clarifications invoking the larger racial

context. In other words, they moved to protect a CC framework.

> This is about civil liberties NOT racism. Criticize the cop for abusing his power, for wrongful arrest based on a misuse of a law, for not respecting Gates' rights in his own home. Fine. But to say 'the cop must be racist cus Gates is Black' just makes you look ridiculous. – *brizzlefoshizzle*
>
> Yep. I mean, there is always a possibility that race is an issue, because racial profiling is a well-known problem…Racism could be involved, but it isn't right to assume that it is unless there is evidence. … - *Frank*
>
> Racism is difficult if not entirely impossible to discuss in public discourse in this country because racism has been defined (by racists) as nothing more than simple bigotry.
> This particular case may or may not be an example of bigotry but it is certainly an example of racism - the kind of systemic racism that made it more likely, by a measurable percentage, that Professor Gates would be subject to this kind of arrest and treatment than a white man in a similar circumstance.
> Racism is a complex structure that operates at social levels far deeper and more pernicious than simple bigotry and when it's defined away as nothing more than hatred for folk with 'dark' skin colors than we are made blind to its operation and very real effects. - *Pd*

Here, Frank agreed that the case may not be about racism, but made sure to say that

racism could be involved because "racial profiling is a well-known problem." Such a caveat was

never present on the right. Here, the potentially ambiguous meaning of deracialization was

managed by the two subsequent commenters. The last comment here allowed for a

deracialization of the case but elaborated on the importance of larger issues (and presents one of

the most sociological takes on the incident I found).

Some of the comments on the left regarding the case were not wholly different from the

discourse on the right. We could pull perspectives from particular comments and find shared

views across the partisan divide. As I mentioned at the start of this section, there were some on the right who argued the arrest was wrong and there were some on the left who supported the arrest. However, the orientation toward racial frameworks made the context and ultimate meaning of these comments different across the partisan divide. While a poll might find overlap between Democrats and Republicans on a racial controversy, an examination of the interaction between partisans reveals much of that overlap to be illusory – especially regarding race. The two sides worked to ensure that virtually no overlap existed on larger racial frameworks.

Conclusion: Flexible Strategies

Researchers have detailed the distinct racial perspectives that divide Americans. Studies also note that such perspectives do not neatly line up with right and left. Presumably, some of those on the right, especially those who were in the minority regarding the arrest possessed more liberal views on race than their compatriots. Similarly, it is likely that those on the left who argued that the arrest was just held more conservative views on race than the majority of left participants. While different views on key racial claims would likely emerge within groups in an interview setting, that research method while more probing of individual attitudes does not explain how racial frameworks are sustained within social interactions.

What I have examined here is how a form of political talk actually takes place. Partisan politics is an interactive group project. As such an examination of group dynamics is essential to understanding the colorblind/color-conscious divides on race that fuel periodic racial controversies and ultimately stagnate discussions on race. I also think that spaces where like-minded individuals discuss and debate controversial events may find similar processes occurring for a wide-range of issues. Whether or not the same kind of processes are as likely when dealing with other issues, like sexism, or in offline spaces will require further research.

I also found that a case involving an accusation of racial profiling is not automatically one in which each side will attempt to employ the case as anecdotal evidence for their racial claims. While in this case, one side engaged in what I call "promotive racialization" of the case, while the other side engaged in "protective deracialization," I do not mean to imply that one tactic belongs to the right and one belongs to the left. I believe that had the case been different we might have seen a reversal of these or perhaps both sides engaging in promotive racialization. The potential of each side to harness a case to promote a racial claim likely leads to the intensity and length of racial controversies. In other words, the frequency and intensity of racialization will likely vary from case to case and within those cases from right to left.

This particular combination, however, should be especially troubling. Racial frameworks are important because they not only explain single cases but because they condition individuals to interpret events by, say, a CB standard that evaluates racism by standards of formal fairness vs. a CC standard that takes into consideration existing inequality. Sociologists, almost universally, consider colorblindness inaccurate, misleading and unsupported by empirical data (Brown et al. 2005). To be blunt, the racial frameworks employed by the American right are wrong. A color conscious framework, while not always accurately expressed by those on the left, offers a far more accurate depiction of our social reality. To the extent that racial controversies involve the promotion of colorblindness and the removal of color consciousness, debate may push real issues of racism, like white privilege and institutional racism, to the periphery of the national discussion.[32]

After a racial controversy, pundits and politicians often call for a "national conversation on race," often failing to realize that we just had one. I think what they mean is that they desire a more satisfying one – or one that changes something, anything, about race in America.

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[32] I thank one of the reviewers of this article for this insight.

Americans have witnessed, and will likely to continue to witness a media spectacle every few months and then be engulfed in a collective disappointment over the lack of change. While I offer no solution here, I hope I have contributed to the understanding of that stagnation and the persistence of the partisan divide on race.

The stagnation is not, in my view, the result of ideological rigidity or the monopolization of the conversation by extremists. Instead, the partisan divide on race owes its resiliency to the flexible discursive strategies described here. Strategies of protective deracialization and promotive racialization, which manage ambiguity, are flexible enough to absorb the impact of those controversies, which we might be tempted to think should, by virtue of the attention they garner, change something.

PART II: THE SOTOMAYOR CASE

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/15/us/politics/15judge.text.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Whether born from experience or inherent physiological or cultural differences, a possibility I abhor less or discount less than my colleague Judge Cedarbaum, our gender and national origins may and will make a difference in our judging. Justice O'Connor has often been cited as saying that a wise old man and wise old woman will reach the same conclusion in deciding cases… First, as Professor Martha Minnow has noted, there can never be a universal definition of wise. Second, **I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life.**

Let us not forget that wise men like Oliver Wendell Holmes and Justice Cardozo voted on cases which upheld both sex and race discrimination in our society. Until 1972, no Supreme Court case ever upheld the claim of a woman in a gender discrimination case. I, like Professor Carter, believe that we should not be so myopic as to believe that others of different experiences or backgrounds are incapable of understanding the values and needs of people from a different group. Many are so capable. As Judge Cedarbaum pointed out to me, nine white men on the Supreme Court in the past have done so on many occasions and on many issues including Brown.

However, to understand takes time and effort, something that not all people are willing to give. For others, their experiences limit their ability to understand the experiences of others. Other simply do not care. Hence, one must accept the proposition that a difference there will be by the presence of women and people of color on the bench. Personal experiences affect the facts that judges choose to see. My hope is that I will take the good from my experiences and extrapolate them further into areas with which I am unfamiliar. I simply do not know exactly what that difference will be in my judging. But I accept there will be some based on my gender and my Latina heritage.

…

Each day on the bench I learn something new about the judicial process and about being a professional Latina woman in a world that sometimes looks at me with suspicion. I am reminded each day that I render decisions that affect people concretely and that I owe them constant and complete vigilance in checking my assumptions, presumptions and perspectives and ensuring that to the extent that my limited abilities and capabilities permit me, that I reevaluate them and change as circumstances and cases before me requires. I can and do aspire to be greater than the sum total of my experiences but I accept my limitations. I willingly accept that we who judge must not deny the differences resulting from experience and heritage but attempt, as the Supreme Court suggests, continuously to judge when those opinions, sympathies and prejudices are appropriate.

One hundred and twelve people have been appointed to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. Until 1967, no one who was not both white and male was nominated to the bench. The first woman was not appointed until 1981. In 2009, only two judges had been non-white. So when, Obama announced his first pick for a Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor, the media immediately cast a focus on race because she would be the first Latina on the court. Adding to the racial focus, the highlighted portion of the above speech was depicted, particularly by those on the right, as evidence of Sotomayor's (and Obama's) racism. Those on the left responded by charging the right with attacking a Latina because, in their view, Republican leaders were either appealing to racists or were themselves racists. Thus, what began as a "post-racial" moment breaking down old barriers instead became yet another racial controversy replete with competing accusations of racism directed at political opponents.

The controversy surrounding Sotomayor's nomination allows me to again explore adherence to liberal and conservative racial frameworks and to examine whether my findings from the earlier chapters hold across cases. As I noted in the introduction, I picked this case because, unlike the Gates case, it involved a key partisan concern – i.e., political appointments.[33] As such, participants could not simply dismiss the appointment itself as media created spectacle.

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[33] Indeed, a Supreme Court appointment is the most important Presidential appointment because justices serve for life and, of course, comprise the only branch of government that citizens do not directly elect.

In addition, a political appointment of a Latina highlights racial themes not present in a criminal justice case involving a black man.

I set the time frame for my searches from May 26, 2009, when Obama announced his pick for the Supreme Court to June 4, 2009, which was before the Senate Confirmation hearings began on June 13th. I did this both to have a manageable time frame and because the hearings shifted a lot of the discourse towards evaluations of individual Senators and handicapping the vote. I again examined five posts from each of the four blogs. Posts covered the speech and a few secondary events that refueled the controversy. For example, when Robert Gibbs, Obama's Press Secretary, answered questions about Sotomayor's speech, those on the right saw his answers as an attempt to downplay the importance of Sotomayor's comments, while many on the left saw Gibbs's remarks as a misguided attempt to placate those on the right. In addition, a former Republican congressman, Tom Tancredo, compared the organization La Raza with which Sotomayor was affiliated, to the Ku Klux Klan. Tancredo's remarks set off admonishment on both the left and the right.

I found several significant conversational themes on each of the blogs. While these themes do not easily graft onto the themes from the previous chapter, I examine each of them with an eye towards illuminating the same processes I pointed to in the Gates chapter. In other words, I first use these themes to explore how each side discerned what was important about the event and preserved space for their partisan-specific racial ideas. Secondly, I look at how the vastly divergent claims from each side depended upon assumptions that tend not to cross partisan boundaries but yet remain the unquestioned basis for discussion within each blog. Finally, I will look at how each side policed discourse with regard to partisan racial frameworks.

The first chapter deals with how participants construct the partisan divide on race. Here I seek to explain why accusations of racism were so frequently directed at political opponents. Following Norton's (2011) in-depth examination of the partisan "news analysis" show *The O'Reilly Factor*, I found an anti-hermeneutic structure at work on political blogs, where interpretive imperatives create "a radically simplified and consistently politicized account of what the news means" (320). In the comments sections of partisan blogs, I found that an anti-hermeneutic structure fit events into a binary semiotic that links "racist" and "non-racist" to the two parties. While my findings here are similar to Norton (2011), my focus on the interaction between partisans allows me to examine "hermeneutic moments" within the dominant anti-hermeneutic structure of blogs and detail how these challenges impact the larger semiotics. In addition, I argue that the content and not just the structure of simplified binaries matter. My examination reveals the projection of a Civil Rights Era understanding of the racial divide onto contemporary politics, resulting in a "misaligned politicization" of Sotomayor's nomination. I argue that this misalignment reinforces an anti-hermeneutic structure.

In the second chapter, I look at identity politics. Participants on the right and the left have wildly different perspectives on identity politics. As such, I first present these different perspectives and then look for the underlying frameworks that give rise to these perspectives (and lead to their almost unquestioned allegiance on each side of the partisan divide). These underlying assumptions form the basis upon which legitimate debate commenced for each side. I argue that each side operated within a set of available interpretations that are generally unavailable across the partisan divide. In this case, while there was a set of agreed upon facts/events, unlike in a criminal case where partisans speculated about what happened, partisan interpretations of this shared reality created an unbridgeable divide.

In the last chapter, I look to the places where substantial debate emerged around Sotomayor's speech. A good deal of debate ensued over Sotomayor's speech, and over the highlighted quote in particular. Therefore, in this episode we have another opportunity to examine how each side managed racially ambiguous comments. That speech focused on the importance of both racial/ethnic and gender diversity in the courts. As I mentioned in the introduction, this case is different than the Gates case because instead of a racially-ambiguous case, Sotomayor's speech and the debates around it dealt directly with important racial issues.

Chapter 6: Racial Orders: "They are the Racists": The Construction of a Moral Divide on Race

King and Smith (2008) argue that American politics has long consisted of two racial orders. They write, "In every period, one order has promoted arrangements thought to advantage those labeled whites. A rival order has sought to end many of those advantages" (686). While racial orders are a consistent feature of American politics, today those orders/alliances are distinct from those that animated the Jim Crow era in both content and form. Despite these differences, however, the accusations of racism that animate modern racial controversies often evoke the previous era. As partisans battle on the field of a long-settled debate, they perpetuate a particularly divisive form of partisan politics - one that moves beyond policy disagreement to accusations of immorality.

Today's racial order contains a closer alignment of partisan affiliations and racial perspective than previous eras. While past racial orders contained a great deal of partisan overlap (Dray 2008; Loewen 2005:31-33; Foner 1990), today's alliances have split the majority of Democrats and the majority of Republicans respectively into color conscious and colorblind camps (King and Smith 2011). In other words, today the parties are better sorted by racial ideas than in the recent past (Tesler 2013; King and Smith 2011; Edsall 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010). Both sides consider Jim Crow era racism illegitimate and immoral.

While Democrats and Republicans support opposing racial agendas, partisans on both sides accept the victories of the Civil Rights Movement. The divides of the Jim Crow era, which revolved around de jure segregation, racial animus, and a belief in categorical inferiority, no longer animate contemporary racial politics. Today, Americans across the political spectrum adhere to the norms of equality established by the Civil Rights Movement (Brown, Carnoy, Currie, Duster, Oppenheimer, Shultz, and Wellman 2005; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Gallagher 2003;

Sears, Henry, and Kosterman 2000). In other words, colorblindness and color-consciousness, while divisive, fit within the discursive boundaries established by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011; King and Smith 2008). Both sides consider Jim Crow era racism illegitimate and immoral.

In addition, both sides make direct reference to an anti-racist Civil Rights Movement and racist Jim Crow defenders. This makes the current racial order distinct from the previous one in another fundamental way. In the 1960s, defenders of Jim Crow did not invoke Lincoln, the abolitionists, or the Union victory in their battles with the Civil Rights Movement. Instead, they cited the "lost cause" and adopted the Confederate battle flag as their symbol. In contrast, today, each side links their political positions to a heroic Civil Rights Movement and links their opponents to the intransigent defenders of Jim Crow. Reference to the Civil Rights Movement might seem more likely for those on the left, who can draw direct institutional links with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. However, while the modern-day Republican Party descends from the anti-Civil Rights coalition of the 1960s (Self 2012; Perlstein 2008), those on the right also frequently invoke the Civil Rights Movement and icons like Dr. Martin Luther King to defend their positions (Perlman 2012) as well as noting that substantial portions of the Democratic party defended Jim Crow and invoking "reverse racism" to claim that those on the left practice/support an inverted form of Jim Crow era discrimination.

Despite a clear agreed upon demarcation of a legitimate Civil Rights-aligned discourse and an illegitimate Jim Crow style discourse, both sides remain unlikely to acknowledge the legitimacy of their opponent's positions on race. So, while colorblindness and color consciousness both, at least rhetorically, fall within a post-Civil Rights consensus, the distinctions are stark enough to cause deep disagreements. For example, Hochschild (1998)

wrote, "both supporters and opponents of affirmative action are passionately committed to their perspectives and concede no moral legitimacy to the other side." Adding to this volatile mix, increasing polarization (Pew Research Center 2012; Baldassarri and Gelman 2008) and party sorting (Fiorna 2013; Levendusky 2009; Abramowitz and Sanders 1998) are accompanied by increasing dislike for political opponents (Pew Research Center 2014; Iyengar et al. 2012; Shaw 2012).

With regard to race, hyper-partisanship results in accusations that one's political opponents are racists. When partisans cast the divide on race as one between racists and non-racists they engage in a form of moral sorting. Such an outcome is not inevitable. The divide rests upon what appears, at least on the surface, over two strategies (one race-conscious and one race-neutral) to achieve the same goal of racial equality. The two strategies are not mutually exclusive. So, it is a bit of a puzzle as to why the sides grant so little moral legitimacy to one another.

Some might say that this is just a reflection of increasingly vitriolic political discourse in contemporary America. The list of culprits is varied. First, people are less likely to engage with those who disagree with them politically – both in the real world and online (Pew Research Center 2014; Bishop 2009). An increasingly politicized media may also encourage the politicization of a variety of issues. Cable news in particular, have been accused of politicizing every event/issue. As a result, opinions on seemingly non-political issues have become linked to an ideology of party. For example, even scientific claims like those around climate change have become increasingly politicized and opinions about the issue subsequently polarized by ideology and party (McCright and Dunlap 2011; Hindman 2009).

From there some media outlets go further and assert that the two sides of an issue are not just party-aligned but constitute a battle of good v. evil. Fox News, the conservative cable news station, has come under particular fire for this brand of "journalism" (Williamson et al. 2013). While the outcome of cable news may be a simplistic sorting of ideas (i.e. some binary variant of good/bad), Norton's (2011) in-depth analysis of one of the most popular shows on Fox News, The O'Reilly Factor, argues that the show, "is not itself simple, but instead is a complex interpretive system that produces a radically simplified and consistently politicized account of what the news means" (320). Norton's (2011) examination of the "complex interpretive system" that makes up this show focuses on how this simplistic politicization is produced.

Norton's (2011) article is entitled, "A Structural Hermeneutics of The O'Reilly Factor." Norton describes hermeneutics as an interpretive strategy, which develops "a structural theory on the basis of texts and evidence" (319). Scholars might recognize this as the methodological basis for establishing scientific claims. Norton (2011) then argues that, "the interpretive strategy of TOF [The O'Reilly Factor] and…news analysis programs more generally, is almost exactly the opposite of hermeneutic. It is a kind of anti-hermeneutics where facts, the news, and life itself become subordinated to the interpretive imperatives of a dominant meaning structure" (319). He further points out, "where the hermeneutic circle moves from part to whole and back in a recursive process predicated on doubt and second-guessing, TOF establishes the whole of its interpretive grasp, and then aligns any given event, statement, or other 'part' with the pre-determined semiotic limits of the whole" (342). This is a strategy poorly suited for developing a meaningful understanding of the events of the day and a contrast with what academics might hope something called "news analysis" would accomplish. A discourse limited by a "pre-determined semiotics" is, however, well-suited for producing a virulent brand of partisanship.

Through an examination of blog comments I demonstrate how the racial divide becomes a moral divide through a "misaligned politicization" of the racial controversy. First, I show how an anti-hermeneutic structure sets up a politicized (between right and left[34]) interpretive framework for the controversy. Second, I demonstrate how the politicization of the controversy invokes a morally abhorrent (according to both sides) Jim Crow version of racism to sort left and right. Third, I show how participants sustain hermeneutic challenges to the depiction of a moral divide of racists and non-racists. Finally, I show how anxiety over the politicization of the controversy fuels this process. In this case, this anxiety is not over the lifetime appointment of a Supreme Court Justice as much as it is over the depiction of the racial order.

In other words, I found that partisans produced a binary structure that does not align with contemporary politics. A structure akin to *The O'Reilly Factor* operates in the comments sections as participants work together to create this dynamic. Participants sorted figures on the right and the left into pre-determined categories of racist and non-racist.

While I found that a basic binary framework, where "their" side is racist and "our" side is not pervaded the discourse on partisan blogs, the interaction between partisans allowed for "hermeneutic moments." Commenters occasionally pushed against binary constructs in three ways. First, some directly challenged the binary of racist v. non-racist. This challenge provoked resistance and often an accusation that the commenter was attempting to reverse the binary rather than simply undermine the anti-hermeneutic structure of the discourse. Second, some presented disconfirming evidence regarding the binary construction. In this case, others either rejected the evidence or engaged in a binary shift from racist v. non-racist to something like dishonest v. honest. Third, a few commenters explicitly reversed the partisan associations with racist and

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[34] …or Republican and Democrat – blogs commenters tend to use "Democrat" and "the left" as well as "Republican" and "the right" as synonyms. For the sake of brevity, I will do so here as well.

non-racist. Such a move often casts one as a troll (and they are by definition). While this last challenge was often dismissed, sometimes evidence would be brought to bear in order to preserve the original associations. In general, when faced with these challenges, participants employed an anti-hermeneutic structure to re-establish the original associations. In other words, an anti-hermeneutic structure was an oft-wielded tool during the racial controversy.

This structure may be less an intentional format, as on *The O'Reilly Factor*, and more a result of the anxiety created by racial accusations. I argue that the anxiety around the racial controversy provoked a dialogic response where statements are directed at both allies and opponents (even though such opponents are unlikely to read their comments). In many ways, the racial controversy itself produces a binary structure by highlighting accusations of racism. The fear that if one side abandons the fight they will end up cast on the wrong side of such a binary prompts them to refocus racial accusations. I also think that the dialogic nature of this discourse influenced the tendency to employ universal definitions of racism (i.e. attitudes and beliefs defined by virtually all Americans as racist) to define their opponents.

Racial Orders on the Left: "The Republican Party = the party of white supremacy"

Several prominent figures on the right made racial accusations against Sotomayor, such as conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh, former Speaker of the House Republican Newt Gingrich, former Republican congressman Tom Tancredo, and conservative commentator Pat Buchanan. Those on the left did not dismiss the accusations from these figures, despite the fact that none of these men were current elected representatives, let alone Senators who would have a direct impact on Sotomayor's confirmation. Instead, commenters refocused the accusation of racism back onto these figures. Commenters on crooksandliars.com as well as dailykos.com went beyond admonishing these individuals and used them as proxies to talk about the

Republican Party or conservatives more broadly. In this way, commenters on the left, seized on these figures and their racial accusations as proof of a partisan divide between a legitimate non-racist (and multiracial) Democratic Party and an illegitimate racist (and largely white) Republican Party.

As participants worked to establish a moral divide between the parties, their evidence often consisted of a reinterpretation of the remarks from these figures. The reinterpretation established a racism test that harkened back to the divides from the Jim Crow era. In other words, those on the left evoked categorical inferiority or racial animus to depict the the contemporary racial divide and create a non-racist/racist binary. As I show, some commenters challenged these binary constructions. However, the majority of participants usually rejected these challenges. The anxiety caused by the initial racial accusations set the stage of a battle where one side would be deemed racist and the other non-racist. While, unlike a criminal case, no jury would issue a verdict, participants acted as if they were engaged in a sort of trial.

The following comments are from a crooksandliars.com post entitled, "Bob Shrum explodes over Pat Buchanan's racism as Limbaugh uses MLK against Sotomayor." The post garnered 113 comments from 62 commenters. Participants were highly critical of both Buchanan's and Rush Limbaugh's racial accusations. Of the 113 comments, 43 comments were not directly relevant to the topics brought up by the post (this contained some unrelated banter as well as two debates that went a bit off topic for my purposes here – one, debating the Ricci case and another debating the existence and meaning of white privilege). Of the remaining 68 comments, which involved 50 participants and 3 trolls (self-identified), all of the participants were critical of Buchanan and/or his claims. 29 of the 50 participants explicitly called Buchanan a racist, while 19 linked Buchanan to the GOP. Eight comments argued against Buchanan's

claims without directly calling Buchanan or the GOP racist. However, I cannot say that these

eight commenters disagreed with the assertion that Buchanan was a racist and that his racism

was indicative of the larger Republican Party in general, since none of these commenters

contradicted these claims and in most cases, were part of conversations where these assertions

were made.

Even though, Buchanan was not a Republican any longer and had often been highly

critical of Republicans, his remarks were sorted into a racist v. non-racist framework linked to

Republican and Democrat. In doing so, participants reinforced a pre-determined semiotic

structure that linked Republican to racist. The following thread from this post is an example of

how participants worked together to refocus the accusation onto the accuser and depict him or

her as a representative of the other party.

> Re: Bob Shrum
> … Why is **this vile racist** on the air? Send him **to Faux where he belongs**. - ctalk
>
> > Re: Bob Shrum
> > No, keep him right where he is. The people who watch MSNBC… **need to see that there really are these racists out there …That way the liberals, us, will not forget** that our job will never be done. – Captain Kangaroo
> >
> > > Re: Bob Shrum
> > > hey ctalk - ur so right...ship him **over to faux** where he can **spew his hate speech with his like minded buddies... - davidhilton**

The thread above demonstrates how participants shaped the meaning of each other's

commnents. Here ctalk argued that Buchanan belongs with the rest of the Republicans on the

conservative news station Fox News. Others pick up on this theme and associated Buchanan and

his view with the Republican Party. The two subsequent comments clarify ctalk's statement by

positing an "us," (i.e. "liberals" as Captain Kangaroo noted) that oppose such racists. davidhilton

then seconded ctalk's assertion that Fox News was where "his hate speech" belongs, with "his

like-minded buddies." While not all comments declared Buchanan a representative of the

Republican Party or of conservatives, subsequent clarifying comments often did so.

When someone dismissed a "racist," like Buchanan, as unimportant, others responded

that such racists were important to understand contemporary politics. For example, here we see a

clarification of the initial dismissal of Buchanan's importance.

> It's time to say goodbye to Pat Buchanan
> Pat Buchanan is a racist and needs to be fired from MSNBC. … It's **time for him to wither into obscurity** along with his bigoted ideas. - WRG

> We should **give racist Pat a microphone** and the spotlight
> Buchanan's hatred of Hispanics is so blatent and over the top- he should not be silenced, but should be encouraged to go even further to the right-
> He will serve as **a fine example of how his party is the party of hatred and bigotry. … - Tom Servo**

Without disagreeing with the racial accusation, Tom Servo clarified WRG's comment by

aligning Buchanan not with obscure "bigoted ideas" as WRG does, but by insisting that, "He will

serve as a fine example of ... the party of hatred and bigotry…" While WRG did not directly

challenge the semiotic structure, the dismissal of Buchanan was rejected by Tom Servo who

preserved the racist/non-racist dichotomy. There was little pushback against depictions of the

GOP as racist. Commenters who dismissed the importance of Buchanan did not object to the

linking him to the entire party or the use of Buchanan as evidence for racism within the GOP.

Indeed, comments that called the Republican Party a racist party were peppered throughout the

comment section. The following two comments fit into the overall discussion without provoking

any interaction.

> Republicans are bigots
> It is common knowledge displayed daily by the gop. Granted **some hide it better**, but it always comes out. And for Rush and Pat speak of the racism of another when they fail to recognise it in themselves is so typical. - Somedaysoon

> The Republican Party = the party of white supremacy
> What a disgusting rant from white supremacist Buchanan- but I hope he keeps it up, he is showing the world what the republican party **really stands for**, and that is H*A*T*E – Tom Servo

> The Symbol of the GOP
> You know, old white man who's afraid of change. - RuperttheBear

The comments above linked Buchanan to the GOP by noting that "he is showing" and revealing the "hate" that "some hide … better." These comments spoke to the importance of the ideas of people like Pat Buchanan and Rush Limbaugh, who served the same function as Revs. Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson often do for those on the right. In other words, they become proxies to talk about the racial ideas of each party. While none of the above people have ever been elected representatives of their associated parties (though all except Limbaugh have run for President of their respective parties), they remained racial touchstones for sorting the racial order. So, instead of confronting the ideas of Buchanan and Limbaugh, participants aligned those ideas within the "predetermined semiotic limits" of the racist/anti-racist binary. That semiotic structure did not allow for unaffiliated or unrepresentative racists.

On the dailykos.com, like crooksandliars.com there were a lot of matter-of-fact accusations of racism directed against critics of Sotomayor's nomination as well as general characterizations of conservatives and Republicans as racist. Commenters sometimes defined what they meant by "racist," but often they relied upon a reinterpretation of some statement. Commenters posited that "what he really meant was…" and then put a plainly racist statement in the mouth of their target – one that hearkened back to the Jim Crow era.

The references to racial animus were not the only form of Jim Crow era racism that those on the left made. The comments below from a dailykos.com post entitled, "Republicans continue to Project" referenced Pat Buchanan as well as others on the right who made racial accusations. The post garnered 213 comments from 101 unique commenters. This first thread in the comments section called Buchanan a racist but added a definition as to why the commenter believed that Buchanan was racist by reinterpreting Buchanan's statements.

       To racist old bastard Buchanan, ANYONE

who is **not a white male is *unqualified for the job***, and therefore must have gotten an unfair advantage over the poor downtrodden white men.
You old racists are dying off, Pat. Enjoy your last, pathetic gasp. It won't last much longer. - chumley

> **Basically saying to any Hispanic**
> **No matter your qualifications, you will always be an affirmative action pick in our eyes.**
> … - marcvstraianvs

chumley began this thread with a definition of racism that rests on a claim of categorical inferiority. Almost all Americans agree that someone who thinks "anyone who is not a white male is unqualified" is a racist. In other words, chumley used a definition of racism that would be uncontested across the political spectrum. In this way, a potential ideological dispute about Affirmative Action, was, for these commenters, a dispute between legitimate non-racist ideas associated with the Civil Rights Movement and illegitimate racist ideas associated with Jim Crow.

The accusation against Republicans, however, was somewhat undermined by non-conforming facts like the promotion of Alberto Gonzales – a conservative Hispanic who was considered for the Supreme Court when Republican George W. Bush was President. This was a hermeneutic moment, where participants had to deal with information that potentially couldn't be sorted into the racist/non-racist binary (especially as they had defined it).

> Unless of course, it's a conservative hispanic
> I don't recall any of this affirmative action talk when Alberto Gonzalez was nominated for the AG spot.- blueyescryinintherain

> > exactly
> > Good point. – chumley
> >
> > ▪ **Ahhh, but Gonzo**
> > **was THEIR** affirmative action pick! **IOKIYAR - mkfarkus**

Here there was an unacknowledged binary shift in the clarifying chain of comments. On one hand, Gonzales's nomination was presented as a clarification and further ammunition regarding the moral repugnancy of the right rather than a re-evaluation of "racism." It also could

support the claim that the right's opposition to A.A. is a way of denigrating minorities who don't serve their interests. However, the definition of Republicans as racists who believe in categorical inferiority was replaced but not by a more nuanced definition of racism. Here the shift moves away from racist v. non-racist towards perhaps dishonesty v. honesty.

While all of those who disagreed with the racial accusation against the GOP on the crooksandliars.com posts were trolls, I did find some participant pushback on dailykos.com posts. Those that departed from the majority depiction of the racial order sought to maintain allegiance (or membership) to the blog, by noting that they were not arguing to reverse the binary and/or by noting their agreement on some other point (i.e. marking themselves as non-trolls). These instances created other hermeneutic moments. As a result, other commenters had to contend with them if they wanted to maintain the original semiotics.

On dailykos.com someone contested the accusation against Republicans and further claimed that the partisan divide was not one that distinguished racists from non-racists. This didn't happen very often on the left blogs (this was really the only instance). This comment was not directed at anyone in particular but began its own thread. Here the commenter voiced disapproval over the tone of debate on the blog as well as the dominant claim about the racial order. Those who responded rejected this commenter's (dinotrac) premise. Indeed, no one recommended the comment by dinotrac, while five participants recommended the counter-claim by FleetAdmiralJ.

> All's fair, yada yada…
> How many times do you guys refer to anything Republican without calling somebody racist, homophobic, misogynistic, thuggish, etc?
> Seems to be the tone of politics these days. It's silly to expect that Republicans won't return the favor. - dinotrac
>
>> most people refer to the GOP
>> as racist, homophobic and thuggish because they **are** [bolded in text] racist, homophobic and thuggish. It's kind of hard to argue that they aren't at this point. - FleetAdmiralJ

> There's a lot of eye of the beholder there,
> Especially when you remember that the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court was a GOP nominee, the first African-American Secretary of State -- and the first African-American Woman to be Secretary of State - were both GOP cabinet members.
> …
> I don't think it was GOPers who did all those nasty political cartoons portraying Condoleezza Rice as an Aunt Jemimah stereotype, or Clarence Thomas as a lawn jockey.
> - dinotrac

Here dinotrac pushes against the anti-hermeneutic structure of the comments section by arguing that we should begin from a complete set of facts and then draw conclusions. However, the next commenter rejected this argument, without attempting to argue against any of the statements of fact. Instead, s/he accused dinotrac of reversing the semiotic links.

> The implication
> What you seem to be saying is that **liberals are racists and that Republicans have done more** to advance the interests of people of color and women than liberals.
> Is that accurate? - otto
>
> > That is your level of logic? Seriously?
> > Try reading what I am saying instead of trying to make up something that I seem to be saying.
> > There is more to life than extremes.
> > Somebody said republicans are racists, etc, I challenged that assertion and included a couple of examples that demonstrate **racism is not the exclusive purview of any one group. - dinotrac**

Otto argued that dinotrac implied that the racial order consisted of racist Democrats and non-racist Republicans. dinotrac responded that this was an out of line mischaracterization of his or her comments. Here dinotrac argued against the idea of a racial order dividing the two parties by noting, "racism is not the exclusive purview of any one group." Later, in this interaction s/he argues that there are Democrats that are racists and Republicans that are racists. While of course true, that claim missed the point that many asserted on the blog – that one party is a racist party and one is not – even though voters may choose to vote on non-racial issues when deciding which party to support. While dinotrac's view was in a tiny minority, this was what a comment

that rejects the notion of racial orders looks like and how others responded to resurrect a racist/non-racist binary.

The response is important because Otto's reply to dinotrac points to the belief that the only alternative to the framework Democrat = racist and Republican = non-racist was the reverse. I believe the insistence on this binary stems from the anxiety created by racial controversies. Those on the left reacted to the possibility that a comment, either by a public figure, or by another commenter, could push aside a central partisan battle. For this reason, many commenters on dailykos.com believed that Obama's Press Secretary, Robert Gibbs's statement about Sotomayor's speech was an unnecessary apology. The dailykos.com post was entitled, "To Robert Gibbs: Don't Apologize and Get Your Facts Straight." The post garnered 409 comments from x unique commenters. The following interactions demonstrate how some participants cast perceived concessions as ceding ground on the larger arguments about the parties.

> I'm trying to find the apology... – dlh77489

> > Here you go
> > Gibbs saying that the Judge should change what she said:
> > > I think if she had the speech to do all over again, I think she'd change that word.
> > If you **want to pretend that's not an apology, go ahead**, I guess, but you're wrong. - JayBat

> > > Whatever…
> > > But I guess it's "Obama's a p#ssy" Day again, so I'll let you guys wallow in that. – dlh77489
> > > ▪
> > > Or, maybe if any of them actually read
> > > the speech, they might understand her comment.
> > > No, maybe not... we'll just **go back to apologizing for having an opinion**, and taking up space, and breathing the air around us, I guess. - blindyone

> > > I still don't see how that's an apology
> > > I think it was **clumsy as an attempt to back the speech statement down.**
> > > Better would be "That's not what she said and that's not what she meant."
> > > Better still would be her saying that. - BentLiberal

In the context of a battle over racism, most commenters accepted that an apology, had one actually occurred, would indeed cede ground on a larger and more important point. The argument here was not over whether Gibbs's alleged apology was wrong, but over whether there was an apology. However, from these few comments it was not clear what participants thought the larger point was: support for Sotomayor, her claims from the speech, or refocusing the racial accusation.

These exchanges took place amidst accusations of racism. In fact, both the post, and Gibbs's speech mentioned the accusations against Sotomayor. Gibbs answered a question in response to accusations about racism not by refocusing them and calling Tancredo or Limbaugh and the entire Republican Party racist, but by dismissing the accusation. Some took that as both an apology and a concession to the right's racial accusations. The exchange below from the same thread demonstrates this.

> Oh come on. It's close enough. And does everything
> that Barb says it does **- buys into and confirms RW bullshit.** Limbaugh and Gingrich can now rightly say, "See, I was right." And then **continue to stoke the racism line.**
> such horseshit weak-kneed idiocy. - Little

> Good grief.
> So you think this allows Gingrich to say, "See I was right, she's a racist" and Limbo to say, "See I was right, she's a David Duke"? Come on, now.
> Reading your post and others tells me that it's not Gibbs who is afraid of the right-wingers, instead it's too many Kossacks. – Escamillo

The exchange in the last two comments above epitomized the disagreement over the "apology." Little contended that Gibbs's statement bought "into and confirms RW [Right Wing] bullshit," while Escamillo argued that Gingrich's and Limbaugh's accusations were still absurd. Disagreement on these points demonstrated the anxiety that existed around the racial accusations. Escamillo pointed to that anxiety when s/he argued that "it's too many Kossacks" who are afraid of right-wingers

On dailykos.com and crooksandliars.com, the racial order was one where Republicans and their supporters are racists and Democrats are not. Participants on the left addressed racial accusations not by dismissing them but instead by refocusing those accusations to make claims about the racial order. In doing so, they highlighted the importance of these accusations. In addition, the uncontestable definition of racism encapsulated by evoking Jim Crow era taboos proved an easier route to making clear accusations of racism. It also more clearly marks the line between a deviant and normal group.

As we will see when I turn to the discourse on the right, there was little impetus on either side to dismiss racial accusations produced by the controversy surrounding Sotomayor's nomination. Instead, each round of accusations created corresponding attempts to refocus rather than dismiss those accusations. Indeed, many on the right pre-empted what they saw as inevitable accusations of racism from the left.

Racial Orders on the Right: "Hatred, racism, and bigotry…wholly owned by…the democrat party"

As noted, some prominent figures on the right, such as Pat Buchanan, Rush Limbaugh, Tom Tancredo, and Newt Gingrich called Sotomayor a racist (or made strong implications to that effect). In the comment sections, those on the right put forth an almost uncontested depiction of Sotomayor and all those on the left as racists. On the right, many resisted attempts to dismiss racial accusations against Sotomayor or the left in general. The majority of participants on right blogs insisted on focusing or refocusing rather than dismissing the accusations of racism that arose during the days following the Sotomayor nomination.

The tactics they employed were similar to those on the left. Participants on right blogs referenced a framework of immoral racists v. moral non-racists. They too referenced a Jim Crow

test for racism. In other words, they accused those on the left of violating the norms of equality that have become universal since the Civil Rights movement.

The right also engaged in a politicization of the controversy. In other words, comments weren't just about Sotomayor or even Obama but the Democrats and the left in general. There were a few challenges to the binary here as well but those challenges were met with resistance. The larger anti-hermeneutic structure animated much of the discourse.

The anxiety produced by the controversy was immediate for those on the right. Participants argued that those on the left would explicitly call them racists or were already subtly doing so. While those on the left could point to specific figures on the right making accusations of racism against Sotomayor, the right could not point to prominent liberals or Democrats who made such accusations. Of course, as we saw in the previous section these accusations were not absent on the left more broadly. Wherever they began, once the accusations of racism were present, a battle over where they would land ensued.

On the first post from hotair.com entitled, "Obama Picks Sotomayor for SCOTUS Slot," the poster mentioned that Sotomayor would be the first Hispanic on the Supreme Court and that such a fact would likely lead to Republicans being "intimidated by Hispanic pressure groups." The poster did not call Sotomayor or the Democrats racists. Instead, he called her a "liberal activist judge" – an essentially vague and undefined notion, but one that is not necessarily race neutral. Some participants dismissed the nomination itself as unimportant because they believed that it would not make much difference on the court. Some also dismissed the racial accusations coming from their own side as counterproductive. The majority, however, embraced these accusations.

On this post, the conversations went in several different directions and touched on some topics unrelated to race. Racial accusations, however, were not absent in the comment section. The post garnered 253 comments from 125 unique commenters. Out of the 125 commenters, 17 explicitly called Sotomayor, or the Democrats in general, racist. These commenters made up 43 of the 253 comments. While a relatively small number, it would have been difficult for other commenters to miss such accusations and therefore respond if they disagreed. Only one commenter chose to dispute the assertion that Sotomayor was a racist.

While, at this point, there were no prominent accusations of racism to refocus, participants anticipated that such accusations would be forthcoming from the left and that the media was framing opposition to Sotomayor as race-based. In addition, commenters made their own accusations against Sotomayor. The first comment below was about 5 minutes into the comments section of the first hotair.com post that announced Sotomayor's nomination.

> **She is a racist end** of story. She has **something against white people** and I say this as a hispanic myself. – Time Traveler

A few minutes later, another commenter rephrased a media question (a question that was also implied in the post) as an accusation of racism against Republicans. These early comments suggest that participants were aware that claims about the racial order were at stake.

> *NBC: Would Republicans dare vote against first Hispanic? artist on May 26, 2009 at 9:31 AM*
> Didn't democrats filibuster hispanic picks of Bush for the Court of Appeals. I guess it only matters when republicans do it **because they are racists. – bopbottle**

bopbottle, like others on right blogs, asserted that Republicans and conservatives were unfairly targeted with accusations of racism for behaviors and attitudes that Democrats and liberals were given a pass on. Therefore, in this view, the claim that Republicans "are racists," was popular because "it only matters when republicans do it." Without specific accusations against Republicans to point to, those on the right recognized that an accusation was, at least,

available to their political opponents. Rather than insist that opposing a minority has nothing to do with attitudes towards minorities in general – at least not automatically, a point that would be difficult to argue against, those on the right refocused the potential accusation and made claims about the Democratic Party by insisting that it was and has always been the party of racism. In this way, participants used the accusation from the left (predicted at this point) to politicize the case.

Commenters on the right responded to the claim that Sotomayor was a racist by linking her to the liberals and the Democratic Party. These kinds of comments were largely additive or clarifying. The two comments below demonstrate this phenomenon.

> So she's **an anti-white racist**. Just shows that the **teachings of Rev. Wright, Obama's mentor**, were not wasted. – MaiDee

> She's **an anti-white racist? Aren't most liberals** in that category, especially the white libs? … - volsense

The first comment argued that her racism reflected Obama's racism. The following comment extended this accusation to "liberals" in general. MaiDee employed a tactic we saw on the left, as s/he used a reviled figure (Rev. Wright) to make larger claims. The larger claim about the partisan divide was not explicit in MaiDee's comment. volsense, however, clarified the comment and extended the critique to "liberals" and thereby made the larger claim that the partisan divide was between racists and, by implication, non-racists.

Like on the left, few on the right blogs challenged the depiction of the racial order. Here, someone who self-identified as not part of the community (what those in the community would call a troll), challenged the right's depiction of the racial order. This challenge provides an opportunity to demonstrate the reassertion of a binary. The commenter below attempted to reverse the binary construction (or at least that is how others read his or her comment).

> *Yeah, the Dems' abuse of Alberto Gonzales sure hurt them at the polls in November.*

> *Akzed on May 26, 2009 at 9:54 AM*
> The rules are **different for you.**
> **Historically conservatives have been racist and anti-immigration.**
> You have a steeper hill to climb to win hispanic votes. – strangelet

Strangelet argued against the other participants from an outsider stance – talking about "you" instead of "us" etc. S/he directly challenged the partisan racial order, but also implied a reversal of the semiotic construction of Republican = non-racist and Democrat = racist. In other words, s/he did not simply contest the notion of a racial order by arguing that some Republicans were racist and some Democrats were non-racist, but instead implied a reversal. Participants on the blog disparaged stangelet for his or her comment but also offered support for their depiction of the racial order.

> *The rules are different for you.*
> *Historically conservatives have been racist and anti-immigration.*
> *You have a steeper hill to climb to win hispanic votes.*
> *strangelet on May 26, 2009 at 9:58 AM*
> Yeah, because **Lincoln was a Democrat** and Robert Byrd was a Republican.
> Wait… - MadisonConservative
>
> *…*
> *strangelet on May 26, 2009 at 9:58 AM*
> Jackass … I hereby solicit a vote for you to be banned for repeating lies and slandering everyone here.
> Do some reading you insolent twerp.
> **Anyone else want this jerk banned? – darwin**

While darwin countered that strangelet was "slandering everyone here", strangelet did not call modern-day conservatives or Republicans racists, but instead pointed to history. MadisonConservative countered this historical argument. In doing so, MadisonConservative used an uncontested definition of racism to sort the political divide. As King and Smith (2011) and others have noted the partisan divide has realigned over time. Participants, therefore, could claim an uncontested racial figure like Lincoln - non-racist to most, and repudiate Democratic Senator Robert Byrd, who was once a member of the KKK – a racist organization to all. Of course, while these facts were accurate, MadisonConservative, like many prominent conservatives, did not address their relevance to the current party alignment (Perlman 2012).

However, my point here is not about the misuse of historical facts (which at one point in this

conversation included claiming that the Republicans were the party of the Civil Rights Act), but

the common use of an uncontested definition of racism to make claims about the partisan divide.

Since everyone agrees that freeing slaves was an act of anti-racism and that joining the KKK was

an act of racism, this comment was similar to those matter-of-fact accusations on the left that

supported racial accusations with what were essentially reworded racial accusations. More

nuanced definition of racism were, like on the left, rare but not absent. While the comment below

is absurd, this response to strangelet has become in recent years the standard explanation, among

conservatives, for the current racial alignment (Perlman 2012).

> *...*
> *strangelet on May 26, 2009 at 9:58 AM*
> Lordy you are a moron.
> **Democrats/liberals provide social services to minorities** which once hooked on, they expect the
> government to take care of them in perpetuity. The result is that **they are enslaved just as the blacks
> were.**
> **Conservatives want everyone, irrespective of color or creed**, to have the opportunity to succeed and take
> care of themselves. The result is that they enjoy freedom.
> Your view **exposes you as just another liberal** who is suffering from a psychological disorder where up is
> down, down is up, and the world must be in complete chaos for you to be happy.
> … - csdeven

This last comment manages to cast the racial order not simply as between racists and

non-racists per se, but to assert a racial policy alliance. While this depiction was one of the few

that attempted to separate the two parties by racial policies instead of just making claims about

which party was racist, it was not at all clear that the commenter believed that these were just

different policy proposals. Generously read, liberals could be misguided in their policy proposals

and inadvertently harm those they genuinely wish to help (see Somers and Block 2005), but the

comment argued that "conservatives want," suggesting motivations and a desire for a colorblind

future, a desire alleged not to be shared by liberals. Instead, liberals might desire a form of

slavery for blacks. Again, despite the nod to a policy disagreement, that disagreement was cast in

terms of illegitimate (slavery) and legitimate (equal opportunity) racial positions. It, too, is a framework from another era.

On the right, I found signs of the same anxiety over the racial order that appeared on the left. Part of the reasons may be due to the unstable nature of the term "racist" and the assumption that each racial controversy was a field to fight the battle over which side was guilty of racism and which side was innocent. Within this framework, implications that the other party was not racist or that a figure associated with one's own party was racist faced substantial resistance from the majority of participants. This is ironic because each side rarely explained how a particular claim constitutes racism without reverting back to a long-settled dispute. In other words, policy positions were not deemed racist on their own terms – even though arguments (with varying degrees of validity) could be made that opposition or support for Affirmative Action constitute a modern form of racism.

The KKK is, for all sides, an unabashedly racist group. Whether or not the KK, or any persona associated with them or sharing their core values holds illegitimate views on race is a long settled dispute. One of the most prominent accusations against Sotomayor was covered on another hotair.com post entitled, "Tancredo: Sotomayor's a member of the 'Latino KKK.'" The poster criticized the racial accusation from former Republican congressman Tom Tancredo. In effect, the poster did not interpret this statement through the pre-determined semiotics and politicization. In other words, the poster did not use a story about race in order to support the idea that Democrats are racist and Republicans are non-racists. While some agreed with the posters criticism of Tancredo, most did not. The post garnered 403 comments from 119 commenters. For 13 of the commenters I could not definitively conclude whether they supported the post of not. Out of the remaining 106 commenters 13 or 12.3% agreed with the post. Out of

these 13 commenters 3 also explicitly agreed with the sentiment that La Raza was a racist

organization but posited that saying so was unwise. The rest agreed with Tancredo's comments

and criticized the post.

Participants could have reworded the racial concerns of Tancredo and others (as the

poster and a few commenters did), so that they were less accusatory. But instead most

participants were simply unwilling to dismiss the accusation of racism. Below is the first

comment on the post.

Ugh. Not helping, Tom. [Tancredo] – aero

This first comment suggested that the racial accusation did not help block the nomination

or score political points against the Democrats (points that were made in the post). However,

others rejected both the idea that Tancredo's comments were bad strategy and, I argue, that the

nomination was the only issue at stake. Instead, others sought to apply an interpretative

framework that evaluated stories as support for or evidence against a depiction of the racial order

as a racist left and a non-racist right. Many saw aero (and others) as stepping away from this

essential evaluation and perhaps offering some form of aid and comfort to those who might see

Trancredo's remarks as evidence to reverse the right's depiction of the racial order. The

following comments responded to the post as well as commenter aero. Participants argued that

failure to call La Raza racist was akin to abandoning an important fight.

Ya'll are pussies. Until conservatives start growing balls like this put a fork in your own ass. - thareb

Why, pray tell, are you telling Tanc to take a break. Like Cheney, he is taking the fight to the Demoncrats [sic], and winning, just like Cheney. Pour it on. **Expose the Demoncrats [sic] for the racist traitors that they are. – federale86**

> *Ya'll are pussies. Until conservatives start growing balls like this put a fork in your own ass.*
> *thareb on May 28, 2009 at 10:13 PM*

+1000
Those who call Tancredo crazy–YOU'RE NOTHING BUT NEOCONS! TANCREDO TO ME IS THE REAL DEAL HERE! **DEATH TO THE RACISTS AT LA RAZA! – BobAnthony**

> *Ugh. Not helping, Tom.*

> *aero on May 28, 2009 at 10:09 PM*
> Neither are you, you candy ass. Stop being afraid to **stand up for whats right. – DwnSouthJukin**
>
> You know, I think it is **high time to oust the p*ssies that reside in our party**. Cheney and Tancredo, keep beating the drum. It's time for some truth. We haven't had it for quite a while! – HornetSting

The responses to aero represented the majority sentiment on the blog. These respondents argued that it was cowardly to step away from this fight. However, the "fight" seemed more than just a Supreme Court nomination and instead involved exposing "the Demoncrats [not a typo] for the racist traitors that they are." Part of this was likely gendered bravado or ornamental masculinity (Faludi --) such as the frequent references to "pussies." But the deeper meaning, I argue, was that something was at stake beyond Sotomayor's nomination.

aero continued a debate with many of these commenters. In doing so, s/he made several statements that maintained his or her virtual membership on the blog – like arguing that there is a liberal media and that Sotomayor is a racist (though without directly saying that). aero attempted to shift the focus toward political efficacy regarding elections. In doing so, s/he created a hermeneutic moment where the interpretive imperatives of the majority of blog participants were replaced with an evaluation of Tancredo's remarks that did not fit into the binary of racist/non-racist. Here aero attempted to make the case for shifting focus from evidence of racism to political expediency.

> **You guys never want to win an election ever again**, do you?
> Yes, libs can get away with such inflammatory speech aimed at conservatives. They have **the media licking their toes!** … We play by different rules, whether we like it or not, whether it's fair or not, whether it's right or not. …
> How 'bout a little common sense and pragmatism, people? Seriously, you're playing into the lefty stereotype of wild-eyed wingnuts with this kind of rhetoric. – aero

Here aero responded that "whether it's fair or not, whether it's right or not" they should act with more pragmatism and perhaps dismiss the accusation. Significantly, s/he did not contest the claim that La Raza is a racist organization. S/he also used some right-wing tropes to solidify her or his membership (e.g., liberal media). While these tropes also serve to set up a powerful

"them" v. an underdog "us" (a common binary framework on both right and left), participants do

not accept this binary shift.

> *I'll put it another way, before I go to bed here. If you think La Raza is wrong-headed, racist or racialist and counter-productive, SAY SO. Otherwise, saying "we have to show due deference to La Raza in the hopes of gaining Hispanic votes" is pandering. No one's beating the Democrats in the pandering department. No one.*
> *ddrintn on May 29, 2009 at 12:16 AM*
> I never said to show deference to La Raza or fail to point out its racist nature. I just said phrases like "Latino KKK" will not help to enlighten the public, …a better way to draw attention to Soto's La Raza affiliation would be for one of our more forceful conservatives in the Senate (Sessions?) to ask Sotomayor during her confirmation hearing about her affiliation with this group.
> "Judge Sotomayor, … La Raza is on record as a pro-Latino organization that **favors re-conquering the American Southwest for Mexico. It also strives to establish Hispanic supremacy.** As an active member of this organization, do you agree with its stated goals?"
> Much, much more effective and devastating than Tanc lobbing the "Latino KKK" grenade. – aero

At this point aero called La Raza racist and suggested a conspiracy theory based question

about the organization, i.e. that La Raza "favors re-conquering the American Southwest for

Mexico. It also strives to establish Hispanic supremacy." Here aero sort of conceded the larger

racist/non-racist binary as the interpretive framework for the nomination. Again, while Aero

seemed focused on defeating the nomination and/or winning the next election, Ddrintin

dismissed this strategy when s/he argued "No one's beating the Democrats in the pandering

department." Here the two commenters did not disagree on any major point regarding race.

Instead, this was a matter of what was more important. In effect, aero deemed the hyperbolic

racial accusation a distraction, but casting it as such, caused others to reassert the claim. Ddrintin

maintained that marking La Raza as racist was the important point--a point that aero did not

disagree with but instead deemphasized. Indeed, much of the pushback against aero and others

focused on establishing the importance of refocusing the racial accusation rather than

deemphasizing it for any competing political reasons.

Here we also see how the accusation of racism relied on an uncontested definition of

racism. First, aero's comment mischaracterizes La Raza's position. Second, it does so by

referencing a Jim Crow era form of racism – the establishment of racial supremacy. This idea

was, of course, embedded in Tancredo's reference to the KKK. Again, it harkened back to a

settled debate since everyone agrees the KKK was (and is) racist.

Calling an organization "like the KKK," as Tancredo did, sets a high bar for racism. Few

organizations can reasonably be compared to the America's oldest and perhaps most well known

terrorist organization. The KKK fought to defend institutions that almost all Americans now

consider morally bankrupt and racist. A comparison with the Klan could downplay what the

Klan did. Or, one could argue that the comparison doesn't mean "exactly like the Klan," just that

the two groups share some disturbing similarities. Some did take the latter route, but many

defended the comparison even when faced with a depiction of a violent terroristic Klan. Many

argued that La Raza was a violent terrorist organization. While some did note that Tancredo said

"without the hoods and nooses" – and argued that he was pointing out that it had the same

philosophy as the Klan even if not the same tactics, most refocused that depiction of the Klan

onto La Raza. For example, below a commenter challenged the comparison by noting the violent

nature of the Klan – particularly its Jim Crow era role in lynching. Others responded by linking

La Raza to violence. The first commenter here, Terrye, argued against a misaligned

politicization, but others instead of tempering their rhetoric reasserted this misalignment.

> …This kind of remark creates sympathy for the target and disdain for the idiot who said it. It does not help the cause, it hurts it. It is also **not true. The KKK lynched people**, burned them out of their homes, accused the Pope of trying to take over America, supported anti Semites and in general were violent, scary and cruel. I don't like this pick all that much but there is no evidence of her ever lynching anyone. – Terrye

> Ok So Tancredo tells the truth and AP condemns him for it. That funny. It is not hateful to call an orange an orange.
> **She's a RACIST BIGOT and a GENDER BIGOT.** Ignoring the facts to appease Hispanics is wrong. - dogsoldier

> dogsoldier:
> … the truth is saying this woman is a member of the KKK or a group like it is stupid. Just plain self destructive and stupid and making excuses for it will not change that. It is the kind of idiot remark that gets conservatives hammered in elections while **morons like Obama win**. If Tancredo wants to go after her affiliation with La Raza, then he can do that without yammering

about the KKK. **Who has she lynched? -** Terrye

If Tancredo wants to go after her affiliation with La Raza, then he can do that without yammering about the KKK. Who has she lynched?
            Terrye on May 29, 2009 at 6:55 AM
Oh please. Guess what, **people supported by La Raza kill Americans all the time** and La Raza fights to keep them roaming our streets, even when they have no legal right to even be in this country. If you want to look at violence, **La Raza supports violent people right now and a hell of a lot more than the KKK ever did. –** progressoverpeace

            Terrye on May 29, 2009 at 6:55 AM
Illegal aliens, mostly Latinos, are **raping and killing our children on a nearly daily basis**…. – jerrytbg

Terrye argued that Tancredo's and his supporter's claims were hyperbolic and inaccurate because they seemed to accuse Sotomayor of affiliating with a terrorist organization Terrye argued against the assertion that La Raza was akin to the KKK, but not that La Raza wasn't racist. S/he argued that the accusation was "not true" because "The KKK lynched people." Rather than back away from the violent accusation progressoverpeace asserted that "people supported by La Raza kill Americans all the time" and jerrytbg blamed La Raza for "illegal aliens…raping and killing our children." The comments above demonstrated the drive to refocus racial accusations. Because of the initial accusation, by Tancredo, the KKK became a standard for an accusation of racism – and so rather than redefine racism out more broadly, several commenters just reapplied the definition.

Those on the right flipped the racial order that participants on dailykos.com and crooksandliars.com asserted. Like their political opponents on the left, they were reluctant to dismiss racial accusations and instead focused those accusations on the Democratic Party, liberals, and the left in general. On the right, like on the left, participants politicized information regarding the controversy by using an interpretive framework that sorted evidence into either supporting the claim that Democrats were racist and Republicans were non-racists or pushing against that claim. The majority of participants not only politicized all aspects of the case, but

engaged in a misaligned politicization by situating their accusations of racism and thereby their political opponents within a universally discredited Jim Crow perspective on race.

Conclusion: Misaligned Politicization

Much of the public debate around Sotomayor's nomination, and I suspect around most racial controversies is less about how best to ensure equal opportunity (or some other shared goal) or debate concerning the role of government but instead about casting one side as illegitimate and one's own side as legitimate. I found that participants, generally, cast themselves as on the side of the universally valorized Civil Rights Movement and their political opponents on the side of the universally derided supporters of Jim Crow. Since the racial order no longer consists of one side supporting *de jure* segregation, claims of categorical racial inferiority, or racial animus, to the extent that discourse remains tethered to these battles that discourse is misaligned with contemporary racial divides. Participants, therefore, resurrected a long-settled battle from the previous racial period of Jim Crow. In the comments sections, I found not only vitriol, but also a misrepresentation of the actual partisan divide.

As noted in the introduction, in public discourse, racism is often an unstable and malleable insult leveled without much precision. As such, racism is a charge that anyone can use during a racial controversy with, as we see here, substantial support from political allies. Racism is also a charge that everyone must contend with during a racial controversy. While many of the left called Republicans and various prominent conservatives racist for their opposition to Sotomayor (as well as for their various racial accusations), those on the right also claimed that Sotomayor was a racist and the Democratic Party was a party of racists. This feature of racial controversies suggests that racial accusations are not about a single person but interpreted as a statement about which groups are or are not racist. In the context of partisan politics, questions

about which groups are racist are about which political party/ideology is on which side of the racist/non-racist divide.

The accusations of racism made by Newt Gingrich, Pat Buchanan, and others helped propel a racial controversy. However, I believe it is not fully accurate to say that these figures started the racial controversy. Instead, I think they simply stepped onto a stage already prepared for this controversy. This is evidenced by the anxiety and predictions of racial accusations before they were made. Still, racial accusations, spoken or assumed, constitute racial controversies. A racial controversy, in my view, is ultimately a battle over where the accusations produced by the controversy will land. Participants on partisan blogs seem attuned to this contest as they refocused the accusations (or potential accusations) onto representatives of the opposing party.

Most participants acted as if they risked ceding ground on a larger racial argument if they simply dismissed the accusations. In this way, a cycle of anti-hermeneutic provocation characterized participants' response to the controversy. As a result, the larger racial argument was less about a specific policy or political appointment and more about which side was racist.

While some did dismiss the importance of the nomination,[35] most did not dismiss the blog-specific assertions regarding the racial order. Instead, to the extent that there was debate within each blog, it was over the importance of the racial accusations. Those, on each side, who argued that racial accusations were unimportant or distractions from other important issues provoked resistance from others who insisted on the importance of refocusing the racial accusation. I argue that defining the racial order with regard to partisan politics and maintaining this definition was a key goal for many participants.

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[35] This was often because Sotomayor, as a liberal justice who was to replace a departing liberal justice would have no effect on the conservative/liberal balance of the Supreme Court.

While participants did occasionally argue about identity politics and diversity among themselves (as I highlight in the following chapters), they depicted their political opponents as racists rather than those who had different views on identity politics or the value of diversity. Again, most did not cast colorblindness or color-consciousness as racism because of its ideological assumptions, but instead depicted support for these positions as evidence of hidden Jim Crow style racism.

These kinds of discourses are polarizing, in that they granted no moral legitimacy to their political opponents. We might also characterize the discourse here as demonization of political opponents. This reality does not bode well for bipartisan compromises necessary to effectively govern the United States.

While there is much to lament about the partisan discourse, we must also consider the possible alternatives. For example, perhaps we should condemn those who label their political opponents racists. Partisans were aware of prohibitions regarding calling people racists and even after acknowledging those they continued to label others racists. They accomplished this by arguing that calling someone racist is acceptable if, indeed, that person was racist. That caveat was difficult to disagree with. In fact, no one mounted an argument, on either blog, that racists should not be called racists. The problem, of course, is that the agreed upon test to establish racism was often based on an interpretation of unprovable claims about an individual's true feelings. Even when participants used definitions of racism that were universal – like "a racist is someone who hates members of another race" they did not agree on the application. Since virtually no one in modern politics admits that they hate members of other races, participants were left to infer this attitude and interpret meanings of their political opponents. Not only were

they not kind in these interpretations – in other words, unlikely to give a political opponent the benefit of the doubt – but the available interpretations varied across the blogs.

After reading through these comments, one might be inclined to lambast both sides for their hyper-partisanship and hyperbolic speech. After all, many have criticized the ferocity with which partisans debate each other and the demonization of political opponents that such heated debates often entail. The comments sections of these blogs seem to offer further evidence of a phenomenon many consider an impediment to constructive dialogue about race. But, I argue that problem may not be so much the ferocity with which they argue but the frameworks they argue within. The problem here is not the failure to call someone or something racist that is racist, but the inability to identify what is and is not racist about the modern era and thereby to accurately depict our battle. In this way, these "call to arms" discourses may demobilize their sides for the actual fight over racism.

Chapter 7: Identity Politics

Part of the problem with our national discourse on race is the extent to which it is

hampered by public ignorance. Many of the basic facts about race and racism in America are not

well understood by the general public. As such textbooks on race often attempt to deliver content

to students about race. However, there is good reason to believe that this strategy has serious

shortcomings. In other words, it is simply not enough for people to have access to all the facts.

After all, the Internet certainly provides access to all the facts. Yet, people on the Internet still

routinely get basic information about race wrong. While incorrect information is a problem in

our political system, how people *perceive* information reveals additional problems with our

political discourse.

The problem of the partisan divide has sometimes been cast as one where two warring

factions inhabit different imagined realities. For example, in 2009, Matt Taibbi, a journalist for

Rolling Stone, characterized the US political system as "doomed because voters were no longer

debating one another using a commonly accepted set of facts." What we have instead, he writes,

is "a nation of reality shoppers, all shutting the blinds on the loathsome old common landscape to

tinker with their own self-tailored and in some cases highly paranoid recipes for salvation and/or

revolution" (2009). Scholarly research confirms that partisans develop perceptual biases and tend

to perceive the world in a manner consistent with their political views (Tabor and Lodge 2006;

Bartels 2002; Hochschild 2001). Jerit and Barabas (2012) found "a selective pattern of learning

in which partisans have higher levels of knowledge for facts that confirm their world view and

lower levels of knowledge for facts that challenge them" (672). Furthermore, they found that

high level of media coverage exaggerates this effect for the issue covered. With regard to race,

Valentino and Brader (2011) found that beliefs about the extent of racial discrimination were

often justifications for previous opposition to redistributive policies (218). In other words, people often fixed the "facts" around their predetermined policy choices.

However, partisanship doesn't simply result from access and attention to a different set of facts. It is important to keep in mind that as Gaines et al. (2007) note, "in politics, facts do not speak for themselves" (957). In other words, "only when people interpret facts can those facts influence political opinions" (956). Gaines et al. (2007) looked at how partisans updated factual beliefs about the Iraq War as conditions changed, while Democrats and Republicans held accurate beliefs about important aspects of the war, their interpretation of those facts diverged widely. More specifically, Gaines et al. (2007) study shows that while Democrats and Republicans can agree on the number of casualties in the war as well as the fact that weapons of mass destruction were not found, they subsequently diverged by interpreting the number of casualties as high or low and the lack of WMD as due to their nonexistence or the Iraq government hiding, moving or destroying them depending on existing partisan views.

Put another way, facts do not unavoidably lead to one and only one conclusion. For example, in an article about social science methods, Schwalbe (1998) relays a story about presenting some statistics about racial inequality to his undergraduate class. He notes that a student remarked that the statistics might be embarrassing for some people. Schwalbe's first read was that "some people" were Americans not living up to their lofty ideals, but the student actually meant black people. The student interpreted higher rates of poverty among blacks as evidence not of an unfair social system but of the deficiencies of black people. Schwalbe's anecdote has empirical support as Brezina and Winder (2003) found that "whites' awareness of blacks' relatively disadvantaged position contributes to negative stereotyping." The facts of racial inequality are not clear evidence for any claim without an understanding of a culmination

of empirical evidence and generalizations from that evidence. To use a term for which the vernacular and the academic meanings vary widely: facts are not meaningful without a theory.

My central contention in this chapter is that we need to pay attention to how interpretive frameworks function on political blogs. Doing so, allows us to see how they function to ensure that even similar facts cannot seem to bridge partisan divides. While the Gates case, and other cases like it, demonstrate how the two sides access their own set of facts, the Sotomayor case centered largely on a set of uncontested facts. While I suspect that even access to similar facts would have yielded divisive political rhetoric in the Gates case, the Sotomayor case provides a clearer look at these suspicions.

Here, both sides accessed similar facts/claims about the specific case. For example, both left and right agreed that the nomination would appeal to Hispanics and thus help the party that supported her (the Democrats) and harm the party that opposed her (the Republicans). Secondly, both agreed that race (and gender) were considerations in Obama's Supreme Court pick. Finally, both noted how racial solidarity organizes contemporary politics. In this chapter I look at the divergent interpretations of these agreed upon claims about race.

I found what differed, often dramatically between right and left was not a set of facts but the interpretation of common facts and claims. The interpretive tools, rather than the facts, are what marked the partisan divide. In addition, these interpretative frameworks were often backgrounded, so that each partisan space narrowed the available interpretations for its participants without explicitly saying so. These interpretations, however, were not simply evaluations of high or low or speculations about what might have happened in a particular case as in Gaines et al. (2007). Instead, the divergent interpretations reflected deeper meanings about how race functions in modern society.

I found that participants maintained divergent interpretive frameworks not by insisting on a definition of racism, but by talking about race with a set of implied definitions that rarely become explicit and thus they remain available for debate. Here I don't simply mean that words or phrases have different meanings but the same facts or claims lead almost automatically to different conclusions in different spaces. The automatic connections between certain beliefs and certain interpretations were co-produced by the participants of each blog.

Broadly, for those on the left, identity politics was, in part, the awareness of racial injustices. Those on the left cited the race of potential voters when pointing to a group reacting to some kind of racial injustice or racial attack from the right. By contrast, those on the right assumed that the highlighting of race, by the left, was divisive and an illegitimate way to mobilize voters.

I found that those on the left separated illegitimate from legitimate racial considerations and embraced color conscious strategies to deal with racial inequality. Those on the right adhered to colorblind ideology, which deems all discrimination based on race as illegitimate. Considerations of race (and gender) have long been an arena of conflict – most notably in dealing with Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action relies on the consideration of race. Another way to put it is that Affirmative Action is discrimination based on race. Both statements refer to the same thing. Of course, discrimination tends to have a negative connotation. Some proponents of Affirmative Action acknowledge that claim but interpret it's meaning differently than those on the right (Kennedy 2013; Ford 2008). Divergent ideological assumptions about race lie behind distinct attitudes toward race-based considerations. Finally, while those on the right viewed most race-based groups (i.e. La Raza or the NAACP) as illegitimate, those on the left took into account a group's orientation toward inclusion/exclusion or inequality/equality. In other words,

for the left, a race-based group seeking inclusion was distinct from a race-based group seeking

exclusion of another group. For the left, a group's advocacy for a racial minority (e.g. blacks or

Hispanics) was a move toward greater equality, while advocacy for a dominant group (e.g.

whites) was a move toward greater inequality. For the left, civil rights groups use race to

promote inclusion and equality, while hate groups use race to promote the opposite. These

distinctions were not recognized on the right.

Both right and left, however, argued that they were part of a politics that honored equality

and inclusion. Despite this commonality, part of the reason for the divergence was due to the

belief on the right that racial inequality can be legitimate provided equal opportunity exists.

Those on the right, as I noted in the last chapter, believed that equal opportunity exists or that

opportunities are now constrained for whites. In the view of many on the right, non-whites have

usurped illegitimate racial advantages to the disadvantage of whites. As such, they argued that

groups like La Raza or the NAACP were not orientated toward equality or inclusion. Conversely,

the left argued that white privilege and assumptions of minority inferiority creates racial

inequality. As such a hypothetical white version of the NAACP could only promote inequality

and exclusion.

The two sides each made statements dependent on a different set of assumptions about

race in America. However, those assumptions were largely backgrounded in these debates.

Another useful term is "unavailable interpretations." Some discourses were unacceptable

because they would be read with certain blog-specific assumptions. The discourse, therefore, was

not just unacceptable but the intended meaning depended on an "unavailable interpretation." In

other words, if we take a comment from one blog and move it to a blog across the partisan

divide, participants would not understand claims in the same way they were originally understood and likely intended.

Racial Appeals: The first Latina Justice

Both sides agreed that the highlighting of Sotomayor's race was a racial appeal. They diverged on who was making this appeal as well as what those racial appeals meant. On the left, most commenters thought that Sotomayor's identity was important because it countered historical underrepresentation on the court. Those on the left also accused the right of making racial appeals to whiteness and in doing so, demonizing minorities. On the right, identity politics represented appeals solely based on one's racial status rather than a racial issue like underrepresentation due to historic exclusion. As a result, those on the right accused the left of making illegitimate appeals to Latinos.

Participants on the right argued that Obama "pandered" to Hispanics with his nomination. The comments below are from the first post on hotair.com entitled, "Obama Picks Sotomayor for SCOTUS Slot." Participants further spoke to the view that Obama's nomination of a Latina was an identity politics trap, which would appeal to Hispanics and put the GOP on the defensive. While these comments were largely additive, commenters imagined both sides of the debate.

> "Comments taken out of context"…like the one she made about being a hispanic woman making her automatically wiser to sit on the bench than a white male? **She's a racist idiot**…and like everything else Obama does is geared towards **pandering to a certain voting block.** - DCJeff

> this is a political pick, Obama wants the GOP to take her down so he and the MSM can then **smear the GOP as "anti-hispanic"** and **lock up the Hispanic vote for good**, and thus all future elections if they vote the way the black vote goes – jp

> **Opposing her is racist?**
> **Who didn't see that one coming?**
> Sick and tired of hearing folks say "No I'm not!".
> Waiting for the day when we have the balls to fight the fight instead of wringing our hands over what the neighbor's think. - Limerick

> **Hispanic pressure groups** will be the least of the GOPs worries. Don't think that Obama doesn't know how to **play identity politics with the Hispanic demographic**, or that Sotomayor won't have a story to tell that resonates with Hispanic voters… - starfleet_dude

While acknowledging the racial appeal of Sotomayor, participants on the right cast that appeal as illegitimate. Keep in mind that this racial appeal was not one that evoked a racial stereotype or demonized another group – actually not even one that makes claims to victimization but an appeal based simply on existing representation. Here participants framed the debate regarding identity politics between themselves who legitimately opposed Sotomayor because she was, as DCJeff wrote, "a racist idiot" and the media who as jp argued "smear the GOP as anti-Hispanic," or Obama who, as starfleet_dude wrote, "play[s] identity politics with the Hispanic demographic." Limerick argued that such "anti-Hispanic" accusations were wrong but expected when s/he wrote, "Opposing her is racist? Who didn't see that coming?"

No one, on the right, acknowledged a legitimate reason for purposefully appealing to members of a minority group. I argue that this was due to the limited interpretations of racial appeals available on the right, which stem from the inability or unwillingness to consider minority status. According to sociologists, a racial minority group is a group that lacks power due to a racialized social system. Since those on the right do not accept the existence of a racialized social system that created both in the past and in the present a racial hierarchy that grants less power and status to such groups there is no legitimate reason to pick someone because of their minority status. On the right, saying Obama purposefully picked a minority could only be interpreted as an illegitimate racial appeal.

On the left, the selection of a minority opened access for a previously excluded group and that symbolic racial message was acknowledgement of the full Americanness of Latinas. Those on the left agreed that Democrats had a chance to "lock up the Hispanic vote for good" and answered the rhetorical "opposing her is racist?" in the affirmative. They did so in a space where a different set of interpretations was available and indeed often assumed.

Those on the left did not deny that Sotomayor would appeal to Hispanics (and women). On the left, participants predicted that Republican opposition to Sotomayor would fare poorly with Hispanic voters. While many on the right shared this view, the interpretation of this claim was quite different on the left. Unlike on the right, commenters on the left viewed this outcome as just. Those on the left did not believe that the right was unfairly targeted simply for opposing an Hispanic Justice. Instead, those on the left argued that the attacks on Sotomayor were subtle (and not so subtle) attempts to demean a Latina identity and/or continue exclusion of minorities. Therefore, for the left, the right engaged in identity politics that demeaned minorities in order to make racial appeals to whites.

On the first post from dailykos.com, "Predictable Attacks Against Sotomayor Begin," participants argued that the attacks on Sotomayor would lead to electoral problems for the GOP. The assertion was that Latinos would be offended by the attacks. Those on the left argued that this would be the case because those attacks were racial. While at times, individual comments seemed to suggest that the GOP was guilty of making illegitimate racial appeals merely by opposing a Latino, subsequent comments made clear that most believed that Republican opposition was based on race and appealing to racist whites. On this basis, commenters predicted reactions among both women and Latinos. Those on the left argued that both women and Latinos would view Republican opposition as an attack on both women and Latinos and further drive those groups towards the Democratic Party.

> let the republicans fight
> and then we can paint Arizona, Colorado, and Florida **a lovely shade of blue for the next generation.**
> Texas becomes purple too by the way. – jalapeno
>
>> Not to mention women
>> See my post above. The majority of American **women**, I think, will **read the empathy line of attack as saying "Women are too emotional to hold important jobs".**
>> That's going to go over **soooooo** well. – blue aardvark
>>
>>> **lets see how many states that**

> **latino plus women do not equal 50%.**
> hmmmm looks like **the regional Republican party** might become the party of Utah and Wyoming in the very near future. – jalapeno

In some ways, these comments embraced identity politics or at least viewed it as a beneficial reality. They believed that people voted with their identities in mind and that voters were able to "read" subtle attacks. The charge was that Republicans were using stereotypes designed to legitimate inequality (i.e. woman are too emotional to hold jobs"). Those on the left deemed such subtle cues both intentional and offensive. For those on the left, conservative criticisms of Sotomayor's racial appeal (to Hispanics and Women) were interpreted as racial appeals (to whites).

Those on the left cast Republican criticism of Sotomayor as not only disparaging Latinas but also as making a coded racial appeal to whites. Racial appeals to whites, for the left, were based on demeaning racial minorities and hence illegitimate. Racial appeals to minority groups, on the other hand, were legitimate. On another post from dailykos.com entitled "Republicans Continue to Project" similar themes emerged. The comment below reflected the sentiment that the intended audience for the GOP was whites.

> Kudos To The GOP
> They finally realize they **don't need Latinos or women (or anyone other than White Southern Males)** to win elections (in Mississippi). – Splicer

Splicer argued that the GOP was making appeals to "white southern males." This was a political tactic that most on the left saw as unwise because it was a coded appeal dependent on disparaging non-whites. Here the GOP is appealing to a narrow segment of voters and in a sense playing their own form of identity politics. By casting the reaction of minority groups as both positive for Democrats and a just reaction to the right's supposed implications, those on the left made racial appeals from their side legitimate and indeed made this the default interpretation of

appeals to minorities, while making the default interpretation of an attack on Sotomayor on any

kind of racial grounds as an appeal to racists.

Considerations of Race: Inequality and Discrimination

Most on the right believed that Sotomayor was picked because she was an Hispanic

woman. On the left, many might agree with this analysis. Indeed, most people are aware that

gender and race representation on the Supreme Court is a factor in appointing Justices. For

example, this was apparent during Justice Clarence Thomas's hearings two decades ago, and will

certainly be apparent when it comes time to replace Thomas, especially if there are no other

blacks on the court. What distinguishes right from left was not the acknowledgement of the role

of race, but how each side employed and thereby, interpreted this agreed upon fact.

Participants on the right framed the debate over Sotomayor as one akin to the debate over

Affirmative Action. Of course, this was the right's view of affirmative action not shared by most

on the left. While the left did not argue that Sotomayor was an Affirmative Action pick, the

criticism would not likely have had the same impact on the left, where many support Affirmative

Action.

The first post from hotair.com, which announced Obama's nomination of Sotomayor,

criticized her qualifications. Subsequent commenters picked up on this theme and argued that

Sotomayor was an "Affirmative Action" pick. While a few commenters argued that she was

qualified or simply asked what the evidence was for her lack of qualifications, the bulk of

commenters were convinced that she was only picked due to her race. In other words, they

argued that her race and gender were the key qualifications for Obama. When a few participants

challenged the idea that Sotomayor was unqualified, others pointed to a rate of overturned

rulings, her statements about diversity, or simply dismissed her qualifications. The exchange

below, however, was fairly typical as it redirected the discussion towards racism.

> *What decisions of hers have you read that **make you think she's an intellectual lightweight?***
> *Proud Rino on May 26, 2009 at 9:35 AM*
>
> What have you read that **makes you think she isn't?** – darwin
>
> *Well, I haven't read enough one way or the other to be able to say she's an intellectual*
> *lightweight. But you have. So **what cases have you read** which led you to that   conclusion?*
> *Proud Rino on May 26, 2009 at 9:48 AM*
>
> **No one here has said that** … that's what's coming from people who know her and are close to her. The
> right questions during her hearing will bring that to light if true. She's also been tagged as arrogant and
> tempermental. Again, the right questions will show that.
>
> What is **obvious is her racism against whites. –** darwin

This exchange, like many others, seemed to dismiss the evidence for her lack of

qualifications in favor of the racial accusation. Here Darwin answered queries about her

qualifications by arguing, "the right questions will show that," while expressing certainty

regarding "her racism against whites." Participants on the right did not just claim that Sotomayor

was racist but that her appointment was an act of racial bias or discrimination. They contended

that attention to her race was not a fair consideration but an unfair form of discrimination.

The following comments grafted arguments against Affirmative Action onto the debate.

These commenters made two claims. First, that Sotomayor was picked due to her race and

gender. Secondly, that such a consideration was illegitimate, without explicitly making that

point. These comments did not interact with a counter argument. As such, they framed a debate

between the two sides by, usually sarcastically, adopting the side of their opponents. In doing so,

the right's version of the debate was distinct from the left's version. In other words, the two

sides, were, once again, not engaged in a direct argument with each other's main ideas but with

a, usually, distorted version of the other side.

> "What are her qualifications?"
> "**She's Hispanic**."
> "Check."
> "She's a **woman**."
> "Check."

"She's a **liberal activist**."
"Check. She's qualified." – Daggett

I look forward to the day when "[Insert name] is the first [insert physical trait] to [insert activity]" is no longer part of our public discourse.
[Lucy] is the first [Half Irish, Half East Asian Islander] to [eat a picnic on Friday]. **It's historic!** – Lehosh

…

Sotomayor was nominated to her New York Circuit Court judgeship by Bush 41. Clinton later got her promoted.
She was **an affirmative action pick then and now.** The issue of her having her decisions overturned rather frequently is something I consider to be quite important. – BigD

I just can't get past how her last name's pronounced. Why her also! **What has she done** in Obama's eyes **that makes her qualified** for a position in the SC? **Shes a latina?** - FontanaConservative

1) Is Sotomayor **unqualified for the Job** — CHECK
2) Is Sotomayor being appointed **based on her Race or Gender** — DOUBLE CHECK
The first Affirmative Action Justice. - CrazyFool

Questions like "what are her qualifications?" were asked as if there were no legitimate answer. Of course, someone could have pointed to her education and her years of experience as a judge, but even those were dismissed by BigD, who argued that her experience as a circuit court judge was made possible because "she was an affirmative action pick then…" One could reply that there is no way to claim that Obama purposefully picked an unqualified person (without entertaining conspiracy theories) unless one believes either a. there is no such thing as a qualified Latina or b. liberalism automatically disqualifies someone and/or c. Obama does not have the right to nominate judges as per the constitution. It is highly unlikely that any of these retorts would matter. Here the consideration of race and gender was not legitimate in the first place. So, any celebration of the first Latina justice could only be interpreted as an unfair advantage catapulting Sotomayor beyond more qualified judges.

The ideas above would not challenge the central idea that affirmative action is illegitimate because all of the identities are equal (colorblindness) regarding exclusion/inclusion and a blindness to racial inequality (racism blindness) because the mere bringing up of the identities is suspect. As Lehosh's comment demonstrates when s/he mocks identity politics by

wondering when we will celebrate the first "to eat a picnic on Friday," those on the right did not sort identities into advantaged/disadvantaged or dominant/subordinate because this interpretive framework was unavailable on the right. Instead, such identities were decidedly not socio-economic positions for the right. Furthermore, those on the right saw claims of disadvantage as a way of silencing legitimate criticisms of minorities.

That Sotomayor was a woman, a Latino, and a liberal were important considerations for those on the left. Claims that Sotomayor was picked, in part, because of these considerations were not seen as illegitimate racial discrimination that those on the left had to discount. Instead, those on the left challenged what they saw as the core of the criticism of Sotomayor's nomination – that whites were disadvantaged by minorities. However, they could largely do this without direct challenge, just by mocking the idea that Affirmative Action was discrimination against whites. Still, those on the left did at times foreground the larger assumptions.

On a post from crooksandliars.com entitled, "Bob Shrum explodes over Pat Buchanan's racism as Limbaugh uses MLK against Sotomayor," commenters didn't simply reject accusations against Sotomayor but contested the underlying assumptions behind these critiques. In other words, they rejected the claim that there was a race-based justice stacked against white males. Below is a direct response to what Buchanan said which sums up the majority opinion on the blog. The indented portions of this comment are the quotes from Buchanan highlighted by the post.

> I'm sure Buchanan was mystified with the outrage.
> He's been allowed to get away with it all these decades and now, someone is just weighing in on it to his face?
>> *"...but I do agree Sonia Sotomayor does believe in **race-based justice** basically at the **expense of white males** and to advance people of color...*
>
> But it's ok when its 'race-based justice basically at the expense of people of color and to advance white males.'
>> *You've got that hostility and bigotry toward white males in America...*

> Hahahahahahahahahahahahaha. Poor fuckin white men, afraid of women, a black planet, brown people, no money, losing a house or two...man oh man. The white man DOES have it tough. They can dish out the hostility and bigotry, but they can take a reversal of fortune…. – miss_kitty

One reading of this comment is that Buchanan was only capable of seeing one form of discrimination – that which disadvantaged whites. The commenter argued that Buchanan ignored "race-based justice basically at the expense of people of color." The comment doesn't make clear whether or not s/he believed "race-based justice at the expense of white males" constituted a real social problem. Although, she does appear to mock the idea with her invocation of "poor fuckin white men." Most commenters dismissed claims of white disadvantage by mocking them. Those on the left did not believe that there was any significant white disadvantage from which to make white identity claims or conversely to deny minority claims. In other words, they posited that systemic or significant disadvantage was necessary to make such claims. The comments below demonstrate the disdain most had for claims of white discrimination. Most believed that such claims were really attempts to hold on to white privilege or to lament its passing. In this light, the appointment of a Latina represented a challenge to white (and male) privilege. The comment below, from the same post, made these points.

> White males are persecuted because
> they are **no longer permitted to pretend they aren't privileged.**
> That's the GREATEST privilege: the privilege to pretend you are not privileged. The corollary is the privilege to pretend you would have prospered, and deserved it, just because you work extra hard, and being white has nothing to do with it... - woody

> Re: Bob Shrum
> Alls I keep seeing is a bunch of white men complaining about **how an ethnic woman might keep them down.** – Embittered Angry

The response from "Embittered Angry" was close to what many on the right were doing and saw little problem with. On the right, they were arguing that an ethnic woman might keep them down. However, on crooksandliars.com this statement was viewed as ridiculous because it was interpreted through assumptions about white privilege and minority disadvantage. As such,

commenters dismissed and mocked white claims-making regarding disadvantage, discrimination, and persecution. I also want to note here that, like in Chapter 4, there were discursive similarities across blogs. Much of the discourse on both sides seems to embrace the left-associated rhetoric of equality. However, here those on the left pick up on some of the strategies of the right as they denigrate those who "complain" or assert a victim-status.

While no one on the left blogs took claims of white victimization seriously, an important caveat is necessary here: Agreement regarding the illegitimacy of claims of white persecution did not equal a consensus regarding white privilege. Mocking claims of victim status was uncontested, whereas statements about white privilege were not. Below chaking argued against terms like "white privilege." Most did not do this explicitly, but some voiced discomfort with any categorical statements about whites. chaking argued that claims about white privilege were akin to calling whites racists. This doesn't appear in the first comment, but in responses throughout the thread. This thread is a good example of what happened when a commenter employed an interpretation not readily available on a blog. Here the commenter missed the agreed upon assumptions and in doing so, pushed some of them to the surface.

> Re: Bob Shrum
> I can't help but feel like shit reading some of the comments. I understand that less than 1 percent of white people have held power and acted in the way that leaders throughout the world have always acted throughout history. And I know that because this relatively tiny group of people are/were predominantly white, it's easy to group all white people in there. But it's either disingenuous, ignorant or just racist to say some of the things being said here. Just as it's disingenuous for Buchanan to act appalled at a relatively minor poor choice of words by Sotomayor.
>
> The fact is that in 2006 **over 16 million white americans were living under the poverty** level- the largest group under the poverty line (albeit not per capita). I think it's **pretty ridiculous to spew all this about how privileged they are. …** - chaking
>
>   You have convienietly failed to quote me accurately.
> The full paragraph I typed was: "*THIS* is fucking why Ms. Sotomayor said that Latinas have an advantage over white males in judging sexism and racism. Until these men have had a week like she has had, or that I have had, or the women I love have had, then they have no damn idea what they're talking about and they can go fuck themselves."
> My point was that it is sickening to me that assholes like Buchanan, Beck, and Limbaugh are whining about **being oppressed white males** meanwhile I am seeing many of **the most vicious stereotypes about Latinas and women** in general everywhere lately and the three aforementioned assholes are among those

perpetrating these steretypes. **The paragraph referred to those three men, and others like them, not all white men.**
But hey, if you're able to cut pieces out of my post to make it sound like I'm oppressive towards white men everywhere, go right ahead. … - Annaleigh

Re: Bob Shrum
So your full paragraph was implying that "white males" could not possibly have a week where they had to hear how bad or vicious or crude they were...
I think we all look through our own blinders a bit. **I'm not saying you don't have valid criticisms of certain individuals, but I think every time we bring a race or a color into it**, then it loses some validity as a whole. You simply **cannot categorize people (or people's actions) by race and be accurate** - too much diversity in all races.
I'm sure I'm looking through my own blinders a bit too. - chaking

sigh Nevermind...
You're once again inserting **"all white males"** where I basically saying **"white male political pundits** who say they're so oppressed out one side of their mouths and savaging Latinas on the other side of their mouths" - Annaleigh

Here the two commenters were talking past one another a bit as they relied on different assumptions. This frequently happened and was identifiable when one commenter argued, "I'm not saying that." Here the point that Annaleigh stuck to was both that racism towards minority groups is an important problem (something chaking does not explicitly contest) and that she was only referring to certain white males in her accusation of racism. A blanket accusation against all white men was illegitimate on the blog as was the assertion that Buchanan and his ilk were not making racist statements. Each commenter stuck to the uncontested discourse as their key point while somewhat avoiding a direct confrontation on the area of disagreement. This could be misunderstanding – or being unsure of the larger issue, but often this happens instead of two people identifying the key part of their argument. Thus it is left to the researcher to attempt to find what the key arguments and areas of legitimate debate were that emerge throughout these conversations.

Chaking missed the assumptions that most on the left made with regard to white privilege. While these kinds of breaches were rare on both sides, they often resulted in misunderstandings as assumptions remained backgrounded through much of the debate. As a

result, chaking interpreted claims of white privilege as saying that a white person should "feel

like shit" because such claims implied that whites are racists. Chaking, here, had to make this

claim explicit. Later on this same thread another commenter addressed chaking as annaleigh

deemed him or her no longer worth debating. Here WRG foregrounded claims about

disadvantage and privilege that underlay much of the rhetoric that had upset chaking. These

interactions provide a rare case where the assumptions were foregrounded due to differing

interpretations.

Re: Bob Shrum explodes over Pat Buchanan's racism as

It's interesting that you can't see whatsoever how you may say some prejudice things, even if unintentionally. …
You seem to **put a lot of stock in white people being racist**, yet completely miss out on how poorly it seems you
judge them. - chaking

You just don't get it chaking

I've read the whole thread and it's obvious you just don't get it. **The poor little white men your defending** may
have had to listen to people who don't like what they have said, but they have never been held in slavery, they have
never had to endure hatred based solely on the color of there skin or their gender, they have never been thought of as
property, they have never been hung or drug behind a pickup truck just because of who they are, and **they have
never had to fight for the same rights** that everyone else takes for granted. – WRG

Chaking objected to others putting a "lot of stock in white people being racist." As such

s/he seemed to interpret claims of white privilege as claims about white racism. WRG, and

others, responded by foregrounding the assumptions that were generally accepted without

explicit explanation. In fact, WRG ended his or her comment by calling chaking an idiot for

chaking's inability to "get it." Most on the left accept the claims that WRG made and read other

comments regarding whiteness with these assumptions as their interpretive framework. Few,

only this one commenter on this post, interpreted comments about white privilege or racism

against minorities as saying that all whites are racist or some other kind of categorical statement.

As we have seen, this interpretation was ubiquitous on the right.

In sum, those on the left interpreted discrimination on the basis of race through a

generally understood assumption that institutional racism privileged whites and disadvantages

minorities both in the past and in the present. On the right, these assumptions were not present. Instead, a colorblind ideology that all discrimination based on race was illegitimate racism prevailed on the right. The interpretative framework on the left was generally unavailable to those on the right and vice versa.

Race-based groups: La Raza and the KKK

As noted earlier, both sides saw themselves as on the side of inclusion and equality and their opponents as on the side of exclusion and inequality. How the two sides could share some of the same principles and yet greatly diverge on their evaluation of race-based political groups is the focus of this section. Again, I argue that different available interpretations of claims and sets of facts allowed each side to come to different conclusions and to maintain a belief that their own discourses reflected a commitment to equality and inclusion and indeed constituted the only plausible interpretation.

The civil rights group the National Council of La Raza became a flash point for arguments over identity politics. Those on the left blasted the right's depiction of the group as racist, while those on the right believed that such an accusation was obvious simply due to the group's name (a literal translation of La Raza is "the Race" – although this distorts its meaning). More broadly, an assumption that groups organized around racial identities were illegitimate was uncontested on the right, whereas on the left such group's legitimacy was dependent on the group's orientation toward equality and inclusion. Since those on the left believed in the existence of a racial hierarchy, a group's orientation toward inclusion and equality depended upon where that group was situated in a racial hierarchy.

The hotair.com post in response to Tancredo's racial accusation against La Raza contained the greatest number of condemnations of identity politics entitled "Tancredo:

Sotomayor's a Member of the 'Latino KKK.'" Most respondents not only agreed with

Tancredo's assessment, as I pointed out earlier, but they also deemed groups organized around

racial identities as illegitimate. While this was not always clear from single comments, clarifying

comments operated based on this assumption.

While participants seconded Tancredo's comparison to a group purporting to represent

white interests, respondents did not argue that such a white group would be legitimate. Indeed,

they dismissed both groups as illegitimate forms of politics. The comment below succinctly

made this point.

> KKK is a white supremacist group right?
> La Raza is a Hispanic supremacist group.
> … - angryed

The above comment exists in a space of limited available interpretations. A group

organized around a racial identity could only be a supremacist group. Conversely, for

sociologists, as well as many on the left, racial groups exist with a racial system. Races do not

exist without a racial hierarchy. As such invoking a racial group invokes the racial system from

which such groups spring. However, if races are not derived from a racial hierarchy (or at least

not from one that currently exists) advocating for a racial group could be viewed as an attempt to

create inequality and perhaps supremacy of one group over another. Subsequent comments

adhered to this understanding of racial groups as they supported Tancredo's comparison. As they

did so they argued that an unfair double standard existed between minority-based groups and real

or hypothetical white groups.

> Allahpundit, [poster]
> I really can't see how you can slam Tancredo on this and defend La Raza. Are you simply saying
> that its not AS racist as MEChA, so there's really no problem, or that Tancredo is a racist for
> recognizing that "The Race" for exactly what it is?
> I'd like to see a bipartisan rule book that **explains why it is OK for a "La Raza," or a
> "NAACP," but not or white centered organization.** … - Star20

Funny to see all those usual suspects posting to reinforce the absurdity of the main post within two minutes of it being posted. Not too staged in the hope of creating a bandwagon of stupidity, was it?

If **caucasians create a group called "The Race", would it be racist?** Would a member of said group be eligible for SCOTUS if the group is less hostile than some radical skinhead group? - Buddahpundit

National Council of La Raza (The Race) is main stream? So cross burning KKK members would be main stream as long as they didn't kill anyone?

The math is pretty complex on this one, **if a group espouses hatred of another group it's main stream as long it isn't the white group doing the hate? How does someone reconcile that?** - Rode Werk

Star20 asked for a "bipartisan rule book that explains why it is OK for a "La Raza"…but not a white centered organization." Similarly Buddahpundit compared a Caucasian group called the race and asked, again rhetorically, "Would it be racist?" Finally, Rode Werk asserted that such groups espoused hate and then argued a white group would be condemned for such activity. These comments were accepted by virtually all of the participants. There were no explicit objections to problematizing a minority-based organization. Indeed, the post that so many object to didn't weigh in on whether La Raza was a racist group. Nor did anyone argue that a minority-based group had by virtue of minority status a distinct orientation toward equality and inclusion. Instead, commenters asked rhetorical questions regarding how anyone could consider such a group non-racist.

While those on the right switched the names and racial designations of groups to point to what they saw as a double standard, left participants made their own comparisons. On the left, however, participants juxtaposed the socio-economic positions of different racial groups. In doing so, they presented their claims with the same air of obviousness that competing claims were presented on the right. The difference as I have argued was the available interpretations. These interpretations led to a divergent focus regarding inequality that did not cross the partisan boundaries.

Those on the left did not take seriously claims of a double-standard regarding identity

groups. Those on the left viewed identity groups as Civil Rights Groups, which legitimately

advocated for disadvantaged communities. In response to Tancredo's KKK quote, commenters

on the post entitled, "Tancredo…" universally condemned Tancredo and his claim of

equivalency between La Raza and the KKK. In doing so, participants maintained that there was a

legitimate form of race-based politics and an illegitimate form of race-based politics by pointing

to a group's orientation toward inclusion and equality. However, in most interactions among

themselves, this reasoning was assumed rather than explicitly stated.

> This crap is the same crap that a certain
> segment of **GOPers say about the NAACP**, and don't even get me started on the HBC (historically black colleges) and UNCF.
> Anything that has to do **with civil rights is suspect and is a Leftist plot** with the sole purpose of destroying Amerika. – CeeusBeeus
>
> Since I know full well…
> ...what La Raza is and isn't, I've been wondering if perhaps the disconnect is over Tancredo's understanding of the KKK. Maybe he simply **considers it an advocacy organization for white people?**
> And I mean that as about 80% snark, 20% serious. – Sportin Life
>
> Because advocating for your community
> is **EXACTLY the same as cross-burning and lynching.** – lgmcp

The first comment by CeeusBeeus, with the exception of the word "crap" might not be

disagreeable to those on the right. Those on the right do equate the NAACP with hate groups and

believe that groups which claim "civil rights" are really leftist groups intent on destroying

America. However, in this space, the underlying assumptions allowed this claim to be presented

as an example of the right's absurdity.

Here the participants acknowledged racial interests as "advocating for your community."

Such racial or ethnic interests on the right were generally deemed illegitimate. For those on the

left, such groups are not analogous. As when Sportin Life mockingly compared the KKK to "an

advocacy organization." S/he then marked his or her comment as sarcasm, but s/he was still

allowing that Tancredo might actually take his ludicrous comment seriously. This thread,

however, only focused on the means used by such groups rather than their racial designation. In other words, lgmcp contrasted, "advocating for your community" with "cross-burning and lynching." This was not the only reason that those on the left believed the two were not equivalent.

At times, commenters on the left foregrounded assumptions about the relationships between racial groups. This was clearest on the dailykos.com post, "Racist Attacks Ramp Up Against Sotomayor." The post noted that the Council of Conservative Citizens (a white supremacist hate group according to the SPLC), but one, which has hosted prominent Republican politicians, "had a photo of Sotomayor in KKK garb and called her "whitey hating." Here the juxtaposition between a white supremacy group and La Raza was held up to ridicule. We can also see how those on the left distinguish the two groups. Rather than simply focus on violence, they talked about the orientation to equality, partly because the CCC, unlike the KKK, was not known for direct violence. On this thread, commenters mocked claims of white disadvantage by reversing social conditions that each group faced. Instead of swapping the names, as the right did, those on the left swapped the social positions of each group, both in the past and the present to highlight existing racial equality that legitimates groups like La Raza and the NAACP whilst delegitimizing groups like the CCC or the KKK. In doing so, they answered some of the question we saw on the right, such as "why it's OK for a La Raza but not a white centered organization."

> I remember those awful years
> when gangs of roving **Latinos would pull white people out of their homes and lynch them** and burn their houses.
> I remember when **Latinos would refuse to sell houses in Latino neighborhoods to white people.**
> I remember when **white people were counted 3/5 of a person** in the Constitution.
> **Oh, wait - no, I don't.** These guys are just fuckheads. – RickMassimo
>
>> Not true! Latinas DO hire whites!
>> They **allow us to clean their houses and tend their gardens for subminimum wage.** You know, all the **jobs so distasteful that no brown person would do them.** – AdmiralNaismith
>>
>>> **My life long dream career of …**

digging crab meat out of its shell with my bare hands was ruined by the dirty Latino racists. – God loves goates

Yeah, no kidding…
…I bet you **couldn't even find a Latino/a who would pick lettuce** all day long under the hot sun, even if you paid him/her $50/hour! Thank God **we've got those whiteys to do that work!** – SLKRR

Commenters on the left pointed to historical and contemporary inequities between racial groups like when RickMassimo sarcastically wrote, "Latinos would pull white people out of their homes…" Here commenters ridiculed claims of white disadvantage and in doing so, ridiculed the underlying assumptions behind criticisms of minority-based groups. Instead of reversing the names as those on the right did, those on the left reversed the power and status relationships of whites and minorities in order to make their points that the two ideas are not equivalent. AdmiralNaismith said Latinos "allow us to clean their houses and tend their gardens for subminimum wage," and SLKRR wrote that "you couldn't even find a Latino/a who would pick lettuce…we've got those whiteys to do that work." These were, of course, reversals of common tropes regarding Latinos and therefore, the comments served to note inequality between Hispanics and whites. The differing views on inequality were the basis for the interpretive divide regarding fairness and race – and it was one that was often implicit.

Conclusion: Disparate Interpretive Frameworks

Both sides saw a contest between a dominant group and a subordinate group or more specifically between whites and Latinos. In other words, there was a race-conscious battle here. On the one hand, we might view the divergence as the right asking the question: "why is it OK for them and not us?" and the left answering that question by pointing to existing racial inequality. This formulation is in line with the distinction between colorblindness and colorconsciousness. However, in these discursive spaces I think each side highlighted an existing inequality. Rather than one side acknowledging racial inequality and the other denying it, each

side focused on a different form of inequality. As such they simply didn't consider (rather than actively dismissed) alternative forms of inequality. For example, the left did not consider unequal evaluations of groups based on a group's whiteness or minority status because the racial makeup of these groups was irrelevant to ascertaining whether or not they adhered to post-Civil rights norms of racial equality. Instead, those on the left focused on a group's orientation toward equality and inclusion. The right did not consider a group's orientation towards equality and inclusion because these factors were irrelevant from the standpoint of assessing unequal treatment of political groups with different racial makeups.

To be clear, I am not saying that CB and CC ideology were not operating here. I do believe, as I noted earlier, that these ideologies explain much of what happened on the blogs. However, in these partisan spaces the discourse around a controversy like this involves both sides talking past one another rather than directly engaging in these debates. Each side's arguments were fairly irrelevant to the other side and the real argument about the primacy and importance of different forms of racial inequality was absent.

The right commenter, Star20, asked to see a "bipartisan rule book" regarding the legitimacy of race-based groups. S/he likely meant this as a rhetorical question. However, if we take the question seriously for a moment, we can begin to see why there is no such rulebook. It might be useful to think of the available interpretations on each side as a set of distinct partisan rulebooks regarding identity politics.

Chapter 8: Diversity

The Civil Rights Movement made essentially two demands on white America – to give up prejudice and to give up privilege. In short, most of white America accepted the first demand, while limiting or sometimes outright rejecting the second demand. The long version, of course, is more complex than that. While today, most white Americans have given up or never embraced overt racial prejudice against racial minorities, many whites reject the notion that subtle racial bias, often unconscious, affects their judgments. In other words, many white Americans fail to consider how race and racial stereotypes impact their thinking absent willful animus towards minority groups (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Most Americans admit that whites had privileged access to education, employment, housing, as well as intangible things like the larger culture valuing them and assumptions of innocence in the past. However, with the fall of the race-based legal structures that clearly spelled out those privileges, many believed these white advantages have long since disappeared. With regard to privilege, most white Americans have accepted the end of de jure segregation and de jure white privileges, while rejecting policies designed to end de facto segregation and de facto white privileges, often denying the latter's existence (DiTomaso 2013).

Those on the right tend to reject both overt prejudice and de jure white privilege and further claim that those were the only demands of the Civil Rights Movement – or at least the only legitimate demands. Those on the left tend to accept the more expansive demands regarding racial bias and de facto white privilege. Furthermore, those on the left trace those demands to the Civil Rights Movement and not to some latter-day extension of the Civil Rights Movement as those on the right claim.

Sotomayor's appointment, a recent Affirmative Action case she had ruled on, and her 2001 speech dealt rather directly with the continuing role of race in American society.

Sotomayor's speech weighed in on long-debated questions regarding the value of diversity (specifically in the judiciary) as well as the role and causes of racial bias. Sotomayor came down clearly on the side of color-consciousness in these respects in her 2001 speech.

While this chapter focuses on the policing of ambiguous comments as chapter 5 did, here the debate is not whether the case should or should not be about race. Therefore, we generally do not see racialization and deracialization of the case. Instead, unlike the Gates case (and many racial controversies), a specific racial issue centers the debate. Here, Sotomayor's speech put the issues of a changing American and the importance of electing a black President front and center. In this way, she offered a direct and explicit challenge to America's racial hierarchy – one that existed throughout the 2008 Presidential election campaign but was rarely explicit and not made so by Obama. This chapter builds on the interpretative frameworks referenced in Chapter 4 and Chapter 7 towards what exactly each side assumes race is.

Here I look at posts and comments that engaged directly with the implications of Sotomayor's speech on diversity. Reporters asked Obama's press secretary Robert Gibbs about Sotomayor's statement: "I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experience would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life." Gibbs said, "I have not talked specifically with here about this, but I think that, … her word choice in 2001, was… poor…" The dailykos.com post entitled "To Robert Gibbs: Don't Apologize and Get Your Facts Straight", rejected this premise. The title of the post on hotair.com was a more neutral repetition of Gibbs, entitled, "Gibbs on Sotomayor's "wise Latina" comment: Her word choice was "poor"." Commenters on the right, as well as the post writer, went a bit further than Gibbs in criticizing Sotomayor's speech. The posts centered on

Sotomayor's speech (one on dailykos.com and two on hotair.com) demonstrated how each side co-produced and maintained adherence to respective racial discourse.

Sotomayor's speech and the abbreviated quote, in particular, sparked debate on the left and mostly condemnation on the right. The main area of contention on the left was over the meaning of the quote and whether the quote accurately reflected the entirety of the speech or was a cherry-picked misrepresentation of the sentiments expressed by Sotomayor, possibly stemming from a poorly worded sentence. On the right the main area of contention was about political strategy. On the right, there was little doubt that the quote and the entire speech were racist.

Sotomayor's speech made two points about diversity. First, she argued that a bias-free objectivity was unrealistic. She said, we "must not deny the differences resulting from experience and heritage…" Secondly, Sotomayor did not view these different perspectives as something to suppress, but instead she argued that some experiences might provide a unique and in some cases, better perspective. She argued that we should "continuously… judge when those opinions, sympathies and prejudices are appropriate." Of course, many did not read the entire speech and focused only on the quote: "**I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life.**" Those on the left invoked the full speech more often than those on the right to adjudicate debates that existed on the left but were absent on the right.

In general, those on the left valued diversity and based their assumptions on the premises from Sotomayor's speech – that bias was a fact and that different perspectives were beneficial because some were better equipped to see certain things. The right rejected diversity claims and adhered to discourses that relied on assumptions that bias must be willful, and that privilege is explicit or otherwise non-existent. Essentially, those on the right focused only on willful bias and

de jure privilege, while those on the left highlighted subtle bias and de facto privilege. As such, here we see partisans moving beyond universal definitions of racism to more ideologically specific ones.

Those on the right did not fully acknowledge a debate over whether bias could be eliminated, but instead framed the debate as bias v. objectivity. Sotomayor had rejected this framework rather than take one side of it. The notion that different perspectives yield perhaps different capabilities, especially when dealing with issues of inequality, underlies much pro-diversity support in the U.S.

While those on the right mischaracterized Sotomayor's argument, those on the left mischaracterized the view on the right. Many left commenters depicted the right's view as irrational and incomprehensible. They saw it as privileging a white male view over a Latina view because, for those on the left, objectivity was an illusion. In other words, those on the left saw the right's criticism as the dismissal of a Latina's judgment rather than a defense of objectivity.

These debates, end up revealing a key underlying assumption about what race actually is. On dailykos.com Sotomayor's quote was perceived as a statement about difference not superiority, and more specifically differences in experiences not biology. Dailykos.com contained some debate on these issues, which encourages a more detailed depiction of these ideas. Conversely, on hotair.com, Sotomayor's comments were perceived as statements about racial superiority not difference, the differences were cast as biological and not social, and there was little debate on these issues.

Participants on the right and left policed ambiguous comments so that they remained in line with the above dominant views. While, heated debates sometimes ensued, certain lines were not crossed and concessions were made that generally worked to uphold the blog's racial

perspective. As I pointed out in the Gates case, participants policed others through interaction. Here I also note how participants demonstrated interest in "what we are saying" and not just arguing with one another. Indeed, coming to a consensus on blogs is not the same as coming to a consensus in an in-person conversation. The same interaction rituals do not exist. We must consider that there was often a substantial time lag between interactions and multiple audiences for such comments. The original commenter may not reply or even see someone's response. In fact, at times commenters directed their responses to other commenters and not the ones they were debating. As such, I argue that policing conversations on blogs is less about trying to convince someone else in particular that one is right and more about controlling the meaning of the comment after the fact. In other words, an ambiguous comment was often reinterpreted or perhaps marked as outside the realm of what "we" say. This was more apparent here than in the Gates case as the debate over Sotomayor's speech was over a set of party-defining issues - i.e. Diversity and behind that the meaning of race in the 21st Century.

Diversity on the Left: "WTF. This isn't rocket science."

Here I focus on the post entitled, "To Robert Gibbs: Don't Apologize and Get Your Facts Straight." Gibbs remarks provoked a battle over "our" position for the left. On dailykos.com, many of the comments addressed whether or not Gibbs erred in his statement and further what that says about Obama's political strategy and Obama in general. While many accused Gibbs and Obama of backing down from Republican attacks, others agreed that Sotomayor's speech did contain a poorly worded section that was a problem, at least out of context. These debates took up the bulk of the comments. However, since the post did address Sotomayor's speech many took the opportunity to defend the speech. They especially did so when a few commenters (about 3) attacked the speech. Comments that went against the grain were challenged directly, These

challenges resulted in long threads as the initial commenter defended or refined their original comments. Again, participants policed community sentiments. They did not simply voice individual opinions but argued about what "we" are (or should be) saying.

On dailykos.com, despite disagreement about Gibbs comments, almost all people agreed with the sentiment (at least as they saw it) expressed in the entire Sotomayor speech. Commenters instead focused on debating what "we", i.e. the left, are saying about the ensuing controversy. Many felt that Gibb's statement did not represent "our side." The commenter below disagreed with the Sotomayor quote and announced agreement with Gibbs and Obama (in effect marking his or her membership), although she went further than either Gibbs or Obama went in criticizing Sotomayor's speech.

> Are we saying that we believe some race have
> more profound life experiences than other races? I've read the remarks in context. **I agree with Gibbs and Obama. I don't think Sotomayor is remotely a racist**, but she could have **expressed herself more elegantly.**
> Does anybody here have any idea how she will rule on abortion issues? - Andhakari

Here Andhakari acknowledged that s/he did not think "Sotomayor is remotely racist." Despite this qualifier, other disagreed with the criticism of her speech and a debate ensued. The comment below replied to someone who disagreed with Andharari. Others then disagreed, but how they did so was important. The debate here was less about whether the one sentence was off (most agree it was), and instead about standing up for the larger points about diversity. In this way, commenters were making sure that the critique of the one sentence was not read as a larger critique of diversity and the blog's racial perspective.

> She didn't?
> *Second, I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences   would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived   that life*
> **She may have meant something a bit different, but I think what she said was unfortunate.**
> Jonathan Turley addressed the word choice in his blog, focusing on the words "better conclusion" and I think had a fair discussion of it. – Heart of the Rockies

She meant something entirely different
Complete transcript in NYT (emph added)
[cut]… *I owe them constant and complete vigilance in checking my assumptions, presumptions and perspectives and ensuring that to the extent that my limited abilities and capabilities permit me, that I reevaluate them and change as circumstances and cases before me requires.* [cut]… *must not deny the differences resulting from experience and heritage but attempt, as the Supreme Court suggests, continuously to judge when those opinions, sympathies and prejudices are appropriate.*
In other words, **I can't help but be informed by my experiences**, as are we all. But I **must be careful to not allow those experiences to unduly influence my decisions. – 1BQ**

That's because Turley's not the sharpest
legal mind. Read the speech!
She's talking about how white male judges failed to find sex and racial discrimination for a very long time in this country, despite it's obvious presence. She's then saying that **she would hope** a **wise** Latina would have come to a better conclusion **in those cases**.
And she prefaced it with "I hope", as in it's obviously not a foregone conclusion but one would hope that someone with those experiences would be able to come to better conclusions, again, **in those cases**.
WTF? This is not rocket science here. – Alfonso Nevarez

I disagree
She was making the simple point that people who have experienced discrimination and hardship are *more often than not* likely to come to better legal opinions, i.e. ones that aren't discriminatory. It only means otherwise out of context, and its a perfectly reasonable conclusion. – The Narrative

While Heart of the Rockies (first comment) focused on "what was said" (meaning the one quote) and acknowledged that Sotomayor "may have meant something different," others focused on what she meant. In doing so, 1BQ, Alfonso Nevarez, and The Narrative argued in favor of diversity claims. 1BQ used excerpts from the speech to contextualize Sotomayor's quote. 1BQ noted that Sotomayor acknowledged bias, while Alfonso Nevarez drew a link between experience and knowledge. The Narrative argued that experience as a minority provides a useful perspective on discrimination.

Alfronso Nevarez ended his comment with "WTF? This is not rocket science." Here, s/he depicted Sotomayor's meaning and conclusions as obvious to all but those who are purposefully ignoring the context or are too stupid to grasp it. Commenters, on both the left and the right,

marked assertions as obvious and, in effect, argued that their readings should clearly represent what "we," as rational people, are saying.

Most commenters on dailykos.com pasted larger parts of the speech to point out that Sotomayor was talking about experience, not intrinsic values of people, and that since experience affects judgments, the quote was a reasonable statement in the context of the entire speech. Indeed, they suggested that race was primarily about experience and not any kind of intrinsic or biological condition. As The Narrative wrote, "She was making the simple point that people who have experienced discrimination and hardship *are more often than not* likely to come to better legal opinions, i.e. ones that aren't discriminatory. It only means otherwise out of context, and it's a perfectly reasonable conclusion." However, not everyone on dailykos.com agreed with this. Some believed that her statement, again at least out of context, suggested some claim to racial superiority.

The comment below elicited a string of debates partly because s/he called Sotomayor's sentence bigoted, rather than unwise or off. However, even here the commenter attempted to declare some allegiance to the blog. There were several subthreads that developed out of this initial comment. The first (below) gets into the role of white privilege. Here diversity was not just about experiences but also about the notions of inequality that make some uncomfortable (Bell and Hartmann 2007). The comment below came closest to the claims on the right. As such, this presented an ideal place to look for policing. Khereva did not call Sotomayor racist, and significantly says that s/he supports her, but still adopts an objectivity standpoint (at least, at first).

> Sadly, it wasn't a false talking point
> As good a nominee as she is, the context of her claim was an argument against the dictum that "a wise man and a wise woman would reach the same conclusion." She decided to **argue *against* that wise summation of equality of justice** and jurisprudence by deciding to claim that a wise Latina woman's conclusion would be *better than* that of a white male.

And unfortunately, **that's simply bigoted and foolish.**
She's still a good nominee, and would make a good Supreme Court Justice.
And her sentence is still a dumb, bigoted, foolish statement *when taken in context.* - khereva

> I don't buy that it is 'bigoted.'
> it would be **bigoted if white men had ANY trouble advancing their legal careers because of discrimination.** the statement was made **in a context where white male judges and lawyers were the recipients of preferential treatment and systematic privilege**, and needs to be understood in that context.
> the statement was off, admittedly. but i don't agree that it was 'bigoted.' – seabrook

>> No, it is.
>> When you claim that your culture, race, or gender makes you *better* than one whose culture, race, or gender differs from yours, you are being bigotted, no matter how trendy or popular you are… - khereva

>>> the right wing memes are coming out now…
>>> "trendy and popular"...
>>> the question is not about 'trendiness.' **it's about privilege and power.** how many women of color are on the supreme court now? how many have EVER been nominated? now, how about white men?
>>> **i agree** with you that the **statement is off.** but bigotry is not as simple as you (and, i would add, rush limbaugh) would like to make it out to be. **bigotry implies a social structure of hierarchical power relations** -- it is not simply a question of "thinking you are better than someone else because of your experiences." – seabrook

khereva claimed that Sotomayor made a claim of racial superiority, even though s/he also attempted to stay within the blog's partisan boundaries by saying, "She is still a good nominee." S/he also wrote that Sotomayor's "sentence" was "dumb, bigoted, and foolish." In response, seabrook marked khereva's comment as not part of the legitimate debate or at least not part of our community, as seabrook referenced "right wing memes" and "Rush Limbaugh." On one hand, such marking was a tactic to win an argument with another commenter by aligning their claims with the right; but it also marks such claims as out of the realm of what "we" on the left believe. Seabrook also focused on the meaning rather than "the statement" which s/he agreed "was off." In doing so, seabrook argued for the recognition of a discriminatory "context" and the role of "privilege and power." Recognition of these claims was, I argue, recognition of the blog's

perspective. Commenters frequently pushed for recognition of the blog's racial perspective and
not just allegiance in a specific political battle.

These two commenters also had a dispute regarding the definition of bigotry. While
khereva offered a relatively uncontested definition of bigotry, which is a term applied to
someone who thinks their race makes them better, Seabrook disagreed with not only the
application of this definition to Sotomayor's speech but disagreed with this definition of bigotry.

> No, they aren't. And your definition of bigotry
> is itself bigoted, because it is purposely constructed to support the lie that **only people of certain races, genders, or classes can be bigoted. – khereva**

> **and here we are at the fundamental crux of our
> disagreement. i do in fact believe that it is much less common for non-privileged groups to
> be bigoted**, [cut]…
> [cut]…she pointed out that for decades, no woman had ever won a discrimination suit at the
> supreme court, and asked whether this would have been true if there had been women on the
> court. in other words, she was saying: **perhaps women would have** rendered *better* rulings than
> the white men who rendered what are now regarded as faulty and un-empathetic rulings**. is it
> bigoted for her to say that white men have generally not been as even-handed as one would
> like in their rulings?**
> [cut]…she is saying, with respect to this particular area of the law, white men (sadly) tend not to
> be as even-handed as one would like. – seabrook

While khereva took issue with the idea that only certain people can be bigoted, Seabrook
responded with a concrete example. In other words, the two didn't disagree on the overall
structure of race in America. Khereva never said that whites were not a privileged group. In this
way, the debate managed to stay within some partisan boundaries.

In total, khereva's original comment garnered a thread of x comments from y
commenters. Several subthreads continued the argument. The comment below was a response to
khereva that created another subthread. Below fisheye pointed to the acknowledgment of bias as
Sotomayor's key point. Khereva stuck to the claim that Sotomayor declared racial superiority.

> I think you are wrong
> She **contextualized her statement with 'richness of experience'.** That is what she claims gives **her hope**
> that a latina woman would reach a better conclusion.

That **she associates gender and ethnicity with particularly favorable experience is a false generalization**. But its quite clear that a latina woman and a white man are going to most likely have **very different perspectives and experiences in this country. - fisheye**

> That doesn't help, but makes it worse,
> because *the context* was the claim that two wise jurists differing only in gender would reach similar conclusions. Her claim, in that context, is also an argument that a white male's experiences are by definition less "rich," and that only one culture-- hers-- provides that requisite richness. – khereva

> > It's not that her culture provides that
> > experience, it's that one's identity provides them with a particular experience in American society and the world.
> > 'only one' doesn't apply
> > She didn't say 'more' or 'less' rich, she said 'the richness'.
> > But yes she seems to be claiming that the richness of a **white male's experience in America is lacking** more often than not, as it contributes to juridical judgment, [cut]…
> > **Can't say I disagree.** - fisheye

Fisheye argued that Khereva made a "false generalization" about Sotomayor's speech. Fisheye insisted that Sotomayor did not make a claim about superiority and went on to defend the value of a minority perspective. Khereva somewhat rejected this premise by again making it into a categorical statement about the qualifications of whites. Khereva did so by conflating culture (which is often a stand in for race) with experience. Fisheye responded by distinguishing the two, thereby establishing why a minority experience might be beneficial. Below another participant responded to Fisheye. Here the two debate the value of minority experiences.

> **Okay, let me ask you this:**
> **Which Anerican identity group's members have a life experience which you would characterize as "rich", more often than not?** By what characteristics do you define this "richness"? – skymutt

> > Any with the personal experiences of
> > their **identity being demeaned and ridiculed throughout their lives by society and including legal and institutional obstacles**, but who exceedingly succeeded through life anyway. [cut]…
> > In the context of the jurust, a lens of privilaged heritage is myopic…- fisheye

> > > So then
> > > ...the obvious question for you is this: **why should we try to remove legal and institutional obstacles to success**, if overcoming those particular types of obstacles is a vital part of building a rich life experience? [cut]… - skymutt

> asdf
> …
> The point is that particular **obstacles are recognized better by those that have had to hurdle them.** And have more likelyhood of being removed if they are contrary to the spirit of our law… - fisheye

Here skymutt subtly seconded khereva's point about superiority when s/he asked which identities have rich life experiences. Fisheye again laid out a defense of the importance of a minority perspective by citing "identities being demeaned and ridiculed…" and later argued, "obstacles are better recognized by those who had to handle them." skymutt did not deny that minorities face greater disadvantages than whites, as such debate over the value derived from disadvantages could take place. Here the blog perspective was preserved in the interaction. An argument like this did not take place on the right because the existence of minority disadvantages was either denied or at the very least, contested. The agreement regarding minority disadvantages allowed the debate about the value of perspectives derived from those disadvantages to take place.

The comment below is from the same thread. Here the commenter neatly sums up the position of the majority of participants on dailykos.com regarding the value of minority experience.

> Actually, no. You should read the speech
> She said that, one, she HOPED it would in discrimination cases.
> And I would too: just as I hope her trial lawyer and trial judge experience gives her an edge in determining what happened at the trial level and how cases actually get to the supreme court, I hope that being in a position to observe and experience discrimination gives her an edge in determining what happens in the real world and how cases actually get to the supreme court.
> I think that only people who think the law should be colorblind even to the point of failing to remedy discimination are the most upset. - Inland

Here Inland directly criticized colorblindness and also noted that statements about the benefit of minority experience are not categorical statements about inferiority or superiority but simply that race is a proxy for experiences. This formulation of race, while often not explicit,

was central to the perspective regarding diversity on the left. Here race is, without explicitly

saying so, a social construct rather than a fixed individual attribute.

Participants on the left engaged in debate over Sotomayor's quote but did not violate any

of the partisan boundaries in doing so. The following thread had some of the same participants

from the previous thread. This was going on simultaneously with the discussions above. Here

seabrook argued that the one line was a problem and detracted from the overall points of the

speech. However, despite this mild criticism, others decided to contest the one line. There is

some agreement with this reading as it was closest to the position of both Gibbs and Obama.

Despite the debate, these comments agreed on the central points regarding race and indeed those

agreements were solidified through the debate as others were criticized for possibly not

embracing them.

> I disagree on this one
> what she said in that one line is pretty hard to defend, and is actually **undercut by what she said before**
> and after it. so, i don't think it is wrong to suggest that she might want to revise that one line… - seabrook
>
>> Exactly …
>> Kossacks and progressives should NOT want to **pick a meaningless fight** over a particular
>> sentence by refusing to acknowledge that it could have been worded in a less misunderstandable
>> way. …Better to concede "bad wording", and the issue is done by Monday. … - Escamillo
>
> o
>
>> **I think Gibbs has it exactly right**
>> 99.9% of the speech is very common sense-perfect objectivity might be something to strive
>> towards as an ideal, **but in reality, everyone brings their experience to the table.** But that one
>> line is very poorly phrased-it pretty much flat out says that the wise latina will make better
>> decisions than the wise white guy, because of her rich experience (apparently the white guys'
>> experience isn't "rich", whatever that means). If you want to argue that **our justice system would
>> be strengthened by having more judges from a wide array of backgrounds, which was a
>> larger point of her talk, I'm right there with you.** But this **line is a clunker**, and its much better
>> to wave it off, like Gibbs did, than to decide that every public utterance of Sotomayor must be
>> defended to the death. - ksduck
>
>> Well said. – khereva

While critical of Sotomayor's quote, ksduck concedes two key points. First, ksduck noted

"everyone brings their experiences to the table" and the "larger point of her talk" that "our justice

system would be strengthened by having more judges from a wide array of backgrounds." In

doing so, s/he tempered the critique. Here khereva, the antagonist from earlier, agreed with

ksduck who argued that the one line was bad, not the entire speech nor many of the pro-diversity

sentiments. Similarly, seabrook and Escamillo did not disparage the entire speech but instead

referenced the one line and urged everyone to abandon a "meaningless fight over a particular

sentence." However, others still thought that overall point required a more robust defense. The

comment below took this stance. Seabrook, then, made it clear that s/he was not contesting the

overall pro-diversity claims and indeed reaffirmed them.

> Why is it hard to defend?
> I honestly don't understand this. Let's say someone comes from a group in society that has a history of enduring prejudice and bias, and that has developed a culture and community that thrives despite and in response to that bias. That person **will then have a set of experiences others do not have when it comes to prejudice**, and **that person will have insights based on those experiences that others plainly will not have**. And all this is plainly important to areas of the law like equal protection and due process where important values of human dignity are at stake.
> Hard to defend? I find it **hard to understand why the statement is even controversial** other than the **unwillingness of people who are ostensibly liberals and progressives to defend the patently true.**
> Stop apologizing, and defend. – andydoubtless

>> it is hard to defend because it seems to
>> preclude the possibility that white male justices could be made to grasp the importance of equal protection and non-discrimination, and then rule accordingly. of course they will never fully 'get it', but that doesn't mean that their rulings will always and forever be less good than the rulings of women of color. … - seabrook

>>> It does not preclude it.
>>> You're **going by the cherrypicked line and not the speech.** - Little
>>>> ▪
>>>> yes, that is what is at issue here.
>>>> if you read my original post, you will see that i **specifically say that the one line**, on its own**, is hard to defend**, and that it is **actually undercut by the rest of the speech. …** - seabrook

For andydoubtless "it" was the overall pro-diversity sentiments of the speech, while for

seabrook "it" was the one line. Andydoubtless referenced what "we are saying" by pointing to

"people who are ostensibly liberals and progressives." He believed that they, the left, were not

defending the "patently true." However, seabrook argued the one line was off, not the larger

point. Seabrook added, "of course, they [white males] will never fully 'get it.'" There was a

debate here, but participants were not really arguing over the larger diversity claims that andydoubtless brought up. Seabrook explicitly stated this when s/he argued in the last comment that s/he was misinterpreted.

The general position on the left was that Sotomayor's one sentence might have been poorly worded or lent itself to misinterpretation, but the larger points regarding diversity were, for almost all, correct and indeed obvious. However, when a commenter criticized the one line, they could have meant that her entire argument and indeed the arguments in favor of diversity (e.g., that minorities faced disadvantages and therefore their experience created unique perspectives for dealing with discrimination issues) were wrong. Other commenters responded so that these potentially ambiguous commenters were in line with the blog's perspective or, barring any concessions from the others, they could mark the commenter as not part of left discourse by referencing right wing memes or figures on the right.

Diversity on the Right: "It is recognizing indisputable facts."

I, again, found similar processes on the right – although as expected the beliefs on the right were very different. Those on the right did not accept the basic premise regarding the need for diversity on the court. It was also clear that those on the right saw little inherent value in diversity and further contended that attention to race (or gender) promoted bias over objectivity. I further contend that this perspective stemmed from a depiction of race as an intrinsic individual characteristic (e.g. biological).

While some commenters on dailykos.com agreed with Gibbs, no one on either dailykos.com or crooksandliars.com called Sotomayor a racist. As I noted, on hotair.com Sotomayor's racism was rarely in question. On the post, "Gibbs on Sotomayor's 'wise Latina'

comment: Her word choice was 'poor','" participants frequently cited Obama's and Sotomayor's

racism. Comments like the following were typical:

> Obama frees black racist thugs who threatened old white people when they went to vote, says white people "cling" to their religion and guns, completely ignores a massive snow storm in rural Kentucky where mostly poor, white people live, and now appoints a very obvious racist to the Supreme Court." - amkum

> "She is a racist who belongs to a racist organization. The only question is, is she an acceptable racists in Obama's America. If she says things like this with recorders running, imagine what she says when they aren't" – thebigolddog

Most commenters on hotair.com took the position that Sotomayor said and/or believed

that Latinas were superior to whites. The following comment demonstrates this phenomenon.

> "…if America is going to elevate a judge to the bench that believes her thinking is superior because she's a latina and a woman, we should let them know what they're getting" –thirteen28

On hotair.com, Sotomayor's statements implied racial superiority. In addition, any

reference to race was tinged with a claim of superiority. Participants on the right adhered to a

notion of objectivity and viewed different perspectives as a form of bias. To most on the right,

there was only one legitimate perspective suitable for a Supreme Court Justice. This view

undercuts the argument for diversity. As such, those on the right interpreted the debate as one

between those who were in favor of racial bias and racial discrimination (i.e. Sotomayor and

Obama) and those in favor of objectivism and no racial discrimination. The comments below

demonstrate how participants on hotair.com interpreted Sotomayor's quote.

> "She used poor word choice. What she really meant to say was: "I am **superior** to any honky man because I am La Raza and female" but what accidently came out of her mouth was: "I am wiser than a white male because I am a Latina." - Geochelone

> Basically, **she is saying that, if you are a white guy defending yourself against an Hispanic woman in her court,,you,, as the white guy,, are already screwed.**
> **No,,, that's not racist at all.**
> See,, we are all equal but there are those who are more equal.
> And it's all unfolding right before our eyes.
> And the RINO's???? Well, they're out picking daisies on the flowered covered hills. – JellyToast

> How about we **base decisions on the Constitution**. If after that the people don't like it the decision, it can fixed. I know our Founders where just white men without the full richness of life of a Latina but they developed an amazing form of government and I would appreciate it if folks would use it instead of revamping it. – Cindy Munford

Geochelone, JellyToast and Cindy Munford framed Sotomayor's position in ways neither she nor those on the left framed it. Geochelone interpreted Sotomayor's quote as saying, "I am superior" and "I am wiser" rather than deal with Sotomayor's ideas about discrimination and perspectives. This reading was premised on the assumption that race referred to biology or "culture" (which operated like a stand in for innate characteristics) rather than an experiential status. If biological or cultural (again, at least in the way the right seems to reference culture) differences rather than experiences were what those on the right thought race entailed, then it does follow that Sotomayor's speech might be anti-white as JellyToast assumed when s/he wrote, "as the white guy…are already screwed." Cindy Mumford could then, using this framework, situate Sotomayor's view in opposition to a presumably objective view "based on the Constitution." Much of this framing went unremarked upon. In other words, few challenged framing Sotomayor's comments as coming down on one side of a debate over objectivity v. racial bias.

Occasionally on the right, like on the left, someone countered these claims. The comment below contained a sort of defense of Sotomayor's larger point. Terryannoline made a counter claim against the racist accusation directed at Sotomayor. No one else on this post agreed with terryannonline. However, she engaged this conversation for some time – so there were many interactions. Terryannonline began by citing language from the post.

> *I wish I had more sympathy for her perspective here, but as a white male, I'm biologically handicapped. Perhaps our wise women commenters, with the richness of their experience, will rally to her defense.*
> I'll **play devil's advocate**. **Maybe she's just saying that** she has had experiences that are different from a white male and **give her different perspective.** Although, that still doesn't excuse the "better" part. But maybe (I know I'm stretching) she is saying that those unique experience puts her "better" position her to have empathy.
> I tried! - terryannonline

There was some notable hesitation here. For example, terryannonline prefaced her remarks by saying she was playing "devil's advocate." She also added "(I know I'm stretching)" and ended with "I tried!" Others did not accept these concessions as reasonable. Instead, many questioned terryannonline's membership. S/he seems unable to fully conceptualize race as a social construction, but this later seems more adherence to the discursive norms of this blog than any inability to understand Sotomayor's points. In any event, her hedging doesn't persuade anyone to consider her points. The comment below reasserted the dominant framing that terryannonline potentially undermined.

terryannonline on June 4, 2009 at 10:30 PM
You're not playing the devil's advocate, but more like the deranged morons advocate. **The left loves to** scream equality until they don't. Her experiences as a latina woman has nothing to do with **following the constitution.** – csdeven

Here csdeven criticized terryannonline and also linked her to "the left" as well as reiterating "following the constitution" as a counterpoint to Sotomayor's view. In doing so, csdeven reasserted the dominant blog position, while casting those who countered it as part of the other side.

After the initial comment terryannonline made another one, which quickly garnered responses. Below terryannonline attempted to suggest that some had violated conservative principles by making racial accusations. Others argued that Sotomayor's racism was not something that was in doubt, at least for conservatives. Here again we see a participant attempt to argue what "we should be saying."

I find it odd how quick some of you are to call her racist. **Aren't conservatives the ones that argue not to be so quick to call people racist?** – terryannonline

This may be a little complex for you, but I'll make it simple. Sotomayor has been making the same racist remark for years,over and over again. She is a member of La Raza (The Race). **This isn't "quick." It is recognizing indisputable facts.** – Star20

I find it odd how quick some of you are to call her racist. Aren't conservatives the ones that argue not to be so quick to call people racist?

> *terryannonline on June 4, 2009 at 10:33 PM*
> Generally speaking, we don't like it when people get called racist, quickly or slowly, for saying things that are not racist.
> **But most people don't mind saying it quickly when the things said are in fact racist.** – myrenovations

Star20's reference to "indisputable facts" and myrenovations use of "in fact," set up the

racist designation as part of acceptable discourse. In other words, these commenters accepted

Sotomayor's racism as an uncontested starting point for legitimate debate on the topic.

Terryannonline pushed against this basis for debate and sought to define a racism that did not fit

Sotomayor's quote. Terryannonline had not seen the quote as a declaration of superiority and

argued that Sotomayor needed to say something to that effect for her to be racist.

> > *Star20 on June 4, 2009 at 10:37 PM*
> > Isn't the **definition of racist the belief that your race is better than others.** Please tell how that comment is racist? I fully admit that her comment might be a "wise" comment for a JUDGE to make but **I wouldn't call it racist.** – terryannonline
> >
> > **terry, u can't possibly be this obtuse here.**
> > "reach a better conclusion"
> > that's why we maintain **what we've maintained over the past month …** -Buckaroo
> >
> > terryannonline,
> > Think of it this way. **I'm a white guy.** I'm sure **I am smarter and make better decisions** than you. Any problem with that? – Star20
> >
> > > *Again, I think it was an unwise comment for her to make. But I don't think that comment makes her racist.*
> > > *terryannonline on June 4, 2009 at 10:48 PM*
> > "I would hope that a wise **White man** with the richness of his experiences would, more often than not, reach a **better conclusion** than **a Latina woman** who hasn't lived that life."
> > Would you consider **that a racist remark?** – holygoat

Both Star20 and holygoat maintained that the quote marked an obvious form of racism.

Terryannoline originally sought to cast the comment as ambiguous and therefore marked the

accusations against Sotomayor as too definitive. In many ways, this was a debate about whether

"we" should make definitive statements regarding Sotomayor's racism. Without any concession

from terryannonline, Buckaroo argued that Sotomayor's racism was "what we've maintained

over the past month." Buckaroo later attacked the membership of terryannonline by calling her

"harry reid" (the democratic senate leader).

"terryannonline on June 4, 2009 at 10:48 PM"
ok, harry reid, u stick with that talking point …
/eyeroll - Buckaroo

Terryannonline continued the debate and once again brought up the context of the quote. S/he

then argued that others were simplifying the quote and missing Sotomayor's meaning.

> *terryannonline,*
> *Think of it this way. I'm a white guy. I'm sure I am smarter and make better decisions than you.*
> *Any problem with that?*
> *Star20 on June 4, 2009 at 10:53 PM*
> Yes, I would have problem if you said that, however, you are simplifying it. She said that comment in the
> context of judging and she deals with **discrimination cases.** So it is not as simple as you put it. –
> terryannonline

> *She said that comment in the context of judging and she deals with discrimination cases. So it is*
> *not as simple as you put it.*
> *terryannonline on June 4, 2009 at 10:57 PM*
> Your statement is troubling here. **You do not seem to understand the purpose of a judge.** It isn't to use
> ones experience to judge cases but to use the law. If the law says that evidence proves a person guilty than
> he/she is to receive a consequence.
> Not that a judge uses personal experience to decide if they receive a consequence. - shick

Terryannoline made a statement similar to those found on the left when s/he cited the

context of "discrimination cases." Here and in the earlier comment terryannonline seems to fully

grasp (and somewhat endorse) the left's position on diversity. In response, shick argued that

Sotomayor argued against objectivity and in effect faithful adherence to the US Constitution.

Here shick managed to flaunt a rather audacious level of ignorance, by confusing a trial judge

with a Supreme Court Justice, while, at the same time, condemning terryannonline's

"ignorance." Others continued to defend a key contention on the right – that Sotomayor was

racist and/or made a racist statement. Another commenter responded directly to terryannonline

below.

> *Sorry but context does matter.*
> *terryannonline on June 4, 2009 at 11:07 PM*
> Not with this comment, the one she's said so many times in different contexts. She once said it in response
> to Justice O'Conner's remark that a wise man and wise woman would reach the same conclusion.
> Look, she may not be racist, but she **certainly thinks Latina women make better judges. I don't know**
> **how that isn't racist,** but that's not really my problem. - Esthier

Esthier saw the comment as racist because s/he interpreted it as saying that one group was superior to another group. The basic assumptions that I pointed to in the last section led to this kind of interpretation. The context of inequality, not just the context of discrimination, was ignored here. In other words, Esthier did not acknowledge that cases could be more suited to those who face discrimination likely because those on the right did not accept that any one group was more likely to face such discrimination in the first place. Participants on the right were unwilling to grant consideration to a context of racial inequality that might yield different experiences by race – especially with regard to discrimination. Esthier misinterprets what terryannoline meant by context.

On the same post, another set of interactions revolved around what was mostly a misunderstanding of one of the commenter's arguments. Here Rev Snow argued that pointing to Sotomayor's use of the word "wise" to criticize Sotomayor's statement was misguided. Many took this argument to mean that s/he had said not to criticize Sotomayor or that others were wrong on whether or not her comment was racist. Rev Snow, however, made a different, slightly off-topic point. When someone went off topic they created ambiguity with regard to the main point that participants had asserted. The commenter here did not contest the main point – that the speech was racist or that Sotomayor was a racist - as terryannonline had done. However, because Rev Snow engaged in an argument with those who had made that point, others reacted as if s/he had contested the main point.

> Several comments here are latching onto the phrase "wise Latina" and launching into amateur psychoanalysis of Judge Sotomayor. They appear to have missed that this phrasing comes from a statement attributed to Justice O'Connor that a "wise old man and a wise old woman reach the same conclusion."
> …
> **Attacks on Judge Sotomayor based on the mere appearance of the word "wise" in her comments are misplaced.** – Rev Snow

> *Rev Snow on June 5, 2009 at 12:36 AM*
> And you, even though it [Latina] is in your own comment, seem to have somehow missed her injection of Raza into it and instead have latched onto only the "wise" part as if it were somehow stand-alone.

If you are trying to defend her, you must really try to do better. – MB4

> *Attacks on Judge Sotomayor based on the mere appearance of the word "wise" in her comments are misplaced.*
> *Rev Snow on June 5, 2009 at 12:36 AM*
>
> That would be fine if it were true.
> Unfortunately, the two statements are the polar opposites of each other when considered in their proper context. **One is intended to reflect an absence of bias while the other is meant to affirm it.** As a challenge for you, which do you think is which? – FloatingRock

By criticizing the attack on Sotomayor, without conceding that parts of those attacks (i.e., the racial accusation) were valid, Rev Snow created ambiguity. MB4 directly pointed to the ambiguity in Rev Snow's comment when s/he wrote, "If you are trying to defend her…" FloatingRock argued that the word "wise" was not the problem, but instead that one statement, "is intended to reflect an absence of bias while the other is meant to affirm it." Here too, FloatingRock acted as if Rev Snow was "defending her," rather than perhaps clarifying the criticisms against Sotomayor. Rev Snow's position on Sotomayor's racism or the validity of Sotomayor's position was not discernable at this point and hence created ambiguity on the blog, which others worked to eliminate. They did so by pointing to the possible objectionable meaning of Rev Snow's comment.

In addition, FloatingRock does somewhat grasp the larger debate that Sotomayor and O'Connor were engaged in. S/he noted that the debate was over objectivity. However, like most on the right, s/he seemed to view the debate as acting with prejudice v. acting without prejudice. That was precisely the framing that Sotomayor rejected. Sotomayor had argued that such a choice between objectivity and bias is an illusion. Instead, she argued that the choice is between ignoring our prejudices or acknowledging our prejudices and also acknowledging that prejudice and perspectives can be both beneficial and harmful. Participants on the right did not acknowledge Sotomayor's framing of the issue. The comment below again misframed the argument between Sotomayor and O'Connor.

> *As a challenge for you, which do you think is which?*
> *FloatingRock on June 5, 2009 at 12:49 AM*

Maybe "Rev Snow" needs a little hint. One sounds along the lines of what a **Martin Luther King might say** and the other sounds along the lines of what an **Imperial Wizard of the Klan might say.** – Joe Bloggs

The misinterpretation of Martin Luther King and the attempt to link him to modern-day colorblindness came up several times on the right. Again, Joe Bloggs disagreed with Rev Snow but not on what Rev Snow actually said. Instead Joe Bloggs reasserted the main position of the blog. Rev Snow later responded and tried to hone his or her critique, while maintaining membership with the right. Here Rev Snow cited the offending comments and reframed the debate over Sotomayor's comments without necessarily taking a side.

> Scrolling back for some examples of what I was talking about…
> > *I think this woman has self esteem problems.*
> > *I can't think of any other reason one would repeat a line like that so often – it's not that she's trying to convince others – it's that's she's trying to convince herself.*
> > *HondaV65 on June 4, 2009 at 10:14 PM*
> >
> > *Maybe if she keeps saying she's a wise woman she'll eventually believe what she is saying. Maybe her parents never told her how wise she is so she's making up for it now.*
> > *Brat4life on June 4, 2009 at 10:33 PM*
> >
> > *What gets me is how she categorizes herself as 'wise'. No shortage of ego on the Left is there now.*
> > *Dr. ZhivBlago on June 4, 2009 at 10:37 PM*
> >
> > *Confident people just don't refer to themselves as "wise", and especially as often as she seems to.*
> > *holygoat on June 4, 2009 at 10:41 PM*
>
> Judge Sotomayor uses the word "wise" — quoting other judges and justices in an **ongoing discussion in the legal world about whether there are, or should be, female ways or male ways or Catholic ways or various ethnic ways of performing the duties of a judge.** And on the basis of that single word choice alone, she's labeled a candidate for psychiatric treatment.
> That's nonsense.
> By all means question her on her judicial philosophy. Criticize her comments. Oppose her confirmation. Take sides against her and with O'Connor and Ginsberg in the discussion noted above and in the link in my first post. Leave the ridiculous fantasy mindreading leaps out of it.
> You ought to do this because it is right and fair and honorable. Debate vigorously and passionately **without stooping into the mechanics of the smear machine. Leave that crap to the Left to continue to discredit themselves with it**. … - Rev Snow

Rev Snow accused others of behaving like "the left." Here Rev Snow asserted membership in two ways. First by saying that s/he was not contesting the main point about Sotomayor's racism and second by casting him or herself in opposition to the left. However, Rev

Snow still left some ambiguity with regard to that main point by not explicitly taking a side with

regard to whether the speech was racist. As such, other commenters continued to respond by

reiterating the key contention on the blog. This persistent repetition established the key

contention.

> *Judge Sotomayor uses the word "wise" — quoting other judges and justices in an ongoing discussion in the legal world about whether there are, or should be, female ways or male ways or Catholic ways or various ethnic ways of performing the duties of a judge. And on the basis of that single word choice alone, she's labeled a candidate for psychiatric treatment. That's nonsense.*
> *Rev Snow on June 5, 2009 at 2:00 AM*
>
> **What's nonsense is that anyone could seriously entertain the idea that, given the same level of intelligence/wisdom, the physiological differences in judges would enable one to generally arrive at a better understanding of the law and its application to a situation than another.** If one constantly arrived at better decisions, that judge would very likely be considered more intelligent/wiser than the one that constantly arrives at worse decisions. To try and take apart the determination of intelligence, or some theoretical "wisdom", from its manifestation in judicial decisions is the work of an imbecile.
> I mean, what is the measure of this mythical "wisdom" if not that it indicates a certain level of decisions generally being reached?
> It's laughable. – progressoverpeace
>
> *Leave the ridiculous fantasy mindreading leaps out of it.*
> *Debate vigorously and passionately without stooping into the mechanics of the smear machine.*
> *Rev Snow on June 5, 2009 at 2:00 AM*
>
> … it is pretty clear that **you are trying to divert attention away from the main subject, which is her clear racism.** Not going to work. – MB4

Progressoverpeace did not argue with Rev Snow's point but instead restated the position

regarding Sotomayor's racism and objected to Rev Snow's depiction of a legitimate debate on

the issue by categorizing the claim as "nonsense" that we cannot "seriously entertain." MB4

again accused Rev Snow of "trying to divert attention away from the main subject" of "her clear

racism." In the course of this debate, progressoverpeace refused to acknowledge racial

experiences and instead treated race as biological. Rev Snow then agreed with progressoverpeace

and the underlying framework but maintained his or her original point.

> *What's nonsense is that anyone could seriously entertain the idea that, given the same level of intelligence/wisdom, the physiological differences in judges would enable one to generally arrive at a better understanding of the law and its application to a situation than another.*
> *progressoverpeace on June 5, 2009 at 2:09 AM*
>
> **You are correct.** And that's how it ought to be done. Attack Judge Sotomayor's ideas, not her. Argue that she has wrong ideas about important subjects relevant to her duties on the bench. On that basis, oppose her confirmation.
> You can do (and most commenters here have done) that quite well without any need to toss

around the "Her mommy didn't hug her enough" garbage. – Rev Snow

While criticism continued, some commenters accepted that Rev Snow was not contesting the main point of what "we are saying" and instead just "how we are saying" it.

> *MB4 on June 5, 2009 at 3:40 AM*
> Unless I'm mistaken, Rev Snow isn't specifically disputing that the comment was racist, only that her use of the word "wise" doesn't necessarily indicate that she has emotional problems because she was evidently borrowing the word from O'Connor's prior statement, (even though the two statements have opposite meanings). - FloatingRock

Here FloatingRock clarified Rev Snow's comments and argued that they were not "disputing that the comment was racist." In this way, FloatingRock clarified Rev Snow's remarks with regard to the blog's racial perspective. S/he also managed the challenge to the right's assertions about racism. This interaction with Rev Snow demonstrates how participants guarded against ambiguity and further focused on what "we" as conservatives are saying.

Conclusion: Definitions of Race

The following example might flush out what the right was missing about Sotomayor's argument. All would agree, even here, that the Dread Scott decision was wrong. It was also a decision decided by nine white men. If that court had been made up of nine former black slaves, who had experiences of slavery that those nine white men did not, two things would likely be true. First, they would almost certainly have come to a different conclusion. Second, that different conclusion would also have almost certainty been better. Most on the right would likely agree with this assessment. However, they did not see slavery – which was undoubtedly a racialized experience as akin to any other form of disadvantage. In other words, many on the right likely did not view the experiences of blacks or Latinos as different from whites. In this way, those on the right failed to conceptualize race (and gender) as constituting a set of different experiences rather than simply a physiological difference (one that does not exist concerning race). In contrast, those on the left accepted these conceptualizations.

Conclusion: The National Conversation on Race

I began this project by thinking about the continual calls for a "national conversation on race" that often accompanies each racial controversy. After the Trayvon Martin case, in which an unarmed black teenager was shot and killed during an altercation with a neighborhood vigilante who pegged the teenager for a criminal, Attorney General Eric Holder, among others, called for a national conversation on race. President Obama, after the shooter was acquitted, argued that perhaps this conversation should not be lead by politicians but take place among the people.

I thought this was a rather odd thing to say. First, it seemed like a way of ducking the issue of racism – something that Obama has frequently done with little success. But second, I thought it unrealistic since race is implicated in so much political discourse. In other words, politicians are frequently talking about race in subtle ways even when they don't intend to (Winter 2008). As such, the public may hear a racial message even without the intent of a particular politician and furthermore may judge according to racial criteria.

I do, however, agree with Obama that a national conversation, at least as currently imagined, seems unproductive. Many have criticized our national discourse on race as unproductive. For example, journalist Ta-Neshi Coates wrote in 2013, "One of the problems with the idea that America needs a "Conversation On Race" is that it presumes that "America" has something intelligent to say about race." A look at the comments around the Martin case should confirm that sentiment. However, we cannot realistically reach beyond politics or partisans to find some ideal national conversation. First, a discussion on race cannot be disconnected from politics. I chose to look at racial discourse in the contexts of politics because race is intertwined with how we talk about politics. As Roberts (2011) points out, race "is a political category that

has been disguised as a biological one" (4). Questions about race are unavoidably political questions.

Given the increasing polarization in our society, some might suggest that we move past the partisans, like the ones I focus on, and seek a national conversation among a large swath of moderates may not appear on political blogs. Attorney General Holder voiced this oft-heard refrain when he said, that public debates on race are "too often simplistic and left to those on the extremes…" While a simplistic conversation left to extremes is certainly not desirable, I don't believe this characterization applies to the blogs I've examined. Before I again justify my focus on partisan blogs, I remind the reader that partisan blogs contain the most educated and most politically engaged citizens. As such, they are not likely to be shut out of any conversation on race. And again, blogs participants tend to align with mainstream racial frameworks. In addition, partisan blogs closely resemble the kind of spaces where people discuss racial controversies. In other words, when people begin to make sense of an issue or event they are unlikely to begin by consulting those with whom they have long-standing disagreements. Instead, they are likely to begin and sustain discussion among the like-minded both on-line and in increasingly politically sorted real world communities (Pew Research Center 2014; Bishop 2009).

Perhaps racial controversies are not the best time to have a national discussion on race, but it is unlikely that race would be brought to the national attention without one. On the other, simply bringing up racism can cause a racial controversy – this was in large part what made the Gates case such a big story. If Obama or the next President bought up the issue of reparations, that in and of itself would likely constitute a racial controversy complete with accusations of racism from both sides.

For these reasons, I see my findings here as representative of an important feature of the national conversation on race. Of course, I too desire a more productive national discourse on race. But how we examine the possibilities depends largely on what we consider the primary social problem. If we view polarization and hyper-partisanship as the primary political problem we end up with one evaluation. However, if we view the primary problem as racism we end up with another. The latter is the way most blog participants saw the problem. They depicted a battle with racism possibly akin to the battle between the Civil Rights Movement and the forces of Jim Crow. Viewed from this perspective the solution is not compromise or a tampering down of heated rhetoric but victory for their side. Here I will deal with a polarization framework first and then contrast that analysis with what I'll call a victory framework.

Polarization Framework

Participants on political blogs didn't simply dismiss or embrace discussion of racism. But, as I demonstrated with the Gates case, partisans dismissed certain aspects of the case and thereby declared some discussion of racism irrelevant and other discussions deeply important. This selective dismissal does not point towards meaningful engagement with our national disagreements on race. Instead, participants on these blogs carved out non-overlapping areas of concern regarding not just the case but racism in general. We saw that those on the right were unconcerned with racism when defined as a social system that privileges whites and disadvantages nonwhites and instead, were primarily concerned with negative outcomes regarding accusations of racism that implicated whites (either individually or as a group). On the left, commenters dismissed some parts of the controversy but sought to voice concern over the importance of racial profiling and racism in contemporary America.

The two sides also eviscerated common ground as they sought to account for the existences of a racial controversy surrounding the Gates case. On the right, participants argued that assertions of black disadvantage and white privilege were accusations of racism against all whites. From this starting point the only relevant racial factor is an individual's willful racism – a point easily denied by whites. Those on the left saw racism as a complicated system, somewhat outside of the individual. As such their take on violations of the racial peace did not depend simply on individual motivations. Furthermore, participants established a racial context through which they urged others to understand the event. They also did so by using a series of cross partisan tools. In doing so, the discourse seemed similar across the partisan divide but the underlying meanings continued to diverge. Of course, one could argue that they both share the goal of a racial peace or racial equality of some sort. However, the racial frameworks that even similar discourses on each side relied upon posited very different definitions of "racial equality."

While new information or new circumstances could, theoretically, spur partisans to reevaluate and perhaps alter racial frameworks, as I've shown, partisans adopted flexible strategies to guard against this outcome. Partisans did not engage in a discourse that could be simply be dismissed as rigid or simplistic. They processed new information and even disconfirming information but while this may have altered their view of the controversy, they employed flexible strategies to preserve distinct racial frameworks. Those on the right used the anecdote to promote a racial claim and engaged in what I called "promotive racialization," while those on the left, who were faced with a possibly disconfirming anecdote deracialized the case and engaged in a process of "protective deracialization" which also preserved their racial frames. I believe that a different case might have reversed which side employed which strategy, but these strategies make an outcome that preserved partisan-based racial frameworks likely.

My examination of the Sotomayor case once again demonstrated polarization over race. The case was a good one to look at the depiction of the partisan divide in terms of race because the controversy was over a political battle, instead of a politician's comments about a non-political event. In the first Sotomayor chapter, I demonstrated the tendency to use the information from the case to mark a racial order between a rational and moral non-racist party and an irrational and immoral racist party. These depictions of political opponents don't bode well for any mutual agreement between the parties. From this starting point, there is no viable partner with which to strike such a compromise.

The Sotomayor case also demonstrated how partisans could have access to the same set of facts and yet come to widely different conclusions because they interpret agreed upon facts according to divisive racial frameworks. While each side acknowledged the role of race in politics and the Sotomayor nomination, the discussion around identity politics showed that the two sides did not acknowledge the same things as problems.

Lastly, when the issue of diversity came under discussion, the two sides saw their conclusions as obvious and not debatable even amongst themselves. Underlying each side's belief in the obviousness of its take on diversity was a fundamentally different conception of race itself. While those on the left viewed race as a social position, those on the right saw race as something akin to a biological status. This distinction constitutes a fundamental difference regarding how race functions in contemporary America.

My methodological focus on interactions allowed me to point out that it was not simply majorities on each blog that engaged in the above practices. Instead, these positions were the agreed upon result of interactions among partisans. In other words, these are group discourses not simply majority discourses. I argue that polarization should not be represented solely by poll

questions to individuals who identify as liberal/conservative or Republican/Democrat but instead, we need to understand how partisans interact with one another and pay closer attention to the result of that interaction. In other words, here I believe that the whole is greater (and more important) than the sum of its individual parts (i.e. participants and comments). For if we were only to look at individual opinions isolated from their contexts, then we could imagine a middle ground where the two side overlap. However, by looking at the entirety of partisan interaction we see that much of that overlap is illusory.

King and Smith (2011) note hostility between right and left in their recent book, *Still a House Divided*. The book offers a well researched, comprehensive, and persuasive depiction of historical and contemporary racial orders. They then suggest that despite different policy preferences (i.e. colorblind v. color conscious) the two sides could tamp down inflammatory rhetoric and agree that dealing with racial inequality will require a mix of race-neutral policies and race-targeting. King and Smith (2011) suggest that some kind of commission designed to cull the best social science research toward developing an optimal set of policy proposals could solve many of the racial problems in our society. I don't disagree with this prescription. In other words, this is desirable but it may be better to think of this as the outcome of a political battle between right and left, not the starting point.

In other words, the coming together of two sides in some kind of race-neutral/race-conscious compromise would be nice, but it doesn't accurately describe reality anymore than does the term "post-racial." Right and left are not collections of individuals with varying viewpoints. Instead they are social groups with their own discourses who are increasingly attuned to their own media and inhabit distinct and separate social worlds (Pew Research Center 2014; Bishop 2009).

Still, generously read, the call for a national discussion might be a call to cease demonization of our political opponents – a call to tamp down the hyperpartisanship that so many lament about politics today. In this reading, the blogs, say representatives from hotair.com and dailykos.com could agree to some form of etiquette rules. They could at the very least agree to stop calling political opponents racists and moderate out any comments that do so. They could stop defining opponents by accusations that they hate others. Lastly, they could stop trying to present the other side as one that lacks moral legitimacy. In other words, each side could cease the attempt to "win" and drain the other side of moral legitimacy. I think this would be a good recommendation if the goal is to stop two sides from fighting rather than to effectively deal with racial inequality and racism. But if we move toward the latter goal, my research looks differently.

Victory Framework

If we set up the goal as the victory of one side over the other rather than an accommodation between the two sides, then the selective dismissal we saw in Chapter 3 is not simply a means to pull the two sides apart but a way of focusing attention around important and relevant themes. References to the racial peace and the underlying divisive assumptions don't simply hamper communication between the two sides but allow each side to put forth and develop versatile collective action frames. The flexible strategies I pointed to in Chapter 5 are then not simply ways of avoiding any change to one's ideology in the face of new evidence, but instead a sign of the durability of a perspective in the face of disconfirming anecdotes. In regards to the Sotomayor case, the depictions of the racial order are not simply vitriol but a form of mobilization. The last two Sotomayor chapters then point to the development of a set of interpretative tools by which to evaluate race in America. First, in the identity politics section

each side develop interpretations regarding the role of identity in politics and then in the diversity chapter they take on what is means to analyze sometime using race by evoking the fundamental nature of race in America.

Sociologists certainly consider interpretative frameworks useful. After all, one of the most important things we do in sociology is teach students to understand identities, like race, as social constructions. We also provide the tools to interpret one's social reality. I frequently warn students against using ancedotes as evidence for larger social claims. As such, we might see a process of "protective deracialization" not as stubborn ideological rigidity but as a rejection of using ancedotes for evidence. Similarly, we could view "promotive racialization" as similar to the use of illustrative examples that we employ to concretize larger social forces. In sum, these processes are not wholly different from what a sociological analysis of these cases might do.

I often, like many sociologists, inform students that sociology is something we all do. We are not always aware we are doing this (as I suspect many of the participants would not qualify their comments as sociological analysis) and we rarely do this in a systematic and theoretically grounded way. But, this points to a different problem with the discourses I have highlighted than the problem illuminated by a polarization framework. While participants are preforming analysis they may be doing it poorly. This framework leads us to much of the sociological research on racism. For we need that research in order to assess the accuracy of each side.

While much has been written about the inaccuracies of the conservative position on race (see Brown et al. 2005), less attention has been given to the inaccuracies on the left. I alluded to one important one when I addressed the misaligned politicization that occurs on both sides in Chapter 6, but there are other problems.

Still, discourses associated with the American left, and the Democratic Party, tend to adhere to a more expansive definition of racism – that includes prejudice and discrimination but also institutional racism. Left discourses posit that past discrimination shapes and conditions present day opportunities, views individual level prejudice and discrimination as more widespread and consequential than those on the right and takes seriously claims of systemic minority disadvantage while dismissing claims of white disadvantage. This is a starting point for a more coherent and focused racial discourse to emerge and hopefully prompt change.

Again, while academics have found problems with conservative views on race and racism (Brown et al. 2005), such findings are not the same as saying that conservatives operate with a flawed conception of racism and liberals operate with an accurate conception of racism. As Brown et al. (2005) note:

> Much of the debate about race in America today still revolves around the question of whether ongoing racial disparities in schooling, jobs, income, incarceration, and other realms are mainly the result of current overt discrimination or the result of flawed culture and behavior of people of color. … the correct answer is neither. Most of the current gap in life chances and various measures of performance between blacks and whites reflect the legacy of past decisions – decisions that cumulatively resulted in a profound imbalance in the most fundamental structures of opportunity and support in America… (226-227).

As Brown et al. (2005) note much racial discourse results in false debates – debates that are, at best, uniformed by sociological research, and at worst, untethered from empirical realities. Others, like Ford (2008) have made similar points.

The question then becomes whether or not the left blogs and left discourse in general can accommodate a sociological understanding of race – or whether the seamless interjection of Jim Crow Era depictions of the racial divide not only potentially mobilizes but also simultaneously confuses the issues at hand. Or whether the adoption of some CB discourse, like we saw in the Racial Peace chapter, pulls the left onto a field limited by colorblind rhetoric. Those on the left

may win a battle using these tactics but they will have moved the discussion away from a more sociologically grounded approach and consequentially an accurate view of social reality.

When I began this project my initial take on the national conversation on race went like this:

If history is any guide we don't need a conversation but a fight to deal with racism. Accommodation with the South did not end slavery. Similarly, the divide between supporters of Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement could not be bridged. The Civil Rights Act was not passed because tempers died down and racial accusations were less frequent. It was not a national conversation that sidelined Martin Luther King and the NAACP, the SCLC or, for that matter, the KKK and the CCC. Instead, these groups fought, sometimes violently, and certainly publicly. In the end, one side drained the other side of moral legitimacy and "won." Today, we all celebrate that victory.

Similarly, gay rights advocates did not convince Pat Robertson et al. that they were right. Nor did they meet such people half way. Instead, they drained Pat Robertson of moral legitimacy and convinced those who weren't aligned to side with them against the Pat Robertson's of the world. Gay rights advocates have, by this writing, largely won the battle (Hirshman 2012). They did so without pretending that there was a legitimate conservative position on the issue. Instead, activists (and sociologists) pointed out that the position of conservatives was not supported by science that attempts to square the conservative position with universal principles of choice, liberty, and equality meant distorting and /or making up scientific claims (American Sociological Association 2013).

While I still endorse the general thrust of this position, in light of my findings I believe that the shape of that fight matters greatly. In terms of polarization, I must concede that the two

sides may be able to agree on a policy for different reason, but such an outcome is far less likely given the current polarization – polarization that the discourse I have reviewed exacerbates. In terms of the victory framework, the accuracy and coherence of each side, particularly the side that seeks to end the advantages of those labeled whites (King and Smith 2008) should be a matter of concern. No doubt racial controversies will continue for the foreseeable future. There have been many since I began this project. Hopefully, this research will help others better understand the shape of the battles that develop around these controversies and provide opportunities for a better engagement with the next national conversation on race.

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