

Reading Race

An Experimental Study of The Effect of Political Advertisement's Racial
Tone on Candidate Perception and Vote Choice

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Paper prepared for presentation at the 61st annual national conference of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 3-6, 2003, Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, Illinois.

We would like to thank the staff at the Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive at the University of Oklahoma for their assistance. We would also like to thank Amanda Boyer (Avila University) for her help with data entry, and Michele Claibourn, Courtney Cullison, Weslynn Reed, Denise Scannell, Craig Stapley and Josh Stockley (all at the University of Oklahoma) for their help with data collection.

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Abstract

As part of the Project on Race in Political Advertising, this paper presents the results of an experiment designed to test the effect of various forms of racial messages in televised campaign advertisements. Building from Mendelberg's (2001) theory of implicit racial messages, we exposed groups of respondents to implicit and explicit messages from a contest in which one candidate was white and the other was African American. Results confirm Mendelberg's earlier findings, and move forward our extension of her theory to include both "racial" and "racist" political messages.

Contemporary scholarship in race and political communication synthesizes the assumptions and findings of previous research in two distinct areas. Media critics and scholars of race in a variety of fields have generally concluded that racial minorities are misrepresented in media images that portray them overwhelmingly in negative and stereotypical ways (Chilsen 1969; Hall 1997). Scholars of voting behavior largely conclude that a significant relationship exists between a voter's race, his or her tendency to recognize and embrace racial stereotypes, and his or her evaluation of a minority candidate (Terkildsen 1993; Williams 1990). However, mixed conclusions have been drawn as to whether the race of the candidate and the voter are the primary predictor of positive or negative evaluations of minority candidates (Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz and Nitz 1995).

Most recent studies have sought to connect the areas of race, media and political behavior by utilizing the theories of framing and priming that offer individual psychological processing of media as the linking factor between the media messages and voter perceptions of candidates and voting probabilities (Reeves 1997; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Perhaps the most significant work in this area to date is Mendelberg's (2001) study of the effects of racial appeals in political campaigns. Mendelberg's conception of variations in cultural norms of race (one of equality, the other of inequality) as the basis for the prevailing form of racial messages (whether implicit or explicit) and as the basis for white voters' psychological processing of such messages integrates the most significant findings of each of these previous areas.

However, while Mendelberg's theory of racial appeals (and the way in which they can either frame political issues or individual candidate images and psychologically appeal to latent racist predispositions held by white voters) provides a firm foundation from which to base any further discussion of these issues, the theory itself is limited in several ways. First, the theory only applies to a single dynamic in which racial appeals are used; that is, such appeals are used by white candidates who draw on negative associations of blacks in order to negatively impact black candidate's or interest (or black interests generally) in voters' choice of candidates. While this scenario is certainly central to our understanding of the intersections of race, communication and political behavior, it does not tell us about the wider variety of ways in which racial appeals are

used in the political campaign process. We offer a distinction between “racist” and “racial” messages that provides for the reality that racial appeals are used by non-white candidates with varying motivations, and that such messages used by white candidates are not singly motivated by efforts to appeal to negative stereotypes of minority candidates or interests.

Second, while Mendelberg’s theory is empirically substantiated through individual reactions to visual stimuli in the form of language and images in print news sources, it does not test the theory given what is arguably the most powerful medium for presenting messages via images – television. So, while Mendelberg argues that implicit racial appeals are most powerfully presented in images rather than simply linguistic inscription, the strength of appeal of such images has not been tested, given the assumption that television messages are, as a whole, stronger than printed (static) images, and they are intentional (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994).

Given this, the purpose of our study on which this paper is based is three-fold. First, we seek to test Mendelberg’s original theory of implicit messages using political advertisements as the primary stimulus. Second, we seek to test the assumptions of those areas of the theory that we have elaborated upon. Specifically we seek to ascertain if “racist” messages have the same effect as “racial” messages. To a lesser degree we test whether racial messages used by a black candidate can mitigate the effects of a racist message by testing the impact of a racial message used by a black candidate. More justification for these distinctions and explanation of how they are tested in the present study are given below, where we outline Mendelberg’s theory of implicit messages and present the ways in which we extend the scope of her theory. Third, we seek to test Mendelberg’s assumption regarding voter responses to explicit racial messages to test whether the same assumption of the effects of implicit and explicit messages remain constant when the source of the racial message is the black candidate.

Previous Work

The effect of media on political attitudes and behaviors can be traced back to Walter Lippman’s writings early in the twentieth century (1922). Since that time, the influence of the field of psychology has turned attention away from early hypotheses about direct media effects to a more sophisticated understanding of the way news and other media-based stimuli can affect political attitudes. Studies in two different areas form the foundation for recent explorations into the relationship of race and media in political campaigns. First, a wide variety of scholars have concluded that a variety of mass mediated forms of communication have a direct influence on racial attitudes, particularly on perceptions of people of color (Cottle 2000; Hall 1997; Kamalipour and Carilli 1998; Rodriguez 1997). It has been generally concluded that most mediated communication about racial minorities presents such individuals and groups in stereotypical ways (Chilsen 1969) – from associations of minorities (especially African Americans) with criminal behavior (especially in television news) as simple-minded caricatures (Cose 1997; Gandy 1998), or as violent and threatening (Drago 1992; Gibbons 1993; Gray 1996).

While not drawing a direct linkage between media images and their effects on perceptions of minority candidates, a second body of literature has demonstrated that whites’ perceptions of black candidates mirror many of those stereotypes allegedly played out in various mediated forms. For example, in a national survey studying white and black perceptions of black politicians’ electability, Williams (1990) found that most

whites attributed characteristics such as “intelligent,” “a strong leader,” “knowledgeable,” “hard-working,” “gets things done,” “experienced,” and “trustworthy” more often to white candidates (25%-50%) than black candidates (5%). Terkildsen (1993) also found that whites, particularly those who harbor some racial prejudice, tend to evaluate black candidates more negatively than white candidates. Terkildsen further concluded that a black candidate’s skin color had a significant effect on the evaluation of his or her competence such that the darker-skinned candidate was evaluated more harshly.

However, the conclusions drawn from these and other such studies have been contradicted, to some degree. For instance, Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz and Nitz (1995) suggest that despite the correlation between espoused stereotypes and perception or evaluation of candidates, a candidate’s race is not necessarily the most salient predictor of minority candidates’ negative evaluations. Their findings suggest that

in line with an “assumed characteristics” perspective that evaluations ultimately depend on what traits specific racial or ethnic stereotypes suggest minority group members should have, what traits they do have, and what evaluative significance is attached to these assumed and individual traits, as influenced by their desirability and correspondence with expectancy (243).

In this regard then, an individual’s previously-held ideologies and beliefs about what a minority candidate should “look like” politically is a significant factor in overall evaluations of minority candidates, rejecting the notion that race exclusively (or “racist” attitudes) are the primary factor in white voters’ assessment of minority candidates.

This is consistent with Howell and McClean’s (2001) study of race and performance on evaluations of black mayors. These authors, who also find a strong relationship between evaluator race and the evaluation of an African American candidate, concluded that an official’s performance was a more significant factor than race. Because of this, one’s ideology (more specifically, one’s political party affiliation) may trump racial and other factors in one’s evaluation of the competency of a minority officeholder (or a candidate who has previously held a public office).

Despite ongoing continuing scholarship in this regard, research over the past decade has begun to merge the assumptions and findings from these two areas of research in order to understand the way in which media representations of minorities influence voter perception and choice. This recent scholarship has focused on the psychological impacts of racially stereotypical messages in media on political attitudes and citizens’ voting behavior. Work in this area has relied on two primary theoretical constructs: framing and priming. William Jacoby (2000) writes that “framing effects occur when different presentations of an issue generate different reactions among those who are exposed to that issue” (751). Cognitive psychologists have conducted research on the effects of differing contextualizations on attitudes and decision-making (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 1982, 1984; Tversky and Kahneman 1981), concluding, in part, that individuals process information differently depending on the employed frame, and that this difference in information processing leads to observable and expected differences in actions taken or choices preferred.

In research on framing and race, the emphasis has been on how the media (generally news) frame a particular campaign as “racial” (generally when a minority candidate is involved) (Clay 1992; Reeves 1997), or by framing a particular minority candidate in a given context. An example of this is given by Gibbons (1993), who demonstrated how the spatial association of news stories worked to frame the image of

Jesse Jackson as devious and criminal during his 1988 presidential campaign. The framing of issues and candidate image in these ways is done by both opposing candidates in a given campaign and by third-party mediators, such as news media or communications from other interest groups. This body of research adds to the previous by injecting the possibility that mass media, in addition to individual prejudices and ideological positions, may influence voting behavior.

In this regard, research on race and political communication that employs priming as a primary construct focuses on the way in which mass media help to make deeply-held attitudes and beliefs more accessible to individuals. In this case, the focus is on the use of racial cues to allow individuals to more easily access negative racial stereotypes and fears (Entman and Rojecki 2000; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Mendelberg 2001). Most recently, the notion of priming (supported and employed to some degree by framing theories) has been used to show directly how racial appeals are used by candidates to gain a competitive advantage by white candidates over African American opponents by using largely implicit messages to prime racial predispositions. The priming of such predispositions, it is believed, translates into voters' negative perceptions of the minority candidate, or minority point of view (if an opponent asserts that another non-minority candidate is heralding the interests of minorities). This, in turn, results in a decision not to vote for the "targeted" candidate.

The most expansive work on the effects of racial priming in political campaign communication, as mentioned above, is Mendelberg's (2001) *The Race Card*. In her concept of cultural norms (equality versus inequality), Mendelberg links findings in all three of the areas discussed in this review. This concept provides the predictive basis not only for the forms of racial appeals that will prevail in political campaign discourse, but for white voters' processing of such messages, as well.

Mendelberg's Theory of Implicit Appeals

Mendelberg's (2001) theory asserts that racial messages will most often take the form of implicit, rather than explicit, verbal appeals. It rests on the consideration of the two sets of actors in the political decision-making process: the candidates and the messages they construct, and the predispositions and processing frameworks of such messages by white voters. Mendelberg claims that politicians rely on racial messages when they seek to violate egalitarian norms and mobilize white voters who harbor racial resentment. White voters also respond to such messages out of the desire not to appear racially biased, while actually holding to certain resentments, fears and prejudices regarding blacks in areas such as work, violence and sexuality, as well as their claim to public resources (7). Differently stated, because of a cultural norm of racial equality currently in existence in U.S. culture, explicit racial messages are not accepted because they violate the equality norm, but implicit messages make it through the psychological gate-keeping mechanism and work to prime underlying fears and stereotypes that whites contend they eschew. Mendelberg's primary thesis is assumed in our present study, and is more explicitly stated in her definition of an implicit appeal:

Implicit racial appeals convey the same message as explicit racial appeals, but they replace the racial nouns and adjectives with more oblique references to race. They present an ostensibly race-free conservative position on an issue while incidentally alluding to racial stereotypes or to a perceived threat from African Americans. Implicit racial appeals discuss a nonracial matter and avoid a direct

reference to black inferiority or to white group interest. They forego professions of racial antipathy and do not endorse segregation or white prerogatives. They convey a message that may violate the norm of racial equality by submerging it in nonracial content. In an implicit racial appeal, the racial message appears to be so coincidental and peripheral that many of its recipients are not aware that it is there (9).

This is consistent with Glaser's (1996) findings that, at least in the South, Republican messages on race claimed to be "conservative not racist" (70). He discovered that "racial issues [were] expressed in conservative terms" and that "racial appeals [were made] in the name of fairness" (70, 71). Again, Mendelberg asserts that images are most effective in constructing implicit racial appeals because they can mask explicit meanings in a way that simple verbal language cannot.

The Project on Race in Political Advertising

The premise of Mendelberg's theory is that whites are the primary actors in the drama of political campaigns that make use of racial appeals; they are primarily those who have something to gain by employing racial rhetoric, and the psychological underpinnings that give rise to the success of such messages exist primarily in the minds of whites in terms of their judgment of blacks and other minorities. While this premise is clearly justified and is utilized in our larger study (*The Project on Race in Political Advertising*), it does not explicate the variety of ways in which racial rhetoric is expressed in the campaign process. A previous content analysis (McIlwain and Caliendo 2002) employing Mendelberg's definitions of implicit and explicit racial messages to identify such appeals in political advertising spots revealed that these forms of appeals were used at virtually the same frequency by African American candidates as they were by white candidates. This unexpected finding led us to broaden the scope of Mendelberg's theory in several ways.

With the realization that both black and white candidates use racial appeals, we contend that what differs from Mendelberg is not the form in which such an appeal is constructed, but the differential motivations for employing them. Based on this we offer a distinction between "racist" appeals and "racial" appeals. As has been argued by other scholars (hooks 1995; Jordan 1974; Katz 1988; Lipsitz 1998; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997; Wilson 1978), we agree that because of institutionalized power differentials it is a mischaracterization to refer to a member of a racial minority group as being "racist." Given this, our definition of a racist appeal is based on Mendelberg's premise that white attitudes about blacks are not only deeply rooted in the psyche of whites, but that racial appeals speak to attitudes that go beyond the individual and are concretized in other forms of institutional structures from media to government. This is to say, white fears, resentments and prejudices are represented and given support, to some degree, by multiple layers of institutional structures that provide a more powerful corpus of psychological racial predispositions to be appealed to. Racial messages that might be employed by non-whites, though they appeal to audience psychology to some degree, have less of a platform on which to base an appeal. Such psychological attitudes do not generally relate to perceptions of upholding a racial power balance that favors whites over blacks, but are more likely to capitalize on more diffuse beliefs about race and race relations.

In making this distinction we offer five propositions of how, in what circumstances and to what ends racial messages might be employed in political campaigns, especially in advertising spots. First, minority candidates may use racial messages in campaigns against white candidates in order to mitigate the effects of racially stereotypical messages employed by the white candidate to negatively affect the perception of the black candidate. In the 1990 North Carolina senate race, for instance, Jesse Helms ran advertising spots that chastised his black opponent, Harvey Gantt, for supporting “racial” quotas, “making the color of your skin more important than your qualifications” and implying the stealing of jobs by unqualified whites. In response, Gantt employed the same appeal to race in advertisements, but did so to combat the notion that his election would have such a result. The manner in which the appeal was constructed was the same in both ads, but clearly each candidate had a different motivation for employing it.

Second, minority candidates may employ racial messages to separate themselves from stereotypical images of their racial group; that is, they may do so to invoke a color-blind message in order to appeal to white voters. This scenario, which is generally the case when black candidates are running in districts where a large portion of the voting population is white, often leads black candidates to make a “preemptive strike,” so to speak, counting on the possibilities that white voters might view him or her as seeking to represent only black interests. The phrases “worked my way up,” or “worked hard and played by the rules,” or images contrasting black candidates’ fore-parents who were slaves with their present image of distinction were often used by black candidates in such situations, generally without the impetus of having to respond to a negative racial appeal aired by a white opponent. (Gary Franks’s 1998 Connecticut race against Christopher Dodd, Allan Wheat’s 1994 Missouri primary race against Marsha Murphy and Carol Mosley Braun’s 1998 Illinois race against Peter Fitzgerald are all prominent examples.)

Third, white candidates may use racial messages to rehabilitate an existing racist image, not necessarily to appeal to and gain minority votes, but to mitigate the risks of appearing to violate the norm of racial equality held by white voters. In a rare ad in his 1990 race against Harvey Gantt, Jesse Helms is shown visiting children in a hospital. Quick edits characterize the movement of images in the ad, but the final frame which holds still for about five seconds, shows him smiling and shaking hands with a black child. These and other such ads demonstrate that a candidate’s anti-minority image may not be altered enough to gain minority votes, but the softening of one’s image may have the effect of not providing cause for mobilization for minorities.

Fourth, minority candidates may employ racial messages when facing other minority candidates. This form of message generally rests on appeals to racial authenticity. In races in which both candidates are non-white, these forms of appeal are not intended to draw on voters’ attitudes on race per se, but on ideological beliefs about appropriate political strategy used to further minority interests. In this way, the conflict is not between upholding or violating norms of equality, but between either side of the debate over within-group solidarity or assimilation. While our analysis of ads thus far have not included any of these such contests, its possibility was demonstrated in the 2002 Alabama primary election between incumbent Earl Hilliard (D) and Arthur Davis (D). With Davis receiving support from those representing Jewish interests, the focus of Hilliard’s appeals became essentially “Davis just looks black, but he really represents white (and Jewish) interests not the interest of blacks” (language ours) (see Halbfinger, 2002). The question remains at this juncture as to whether the form of these messages,

whether implicit or explicit, is most effective in priming the necessary attitudes over within group solidarity to be successful.

A fifth and final proposition is that minority candidates running in majority-minority districts may use racial messages in order to prime anti-white sentiment in order to appeal to and mobilize minority constituencies or whites who adhere to egalitarian norms. Several political realities that are currently changing and beginning to take shape necessitate a broader understanding of the variety of ways that racial appeals make their way into political campaign strategy, either intentionally or unintentionally. First, the growth of Hispanics to become a numerical majority of the population in some areas will likely have the effect that more Hispanics will be squaring off against white candidates in future federal races. Second, the slow but steady decline of steadfast loyalty of blacks with the Democratic Party will likely lead to election contests between blacks in majority-black districts to become increasingly competitive.¹ Third, the drive towards realignment of previously drawn majority-minority district will likely change the voting audience of districts such that more racial parity exists. All of these elements and others, attested to by a plethora of recent research (Bostis 2002; Lublin 2002; also Guinier 1995), beg for the exploration of how the dynamics of race have been played out in past campaigns so that we may better understand and predict how they may be used in the future.

This Study

The purpose of the present study is to experimentally test Mendelberg's original theory of implicit appeals, as well as some of the aspects of our extension of her theory. To the degree that we test Mendelberg's theory, this study differs from her methods in several ways. First, our primary stimuli for testing the effect of racial appeals are televised political advertising spots sponsored by individual candidates. We agree with Mendelberg that

implicit racial appeals can be generated with words alone. But finding words that have a clear racial association yet seem to be nonracial is a difficult undertaking. Visual images are a more effective way to communicate implicitly. Indeed, visual images have proven to be powerful cues for evoking racial stereotypes. Stereotypical or threatening images can communicate derogatory racial meaning in a more subtle way than an equivalent verbal statement (9).

Given this, we believe that using television advertising is the best way to test how the varieties of ways racial messages are used and their effects on potential voters. This helps to control the actual message and avoid news media framing of racial messages. The intentional nature of advertising will have a greater bearing on the construction of the racial messages and the possible effects. That is, judgments that follow from the ads are more likely to be attributable to the attitudes and intents of the candidate himself or herself, rather than a news media outlet's framing and interpretation of the message. This

¹ In our efforts to develop a comprehensive list of black candidates who have run for federal office in general and primary elections from 1952 to the present, it is quite clear that up until around the 1990's most black candidates who were elected held office for a long period of time and were replaced by a successor who was "hand picked." This is assumed because the races following an officeholder's retirement generally either had only one candidate, or the race was overwhelmingly lopsided in favor of one candidate.

notion is supported by Jacobs's and Shapiro's (1994) extension of priming processes, which distinguishes between unintentional priming that follows from news media's reporting on issues and campaigns, and intentional priming, which is the "deliberate strategies that candidates pursue to influence voters" (528).

Third, rather than manipulating only the exposure to certain kinds of messages such that one group received one form of racial message, another a different kind, etc., subjects in our experiment were exposed to various message forms simultaneously. That is, all subjects, regardless of their exposure to the explicit or implicit message test stimulus, were simultaneously exposed to some non-racial messages.

Fourth, and finally, to test, to a limited degree, our hypothesis about the additional dimensions in which racial messages are used, we also submitted subjects to racial messages by the minority candidate to ascertain whether or not such messages had any differing effect than when used by a white candidate.

Data and Methods

The experiment was run at a large Midwestern university in January 2003. Students in five introductory-level political science classes, and two introductory-level communication classes were asked to participate in the study. Table 1 reveals the demographics of the participants. While we were not able to randomize the respondents, this sample of convenience is quite diverse with respect to sex, party identification and political ideology. The sample has a higher percentage of white respondents than the population of the United States, and there is a disproportionate number of Protestants.² Age is always a concern with undergraduate experiments, and since the majority of students were in their first-year, it is no surprise that the average age is 19.7 years. We randomly assigned each class to an experimental group, only monitoring for relative equity with regard to number of students in each group.

[Table 1 about here]

After signing a voluntary consent form, students in five experimental groups were shown six different advertising spots from the 1990 North Carolina Senate Race between Jesse Helms (R) and Harvey Gantt (D) (see the appendix for a description of each spot). The tape contained a randomized arrangement of spots, showing each twice (each respondent saw twelve total spots). Based on our previous content analysis of these spots, we carefully chose three spots from each candidate that contained no racial messages whatsoever. We then chose three spots from each candidate that contained implicit political messages, and three from each that contained explicit political messages. None of the six ads that were shown to respondents in the control group contained racial messages. Respondents in the "Helms implicit" group were shown three Helms ads that contained implicit racial messages, and the same three non-racial ads from Gantt that were seen by those in the control group. Similarly, those in the "Helms explicit" group were shown three explicitly racial ads for Jesse Helms, as well as the same three non-racial ads from Gantt as were seen by those in the control and "Helms implicit" groups. We repeated the same procedure for the "Gantt implicit" and "Gantt explicit" groups, showing the Helms control ads, in addition to the unique ads for Gantt

² Since race is a primary focus, our greatest concern is in this regard. As part of the larger project, we will run the same experiment at a historically black college to compare results to this study.

in each of those groups. After viewing the spots, respondents completed a questionnaire that began with an item asking them to choose a candidate, as if they were casting a ballot.³ They were then asked to rate each candidate on a feeling thermometer.⁴ The remaining items ranged from demographic information to items designed to measure symbolic racism.

Results

We begin with a series of difference-in-means tests to compare responses to two dependent variables with respect to experimental group. Put simply, we are interested in respondents' perceptions of the candidates, as well as for whom they would vote, if given the opportunity. The first variable is captured by way of the individual feeling thermometer scores for each candidate. Since feeling thermometers have a tendency to vary greatly among respondents (while a 75 may be "quite warm" to one respondent, it may seem "rather chilly" to another), we calculated the difference in thermometer scores by subtracting the Helms value from the Gantt value. What results is a scale that ranges from -100 (100 for Helms, 0 for Gantt) to +100 (0 for Helms, 100 for Gantt). We compared the differences in the means for each experimental group, with the following hypotheses, culled from the above-mentioned literature and theories, in mind:

H_{1a}: Respondents viewing implicit racial ads by Helms will feel more strongly about him than those who either view no racial ads or those who view explicit ads by Helms.

H_{1b}: Respondents viewing implicit racial ads by Gantt will feel more strongly about him than those who either view no racial ads or those who view explicit ads by Gantt.

Table 2 presents the results related to these hypotheses.⁵ It is clear that while respondents in all groups have net rankings that favor Harvey Gantt, those in the group that saw Jesse Helms's implicitly racial ads give him the most favorable net ranking of all the groups—a net gain of some 13 "degrees" compared to Gantt. Helms also did better with respondents in the group that saw Gantt's explicit ads than with those in the control group (about seven "degrees" better). In fact, Helms had a better net ranking among those who saw Gantt's explicit ads than those who saw his own explicit ads. This lends support to Mendelberg's theory that implicit racial advertising works better for white candidates than explicitly racial advertising. But our notion of "racial" messages holds, as well, as Gantt's strongest base of evaluations came from those who watched his implicitly racial ads (nearly eight "degrees" net gain from the control group). Further, there is a dramatic

³ The question read as follows: "If you were able to vote in the election for which these television ads were run, who would you be most likely to vote for?" [response options: Harvey Gantt (D), Jesse Helms (R)].

⁴ The question read as follows: "We would like to get your feelings about these two candidates. Please rate each of them using what is called a 'feeling thermometer.' You may use any number from 0 to 100 for a rating. A rating between 50 and 100 degrees means that you feel warm or favorable toward the candidate. A rating between 0 and 50 degrees means that you don't feel too favorable toward the candidate. If you do not feel particularly warm or cold toward a candidate, you may rate him a 50."

⁵ A one-way Analysis of Variance test indicates that there are statistically significant difference between experimental groups with regard to the difference in feeling thermometer scores ($F=6.07$, $p<.001$).

difference (some fifteen “degrees” warmer) in evaluations of Gantt among those who saw his implicit ads, as compared to those who saw his explicit spots.

[Table 2 about here]

Our other interest is in identifying any differences in which candidate the respondent would vote for if given the opportunity. This variable is a dichotomous measure, where 1 indicates a vote for Helms, and 2 indicates a vote for Gantt. The following hypotheses are tested:

H_{2a}: Respondents viewing implicit racial ads by Helms are more likely to vote for him than those who either view no racial ads or explicit ads by Helms.

H_{2b}: Respondents viewing implicit racial ads by Gantt are more likely to vote for him than those who either view no racial ads or explicit ads by Gantt.

Table 3 presents the results of these difference-in-means tests.⁶ Again, respondents in the group that saw Jesse Helms’s implicit advertisements were the most likely to vote for him, whereas those in Gantt’s implicit group were most likely to vote for him. Whether we consider candidate evaluation or vote choice (two related constructs, to be certain), implicit advertisements seem to work best.

[Table 3 about here]

We turn now to multivariate predictive models for each of these dependent variables. It is possible that the differences in means are a function of some other variables that have been found to be relevant to vote choice. Predictive regression models allow us to test the results above, while controlling for a number of other variables. Further, we can test the possibility that the respondent’s race is important in an interactive way with other variables. Hypotheses 1_a and 1_b are considered again in Table 4.

[Table 4 about here]

The first model includes no distinction with regard to groups. Instead, this model predicts vote choice by way of the respondent’s race, political ideology and attentiveness to media and current events.⁷ About a quarter of the variance in the net feeling

⁶ A one-way Analysis of Variance test indicates that there are statistically significant difference between experimental groups with regard to vote choice ($F=4.43$, $p<.01$).

⁷ The questions read as follows: Race “What race do you consider yourself to be?” [response options: white, black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, other]. Responses were collapsed into a dichotomous measure of “white” or “non-white.” Ideology “We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Below is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” Attentiveness to media was measured by way of four items asking respondents to indicate how frequently they participated in the following activity (read a daily newspaper, read news magazines, watch television news, and listen to news on the radio) [response options: more than once a week, about once a week, about once a month, less than once a month]. These questions were combined with a question about the respondent’s general attention to world events: “Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t

thermometer scores is explained by these three variables. The positive value for race indicates that non-whites were more likely to have a net favorable rating for Harvey Gantt than whites. The negative value for ideology is predicted, as it indicates that liberal respondents tended to support Gantt. The second model considers a respondent's level of symbolic racism, as operationalized by Henry and Sears (2002). Higher scores indicate a greater level of symbolic racism, but the coefficient in this model does not reach statistical significance. It is possible that symbolic racism may affect perception of these candidates as an interactive function with race. Model three tests this assertion, but results indicate that this is not the case. It is possible that a Hawthorne effect may be at work, but whatever the reason, accepted tests of symbolic racism have no relationship to the net evaluation of these candidates in this sample.

The fourth model takes into account the effect of being in a particular experimental group, absent any other predictors. Only the Helms implicit group reaches a commonly accepted level of statistical significance, and the model is a poor predictor of the variance in the dependent variable. That is to say that exposure to differing types of messages is not, in and of itself, a powerful way to predict how respondents will feel about the candidates. Perhaps this, too, is an interaction effect with the respondents' race. In model 5, we multiply race by the experiment group to produce four interaction variables. None of them, however, reach statistical significance, and the predictive power of the Helms implicit group on its own is not affected. For the final model, we bring back the race and ideology, as well as a control for attentiveness, and include the dummy variables for the groups. The adjusted R^2 value is .27, only slightly better than the first model, which did not include the experimental group variables.

We take a similar approach to predicting vote choice. Because we are dealing with a dichotomous dependent variable, we turn to a logistic regression model to test effects on voting for either Harvey Gantt or Jesse Helms. In Table 5, we once again consider Hypotheses 2_a and 2_b.

[Table 5 about here]

Similar to the models presented in Table 4, these models show that the most important predictor of vote choice in this sample is the respondent's ideology. Still, even controlling for ideology (as well as the respondent's race and level of attentiveness), the fourth model continues to show a statistically significant Wald statistic for the Helms implicit group. Again, this confirms Mendelberg's theory that implicit racial messages are effective for white candidates.

Discussion

While we have provided some empirical support for Mendelberg's original theory, and more limited support for our broader theory of the effects of racial/racist messages in televised political ads, it is clear that we have a long way to go. In our sample, most of the variance in vote choice and candidate perception appears to be a

that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?" These five items were recoded so that higher values indicate more attentiveness, and they are contained in an additive index (divided by five) of attentiveness (Chronbach's alpha=.645).

result of respondents' political ideology. Still, at least for the white candidate in this contest, exposure to implicit racial messages helps to boost respondents' evaluations, as well their tendency to vote for him.

Future studies will move forward these results in a variety of ways. First, a more representative sample needs to be drawn. Particularly, the effect on minority respondents needs to be tested. This needs to be done for contests in which one candidate is a racial minority, for those in which both candidates are racial minorities, and, indeed, for those in which neither candidate is a racial minority. Second, in order to fully test our theory about differing intent of messages with racial content ("racist" versus "racial" messages), we will need to take into consideration the composition and history of the district (for House races) or state (for Senate races).

As racial minorities continue to demand inclusion and representation in the American electoral system, it is increasingly important to conduct systematic and comprehensive studies that collect and measuring the effect of racial messages. Using multiple research methodologies, The Project on Race in Political Advertising seeks to consider how race and political communication have and will continue to interact in American political elections.

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Appendix. Advertisements Included in Each Experimental Group

Below is a synopsis of the content and visuals that is included in each advertising spot, for each experimental group. Each group was shown six advertising spots twice. An opponent's control group advertisements were used in each of the four test groups, as well as in the control group. That is, for the Helms "implicit" and "explicit" groups, Gantt's control spots were used, in addition to the three unique spots (in each group) for Helms. Similarly, the Helms control spots were used in the Gantt "implicit" and "explicit" groups, in addition to the three unique spots (in each group) for Gantt.

Control Group

Jesse Helms

1. "Gas Tax/Foreign Aid" – How liberal is Harvey Gantt? He wants to double the tax on gas and increase wasteful foreign aid spending. Visual: Words on the screen, small photo of Gantt, no appearance of Helms.
2. "Environment/Exempt" – Gantt has a horrible environmental record; Helms has done much in the Senate to force oil companies to clean up the environment. Visual: Words on the screen over North Carolina scenery, the New River.
3. "Textile Manufacturers" – Helms has used his seniority in the Senate to help save textile mills in NC. He is effective. Visual: Words on the screen.

Harvey Gantt

1. "Stop" – Gantt wants to stop the building of a waste incinerator plant because enough people had not been consulted and he is concerned about the safety. Visual: Talking head ad.
2. "Label" – Gantt says that Helms ads about Gantt's abortion position are "hazardous to the truth." Visual: Words on the screen explicate issue positions on abortion.
3. "The Worst" – Helms has the worst record in the Senate on education. The ad lists all of the votes against education that he has amassed. Visual: Small picture of Helms with words on the screen, lists all of the votes.

Helms Implicit Group

1. "Dr. Barry Miller" – Dr. Miller, a white doctor, talks about how Helms has done so much for children with cerebral palsy. The ad shows pictures of Helms visiting kids in the hospital and reading to them. Three of the kids are white, but the last one is black.
2. "People" – Constituents from Gantt's mayoral district are interviewed and they complain about Gantt, how he raised taxes, and was the "most liberal mayor [they've] ever had." All of the constituents are white.
3. "20 Years" – This is a talking head ad of Helms speaking about education. He says that liberals have been making education mistakes for twenty years, including "forced busing" and "neighborhood schools wrecked." He claims that voting for Gantt would be one more vote for Ted Kennedy.

Appendix (continued)

Helms Explicit Group

1. “Solutions” – This is a talking head ad of Helms discussing education. This ad is very similar looking to the “20 Years” ad, and starts with the same statements. This one, however, launches into the Kennedy “quota bill,” which Helms claims requires the hiring of teachers based on race and not qualifications. Helms’ say that Gantt “complains” about him voting against this bill, and announces, “You bet I did!”
2. “Racial Quotas” – This affirmative action ad begins with a white man crumpling up a rejection letter. The voice-over script is as follows: “You needed that job and you were the best qualified, but they had to give it to a minority because of racial quotas. Is that really fair? Harvey Gantt says it is and supports Ted Kennedy’s quota law, that makes the color of your skin more important than your qualifications.” Visual: Side-by-side photos of Helms and Gantt with the “for” and “against” of racial quotas.
3. “Betrayed” – How did Harvey Gantt become a millionaire? A voiceover says that he used his “minority status” to get a free television station license and then sold out to a “white owned company”. The voice-over claims that the black community “felt betrayed,” but the deal made the mayor a millionaire. Visual: Pictures of Gantt, newspaper stories about the transactions involved, pictures of the TV station.

Gantt Implicit Group

1. “Architect” – This ad features testimonials about Gantt where he is surrounded by whites. The voiceover says that Gantt earned things the old-fashioned way with hard work and determination. He was the first in his family to graduate from college. “I was raised to believe that no one hands you anything in this world. You’ve got to work for it,” Gantt says.
2. “Achievements” – This spot is similar to “Architect” with regard to visuals. Gantt is at a picnic shaking hands with mostly white constituents. The voiceover says that he is trying to “bring people together to make progress.”
3. “Simply” – This spot features constituents of North Carolina complaining about Helms. All of those included are white. Their comments suggest that Helms has “lost touch” and he’s not “dealing with the issues.”

Gantt Explicit Group

1. “Yes” – This spot claims that the racial quota ads by Helms are “outright lies” because Gantt explicitly opposed to racial quota laws. Voiceover attacks Helms and gives statistics about the poor state of things in North Carolina. This ad asks viewers to say “no” to the smear campaign that Helms is allegedly conducting.
2. “Bull” – Harvey Gantt speaks: “Jesse Helms is running another smear campaign, charging me with using my race for financial advantage, charging me with wanting to require gay teachers in schools. They’re lies and Jesse Helms knows it. For 18 years, he’s been playing on people’s fears and killing this state’s hopes in the process,” Gantt urges people, “Don’t be taken in by the smears.”
3. “State” – This is another ad about the alleged smear campaign of Helms. It states that Gantt is opposed to racial quota laws. “It’s time to reject Jesse Helms’ politics of the past and move North Carolina forward,” reads the text and voice-over.

Table 1. Descriptive Information of Sample

Sex		Ideology	
Men	52% (251)	Liberal	30% (145)
Women	48% (235)	Moderate	23% (112)
		Conservative	32% (154)
		Don't know	15% (74)
Race		Party Identification	
White	78% (372)	Democrat	16% (81)
Black/ African American	7% (31)	Ind. Lean. Dem.	12% (60)
Asian/ Pacific Islander	6% (29)	Independent	6% (30)
Hispanic	4% (19)	Ind. Lean. Rep.	7% (34)
Other	6% (29)	Republican	35% (170)
		None/DK/Other	23% (111)
Religion		Major	
Protestant	65% (295)	Political Science	3% (16)
Catholic	15% (71)	Communication	2% (11)
Jewish	< 1% (2)	Other	95% (453)
Islamic	< 1% (3)		
Other	9% (31)		
None	9% (42)		
Experiment Group		Year in School	
Control	18% (87)	First year	51% (249)
Helms Implicit	21% (100)	Sophomore	30% (146)
Helms Explicit	22% (108)	Junior	13% (64)
Gantt Implicit	17% (83)	Senior	6% (27)
Gantt Explicit	22% (108)		

Note: Statistics are based on a maximum sample size of 486 respondents. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Parenthetical values indicate raw number of respondents in each category.