

Who's *Really* Black? A Theory of African American Authentic Appeals

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Introduction

The infusion of racial minorities into elected offices in the United States has had important ramifications for democracy and representation. Operating within a racist historical context, minority candidates have to overcome prejudicial notions that are deeply rooted in the conscious or subconscious minds of voters. But what happens when two African American candidates run against each other in a majority-minority district? How are racial (as opposed to racist) messages used in these contests?

When blacks began running for public office in civil-rights era America, candidates appealed to masses of voters by claiming to be able to best represent “black interests.” Despite this, a norm of racial solidarity within the African American community (and the fact that most black elected officials represented districts made up overwhelmingly of African American constituents) made the question of race a relatively moot point in black political campaign strategy and communication. In the years since, several demographic and ideological shifts have taken place: blacks and other minorities have increasingly been elected to local and state offices (Bositis, 2002), which suggests that federal election contests in certain areas will increasingly involve minority candidates competing with whites; trends in racial redistricting have increased the number of majority-minority congressional districts throughout the U.S; and the ideological diversity within African American communities has increased dramatically, expressed in a number of factors, including the nonracial types of policy issues that blacks say concern them, the increasing numbers of blacks self-identifying as either Independents or Republicans (whose numbers increased 150% between 2000 and 2002), and the changing view of what black leadership means (Joint Center for Political And Economic Studies National Opinion Survey 2002, cited in Myers, Pritchett and Kennedy, 2003).

Though as a whole the vast majority of black voters are still registered Democrats and/or vote for Democratic Party candidates, this growing diversity is likely to change the degree of competitiveness among candidates vying for seats in majority-black districts. Until the relatively recent past, authors such as Gerber (1996) have recognized the general lack of competition among minority candidates within majority-minority districts. As the degree of competitiveness increases, however, we can expect that blacks will be increasingly targeted with a wider range of candidate messages aimed at a greater diversity of attitudes and policy issues. Consequently, black voters would increasingly have to make difficult choices about the candidate for whom they vote.

These factors, as they have played in recent election contests among African Americans, have led to a growing trend in the use and tone of racial messages by African American candidates targeted toward black voters. The content and tone of such messages are characterized largely as appeals to “black authenticity.” The use and character of such messages are exemplified in one of the most recent and notable election contests: the 2002 Democratic primary election for Alabama’s 7th Congressional District, which featured two black males (Earl Hilliard and Artur Davis) running against one another for the party’s nomination (and, thus, the seat). Press accounts of the contest pivoted on the race issue, particularly with respect to the interpretation that the incumbent, Hilliard, was claiming that “his lighter-skinned opponent [was] not really black at all” (Harnden, 2002). For their part, the candidates also participated in discussions about “black authenticity.” Such claims were made in a number of congressional races during that and the following election cycle.¹

¹The U.S. House Democratic primary contests in 2002 between Denise Majette and Cynthia McKinney (Georgia) and Arthur Davis and Earl Hilliard (Alabama), as well as the 2004 general election for the U.S. Senate seat in Illinois between Barack Obama (Democrat) and Alan Keyes (Republican) are some of the most prominent examples.

The literature in the broad sub-field of political communication is bereft of any significant theoretical model that might help to understand and explain African American electoral behavior in general, or within the limited context of African American candidates and voters—the communication of African American candidates and their influence on black voters—in particular (Johnston, 1999; Morris, Roberts & Baker, 2001; Valentino et al. 2002a). And, while work on the (in)famous Willie Horton ad from the 1988 presidential election and other anecdotal material on racial messages used by other candidates (Johnston, 1999) has helped us to understand the impact of racial messages in general (see Jamieson 1992, pp. 16-42; Kinder & Sanders 1996, chapter 9; Mendelberg, 1999; Reeves, 1997), none of this work can account for the effect of racial messages on voters' perceptions of a racial minority candidate. In sum, there are two notable gaps in the literature regarding the use of racial appeals in political campaign communication: how such messages used by white candidates affect black voters, and how and why black candidates employ racial appeals and their influence on black voters. This paper focuses on this second area of inquiry.

We believe the demographic and ideological shifts within the African American public and the lack of empirical understanding of black candidate communication and voting behavior necessitate the development of a theory to guide our understanding about the growing trend of black candidates' use of appeals to black authenticity in political campaign strategy. Given this, we propose a theory of African American Authentic Appeals, the components of which we substantiate here. Our articulation of this theory are built around the following dimensions/questions: 1) the necessary and sufficient conditions under which appeals to black authenticity are used (when can we predict they will be employed by candidates?); 2) the ways such appeals are constituted in common forms of campaign communication (how do we know

them when we seem them?); 3) the psychological attitudes that are primed to give such appeals their weight (what about blacks' psychology makes such an appeal potentially effective?); and 4) the factors that determine the effect of such appeals (under what conditions will they succeed or fail?).

This paper proceeds in the following manner. First, we provide a brief review of existing theoretical literature, which demonstrates and justifies the need for the theory. This includes a discussion of literature in the following related areas: electoral representation, race and voting behavior, political advertising, perceptions of African American candidates, and racial priming and implicit appeals. Then, we articulate our distinction between "racist" and "racial" appeals and the theoretical necessity of such a distinction. As we proceed from here to putting forth our theory of African American Authentic Appeals, we begin by establishing what we refer to as an existing "norm of black solidarity," and proceed to explain the multiple dimensions of the theory.

Existing Theory

The scholarly literature to date is unable to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the voting behavior of African Americans or the appeals commonly used by African American candidates who vie for their votes. Several recent and important studies of the use of racial cues and their impact on voters' perception of candidates and vote choice cite several limitations. One limitation is the non-inclusion of African Americans voters as an audience for consideration of study. Valentino et al. (2002a), for example, state the following about their study:

In keeping with this practice, we too focus on non-blacks, though we do so reluctantly.

We believe that the theory of implicit communication applies to blacks as well as whites,

though individual differences will certainly moderate the size of the effect . . .

Ultimately, however, the theory of racial priming must be extended to include and understand the reactions of *all* audience members. (p. 78, emphasis in the original)

Neglecting to measure how blacks respond to racial messages is one of two significant gaps in the scholarship. The second has to do with the race of the candidates in election contests where racial messages are invoked. In short, we have empirical evidence that certain patterns of behavior exist among African American candidates and voters with regard to race-based political communication, but we have little, if any, empirical evidence about how such appeals are constructed and how they influence African Americans. We believe this cannot occur without some guiding theory of how these appeals work within and among this population of American voters. Given this, we seek to provide a theory that would help to explain African American voting and candidate behavior in the limited context of elections in which candidates are African American and where the majority of their electoral appeal is targeted to other African Americans (in majority-black districts).

Race & Representation

While this space does not allow for an adequate review of the vast theoretical literature on the nature of representation in democratic contexts, we feel obliged to mention that a theory of appeals to authenticity would be irrelevant without certain presumptions regarding representation. These presumptions center on the desire for citizens to have their interests reflected in their elected leaders. This desire often manifests itself in the notion that citizens should be “represented” by officials who “look like” them. When the demographic characteristics of officials is disproportionate to that of their constituents, there is often a

perception of a failure, or “lack,” of representation. That is, the fact that men hold a proportion of Congressional seats that is drastically different than their percentage of the population is only troubling if one believes that women are disadvantaged as a result—that men cannot adequately represent women’s issues.

Race-conscious Congressional districting arose as a solution to African American under-representation in Congress, and it relies on a presumption that whites will generally not vote for black candidates.² The result has been the creation and maintenance of so-called “majority-minority” districts from which nearly all African American members of Congress are drawn. Nearly all black members of Congress have come from districts that are composed of a majority of black constituents (so-called “majority-minority districts”) (Lublin, 1995, p. 125, note 5). While the value of these districts to secure adequate representation for the black community is debatable (see Benoit & Shepsle, 1995; Guinier, 1995; Handley, Groffman & Arden, 1994; King, Bruce & Gelman, 1995; Lublin, 1995), their existence typifies the reality of black representation in Congress to date. Understanding the dynamics of voting behavior within such districts, then, is an important, but neglected, aspect of political psychology and political communication.

Race & Voting Behavior

Research in a number of fields and sub-fields (political advertising, political, individual and group psychology and behavior, and racial/ethnic studies) and several established theories (media effects, priming, framing, and individual and group identity theory) exemplify the gap in understanding that exists in the study of racial messages in political campaign communication. Insights and conclusions from each also provide a foundation for the theory of African American

² This is a presumption, of course, that has been continuously affirmed both historically and in the scholarly literature on white voting behavior with regard to black candidates (see, for example, Terkildsen, 1993; Williams, 1990).

Authentic Appeals we propose and develop here. Previous research on the intersections of race, political campaign communication and voting behavior has focused largely on two distinct, yet related, sets of questions. First, what perceptions do white voters have about minorities in general, and minority candidates specifically, and how might those attitudes influence vote choices in election contests where either a minority candidate or a white candidate championing minority interests is involved (Sigelman et al., 1995; Terkildsen, 1993; Williams, 1990)? Second, what forms of racial messages are used in political campaigns to prime white racial attitudes (primarily related to specific public policy issues), and are these racial attitudes relied on when making voting decisions (Johnston, 1999; Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino et al., 2002a; 2002b)? Although conclusions regarding the direct link between whites' existing prejudicial attitudes and vote choice are mixed, research thus far supports the notion that racial cues are effective in priming such attitudes, and in doing so affecting whites' voting decisions.

Perceptions and Evaluations of Minority Candidates

Many scholars have examined the broad notion of white racial predispositions (Frederickson, 1971; Jordan 1974). More recently, other researchers have drawn on more general findings in the area of mediated representations that depict minority images as largely negative and stereotypical to demonstrate that whites' perceptions of black candidates mirror many of those stereotypes allegedly played out in the broader forms of media (Cottle, 2000; Drago, 1992; Gibbons, 1993; Hall, 1997; Kamalipour & Carilli, 1998). But this work has often failed to take into account that mediated images may actually be (at least in part) the basis for such prejudicial attitudes. 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 than to black candidates. 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 similar studies have been somewhat contradicted. For instance, Sigelman et al. (1995) suggest that despite the correlation between espoused stereotypes and perception or evaluation of candidates, a minority candidate’s race is not necessarily the most salient predictor of his or her negative evaluations. Based on an “assumed characteristics” perspective, their findings suggest 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. (p. 243)

In this regard, 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 (or “racist” attitudes) is 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).

The majority of research shows, however, that race is at least one factor among others. Thus, it is beneficial to further explore what degree of effect it has on voting decisions. Further, as some scholars point out, it is rather difficult to dissociate race and ideology because they have been integrally connected for so long (Kinder & Winter, 2001). This connection between race and ideology is an integral component of our theory of African American authentic appeals.

Racial Priming and Implicit Racial Appeals

Conclusions from the most recent studies regarding the priming effects of racial messages and their resultant bearing on candidate evaluation and vote choice (Caliendo, McIlwain & Karjala, 2003; Valentino et al., 2002a; 2002b) provide both methodological and theoretical grounding for our study. These studies test (and ultimately support) Mendelberg's (2001) theory of implicit racial appeals. Mendelberg argues that implicit appeals, as compared to explicit racial appeals, prime white voters' negative racial prejudices, which, in turn, influence views on public policy matters and voting decisions. These conclusions are consistent with a number of related studies (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Reeves, 1997).

Valentino et al., however, saw a need to better isolate and measure actual priming effects resulting from voters' exposure to subtle racial messages. In doing so, they were able to test what types of cues are most powerful in priming racial attitudes, and to identify the psychological mechanisms that underlie racial priming. In one study (Valentino et al., 2002a) the researchers experimentally manipulate the types of racial cues viewed by respondents in a laboratory setting,

using political ads as the vehicle for the racial cues. This choice of stimulus (political advertisements) differs from those used in Mendelberg's studies (news stories), but the results suggest, along with previous research (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Jacobs & Shapiro, 1994), that ads may be a more significant way of testing racial cues since they express intentional messages of candidates themselves, alleviating much of the third-party framing effects that news broadcasts present. Valentino et al. (2002a) found that messages regarding government spending and taxation prime racial attitudes even without racial imagery. However, they found that messages using imagery in political ads linking blacks to comments about undeserving groups had a more powerful priming effect. Two of their other significant findings are important in terms of shaping further studies in this area. Racial priming is mediated by the accessibility of race in memory, rather than self-reported levels of the importance of group representation. Additionally, they found that expectancy-violating, negative racial cues regarding blacks suppressed racial priming, while the violation of positive stereotypes of whites had a positive racial priming effect.

In a related study, Valentino et al. (2002b) found that ads containing racial cues significantly strengthened the impact of ideology self-placement in evaluating candidates. This was especially so in cases where ads portrayed some advantage of whites over blacks. Conclusions from this study suggest that group cues (and especially group racial cues) are powerful in priming political ideology.

While appeals to black authenticity are likely to be articulated along similar dimensions of implicitness/explicitness, the very foundation of this dynamic changes when we move away from discussion of racial appeals used by white candidates that prime various forms of anti-black sentiment or other prejudices. That is, theories about implicit racial appeals are necessarily

bound by the race of the candidate and that of the audience potentially affected by the appeal. This raises the unexplored question of whether the same theoretical assumptions can be directly carried over to the alternative scenario with respect to the nature of the appeal and to the underlying attitudes being primed by that appeal.

The implicit/explicit nature of racial appeals that has been explored in current literature is based on an egalitarian norm that makes it necessary to sublimate racial appeals in order to mitigate negative reactions by whites who would view this as a violation of this norm. The degree to which appeals to racial authenticity are implicitly or explicitly constructed similarly depends on norms of viewing race and race relations amongst members of the black community, as we explain below. Prior to this explanation, however, a distinction we make between “racial” and “racist” appeals is necessary not only to understand the veracity of implicit versus explicit appeals to racial authenticity, but to our understanding of the variety of strategic purposes for which such appeals may be used.

Racist Versus Racial Appeals

Though race-based appeals have been standard in black electoral politics throughout the last four decades, scholarly and popular discussions of the use of such appeals by political candidates has proceeded under the conventional wisdom and within a narrow scope that presumes such messages are being used primarily by white candidates to negatively affect African American or other minority candidates or white candidates who champion issues of racial minorities. The reason for this rather myopic focus on racial messages in political campaign communications is understandable given the pervasiveness of anti-black racial discrimination throughout U.S. political history and the degree to which negative racial

sentiments have been drawn on in political campaign strategy to gain political advantage. This is to say that such appeals have been typically seen as the “worst” kind of appeal (in a moral sense because they draw on attitudes of racial inequality), so they have attracted the bulk of attention from scholars who seek to understand and even mitigate their uses and effects. However, the empirical reality is that for a group (African Americans) that is exposed to the same messages as the majority population (messages from candidates of all races), and whose vote as a population is critical in many elections, racial messages are constructed, used and responded to in a variety of ways beyond the white vs. black dynamic.

A thorough review and analysis of racial messages used in recent election contests involving minority candidates demonstrates that African American and other minority candidates often use racial appeals to further their election goals. Specifically, we found that black candidates in bi-racial contests for the U.S. Senate from 1990 to 2000 used racial messages in their television advertisements at a similar rate as their white opponents (McIlwain & Caliendo, 2002). Focusing on a sample of 2002 congressional contests with competing black candidates, we found that the media employed five primary frames related to African American Authentic Appeals (described in some detail below) (McIlwain & Caliendo, 2004). These frames highlight our contention that racial appeals are used in contests with two black candidates in ways that are more complicated than the racist appeals used by white candidates (either against black opponents or to otherwise capitalize on racist stereotypes in the electorate). Accordingly, we offer a detailed theory of African American Authentic Appeals that is grounded in existing theory and suggested by recent empirical studies.

A Theory of African American Authentic Appeals

Mendelberg (2001) established two sets of cultural norms that essentially provide the framework for how citizens view race generally, and racial minorities and race-related political issues in particular. These two sets of norms more or less coincide with the division between the period of Reconstruction and the post-Reconstruction/civil rights era. The first norm she outlined—one of exclusion, racial prejudice and inequality—gave way to a norm of inclusion, racial tolerance and equality. These two sets of norms are directly linked to the presence and form of racial appeals made in political context. The first is linked to explicit racial appeals, while the second is linked to implicit appeals. As noted above, the explicit/implicit dynamic she and others have used does not necessarily hold when we turn from explaining the influence of racist messages by white candidates on white audiences to racial messages made by black candidates aimed primarily at black voters.

The Norm of Racial Solidarity

A theory of African American Authentic Appeals, consequently, must first establish the dominant patterns of behaviors and attitudes about blackness and the relationship amongst black people. That is, several questions must be addressed: 1) What are the norms of viewing race, blackness and the role of blacks in American government?; 2) How do such norms relate to the various forms of political communication by black politicians?; and 3) What normative shifts account for divergent kinds of messages?

The theory presented here is based on what we refer to as a norm of racial solidarity. We argue that this norm of solidarity emerged in direct response to the newly-prevailing norm of racial equality in white America, which gave black Americans space to more fully explore and

express their individual and collective identities. The Harlem Renaissance, for instance, gave rise to popular expression of the black experience in a variety of forms. We can see evidence of this trend in the birth and development of black art, music, theatre, and literature, as well as Black (or Afro-American or African American) Studies departments at universities throughout the United States. All of this cultural expression, study and intellectual and artistic development is best understood through the black psychology movement that emerged in the 1960s.

The black psychology movement was a response to what was seen as a bias towards white models of psychology. The standard form of psychology, already preoccupied with notions of individual personality, was amended by black psychologists who posited the need for the development of “authentic” black identities to counteract blacks’ internalized hatred of themselves given white perceptions of them (Akbar, 1984; Hall, Cross & Freedle, 1972; White, 1972). Where black identity development was the individual psychological response to the problem of racism, the notion of black solidarity (group identity), however became, around the same time, the group political response. It was suggested that in order to gain the political agency necessary to redress problems associated with America’s racist past, blacks would need to band together under a common banner of identity and political strategy to attain gains in the political and socioeconomic contexts of the day (Clay, 1993; Smith, 1989).

This norm of racial solidarity, motivated by the need to increase blacks’ political and social capital, was expressed in a myriad of ways throughout the 1960s and beyond. It was built into the structure of the American election and governing process with the institutionalization of racial gerrymandering. It was less formally, but still powerfully, institutionalized in the development and maintenance of political party alliances between the African American community and the Democratic Party. African Americans have long been the most cohesive

constituent of the Democratic Party (Myers, Pritchett & Kennedy, 2003; Stanley & Niemi, 2000; Wielhouwer, 2000), a relationship dually-characterized by structural dependence and group (African American and Democratic Party) loyalty (Tate, 1995). Beyond the political arena, other social expressions of black solidarity emerged in the form of economic solidarity (McIlwain & Johnson, 2003), where the increase in black wealth began to be channeled back into the black community with a “for us by us” mentality, perhaps first championed by various members of black nationalist movements in the 1960s.

The norm of racial solidarity, simply put, is the long-dominant position by black Americans that a common agenda, ideology, goal and political strategy is necessary to gain political and social power in a country where they have had relatively little. Breaking ranks in any of these areas is seen as weakening both individual and group attempts to progress socially and politically in ways that would more positively affect the black community. It is this norm, and the recent and steady departure from it, that gives rise both to the possibility, probability and potential of appeals to black authenticity.

Necessary Conditions

The foundation of our theory establishes the prevailing norms among African Americans and the recently-emerging shift away from black solidarity to a more fragmented orientation to collective political behavior. The following part of our theory is directed toward the individual and collective racial and political conditions under which appeals to authenticity are likely to emerge and have strategic import. We theorize that such conditions, and the possibilities of influence that such appeals might have, are associated with three ways in which black voters perceive themselves within the sociopolitical arena. These include: the degree of blacks’

individual identity or self-concept, the ways blacks perceive their relationship with others of their racial group, and the ways these identities manifest themselves in voters' attitudes regarding substantive political and ideological issues.

Individual Racial Identification

The black psychology movement promoted the notion that the success of black individuals was highly dependent on the development of a “healthy” self-concept rooted in black, rather than white, perceptions of members among the African American racial group. This position emphasized that one's identity was necessarily a racial one, but nevertheless one based on a valuation of blackness as equal with whites, if not, for some, superior. This concept of what would constitute a “healthy” sense of self for the black individual has persisted to this day as a necessary condition for proper black psychological functioning (Cross, 1991; Grossman, Wirt & Davids, 1985; Phinney, 1990; Shelby, 2002; Thompson, 1999; 2001).

The extant literature in psychology (among other areas) firmly supports the breadth and depth with which ideas about individual identity generally, and black identity in particular, contribute to African Americans' cognitive processing of political information and decision-making (Allen, Dawson & Brown, 1989; Gandy, 2001). Appeals to racial authenticity are, consequently, appeals to one's individual racial identity and, more particularly, to the maintenance of such an identity. In other words, for the individual who sees himself or herself, or defines himself or herself primarily as “African American,” the appeal to authenticity works to support such a self-concept. Acceptance of such an appeal allows one to maintain this racial sense of self, while rejecting it works to de-center or devalue one's racially-defined identity—in

effect, to deny one's own "blackness."

Collective Racial Identification

It is clear, both empirically and phenomenologically, that one's self-identification within a racial group does not preclude him or her from having a differing level of investment in or connection to one's larger collective racial group. Thus the emergence and potential success of appeals to authenticity cannot be explained solely on the degree to which any individual sees himself or herself in racial terms—as essentially a "black" person by culture or definition.

Questions about racial authenticity, perhaps more so than any other form of expression, have emerged within popular and academic discussion of rap music. Scholars such as Kapano (2002) and McLeod (1999), for example, view authenticity of expression as a way of opposing the threat of assimilation by maintaining a minority group's collective identity. According to each of them, appeals to authenticity emerge when such an assimilative threat is present within a given context, and the appeal targets those who maintain a sense of racial group identification, inducing a greater sense of the need to maintain racial group solidarity. We suggest that, as a whole, such identification exists within a majority-black district where two black candidates would likely compete with one another. Additionally, we posit that an appeal to authenticity will be successful because such an appeal suggests that by not voting for the "authentic" black candidate may translate into a loss of social and political capital and diminish the collective identity of voters' racial group members. Perhaps most of all, we expect that such appeals will be successful because they implicate the voter in these possible detrimental effects (if he or she decides to not vote for the "authentic" black candidate).

Racial Issues and Ideology

The final pillar of our theory regarding the conditions surrounding and potential effectiveness of authentic appeals relates to the degree that one's individual and collective identity translates or diffuses strongly-held or predictable support for specific ideological and/or issue positions. This may take two forms: the degree to which blacks cite "racial" issues as the most salient political issues of importance or concern to them, or their degree of support for the acceptable position on such issues. We would expect that blacks who define themselves individually in principally racial terms, and those who similarly identify strongly with the collective, would tend to have a heightened sense of racial awareness, and that such awareness would manifest itself in citing race-based political issues as being most important to them. In addition, we would expect that such individuals would take positions on these issues in ways most traditionally held by the group. For example, blacks heavily invested in blackness both individually and collectively would most likely view issues such as affirmative action and racial profiling as some of their most important political concerns and would also tend to take a position in support of affirmative action and against racial profiling policies.

This third necessary condition is central to our theory because, despite the expectations above, it is quite plausible that individuals with strong individual and collective racial identities may indeed act contrarily (that is, not cite racial issues as their most salient of policy issues or take the traditional stance on these issues [Schmermund, Sellers, Mueller, & Crosby, 2001]). Therefore, it is not enough to know simply the degree to which individuals identify themselves racially or in relationship to a larger racial group. How such identification translates into actual political concerns and policy positions is also necessary to understanding under what conditions

an appeal to racial authenticity would be made and the possible effect of such an appeal. Given this, the natural target for appeals to African American Authenticity are black members of a district whose identity is defined by their physical and cultural characteristics of their racial group and who strongly identify with and are invested in a loyal relationship to others in a community who look and act like them.

Message Articulation

Our desire to contribute to the fields of political science and communication require us to offer theory that builds upon and moves beyond the cognitive realm. It is the behavioral aspects of this particular type of political rhetoric (African American Authentic Appeals) that ultimately affect electoral successes or failures (and, thus, representation). Accordingly, this theory should adequately account for the predictability of racial messages in contests featuring two African American candidates, as well as the results of such messages in terms of electoral success, vote accumulation (and margins) and other indicators of message resonance.

Construction of Authentic Appeals

What is left, then, is for us to identify the types of racial appeals that are likely to be used by black candidates in contests against other black candidates. We identify five variations of the authentic appeal below. These appeals follow from our understanding of existing theory and are derived more specifically from an analysis of media frames of authentic appeals in congressional races during the 2002 election cycle (McIlwain & Caliendo, 2004). These are appeals that, one way or another, suggest to potential voters that one's opponent, while he or she may look to be of African American genetic composition, is not *really* black.

Appeal to Physical or Cultural Authenticity

One way of appealing to authenticity is to make implicit or explicit references to the physical, racial features of a candidate, opponent or third party to which one or the other is associated. Such an appeal may be employed by a candidate or third party and is offered as a valuative basis for comparison. The appeal may be used to highlight one's own racial features or to associate one's opponent with a member of a racial group considered to be in opposition to one's own racial group.

This appeal will often be used by depicting one's opponent in photographs with white supporters (especially powerful and/or high-profile whites) or by making suggestions that one's opponent is largely supported by whites. The suggestion is a sort of Booker T. Washington parallel—"if white folks like this candidate so much, he or she can't be that good for black folks." Black candidates who have shunned African American vernacular, those who speak with "white accents," or those who were educated at historically white colleges or universities (especially if the school is not in the district) are particularly vulnerable to an appeal to physical authenticity.

Appeal to Party Authenticity

This appeal allows a candidate to claim black authenticity by referring to his or her own party affiliation as a basis of comparison or by attacking the party affiliation of his or her opponent. Such an appeal will take the form of Democratic candidates attacking black Republicans in order to signify the latter's existence as a historical aberration, or as a basis of attacking an affiliation with "Republican" issues—that is, their "Republican-ness."

Appeal to Issue Authenticity

In this aspect of the authentic appeal, one candidate emphasizes his or her stance as being in line with traditional norms of black political ideology with respect to public policy issues. Often linked to the former aspect of the authentic party appeal, this appeal purports a clear division between descriptively “black” and “non-black” issues and a normative or “correct” (as per tradition) position on such issues. The issue authenticity appeal can be used as a proxy for the party appeal. A Democratic candidate will claim, for instance, that a black Republican or a black Democrat’s position is less authentic because it is not in line with the history of black issues preferences. In many cases, this signals identification with the Republican (less authentic) party, but the appeal is issue-based, rather than party-based. That is, there is a powerful presumption of understanding of the authenticity of a “black” position on a number of public policy issues such that labeling the out-of-favor positions as “Republican” is not necessary.

One reason for using this appeal rather than the party appeal is that it allows one to talk directly about an issue without insinuating that there is something necessarily “bad” about blacks having a broader choice of candidates, or that blacks should give blind loyalty to the Democratic party. Such sentiments suggestive of blacks as a monolithic voting bloc are becoming increasingly unpopular in African American circles, and the employment of this appeal could have negative consequences for the candidate who uses it if the candidate who employs it is exposed in this regard.

Appeal to Historical Authenticity

This aspect of the authentic appeal is used by making general references to one's historical place as a candidate or officeholder. Such appeals seek to implicitly connect a present candidate with other "racial record-breakers." Many historical figures accomplished their feats further back in history, during a time when one might claim more easily that African Americans were more monolithic in their political thought and behavior than they are now. This appeal is designed to make a connection with a figure from a past in which black people had to emphasize their racial solidarity around political ideologies and issues.

In this appeal, we will find age to be an important variable. Black candidates who "came up" during the civil rights movement from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s will claim an authenticity of struggle, commitment and experience than their younger black counterparts. Similar to political discourse in all racial contexts (yet specific to the issue of civil rights struggle), a candidate will argue that he or she has "walked the walk" while his or her opponent is merely "talking the talk."

Race Card Accusation

This appeal mirrors the dynamics discussed by Mendelberg (2001). It emerges when a particular statement by a candidate in any form of communication is interpreted as using race as an appeal to gain some competitive advantage. The reason for a candidate to invoke an authentic appeal is clear. However, calling attention to that appeal is *itself* an appeal to racial authenticity. To do so is to claim that "playing the race card" is a "white" strategy historically used to denigrate blacks, and that to employ such a strategy is to betray one's race by employing a white person's tool to do harm to one's own (black) people.

It is important to understand that while we conceptualize these variations to be a comprehensive encapsulation of the African American Authentic Appeal, alterations to this list may occur at different points in history. For example, while an appeal to party authenticity is an plausible option today, fifty years from now party alignments may be such that such an appeal is not possible. Still, these five appeals form a solid foundation from which scholars can examine, apply and test hypotheses for appeals to racial authenticity.

Implicit v. Explicit Authentic Appeals

It is evident that the different forms of appeals to authenticity described above could be constructed either explicitly or implicitly. As it is with any form of appeal, the implicit message is much more difficult to identify. That is, the very fact of implicitness opens an appeal up to a variety of interpretations, primarily because of the ambiguity of the various forms of signs that may be used in their construction. This ambiguity lends implicit appeals its effectual power in African American Authentic contexts that draw on individual and racial group solidarity, as much as they do in racial appeals that draw on negative predispositions held by whites against blacks or other racial minorities. Because majority-black districts also include various percentages of white citizens, it is important as well to theorize how appeals to black authenticity are likely to impact white voters in majority-black contexts.

African American Voters

First, we contend that explicit appeals to authenticity would be most effective on those black voters with strong individual and group ties to their racial group. We argued above that authentic appeals would be read by individuals with these characteristics as a threat to both their

individual and collective identities, as well as contribute to a sense of guilt in weakening the collective political and social power of the community. It follows then that the more explicit the appeal to authenticity is, the more salient that threat would be in the message as interpreted by voters. That is, with explicit appeals, each of these potential threats are amplified. As a result of this amplification, and one's heightened awareness and realization, the voter would be much more likely to allow the appeal to influence his or her perceptions of the candidates involved, as well as the candidate for whom they ultimately vote.

Explicit appeals to authenticity would also have the most effect on black voters who do not identify strongly either individually or collectively with the racial group, or those whose identity does not translate into salient racial issue concerns or traditional stances on racial issues. However, the explicit appeal would serve not to heighten voters' threat level with regard to individual and collective identity or political power, but to heighten their attitudes of opposition—to amplify their frustration with what they are likely to see as claims of essentialism. They might likely see such claims as having a negative effect on public perceptions of African Americans, and may also perceive that these appeals could weaken their social and political power.

While we would certainly deny that implicit appeals to authenticity may have some impact on black voters' perceptions and vote choice decisions, we theorize that such appeals would have significantly less of an effect on voters despite their level of identification with the racial group, racial issues saliency or racial issue positions. While most blacks across this range of identification would likely recognize the authentic appeal, though implicitly delivered, it would have little power to raise one's sense of threat or dismay over claims of essentialism. Again, because they are likely to recognize the racial nature of the message, we cannot say that

there will be no effect, but, in this context, we expect any effect to be less than that from an explicit appeal.

White Voters

Explicit appeals may have a detrimental effect on another voting constituency—white voters. However, the precise impact is less determinable, primarily because of the differential relationship whites may have with regards to the norm of racial solidarity that underlies African American political ideology and behavior. While racial messages may have a disconcerting effect on some whites when used by a white candidate in a bi-racial election, literature suggests that the lack of identity investment by whites will have little effect comparatively on white voters as opposed to blacks. For instance, McIntosh (1992) suggests that few whites acknowledge their position of privilege above blacks and other minorities. Jackson & Heckman (2002) similarly suggest this by identifying white college students' lack of concern over a circulated racial "hate message," as compared to the reaction of black students. These and other studies suggest that because blacks have more of a stake in the outcome, they, more than whites, will be affected by an explicit appeal to racial authenticity that is bounded within the confines of a primarily African American community (i.e., majority-minority districts, where such appeals will generally be used). This is to say that an appeal to racial authenticity may suggest to a white voter that the black candidate, who holds himself or herself out to be more authentic, will favor "black interests" over the white voters' interests.

It follows then that the tenuous relationship with, or identity investment, in such outcomes will lead implicit appeals to have little effect at all on white voters' perception of black

candidates making appeals to black authenticity. It is possible that the implicit racial appeal may not even register with white voters, and even if it did, it is not likely to prime any sense of strong attitudinal or behavioral action on their part. Thus, we would argue that explicit appeals may negatively affect white voters' perceptions of a black candidate who claims to be authentically black when such appeals are made implicitly. Under these circumstances, the white voter would most likely default to other determinants of vote choice (party identification, issue compatibility, candidate character and likeability, etc).

Future Directions

It is only after five years of careful consideration that we boldly put forth what we believe to be a well-grounded and sensible middle-level theory of African American Authentic Appeals. We have engaged in quantitative and qualitative content analyses of racial and racist messages in hundreds of televised political advertisements, tested the effects of these messages in an experimental study, and analyzed media coverage of congressional contests that featured two African American candidates. As we monitored races that contained at least one African American candidate in 2004, however, we realized that we could go no further without an articulated theory of how racial (as opposed to racist) appeals are used by black candidates. This paper is our offering.

It is our intention that this theory cracks open a space for research on racial appeals to move forward as the trend of black Americans seeking federal office increases, and as black voting behavior becomes less predictable. We envision (and expect to conduct) further descriptive studies of message formation, empirical tests of cognitive processing of racial messages, and studies of the effects of messages on target audiences. We invite and anxiously

anticipate the work of other scholars as the realities of black political participation unfold into the theoretical cradle that we have attempted to construct.

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