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# Racialized Reality: Crime News and Racial Stereotype Framing

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Racialized Reality: Crime News and Racial
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**Abstract**

Research shows that crime news is a primary mechanism for shaping public consciousness surrounding legal order, social morality, and threats present in their citizens communities. This research explores how news media influences negative attitudes towards criminal justice reform and Black identity. Utilizing Framing Theory, this study focuses on whether negative stereotypes in crime news triggers racial prejudice and bias towards African Americans. Participants of this study will consist of current students at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. The findings suggest that knowing the race of a potential criminal assailant influences respondents' attitudes towards presumptions of guilt, future criminality, and criminal justice policy.

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**Introduction**

Currently our society is experiencing increasing racial polarization that has caused tension between various cultural groups. This tension is complex and is attributed to various causes that include but are not limited to political partisanship demographics, wealth discrepancies, and general dissonance in understanding cultural differences. Amid this controversy, mass media's emergence as a primary source to receive cultural information requires that the accuracy of said representations be called into question. This is an important consideration due to the potential for inaccurate or biased portrayals of individuals, via the media, to evoke unconscious racial stereotypes that would mislead citizens to misrepresent cultural groups as a whole furthering the widespread discrepancies of cultural cognition.

I define cultural understanding/cognition as the ability to diminish internal ethnocentric ideals to allow the acceptance and inclusion of cultures different than your own. While there is a myriad of factors that contribute to a cultural misunderstanding, one of the primary factors that I believe causes this dissonance is fear. Therefore, I argue that the news' presentation of crime to the public incites a certain level of bias that influences citizens attitudes. An issue that is not thoroughly examined within scholarship is how the media's gate keeping authority makes way for demographically disproportionate reporting of crimes to trigger individuals underlying racial prejudices and inappropriately assign them to a culture in general. One should not assume that media outlets are purposefully producing racially biased information however, this paper argues that there is a connection between the information presented by news media and the unconscious ideologies individuals may hold. This paper seeks to answer this research question: To what extent does media, specifically crime news, cause racial prejudices and stereotypes? By dissecting this question and garnering the necessary information to answer it, I hope to shed light

on some of the tangible ways negative racial ideologies correlate to and can be unknowingly

provoked by some of the most common features of our society. This research will by no means

ameliorate the difficulty of having conversations about the historically insidious effects that

racism has had on the world. Being that racism is embedded within the foundation of United

States society, trying to end it at is source is practically impossible. The more pragmatic

approach, and the purpose of this research, is to allow individuals to recognize day-to-day

catalysts that peak their deep-seated beliefs and address them accordingly.

## Literature Review

### Television in Relation to Reality

Technological advancements have made news outlets increasingly accessible to the

masses (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; McQuail, 2010; Graber & Dunaway, 2017). The vast amount

of information that is accessible to society raises concerns about media outlets' ability to

accurately present narratives that are representations of reality. It is reasonably assumed that the

general public has ample opportunity to garner unadulterated facts about current events

happening locally and at large. However, the efficiency and accessibility of today's news media

makes this exercise inherently taboo. Largely, the earliest studies of mass media focused on a

holistic analysis of the proportions of content that was aired in entertainment media (Neuendorf

& Kumar, 2015; Krippendorff, 2018; Riffe et al., 2019). As this scholarship progressed, scholars

shifted their focus to interpreting how these proportions rendered symbolic effects on certain

values in society. The current studies build on this work by examining how outlets accurate

presentation of crime stories and the races associated influence citizens' perception of those

involved and the presence of threat in their communities. It is important to note that the televised

news is not the only source that individuals use as a basis for representing society. However, as

news media provides a visual frame to present information, and because race is a visual concept, this analysis focuses on news media.

**Early Television Content Analysis**

Dallas Smythe (1954) conducts a study that analyzed the television content inventory of New York, Los Angeles, and New Haven networks (Smythe, 1954). Additionally, the study employed a content analysis on the methods utilized to improve the process of determining the degree to which television portrays reality to American citizens. Due to the inherent economic elements included on television, such as program content and advertisements, Smythe asserts that the fundamental measure to which television can be akin to "reality", is the commercial context that is symptomatic to a capital driven society (Smythe, 1954 p. 7). As most program content is used for viewer entertainment, the study reported that this is also the source of 98% of violent content and its largest content type, drama, was the most common program type. The study found that drama, as the largest entertainment content category, accounted for 87 percent of the total acts of violence, contained discrepancies within the races of heroes and villains, and that law-enforcement officers were highly stereotyped (Smythe, 1954). A congruent approach conducted by Sydney Head (1954), collected data from 209 television programs over 13 weeks and found that law-enforcement content rarely involved non-white characters. The findings showed that, of the observed content, 17 percent of characters were criminals and that the sample was not representative of reality (Head, 1954). As it is shown, scholars found early in media development that networks have the ability to present stories that do not reflect our shared reality. However, the fictional components of reality television will inherently limit the degree to which content analyses can comment on our complex society. Modern technology now allows us to broaden examinations of television programs that claim to present reality.

**Television in Relation to Reality**

As technology advanced, scholars began taking theoretical approaches to analyzing television content. Joseph Dominick (1973) tested the "reflective theory of broadcasting" which poses that television is a mirror of reality. Testing this framework, participants watched 51 TV shows—restricted to the genres of drama and comedy—and recorded general information about what they viewed as it pertained to crime, criminals, law-enforcement, victims, and witnesses. The respondent's interpretation of television narratives were compared to real world occurrences to reveal that television overrepresents violent crime directed at individuals, televisions criminals rarely resemble their real-life counterparts, and racial groups are inaccurately tied to certain crimes that they are statistically associated with (Dominick, 1973). In a similarly designed analysis, Joseph Sheley and Cindy Ashkins (1981) asked their participants to document all information regarding crimes and the types of crimes presented that caused them to be concerned for the four major television stations in New Orleans. Of the four, only one source covered crime that closely correlated with police reporting, while the other results showed that respondents fear minimally correlated to the most frequent crimes logged by the police (Sheley and Ashkins, 1981). Consequently, this literature highlights the duty news analyses have to ensure their content informs the public about the legitimate concerns facing their community. Overlooking this responsibility creates the potential for misguided fear to be directed towards racial groups and their neighborhoods.

While fear of cultural groups is elicited through many different mechanisms in media, there is literature that supports the idea that news media has the ability to shape public consciousness regarding what is urgent or threatening in the community (Sacco, 1995). This led scholars to conduct studies that sought to assess the descriptive representation amongst those

involved in crime news reports. The results showed that African Americans in local news were twice as likely to be reported as perpetrators of crime while Whites tended to be overrepresented as victims and officers (Dixon and Linz, 2000; Dixon et al., 2003). Thus, it is reasonable for the skeptical citizen to be readily understanding of news outlets primary function of being a mechanism for interpretation; the same way that an uninformed citizen may turn to fictional television to provide a visual representation of the stories that are being lived throughout their communities. The author's support of the idea that citizens who view crime news innately hold a decontextualized view of society as a result of the reporting by outlets they frequent, welcomes additional scholarship to follow that examines how citizens inaccurate views and fears about crime in their community's associate and connect to their interpretation of reality.

**Television Reality Shaping Public Consciousness**

Building on scholarship that sought correlations between media and reality required examining if information presented by the media influenced citizens perceptions of what is happening in society. A 1999 experiment that studied the behavior of the characteristics that White respondents held about Black people, revealed that as the negative stereotypes they held increased, positive stereotypes decreased—interplaying through a "bipolar structure" (Levine, et al., 1999). Accepting this to be valid would support the idea that news media—as it is assumed to be accurate—can influence citizens perceptions of individuals unrelated to the situation presented and information that citizens observe can lead them to disproportionately assign negative stereotypes to various cultural groups. To test this, Dixon and Maddox (2005) conducted an experiment that aimed to gauge citizens "emotional discomfort" after viewing a criminal news report, as well as test if respondent's perception or ability to remember the perpetrator and/or victim could be altered by their race. They found that no matter a participant's

level of exposure to the news, all found that dark-skinned Black males were the most memorable perpetrators. Additionally, the study found that heavy news viewers were partial towards victims of crime stories where the perpetrator was Black regardless of skin tone (Dixon and Maddox, 2005).

These findings offer reputable contributions in displaying how bipolar stereotypes can behave in real time and that Black people can illicit citizens to develop discomfort. Outside of illustrating respondents' ability to identify skin tone, I would argue that the implications from the findings provide limited direction to be applied to reality. In reality, facial characteristics can be a racial identifier. Computer programs used to alter skin tone is a valid experimental control however, Black people making some White people uncomfortable is not a new phenomenon. More productive findings would be centered around examining if racial stereotypes about racial groups at large are influenced by crime news, rather than identifying the darkest person in the room. Conventional wisdom surrounding mass media regard it as an instrument that elevates the salience of ethnic symbols. Whether a person "goes viral" or is simply involved in a story presented on the 5'o'clock news, scholars assert that an identity is inseparable from the group and symbols that are integrated into a culture (Gans, 1979). Therefore, research can build on the established findings by testing whether the feelings attributed to a dark-skinned individual are then applied to the entire Black community. Additionally, all the findings up until this point have tested respondents' reactions to recorded crime news programs where individuals in tune with current events may be pre-exposed to the story. More control could be implemented into an experiments design to reduce this effect which would allow participants' racial stereotypes to be examined in real time. Here is where we find that the process of developing racial stereotypes and the societal forces that trigger them are able to be located and unpacked.

In addition to understanding how the information presented by the news influences citizens' implicit biases, understanding that media networks consist of humans who also hold their own preconceived notions should not be overlooked. The media market is oversaturated with sources that produce content on current events. Recognizing this makes it completely plausible that media outlets, whether consciously or unconsciously, allow their biases to infiltrate their reports. Reporting on crime news is a task that should be approached delicately as it will damage the character of those associated. The crimes that receive airtime, the placement of the reports during the program, the facts provided to citizens, quotes provided from interviews, the photo of the assailant, as well a number of other factors will influence citizens perception of danger. With numerous programs reporting on different events in different ways, we must interrogate what makes citizens choose the content of one source over another. In doing so, we can see whether citizens prefer sources that produce unbiased reporting, or if they choose sources that confirm their preconceived attitudes.

**Media selectivity**

In attempting to explain the effects of media's presentation of social phenomena, it is important to acknowledge the actual volume of mass media that is available for the public to consume. Since the emergence of broadcast television there have been a finite amount of viewing options, and, as cable television became more widely available, these programs have expanded to a seemingly infinite amount (Arceneaux, 2013). As a result, media outlets are now in simultaneous competition for the citizens viewership. While the literature covered thus far has reviewed analyses of television's content, the abundance of information produced via the media makes it important for literature to compartmentalize such sources to account for the many specialized viewing options available to citizens. The weather, current events, and crime reports

are the conventional categories that news outlets cover. Within current events there are subcategories of sports, popular culture, and politics to name a few, and media outlets take responsibility of informing the public of the reality that surrounds each topic they cover. Thus, it is important to consider what drives citizens to accept a particular sources presentation of the facts.

Scholarship has generally aligned in characterizing news media as a vital source for citizens to access political information. Given that news media typically takes place during "prime-time" television hours, news outlets compete in producing broadcasts that elicit an emotional dramatization of political commentary to gain viewership. However, it is worth noting that partisan news is enabled to intensify this practice far more than apolitical news sources—if such a program even exists. Scholars find that, when presented a sensationalized report on the opposing party, viewers are likely to become angry and apply the misguided policy views to the candidates associated, as well as the opposing party at large (Hasell and Weeks, 2016). In addition, studies find political media plays a prominent role in setting the stage for the magnitude in which citizens perceive a partisan divide (Levendusky and Malhortra, 2016). As such, scholarship has trended towards identifying how media producers alter their message for citizens to self-select from. While not completely in line with what this research seeks to address, if media is able to influence democracy as it is shown to, it is naïve to overlook the media's ability to function the same surrounding attitudes and feelings toward other groups of people. As is shown that media outlets can influence political ideologies calls into question medias ability to influence attitudes towards other contentious topics such as race.

Continuing, the agenda setting powers of the media informs citizens on how they should think of a certain topic. Whether electing to watch programs that confirms their biases or

programs that present "unbiased" facts, citizens make the active choice. Through this selective process, this research adopts the approach of Arceneaux and Johnson (2013) that assumes citizens to behave as active participants in what messages they accept. These same scholars find that citizens tend to prefer news that affirms their political ideology, which indicates that these citizens are making this conscious choice on the basis of becoming informed or entertained. While studies have traditionally gauged partisan news' effect on citizen attitudes by finding their audiences and surveying their political preferences (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013), this is not the approach taken here. As attitudes on policy are essentially a matter of preference, identifying the psychological processes that determine said positions leaves social scientists with difficult limitations to overcome when rendering conclusions. Recognizing this, scholarship should be shifted to delineating the delicate balance between audiences allowing their political ideologies to drive the media they choose to consume and media spurring this process. In relation to crime news, even though ideologically slanted news can lead to citizens to be biased in the information they elect to watch, these tendencies have minimal impact on the crimes committed and the way stations choose to report on it. Thus, this analysis does not seek to assert that political media is an explicit catalyst for provoking stereotypes but acknowledges that, as the state of media currently makes political information theoretically unavoidable, these forces are a potential variable in citizens interpretation of news information.

When discussing biases, procedures, formulas, and reporting tactics can mitigate the objectivity that media networks implement in their practice. However, these checks are limited as different media outlets produce different programs for their targeted audiences. The important point here is that media networks are familiar with their audiences and will continue to do what they can to maintain it. Citizens reward them by continuing to frequent the outlets. Accepting

media as a mechanism that influences racial stereotypes requires a recognition of the fact that humans carry these attitudes with them. As such, the history that has produced ideologies about the Black identity must be discussed in order to understand the continued evolution of negative racial stereotypes.

<div style="text-align:center">**Racialized Criminality**</div>

Much of the literature review up until this point has covered how scholars have traditionally approached media analysis. In inserting race and the perpetuation of racial stereotypes against Black people into discussions of media analysis, a review of the development of racialized criminal identities is appropriate. This study is in no way an exhaustive synthesis of the lengthy canon of race and crime experts. However, in describing the presence of criminal stereotypes against Black people necessitates acknowledging the wide range of scholars that have advanced discourse about the development of Black identity, crime and the Black identity, and the perpetuation of these racist attitudes (Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1952; Mills, 1997; Alexander, 2012; Kendi, 2016). As media is increasingly becoming utilized as a machine for the relaying of information, broadcasting agendas, and as a landscape for political and public culture to be presented and interpreted through social platforms, the effective use of this tool and its capabilities to further the racial divide must be called into question. In making these connections, media conveying racial stereotypes seems less like a new phenomenon as it aligns with the history of Black objectification.

**Black Identity**

The field of Black studies, in general, aims to locate silences, gaps, and erasures of resistances by society through overt racial performances and the practices that are not explicitly evident (Hine, 2014). The gap in this instance, lies in the way in which media is a reifying source

of racial information and attitudes, but it is not always thought of as such. As Barbara Jean Fields (1990) reminds us that race in the United States has evolved from an idea to an ideology, the question then is not if race is present, but how racial information is manifested into our everyday life experiences.

Considered to be the father of Black identity by many scholars, W.E.B. Du Bois presented one of the groundbreaking frameworks in which to explain the lived experience of Black people that has survived through literary time. "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (Du Bois 1903). Residing between the emancipation of enslaved people and before Jim Crow, Du Bois was forecasting that the apparent milestone our country had achieved was purely a symbolic notion and that racial discrepancies would continue to be perpetuated. Du Bois describes Black people as displaced, a, "seventh son", in the world burdened by the conditions of bondage. Enslavement "veiled" the Black identity on two fronts: the outward projection of constantly being otherized, and the internal reconciliation of one's status as different. Continuing, Du Bois argues that this causes strain within the stream of Black self-consciousness that renders the body displaced as, "an outcast and stranger in my own house" (pg. 2), constantly striving for self-actualization in the former—to not be seen as a problem—and legitimization in the latter—an acceptance of the Negro soul. Du Bois' work inserted the Black identity into academic discourse, providing room for more localized studies to follow.

Frantz Fanon (1952) extends Du Bois' concept of duality within the Black identity to a raised dimension that adds an additional layer to the conception of the Black self. Fanon offers, "Not only must the black man be black; he must be Black in relation to the White man" (Fanon, 1952), acknowledging the binary nature of the internal struggle of Black self-actualization. Fanon views Black individuals discovering a sense of self as a "negating activity" to describe

how the attitudes towards Black people are conditioned on its proximity to whiteness. In other words, Fanons' framework presents Blackness itself as created to also create whiteness—one could not be White, without something that could be considered not White. Patricia Williams (1988) describes the paradoxical nature of the Black body trying to obtain an image of a liberated human in an environment that was created and perpetuated under conditions that maintained its bondage. Williams argues that laws and rights presents images that instruct social hierarchy and, over time, have been manipulated to un-right and disempower the objectified. Charles W. Mills (1997) offers that our society presides under an underlying racial contract embedded within our society that has produced the racial discrepancies and systemic discrimination that we see today. The overarching idea here is that the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, stereotypes, etc., that are associated with the Black identity are the product of the Black identity being indoctrinated into society in opposition to whiteness.

Through an understanding of the origins of racial identification, that the ways in which a racialized social hierarchy conditioning social attitudes become evident. The various studies on the Black lived experience highlights scholars attempts at describing Black embodiment. The lineage of such scholarship illustrates generations of scholars wrestling with the task of claiming social agency within the confines of a reality that has historically denied Black people of such self-recognition. Opponents to this argument may reason that as more Black individuals permeate more successful society levels, more individuals will develop more positive attitudes towards Black people but unfortunately, this is not the case. This mode of thinking assumes that success and Blackness are innately incompatible (Kendi, 2016). Accepting the reality that Black people were ushered into the United States society as less than reveals that even if media sources

promote positive images of Black people, these efforts could be ineffective when placed against negative images such as crime.

An understanding of what the Black identity communicates to White counterparts is difficult to capture with studies of media content or stimulus response surveys. Various scholars have added historical context to the development of Black people being popularly perceived as criminals (Alexander, 2012; Middlemass, 2017; Muhammad, 2010). The Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Jim Crow era, and the War on Drugs are just a few ways these consequences have manifested through US history that have led to socioeconomic disparities throughout the Black Diaspora. As a result, these racial divisions that have been relegated to social phenomena, should be explained as vitally connected to political and economic structures and processes (Hall, 1980). History has perpetually downplayed the fact that the crimes committed against Africans and Indigenous people were required in forming the United States. This created the modern allusion that Western sociopolitical—and especially socioeconomic—culture was not conditioned on creating inferior images of the enslaved (Horne, 2018). This has led scholars to present historical analyses that insert race into the foreground of the political arena (Singh, 2005). In doing this, the lack of Black political advancements over time serve to illustrate that racism remains to the current day a core feature of the Black identity. Singh, in turn, views race not only as a social marker, but also a tool for political agency that has been instrumental in hindering Black people from being regarded as full citizen-subjects.

As Alexander (2012) puts it, "The genius of the current caste system, and what distinguishes it from its predecessors, is that is appears voluntary" (p. 215), requiring Black people to take on the burden of reclaiming the narrative of the identity that was stripped away from them. Any image or object that a person sees conveys a message but as we see here, the way the message

is crafted is crucially important as it will determine how the information is received. Without holistic historical evidence, interpretations of Black culture will always fall short of accurately depicting the totality of the Black lived experience. Without knowledge of the progression of institutionally discriminatory policies implemented from chattel slavery to the current day, understanding the way in which majority White media gatekeepers create artificial fear of Black people while not explicitly expressing racism is not plainly seen. However, narrative is essential to bridge the gap between our personal perceptions and the lived experiences of those that are different.

The historical context about how the Black identity has developed is essential to this research as it reveals how race has been politicized to oppress Black people. Black people were brought into society as enslaved, and the violence committed against slaves remains in the consciousness of American society. It just looks different. Efforts such as the Emancipation Proclamation, Brown v. Board of Education, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act have attempted to provide *de jure* remedies to racial subjugation. However, these policies have been regarded by scholars as merely transitions between modes of servitude (Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2010). In other words, changing laws will not change societies perception of Black people. In addition, these legal remedies have not prevented Black people from making up the majority of the prison population. As such, it is not the purpose of this research to present these negative stereotypes against Black people as new. Black people have been regarded as inferior and violent when they were enslaved, and these attitudes persist to this day. Media outlets consist of people who are not immune from holding these historically embedded ideologies about Black people. Thus, this research seeks to build on this scholarship by showing how the media is a modern agent that reproduces and reinforces the racist stereotypes against Black people and people of color.

**Research Design**

This project assumes that positive and negative racial stereotypes are deeply correlated and demonstrated through the context of a bipolar structure. Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley (1997; 2002) conducted two studies that focused on respondents receiving racial cues from crime news and the implications of stereotypes that are created as a result of the media's presentation. They tested public perception of race as it related to criminal news reports and found that when Black criminals are associated as violent perpetrators, white respondents were more likely to take harsher stances on crime and punishment. The scholars concluded that public opinion in the criminal justice system's realm is, at the very least, influenced by racial animus. These findings provided significant contributions to the field that would allow citizens to raise their awareness of the underlying forces that have an impact on the way people view those that are different from them. However, a significant amount of time has passed since these studies were conducted. The current events of Black Lives Matter Protests, a historically polarizing presidential election, and the insurrection at the nation's capital have inserted race relations back into the primary discourse of the media and as such, this study warrants revisiting. Through my study, I hope to extend this conversation to offer why this bipolar structure exists and unpack its implications to answer my research question: Can racially charged phenomena that is presented in the media with negative connotations, such as crime, cause underlying racial prejudices and stereotypes to become externally explicit?

**Conceptual Definitions and Purpose**

When deciding on what racially charged phenomena would be most beneficial to analyze, being that the majority of society has some access, whether indirect or direct, to the news, crime seemed to be the most common topic reported that had negative connotations. Additionally,

*negative connotations* serve as a concept that allows me to verbally express not only how "crime" as a word itself has negative associations, but more importantly, how being portrayed as a criminal has damaging ramifications on that individual's identity, anyone associated with the individual, and, most important to this research, the racial group they belong to. Moreover, for the purposes of this study, *racial prejudices and stereotypes,* should be understood as automatically attributing ownership/association of any object/subject within society to a particular racial group and, as a result, they will be theoretically utilized to denote this, however in practice, there are certain distinctions between the two. *Racial prejudices* can be discrete or overt but are typically formed out of discontent with another ethnic group. On the other hand, *racial stereotypes* are generally discrete (although they can be executed in dialect) and involve aggregating an entire racial group as exhibiting a certain behavior, that can be positive or negative, based on observing a small sect of said group being involved with said behavior. Lastly, it is important to note that due to "race" being rooted in social constructions and "culture" being an aspect of a race that is intuitively developed within said race to serve as a collective identifier, I will be using *racial group* and *cultural group* interchangeably.

**Theoretical framework**

Framing is a theoretical framework that describes the process of individuals accumulating unique conceptualizations about issues that shift their thinking about said issue (De Vreese, 2005; Chong & Druckman, 2007). The scholarship supports the idea that mass media plays a significant role in agenda-setting through priming citizens to link issues through their reporting tactics while also interpreting current events by framing the stories using strategic language and visuals (O'Brien, et al., 2019). The term *frame* was not widely used to describe how issues are gathered for mass consumption until the late 1980's as scholars directed more research to the

way content is transmitted to citizens (Jackson, 2019). From here, scholars found that the repetition of frames by news producers cause said information to be stored into memory and accept whatever connections were made (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). As political and racial information are part of the typical agenda of news media, the effects of how this phenomenon is presented to shape individual attitudes is becoming increasingly necessary for scholarship to study (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Jackson, 2019; O'Brien, et al., 2019). As we have established individuals actively choose their media preferences, I adopt framing theory to aid in conceptualizing how the ethnicity of an assailant presented in a news story reproduces and reinforces negative racial attitudes.

In order to explain how racial stereotypes function in relation to the information citizens are exposed to, the bipolar structure of stereotypes is adopted. This framework posits that individuals apply positive stereotypes to their own identity when they are rewarded and apply negative stereotypes to others when the result is punishment—where "punishment" is negative feelings and attitudes that society associates with your identity (Levine, et al., 1999; Campbell & Mohr, 2011).

As new media's purpose is to inform the public of the occurrences pertinent to said community, the innate reaction of the populous being alerted, especially in relation to crime, is expected. I argue that the process of citizen's applying a culprit's criminal association to a complete stranger on the basis of race warrants considerable attention. To illustrate this process, I use these three theories, learning, association, and reinforcement theory, to create my own conglomerate model to conceptualize how this process manifests through human cognition. Learning theory attempts to explain how individuals, as they traverse through their everyday life experiences, cognitively record attributes and behavior patterns about the people they encounter.

Typically, scholars have produced research aimed at the actual process of acquiring information (Kolb, et al., 2001; Illeris, 2018) however, as learning theory is a broad topic, I attempt to extend its application to watching news which generally offers more subtle collections of knowledge.

The general understanding amongst scholars in the field surrounding association theory is actually found in 'Differential Association Theory' which is attempts to explain how criminal acts are learned through the same behavioral learning modes (Burgess & Akers, 1966; Akers, 2011). Recognizing criminology as a necessary field in academia, I argue this line of research is limited as it reduces deviant behavior into a formulaic process that overlooks the numerous variables at play, including the supposed criminality placed on some individuals. As such, here I propose an abstraction of association theory where, through the gathering of observations, an individuals' memory is able to be activated through the brain's stimulus-response connections that causes them to learn to affiliate certain past occurrences to what is currently in front of them. These three theories are bereft of implications regarding stereotypes, and I build on the bipolar structure of stereotypes to create my own framework: Stereotype Trigger Theory (Figure 1— Appendix). Utilizing this framework, this research seeks to explain how stereotypes are learned, activated, and are reinforced as a result of the way citizens are presented information. Thus, this conceptualization should be taken as innovative, all the while limited as it is being developed.

**Hypothesis**

The theories presented offer substantial explanatory power to the relationship between racial stereotypes and news media. Crime news as an engine that produces cultural information must be called into question as a catalyst for evoking racial stereotypes that influences attitudes about the assailant's criminality, sentencing, and prison reform policy. As such, I look to test the following hypotheses:

$H_1$: Respondents exposed to the treatment group with a Black assailant will be more

likely to assume their guilt.

$H_2$: Respondents exposed to the treatment group with a Black assailant will be more

likely to assign harsher sentences.

$H_3$: Respondents exposed to the treatment group with a Black assailant will indicate that

they are more likely to commit a similar crime in the future.

$H_4$: Respondents exposed to the treatment group with a Black assailant will be less in

favor of prison reform policy.

**Methods and Methodology Overview**

This study will utilize an experimental survey design with four randomized treatment

groups as well as a post-treatment survey to follow. The first three treatments will ask the

respondent about each one of the following crimes: armed robbery, illegal drugs, and

embezzlement. These crimes were selected to provide a range of offenses, from violent to non-

violent, to test if the nature of the crime impacted their assessment of criminality. The fourth

treatment will ask the respondent their approval of certain prison reform policies. One proposes a

furlough program that is primed with race (Black/White). The other is a mental rehabilitation

transition program, however it does not indicate a race and instead proposes the policy be open

for violent offenders (See Figure 2—Appendix). The goal of this analysis to conduct a fiscally

efficient study that will contribute to the existing literature and serve as a plateau for more

scholars that will regard this topic as notable for further research.

To test how race impacts the assigning of guilt and prison reform attitudes participants

were presented a series of questions that identified either a Black or White male. A gender

component was not included to make sure that only race was being tested. The post-test will be

used to capture a participants racial and political ideologies. Scholars have not succeeded in utilizing a consistent model for this measure due to racism being conceptualized in inconsistent ways, and some scholars have blurred the line between racial attitudes and policy preferences (Henry & Sears, 2002). Nonetheless, these questions were included in attempt to capture a full sense of respondents' racial animus.

For each of the experiments, the crime serves as the dependent variable. For example, I ask participants in the armed robbery experimental group, "Consider a case in another city where a [White/Black] man was arrested for robbery with a dangerous weapon: In your opinion, how likely is it that the man is found guilty of the crime? (1) Very Likely (2) Likely (3) Unlikely (4) Very Unlikely". Following the guilt question, I ask, "In your opinion, how long should the man serve in prison if found guilty? (1) 1-5 years (2) 5-10 years (3) 10-20 years (4) 20+ years". The last question asks, "How likely is it that the man will commit a similar crime again in the near future? (1) Very Likely (2) Likely (3) Unlikely (4) Very Unlikely". The next two treatment groups are the exact same aside from three (3) exceptions: First, the second treatment group crime asks about possession of illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia. Second, the second treatment group sentences were reduced to, "(1) 1-2 years (2) 2-3 years (3) 3-4 years (4) 4-5 years", to reflect realistic drug sentence guidelines. Lastly, the third treatment group asks about an embezzlement crime but repeats the follow-up questions and sentencing intervals from the first treatment group.

The fourth experiment asks participants the following question, "Some states have programs to help prisoners—many of whom are [White/Black]—adjust to life outside prison by granting them weekend furloughs near the end of their prison terms. (1) Strongly approve (2) Approve (3) Disapprove (4) Strongly Disapprove". I then ask, "In your opinion, how likely is it

that prisoners in programs like this will commit more crimes while they're on a weekend furlough? (1) Very Likely (2) Likely (3) Unlikely (4) Very Unlikely". The final question asks, "Consider a state policy that grants early release to good conduct prisoners—including violent offenders eligible for parole—and enlists them in mental rehabilitation transition programs aimed to reduce recidivism rates. 1) Strongly approve (2) Approve (3) Disapprove (4) Strongly Disapprove". These questions seek to test if the race of the criminal listed in the previous question impacts respondents' assessment of guilt presumption. These questions seek to test if the race of the criminal listed in the first question impacts respondents' assessment of guilt presumption.

For each experiment, I recoded the responses to the follow-up questions to be under one variable name that corresponded to the experiment (guilty, sentence, and recidivism) and I repeated this for each of the four treatment questions. It is important to note that, while typically survey stimuli stand alone, the follow-up questions should be conceptualized as part of the experimental stimulus. That said, each experiment (i.e., Exp. 1 Guilty, Exp. 1 Sentencing, etc.) serves as the *dependent variable*. I then recoded the groups from each experiment under one variable name (i.e., Exp. 1 group) for the participants that were assigned to either the control or treatment group. For each of the four experiments, I looked at the questions they responded to and assigned a zero (0) or one (1). Zero signifies that the particular observation was randomly assigned to the control question (White) for that experiment, and one signifies that the respondent was assigned to the treatment group (Black). For each experiment, the group variable I created served as the *independent variable*. It is important to mention that respondents were assigned randomly to each of the four treatment groups—the treatment received for each experiment did not impact the group respondents were assigned to for the following treatments.

The sample consisted of primarily University of Arkansas students (n=~230). The respondents must be at least 18 years of age, and, due to the selection being open to the entire community, hopefully it will attract as many different levels of education as possible to minimize selection threats to internal validity. The experiment will likely have to be conducted with a minimum of 20 participants to ensure that findings can have some degree of general application while also recognizing that the participates have not undergone such experimentation which allows conclusions to be drawn.

### Data Analysis

I began my analysis on race influencing crime attitudes by revisiting the model's scholars have utilized to examine negative stereotypes against African Americans impacting racialized crime policy (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997, 2002, in press). All four experiments were analyzed with an OLS regression model and I discuss the results from the experiments with accompanying figures below. I will synthesize the results in the discussion section following the analysis.

$H_1$: Respondents exposed to the treatment group with a Black assailant will be more likely to assume their guilt.

$H_0$: The treatment group with a Black assailant will not impact respondents' assumption of their guilt.

For this hypothesis, I sought to assess if the race of the criminal impacted respondent's presumption of guilt. The guilty question for each of the three experiments (armed robbery, drugs, embezzlement) asked, "In your opinion, how likely is it that the man is found guilty of the crime?". The regression results show to be statistically significant and positively correlated indicating that the race of the criminal had an impact on participants' responses to this model. As

the control group (White criminal) was coded as 0 and the treatment (Black criminal) 1, the

positive correlation signifies that participants exposed to the "Black" racial identifier were more

likely to assume their guilt for all three crimes (armed robbery, drugs, embezzlement). Based on

the analysis of Hypothesis 1 (Figure 1.1), the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative

hypothesis that being exposed to a Black assailant will elicit greater presumption of guilt is

accepted.

|  | *Dependent variable:* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Model 1: guilty (1) | Model 2: guilty (2) | Model 3: guilty (3) |
| Exp.1 group | 0.552*** (0.090) |  |  |
| Exp.2 group |  | 1.040*** (0.084) |  |
| Exp.3 group |  |  | 0.789*** (0.097) |
| Constant | 2.900*** (0.063) | 2.693*** (0.060) | 2.746*** (0.069) |
| Observations | 235 | 230 | 228 |
| $R^2$ | 0.139 | 0.401 | 0.226 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.135 | 0.398 | 0.222 |
| Residual Std. Error | 0.691 (df = 233) | 0.639 (df = 228) | 0.735 (df = 226) |
| F Statistic | 37.486*** (df = 1; 233) | 152.443*** (df = 1; 228) | 65.821*** (df = 1; 226) |

*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

**Figure 1.1**

**H₂**: Respondents exposed to the treatment group with a Black assailant will be more likely to assign harsher sentences.

**H₀**: The treatment group with a Black assailant will not impact respondents' assigning sentences.

|  | *Dependent variable:* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Model 1: sentence (1) | Model 2: sentence (2) | Model 3: sentence (3) |
| Exp.1 group | -0.329*** (0.100) |  |  |
| Exp.2 group |  | -0.101 (0.116) |  |
| Exp.3 group |  |  | -0.254** (0.113) |
| Constant | 1.842*** (0.070) | 1.570*** (0.082) | 1.921*** (0.080) |
| Observations | 235 | 229 | 228 |
| $R^2$ | 0.044 | 0.003 | 0.022 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.040 | -0.001 | 0.017 |
| Residual Std. Error | 0.766 (df = 233) | 0.877 (df = 227) | 0.856 (df = 226) |
| F Statistic | 10.807*** (df = 1; 233) | 0.753 (df = 1; 227) | 5.033** (df = 1; 226) |

*Note:*                                                              *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

**Figure 1.2**

$H_2$ sought to assess if the race of the criminal caused respondents to assign harsher sentences. The sentence question for each of the three experiments (armed robbery, drugs, embezzlement) asked, "In your opinion, how long should the man serve in prison if found guilty?". The regression results for Experiment 1 (armed robbery) and Experiment 3

(embezzlement) show to be statistically significant and positively correlated indicating that the race of the criminal had an impact on participant's responses to this model. However, the negative correlations for Experiment 1 and 3 indicates that respondents exposed to the control group (White assailant) assigned harsher sentences—a relationship that is outside initial predictions. In addition, the regression coefficient of the independent variable for Experiment 2 (drug offense) does not show to be statistically significant which is not consistent with projections.

Based on the analysis of Hypothesis 2 (Figure 1.2), Experiment 1 and 3 prove to reject $H_2$ however, the statistical significance of the models also does not allow for the null hypothesis to be accepted. Based on the analyses of Hypothesis 2, the Experiment 2 model shows that the null hypothesis must be accepted and the alternative hypothesis that respondents would assign Black criminal's harsher sentences is rejected.

**H₃**: Respondents exposed to the treatment group with a Black assailant will indicate that they are more likely to commit a similar crime in the future.

**H₀**: The treatment group with a Black assailant will not impact respondents' assigning future criminality.

For Hypothesis 3, I sought to test if knowing the race of a criminal would cause respondents to be more likely to predict that the assailant would reoffend. The recidivism question for each of the three experiments (armed robbery, drugs, embezzlement) asked, "How likely is it that the man will commit a similar crime in the near future?". The recidivism model shows to be statistically significant however, the negative correlation is not consistent with my initial hypothesis. The regression results show that participants exposed to the control group (White criminal) were more likely to report them as reoffenders. Based on the analysis of $H_3$

(Figure 1.3), the regression results prove to reject this hypothesis. Moreover, the statistical significance of all three experiments in this model prove to reject the null hypothesis as well.

|  | *Dependent variable:* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Model 1: recidivism (1) | Model 2: recidivism (2) | Model 3: recidivism (3) |
| Exp.1 group | -0.308*** (0.075) |  |  |
| Exp.2 group |  | -0.361*** (0.092) |  |
| Exp.3 group |  |  | -0.805*** (0.095) |
| Constant | 3.025*** (0.052) | 3.292*** (0.065) | 2.735*** (0.067) |
| Observations | 233 | 229 | 227 |
| $R^2$ | 0.068 | 0.064 | 0.241 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.064 | 0.060 | 0.238 |
| Residual Std. Error | 0.573 (df = 231) | 0.692 (df = 227) | 0.716 (df = 225) |
| F Statistic | 16.831*** (df = 1; 231) | 15.562*** (df = 1; 227) | 71.600*** (df = 1; 225) |
| *Note:* |  |  | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

**Figure 1.3**

**H4**: Respondents exposed to the treatment group with a Black assailant will be less in favor of prison reform policy.

**H$_0$**: The treatment group with a Black assailant will not impact respondents' opinions on prison reform policy.

$H_4$ sought to assess if the race of the criminal impacted respondents' attitudes towards prison reform policies. The "furlough" question asked participants their view on the following prompt, "Some states have programs to help prisoners—many of whom are [Black/White]— adjust to life outside prison by granting them weekend furloughs near the end of their prison terms." This was the first question of the experiment and is the only of the three that identified the race of the group in which the policy is targeted to assist. I did this intentionally as to see if there would be a difference in attitudes for policies that identified the race versus policies that did not.

The "recidivism" question asked participants, "In your opinion, how likely is it that prisoners in programs like this will commit more crimes while they're on a weekend furlough?" This question seeks analyze whether the race participants observed in the first question impacted their view of the program's effectiveness and assumption of future criminality.

The "rehab" question asked participants their view on the following prompt, "Consider a state policy that grants early release to good conduct prisoners—including violent offenders eligible for parole—and enlists them in mental rehabilitation transition programs aimed to reduce recidivism rates". This question sought respondents support, or lack thereof, for a policy that sought to keep criminals from being reoffenders. In addition, I included the element that the primary beneficiaries of the policy would be violent offenders to see if that elicited more negative attitudes towards the program.

The regression results (Figure 1.4) for Experiment 1 (furlough) and Experiment 2 (recidivism) show to be statistically significant, indicating that participants responses were

impacted by the stimulus. The furlough coefficient is positively correlated indicating that the

race of the criminal had an impact on respondents' attitude towards this reform program. On the

other hand, the recidivism coefficient is negatively correlated indicating that participants thought

white assailants would be more like to reoffend during the furlough program—contrary to

preliminary expectations. Based on the analysis of Hypothesis 4, the results from question 1 are

the only of the three that reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that race

impacted respondents' opinion on the furlough policy. The findings from question 2 reject the

null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis. The results from question 3 (rehab) failed to show

statistical significance and as a result, it rejects $H_4$ and accepts the null hypothesis.

| | *Dependent variable:* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1:<br>furlough<br>(1) | Model 2:<br>recidivism<br>(2) | Model 3:<br>rehab<br>(3) |
| Exp. 4group | 0.783*** <br>(0.135) | -0.205** <br>(0.084) | 0.050 <br>(0.096) |
| Constant | 2.491*** <br>(0.096) | 2.045*** <br>(0.059) | 3.445*** <br>(0.068) |
| Observations | 223 | 223 | 223 |
| $R^2$ | 0.131 | 0.026 | 0.001 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.128 | 0.022 | -0.003 |
| Residual Std. Error (df = 221) | 1.011 | 0.623 | 0.716 |
| F Statistic (df = 1; 221) | 33.456*** | 6.011** | 0.273 |

| *Note:* | $^*p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$ |
|---|---|

**Figure 1.4**

**Discussion**

Expected responses were evaluated by testing four hypotheses: whether race impacted presumption of guilt, whether race influenced assigning sentences to criminals, whether race impacted assumption of future criminality, and whether race impacted individuals' attitudes towards prison reform policy. For the first response, the findings were as expected: respondents were more likely to presume guilt when presented with a Black assailant in the stimulus. Perhaps the most significant of the findings as it aligns with the overarching purpose of this research. Over a span of three categorically different crimes (violent, non-violent, white collar) the regression results consistently showed respondents were more likely to report the Black perpetrator as guilty. These findings align with the long line of literature from W.E.B DuBois (1903) to Michelle Alexander (2010) that seeks to analyze the ways in which Black commodification, objectification, dehumanization, criminalization, etc., has culminated into an ideological mark placed upon Black bodies that has perpetuated the negative attitudes associated with Blackness.

In addition, the results from Experiment 4 show that race did play a role in participants support for a furlough program. As the results did behave as expected, I argue that the theories of media selectivity and framing play a primary role in influencing how these polices are perceived. As there is research that supports the idea that the politically conservative tend to be more likely to push messages and initiatives centered around "law and order", it is reasonable to expect that this will also impact individual's assessment of a threat. That is, participants that observe more information that paints Black and Brown people to be violent and non-law abiding, are more likely to view them as such even after serving their due time in prison. Moreover, these findings are also consistent with the stereotype trigger theory that I created. Again, viewing stereotypes as

behaving in a bipolar fashion, White respondents are less likely to assume White assailants to commit a crime while on furlough because doing so associates their own identity with negative stereotypes.

Although the remaining variables did not behave as expected the fact that this study was modeled after research published in two of the top journals within their field (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997, 2002, in press) over 20 years ago provides enough space for these results to offer contributions. In explaining the results rendered from the experiment, it is noteworthy to consider the tangible effects that could arise from simply asking respondents about racially charged topics. Generally, surveys have questioned respondents about racial attitudes directly. While I also inquire about explicit racial ideals, I intentionally present them after the treatment questions in order to avoid triggering preexisting racial sentiments. Nonetheless, considering the high salience of race in current mainstream media, the accuracy of reported racial prejudice should be called into question. Put differently, respondents are presumably less likely to report their visceral racial prejudices on a survey so they will not be viewed, by themselves or anyone else, as racist. Abrajano and Álvarez (2019) conducted a study looking at a span of American National Election Survey items that have racial sentiment as the primary topic to test if different survey modes effect respondents' answer's to items regarding racial attitudes. They found that respondents taking the survey online were more likely to report negative attitudes towards Black and Latino people than respondents that took a face-to-face survey. As I administered an online experiment, the findings on survey mode are not of primary concern in this analysis. Rather, simply because Abrajano and Álvarez found a difference in responses suggests that there is a raised awareness respondent's experience when presented with racially charged information. Some participants may have become privy to the topic through reading the title of the survey. As

such, the current time period combined with respondents' awareness of being questioned about racial information are recognized as potential spurious variables.

I recognize several limitations of this study. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) found in their study that, as crime news is typically accompanied with an image, the visual nature of the experiment script can impact responses. It is well understood that the United States social structure is conditioned consists of a racial on the basis of their skin color. As such, recognizing race is an inherently visual undertaking. While this study primed participants with just the word Black/White, I am unable to know what image was produced in their brain. A more conclusive study would include the images of the assailants which would add explanatory power to concluding that race was a significant factor. Similarly designed studies have used visual images in the stimulus, however the participants were presented the same picture but altered the skin tone using photoshop programming. While I acknowledge the importance of methodological consistency, I argue that this approach is also limited. There are distinctive physical characteristics that distinguish Black people from White people. Further research should aim to humanize the stimulus images to the best of its ability. The intriguing gap in this research lies in uncovering the ways in which real images impacts respondents' ideologies and attitudes about more broad crime topics and issues related to race.

Additionally, this study is limited by the time period in which such analysis is conducted. I believe that social media has eclipsed traditional television news in communicating current events to the public. This is proven even more so by the fact that the majority of television news programs and networks have social media accounts where they also report the news. Local news headlines and reports are now reaching communities in vastly different ways and the approaches to analyzing this content is outdated. I recognize the need for experiments to be replicable and I

do not believe that evolving the methods would make this impossible. Simply put, social media news content looks different, is presented differently, and is interacted with in different ways. For example, a crime report could be published on a social media cite and there is a comment thread that discusses all the negative effects of criminal justice policy which could influence the citizens attitudes. The possibilities are numerous, but the main point here is that the traditional way in which media is analyzed in academia must be further developed to account for the rapid evolution of mass media. Future studies should aim to seek social media content analysis and compare it to the television content. As social media apps become more widespread throughout the world and our dependence on them increases, it will be detrimental for scholarship to observe how society is changed as a result.

Through this study, I was able to gather data that shed light on the ways in which racial stereotypes can be unconsciously triggered. It is important to note that I gathered a convenient sample (n = ~200) of primarily University of Arkansas undergraduate students. There is literature that supports the general idea that college students tend to have more progressive views, and I do acknowledge this could have certainly influenced the findings. As this is an experiment that participants have never been exposed to in the very literal sense, the findings are not bereft of significant implications. Nonetheless, this experiments' population parameters bring about inherent limitations. A more robust analysis would broaden the scope of students that were tested to ensure consistency amongst race, academic discipline, and gender. A representative same of this magnitude would allow potential conclusions about the university as a whole to be rendered. Moreover, conducting a representative study of adults aged 30 and older could offer stronger conclusions to be made about society as a whole.

In conjunction with the selection of the sample, this study is limited by nature of its content. There is a substantial amount research that finds race to be a primary cue in crime news reports that influences citizens attitudes about crime and race (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997, 2002, in press; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Jackson, 2019). While this is significant for further research, it is also important to acknowledge that race is not the only factor. Hanes Walton Jr. (2000) brings forth the idea of socializing events to assess the ways in which significant political episodes socializes the generations that undergo them. In conjunction, Heather Silber Mohamed (2017) discusses the ways in which protests are significant events that influenced the self-identification of group members. Since the start of this research in 2019, we have experienced a global pandemic, the second wave of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the January 6, 2021 capital insurrection. Over the period of this short couple of years, conversations about racism, implicit bias, White supremacy etc., have become more salient since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. As a result, these findings represent a generation entering its prime wrestling with these issues in a critical fashion. The results show that criminal justice reform is not lost amongst young people who are being forced to change and evolve during these unstable and chaotic times. What these results show me is that there is hope. I am hopeful that these times are pushing my generation to be truth seekers. As we bear witness to the sometimes-ugly truth, I have hope that we will have the courage to change our ways for the betterment of the underrepresented and underserved.

**Conclusion**

This research expected to find is that, when participants are primed with a Black criminal, they will be more likely to assign guilt, apply harsher sentences, and presume future criminality. In part I did find this. This study found that respondents were more likely to assign guilt after being primed with a Black perpetrator and this should not be overlooked. I will keep accurate records of the procedures taken, materials presented, surveys, etc., to ensure the study is repeatable, in an attempt to maximize its reliability. The findings from this study have multiple paths for implications to be made, justifying it as a topic that is worth continually studying. The research offers various considerations for scholars to further through additional experiments. As more findings are developed and solidified by additional research, they can act as an engine of education that will help uncover some of the insidious ideologies that are embedded within our society. If the findings trend as anticipated, research should continue to be geared towards finding additional aspects of society that trigger racial prejudices to be projected. If the findings begin to trend in the opposite direction, then research focus needs to shift back to trying to find where racial prejudices originate in society.

What must not be forgotten is that racism is not something that can be reasoned with. Conversations about implicit bias, racial stereotypes, and microaggressions are beneficial as it allows individuals to claim their predisposition's. These one-dimensional approaches to addressing racism connects an individual to an isolated feeling; it is finite. This research, and studies in the like, are attempting to add depth to this approach to uncover the ways in which predispositions are reinforced by social structures and practices. Racial stereotypes are rooted in hatred that extends far beyond the shores of the Americas. Their persistence can be credited to no other source other than its own self-perpetuation evolving and being redesigned throughout human history. Any explanation outside of this would be to blame the stereotyped for the ideal's

society projects onto them. Race being a social construct is often touted to deemphasize its pervasiveness to promote colorblind distinctions between human beings. While this is an admirable approach, it once again overlooks the way in which the contradictions produced by racism in the development of the American sociopolitical institution have compounded. Further research should continue analyzing areas of society that feed information to the masses via public forums where citizens interact with one another—i.e., social media. Here we find true public opinion that can be utilized to analyze what agenda is being set and by whom. As we continuously answer these questions, we will have a better understanding of power distribution in order to make conscious efforts to shift society toward truth and justice.

This research affords society the opportunity to gain vast amounts of intellectual and moral capital. For example, pursuing this topic further could find ways to address how certain "phobias" are developed against certain races. There is ample amount of reputable research that explores phenomena that tries to explain why things are different, while this research tries to use said differences in order to make us realize that we are, more or less, the same. Marginalized communities are unable to convince the majority culture that the stereotypes against them are misguided. Until multiple systems are put in place that are critical of problematic institutions and consistently hold them accountable, society will remain trapped in a loop of reincarnating racial animus. Equality is something that at times seems like an urban myth within our society. Coming to an understanding is the only way that it will become true.

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**Appendix**



**Figure 1**

**Stereotype Trigger Theory**

## Survey Questions

**Preliminary questions**

How old are you?

What is the highest level of education you completed?
__ Freshman
__ Sophomore
__ Junior
__ Senior
__ College graduate
__ Post-graduate education
__ Don't know
__ Refused

Are you male or female?
1. Female
2. Male

In what state do you currently live?

In what country do you currently live?

**Experiment 1**

Consider a case in another city where a [Black/White] man was arrested for robbery with a dangerous weapon:

In your opinion, how likely is it that the man is guilty of the crime?
__Very unlikely
__Unlikely
__Likely
__Very likely

In your opinion, how long should the man serve in prison if found guilty?
__1-5 years
__5-10 years
__10-20 years
__20+

How likely is it that the man will commit a similar crime again in the near future?
__Very unlikely
__Unlikely
__Likely

___Very likely

## Experiment 2

Consider a case in another city where a [Black/White] man was arrested for possession of illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia:

In your opinion, how likely is it that the man is guilty of the crime?
 ___Very unlikely
 ___Unlikely
 ___Likely
 ___Very likely

In your opinion, how long should the man serve in prison if found guilty?
 ___1-2 years
 ___2-3 years
 ___3-4 years
 ___4-5 years

How likely is it that the man will commit a similar crime again in the near future?
 ___Very unlikely
 ___Unlikely
 ___Likely
 ___Very likely

## Experiment 3

Consider a case in another city where a [Black/White] man was arrested for embezzling $50,000 from the tech company where he worked:

In your opinion, how likely is it that the man is guilty of the crime?
 ___Very unlikely
 ___Unlikely
 ___Likely
 ___Very likely

In your opinion, how long should the man serve in prison if found guilty?
 ___1-5 years
 ___5-10 years
 ___10-20 years
 ___20+

How likely is it that the man will commit a similar crime again in the near future?
 ___Very unlikely
 ___Unlikely
 ___Likely

__Very likely

## Experiment 4

Some states have programs to help prisoners—many of whom are [Black/White]—adjust to life outside prison by granting them weekend furloughs near the end of their prison terms. Do you:
__Strongly disprove
__Disapprove
__Approve
__Strongly approve

In your opinion, how likely is it that prisoners in programs like this will commit more crimes while they are on a weekend furlough?
__Very unlikely
__Unlikely
__Likely
__Very likely

Consider a state policy that grants early release to good conduct prisoners—including violent offenders eligible for parole—and enlists them in mental rehabilitation transition programs aimed to reduce recidivism rates:
__Strongly disprove
__Disapprove
__Approve
__Strongly approve

## Post-treatment questions

Which of the following best describes your race or ethnic background?
__American Indian
__Asian
__Black or African American
__Hispanic
__White non-Hispanic
__Something else (specify)

On a scale of political ideology, individuals can be arranged from strongly liberal to strongly conservative. Which of the following best describes your views?
1. Extremely liberal
2. Liberal
3. Slightly liberal
4. Moderate; middle of the road
5. Slightly conservative
6. Conservative
7. Extremely conservative

99. Haven't thought much about this

With which political party do you most identify?
1. Democratic
2. Republican
4. Independent
5. Other

Do you completely, somewhat, or slightly identify with that party?
__Completely
__Somewhat
__Slightly

There are a lot of different programs or news shows on the TV about things like politics and the economy. Do you ever watch any news shows on television?
__No
__Yes

During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read, or listen to news on TV, radio, printed newspapers, or the Internet, not including sports?
0. None
1. One day
2. Two days
3. Three days
4. Four days
5. Five days
6. Six days
7. Seven days

How much attention do you pay to news about national politics on TV, radio, printed newspapers, or the Internet?
1. A great deal
2. A lot
3. A moderate amount
4. A little
5. None at all

Think about the fictional programs that you watch like dramas and comedies that are on TV. When you see Black people on TV shows, how often are they playing each of the following types of roles?
*Very often, Sometimes, Not too often, Never, Don't know*
__Doctors or Nurses
__Criminals or gang members
__Maids or house keepers
__Police Officers or Firefighters
__Lawyers or Judges
__High school dropouts

__Teachers
__Gardeners or landscapers


Think about the fictional programs that you watch like dramas and comedies that are on TV. When you see White people on TV shows, how often are they playing each of the following types of roles?
*Very often, Sometimes, Not too often, Never, Don't know*
__Doctors or Nurses
__Criminals or gang members
__Maids or house keepers
__Police Officers or Firefighters
__Lawyers or Judges
__High school dropouts
__Teachers
__Gardeners or landscapers


How many White people do you know as co-workers, neighbors, friends, or family? Would you say it is none, one or two, several, or a lot?
__ None
__ One or two
__ Several
__A Lot
__ Don't know


How many Black people do you know as co-workers, neighbors, friends, or family? Would you say it is none, one or two, several, or a lot?
__ None
__ One or two
__ Several
__A Lot
__ Don't know


How frequently do you have contact or interact with Black people?
__ Daily
__ Weekly
__ Monthly
__ Almost Never
__ Don't know


How frequently do you have contact or interact with White people?
__ Daily
__ Weekly
__ Monthly
__ Almost Never
__ Don't know

Thinking about those interactions or contacts you have had with Black people, would you describe them as mostly positive, mostly negative, or about equally positive or negative?

__Mostly positive
__Equally positive or negative
__Mostly negative
__Don't know

Thinking about those interactions or contacts you have had with White people, would you describe them as mostly positive, mostly negative, or about equally positive or negative?

__Mostly positive
__Equally positive or negative
__Mostly negative
__Don't know

Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with each of the following statements?

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree somewhat | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree somewhat | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Scholars have learned that information often influences the way in which people answer survey questions. With this in mind, we are interested in whether you are taking the time to read the text that precedes each question. So, in order to demonstrate that you have read this text, please ignore the question below and skip to the next question.

Which of the following devices are you using to answer this survey?
__A computer
__A tablet (like an iPad)
__A smart phone (like a Blackberry or iPhone)

I want you to think about some characteristics we sometimes associate with groups of people. In each case, I'll describe two ends of the scale, and you can tell me where you would place each group. {Whites, Black}
*-1 through 7: 1 meaning all people are first listed term and 7 means that all people are the latter term. A score of '4' means that you think that most people in the group are not closer to one end or the other, and of course, you may choose any number in between.*
- Hard-working and lazy
- Prone to violence and not prone to violence
- Patriotic and unpatriotic
- Criminal and law-abiding
- Short tempered and even tempered
- Prefer to be self-helping and prefer to live on welfare
- Hostile and friendly

In general, do the police treat whites better than blacks, treat blacks better than whites, or treat them both the same?
__ Police treat whites much better
__ Police treat whites moderately better
__ Police treat whites a little better
__ Police treat both the same
__ Police treat blacks a little better
__ Police treat blacks moderately better
__ Police treat blacks much better

In general, does the federal government treat whites better than blacks, treat blacks better than whites, or treat them both the same?
__ Treats whites much better
__ Treats whites moderately better
__ Treats whites a little better
__ Treats both the same
__ Treats blacks a little better
__ Treats blacks moderately better
__ Treats blacks much better

Over the past 5 years or so, would you say that violent crime in our nation has increased.
  __A lot
  __A little
  __Stayed about the same
  __Decreased a little
  __Decreased a lot

Taxpayers should not have to pay for lawyers to defend poor people who are obviously guilty of committing a crime.
  __Strongly agree
  __Agree
  __Neutral
  __Disagree
  __Strongly disagree

Should federal spending on dealing with crime be increased, decreased, or kept the same?
  __ Increased a great deal
  __ Increased a moderate amount
  __ Increased a little
  __ Kept the same
  __ Decreased a little

Accused rapists and child molesters have every right to a fair trial.
  __Strongly agree
  __Agree
  __Neutral
  __Disagree
  __Strongly disagree

If someone is caught red-handed beating and robbing an elderly person on the street, it is just a waste of taxpayer's money to bother with the usual expensive trial.
  __Strongly agree
  __Agree
  __Neutral
  __Disagree
  __Strongly disagree

Far too many guilty people are set free because of some legal technicality.
  __Strongly agree
  __Agree
  __Neutral
  __Disagree
  __Strongly disagree

In dealing with criminals, it is more important to rehabilitate them than to punish them.
    \_\_Strongly agree
    \_\_Agree
    \_\_Neutral
    \_\_Disagree
    \_\_Strongly disagree

Anyone convicted of murder should receive the death penalty.
    \_\_Strongly agree
    \_\_Agree
    \_\_Neutral
    \_\_Disagree
    \_\_Strongly disagree

The best way to deal with violent crimes is to dramatically increase prison terms for people who commit violent crimes.
    \_\_Strongly agree
    \_\_Agree
    \_\_Neutral
    \_\_Disagree
    \_\_Strongly disagree

To really reduce crime in this country we need to focus more on reducing poverty instead of just cracking down on criminals.
    \_\_Strongly agree
    \_\_Agree
    \_\_Neutral
    \_\_Disagree
    \_\_Strongly disagree

# UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

**To:** Najja K Baptist
BELL 4188

**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair
IRB Expedited Review

**Date:** 10/05/2020

**Action:** **Exemption Granted**

**Action Date:** 10/05/2020

**Protocol #:** 2008277311

**Study Title:** Crime News and Racial Stereotype Framing

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc:    Warrington E Sebree, Investigator