Black Lives Matter Media Framing Effects

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Abstract of Thesis

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Framing theory explains that the media can select certain aspects of an issue and make them more salient, thus influencing public opinion on that issue. Similarly, social movements have historically been framed in the media. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement coverage showed opponents of the movement as violent and irrational while framing protestors as peaceful, shocking mainstream Americans into support of the movement (Roberts and Klibanoff, 2007). However, a similar social movement, Students for a Democratic Society, was framed as radical and militant preventing mainstream sympathy or support (Gitlin, 2003). That work suggests that how the Black Lives Matter movement is framed may influence support for the movement and its policies. I seek to answer the following research question. Does negative media framing of the Black Lives Matter Movement impact public perceptions about the organization and their cause?

To test the effect of framing of the movement on opinion, I undertook an experiment which provided individuals with one of three news stories that framed Black Lives Matter in a positive, negative or neutral fashion. I find that positive media framing of the Black Lives Matter Movement increases support for the organization. These effects do not carry over to increased support for the causes and perspectives Black Lives Matter advocates for – those who view the positive media framing are no more likely to think more needs to be done to achieve racial equality and no more likely to view fatal police encounters with Blacks as signs of a broader problem or see police brutality as an issue than those who received alternative frames. These findings are consistent even among only White respondents. The data indicates no difference in views among those who
viewed the negative and neutral framed Black Lives Matter articles and those who did not read about Black Lives Matter. This suggests that the negative frame might be the dominant frame most Americans already have about the Black Lives Matter movement, especially among White only respondents. Still, even if the negative frame is already the dominant frame, my study shows the potential for positive media framing to make an impact on support for Black Lives Matter. These findings have significant implications for the success and strategies of the Black Lives Matter movement.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

On February 26, 2012 George Zimmerman shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. Black Lives Matter started as a hashtag on Twitter, sparked by Martin’s murder and Zimmerman’s subsequent acquittal, but today describes a mass movement to end the systematic violence perpetrated against Black lives in America. Sadly, there is an evident racial divide in public opinion surrounding Black Lives Matter, with a majority of White Americans not supporting the movement. Even though most Americans recognize that police brutality and racial inequality are an issue, this does not translate into support for the Black Lives Matter Movement. But why do so many Americans support the goals of Black Lives Matter but not the organization? The answer likely lies in media framing as I expect positive framing of Black Lives Matter will increase support for the organization while negative framing will undermine support.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Robert Entman was one of the first scholars to analyze media framing effects. He viewed the concept of framing as “a way to describe the power of a communicating text” (Entman, 1993, p. 51). Framing includes both selection and salience, making one aspect of an issue more salient in communications than other aspects of that issue. A frame defines the problem, identifies its source, makes moral judgments, and offers solutions. Extending this research, Entman finds that media bias is often related to media framing. He argues when the media presents a repetition of certain frames, it becomes a bias that supports the interest of one side. And when news slants, those who are favored by the slant become more powerful (Entman, 2007, p. 170). Entman concludes that this type of framing bias and slant can be harmful to objective journalism, as these frames impact how viewers assess important political issues.

Chong and Druckman also studied media framing effects, offering a method for identifying frames in media coverage and a model for understanding how these frames impact public opinion. They define framing effects as “when changes in the presentation of an issue or event produce changes of opinion” (Chong and Druckman, 2007c, p. 104). Chong and Druckman argue that to identify and analyze a frame, you must first identify the issue or event being discussed. Then, analyze and determine how this frame may impact public opinion (Chong and Druckman, 2007c, p. 106-7).

**Framing Effects**

Considerable research demonstrates that frames do influence public opinion. For example, Chong and Druckman perform two experiments to determine if a frame’s strength or frequency impacts viewers more. They define a frame’s strength as its relative
persuasiveness and frequency as the amount of times the frame is repeated (Chong and Druckman, 2007b, p. 638). Both experiments used the same design where participants read an editorial, the first was about urban growth and the second was about a hate group rally. Participants were offered one of four frame conditions on the issue, defined as weak or strong and positive or negative. Also, certain participants were given a repetition of their frame condition (Chong and Druckman, 2007b, p. 641-2). After reading the editorial frame participants completed a questionnaire that measured their attitudes. In both experiments they found that framing effects depend more on frame strength than frequency. Also, that weak frames have minimal effect on opinions regardless of the frequency (Chong and Druckman, 2007b, p. 644-6). They conclude that framing effects depend on the quality of the frame more than the frequency.

Furthering their research, Chong and Druckman seek to determine which frames will have an effect on the viewing public when there are many competing frames in the media. They use data from two previous experiments to determine the effects of competitive framing. Previous scholarship demonstrates that competing frames neutralize each other, with viewers moving from one side to the other and then back to the middle. But they find that when competing frames are separated by time, the accessibility of the previous argument declines. Thus, individuals give greater weight to the most recent frame (Chong and Druckman, 2010, p. 666-677). Their results indicate that individuals will have different opinions when they receive competing messages all at once versus competing messages over time, as they will access the strongest and most recent frame.

Chong and Druckman (2012) also analyze counterframing, defined as “a frame that opposes an earlier effective frame,” comes later in the time frame and advocates a
position contrary to the earlier frame (p. 2). They uncover how the timing and repetition of counterframes impact their success. Using an over-time experiment, they find that counterframing effects depend on the extent to which individuals hold strong or weak opinions about the original frame. So strategists should avoid raising the issue among those who form strong attitudes with the original frame, as counterframing only makes the original frame more salient. But if people have weak attitudes, counterframing and specifically repetitive counterframing will alter those attitudes (Chong and Druckman, 2012, p. 8-9).

There are some limits to the success of framing. Druckman finds the credibility of a frame’s source may impact its relative success. He conducts two laboratory experiments exposing participants to either a credible source, like Colin Powell, or a not credible source, like Jerry Springer. He finds that framing effects are strongest for those receiving the credible source frame and concludes that source credibility is necessary for successful framing (Druckman, 2001, p. 1045-1058). Additionally, Slothuus and Vreese found that citizens are more likely to believe a frame if it’s presented by their party. They test the effects of partisanship and groups on framing with two experiments. Both experiments found that individuals are more inclined to accept a frame when their party or group presents it (Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010, p. 636).

Framing Social Conflicts

One of the earliest and most influential studies of framing suggests how frames influence views on social conflicts. Nelson, Clawson and Oxley perform an experiment to analyze the effect of news frames on tolerance for civil liberties conflicts. They examine how a local television news outlet framed a KKK rally in Ohio (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997, p. 567). Participants were randomly assigned one of two possible local
news stories about the KKK rally, with “free speech” or “disruption of public order” frames. After presenting them with the framed content they asked participants to express their level of tolerance for the KKK. They found those exposed to the “free speech” frame were more likely to express tolerance for the KKK, while those exposed to the “disruption of public order frame” expressed significantly less tolerance (Nelson, et al., 1997, p. 572). These results indicate that framing effects matter, especially for social conflicts.

McLeod and Detenber also investigate the effects of television news coverage on protests and social movements. Specifically, they look at how the framing of protests impacts views of the current the status quo. They argue the media will often produce messages that support the status quo and elite power structure. They define status quo support framing as coverage that “highlights the deviance of protestors, diminishing their contributions and effectiveness,” while “insulating the power structure, and defusing the threat” (McLeod and Detenber, 1999, p. 5). Also, any coverage that seeks to “delegitimize, marginalize, and demonize protesters” (McLeod and Detenber, 1999, p. 6).

In their experiment they present participants with one of three stories about an anarchist protest in Minneapolis. All stories adhered to the protest paradigm, which states that the news often pays considerable attention to the appearance and behaviors of protesters in a way that draws attention to their deviance from social norms, but varied in their degree of status quo support. Then participants completed an assessment that measured their attitudes. They found that higher levels of status quo support framing led to higher levels of criticism of the protestors (McLeod and Detenber, 1999, p. 4-15). Thus, status quo support framing allows viewers to identify with the police while
criticizing protestors. This has the potential to hurt any social movement that challenges the status quo, especially one like Black Lives Matter that directly challenges police.

**Framing Race in Mainstream News**

Any understanding of media framing of Black Lives Matter must be put into context with how race has generally been framed in the news. It is evident that the American news media racially frames crime coverage. For example, Entman and Rojecki (2000) perform a content analysis of Chicago local news coverage between 1993 and 1994, looking at the 6pm, 9pm and 10pm local news broadcasts (p. 79). They find that there is an overrepresentation of violent crime and that this coverage has a racial skew. Incongruent with real Chicago statistics, White victims were depicted more frequently than Black victims. This sends the message that “White life is more valuable than Black” in news representation (Entman and Rojecki, 2000, p. 81). Also, Blacks were twice as likely as Whites to be depicted in physical custody or with a mug shot. Conversely, Whites were more likely to be depicted as “good Samaritans” and as police or other officials (Entman and Rojecki, 2000, p. 82-4). This leads many to believe that Blacks commit more violent crimes. It becomes a pattern of negative stereotyping, as the cultivation theory explains people believe what they see on television as reality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986, p. 23).

But news constructs a racial reality that doesn’t exist. Data shows that in 1997 violent crime was 41% Black and 57% White (Entman and Rojecki, 2000, p. 79). Statistical comparisons prove that Blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of violent crime and underrepresented as victims. Dixon and Linz (2000) also found a racial skew in crime coverage. They perform a content analysis of local TV news in LA and Orange
County from October 1995 through June 1996 and found that Blacks and Latinos were significantly more likely to be depicted as lawbreakers than Whites. Also, that Blacks and Latinos were more likely to be depicted as lawbreakers than as law defenders, while Whites were more likely to be depicted as law defenders. Finally, compared to the official statistics and records, they found that Blacks were overrepresented as lawbreakers while Whites were underrepresented as lawbreakers. Also, Whites were overrepresented as law defenders (Dixon and Linz, 2000, p. 132-147). This impacts how individuals view these groups as Whites are understood as positive law defenders while Blacks are conceptualized as negative lawbreakers. Thus, any social movement that criticizes police and promotes Black bodies may be easily criminalized in the public mind.

Dixon furthers this research, performing an experiment about perceptions of police officers. In the experiment, participants were exposed to a crime story embedded in a short newscast and randomly assigned a condition. The conditions included officer race as Black, White or unidentified and perpetrator race as Black, White or unidentified. After viewing the content, participants were asked how likely they thought the unidentified officer or perpetrator was White or Black. Also, how positively they felt about the officer. Finally he asked participants if they were heavy or light news viewers (Dixon, 2007, p. 276). The results indicate that participants thought they remembered the perpetrator being Black when no race was mentioned. Also, heavy news viewers were more likely to think the unidentified officer was white and generally had more positive perceptions of unidentified officers, but not Black officers (Dixon, 2007, p. 279).

Finally in 2015, Dixon and Williams conducted a content analysis examining 146 cable and network news programs aired between 2008 and 2012. They found Blacks as
“invisible” on network news compared to real world statistics. Of the crime stories they examined, 47% mentioned violent crime specifically (Dixon and Williams, 2015, p. 30). Also, Latinos were greatly overrepresented as undocumented immigrants and Muslims were overrepresented as terrorists (Dixon and Williams, 2015, p. 31-2).

It is evident that television news has a common crime script defined as violent crime committed by non-white men. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) argue this script has become embedded in our unconscious understanding of crime and race (p. 560). They assess the impact of this crime script on the viewing public by performing a detailed content analysis examining the crime news script in LA local television news between 1996 and 1997. Of the 3,014 crime stories 83% were about violent crime and 50% of these reports made explicit reference to the race or ethnicity of the suspect. Minorities made up 56% of all suspects and 59% of suspects in violent crimes. Comparatively, Whites made up 44% of all suspects and 41% of suspects in violent crimes. But when referencing real-world statistics, they find this is not an accurate reflection of LA crime (Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000, p. 562).

Adding to these findings, they perform an experiment where participants receive the crime script with different perpetrators, a Black male, a White male, no racial identity and a control group received no crime story. Participants then watched a fifteen-minute local newscast video including commercials and other nonracial stories. Then were asked to complete a questionnaire. They found that participants are more likely to remember the Black perpetrator than the White perpetrator. Also, 70% of participants with the no race condition falsely recalled seeing a Black perpetrator. “Taken together, these data reveal that the crime script generates strong expectations about crime, allowing viewers to fill in
gaps in the script” (Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000, p. 564). Also, exposure to the racial element of the crime script increases support for punitive approaches to crime and heightens negative attitudes about African-Americans. This all serves as evidence of both racialized coverage of crime in American news and its effects. The media constructs a racialized reality about crime that does not exist, impacting how viewers assess Blacks.

Entman (1992) also argues that news coverage contributes to what he calls “modern racism” or “symbolic racism” (p. 341). This type of racism is different from traditional racism, which is understood as open bigotry and the belief that Whites are inherently superior to Blacks. Modern racism is operationalized as “general affective hostility toward black persons; rejection of blacks’ political aspirations; and denial that discrimination continues to be a problem for blacks” (Entman, 1992, p. 346). He performed a content analysis of Chicago local news, as 50% of American households watched the local newscast on an average night (Entman, 1992, p. 348). After finding that Blacks are often as depicted more threatening and less individualized than Whites, Entman (1992) argues “modern racists may even feel an unconscious attraction to local news because its content helps confirm their sentiments, while its presentation allows them to deny they are racist” (p. 358). Local news confirms the beliefs that discrimination is no longer problem for Blacks, while increasing affective hostility toward the community. This type of modern racism, supported by the local news, would significantly decrease support for Black Lives Matter.

Adding to this work, Gilens argues that other issues in the media are racially coded, such as poverty. Gilens analyzes data from a 1991 National Race and Politics Study. Excluding Black respondents, he looks at what leads to support or opposition of
welfare and the degree to which welfare views are rooted in racial animosity (Gilens, 1996a, p. 593-6). His findings indicate that the strongest predictor for attitudes on welfare is racial attitudes. Whites who accept the view of Blacks as lazy are more likely to oppose welfare. In a 1994 CBS/New York Times survey 55% of respondents said most people on welfare are Black, and they held consistently more negative views about welfare (Gilens, 1999, p. 139). Gilens argues media coverage likely explains these links.

In another study, Gilens analyzes images in news magazines and finds that Blacks are overrepresented as the poor. He finds that Blacks made up 62% of the poor depicted in stories; over twice their actual proportion which data shows is 29% (Gilens, 1996b, p. 519-520). Blacks are significantly overrepresented in poverty coverage, which creates a warped perception of the Black community among Whites who have no contact with racial minorities other than television. Gilens also found the country pays more attention to poverty when coverage is White and sympathetic. But stories about Black poverty are not viewed as sympathetic by the mainstream. This type of coverage helps explain how news created and perpetuates stereotypes and how those are linked to views on poverty.

It is evident that racialized news coverage, depicting Blacks as violent and criminal, does not lead to sympathetic views of the community among mainstream Americans. But do all viewers respond to racial cues the same? Ismail White conducted two experiments to address how White Americans versus Black Americans’ exposure to racial cues, like news frames, impact public opinion and views of Blacks as a community. In his research, White found that implicit racial cues work for White Americans, but not Black Americans. Consistent with his expectations, racial considerations are most salient for Blacks when presented as an explicit appeal, but most salient for Whites as an implicit
appeal (White, 2007, p. 351). Thus, White Americans respond to racial cues and frames differently than Black Americans.

**Framing Social Movements**

Gamson and Wolfsfeld argue that social movements have a transactional relationship with the media. They assert that both sides are dependent on the other, but social movements are more dependent on the media. Social movements need the media for mobilization, validation and scope enlargement (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993, p. 115-6). The media can help social movements extend their power, but they can also limit the success of social movements. For example, “a demonstration with no media coverage at all is a non-event, unlikely to have any positive influence (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993, p. 116). They argue the relationship between the media and social movements is often characterized by a constant struggle over framing as journalists can be understood as gatekeepers who decide which frames social movements receive as well as whether they receive coverage at all (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993, p. 118-9).

Benford and Snow analyze how framing literature and theory can help us understand social movement dynamics, examining how various authors have understood collective action frames. They argue that social movements actors are “agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 613). They define collective action frames as “not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions, but also the outcome of negotiating shared meaning,” and say that collective action frames perform an interpretive function, simplifying the complicated “world out there” (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614). There are two characteristic features of collective action frames,
“once concerns their action-oriented function...the second refers to the interactive, discursive processes that attend to these core framing tasks and that are generative of collective action frames” (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 615)

Benford and Snow conclude with a discussion of the importance of visuals to framing and the consequences of framing processes for other social movements. They argue that strategic processes are important to social movement framing. “Frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose,” and social movements use frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation strategically (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 624). In their work, they provide a clarification of the connection between framing concepts and other conceptual and theoretical formulations relevant to social movements, such as schemas and ideology. Ultimately, they find that collective action frames, like other frames, can be used strategically to help or hinder social movements. Also, that visuals have a significant impact in framing when looking at social movements.

Various social movements have been framed in the media, like the Civil Rights Movement. Roberts and Klibanoff (2000) argue that the media did have a major impact on mainstream White support for the Civil Rights Movement. They perform a content analysis of the media coverage and events surrounding the Civil Rights Movement. The Emmet Till tragedy brought White reporters to the South to report on race relations. *Jet* magazine published close up photographs of Till’s body at the funeral. His mother asked that the casket to remain open so everyone could see the devastating effects of White supremacy. The Northern press quickly picked up this story voicing outrage to the horrors of the Jim Crow South. A tragedy became an opportunity thanks to Till’s mother.
The big three networks, NBC, CBS, and ABC, started covering race relations in the South (Roberts and Klibanoff, 2007, p. 87-93). Broadcast news as a medium really helped this cause. In Little Rock, journalists used images to convey the violence and chaos. Little Rock and school desegregation became a national story with 67% of Northern papers and 68% of Southern papers giving it front-page headlines. Local and national media both gave Little Rock a lot of attention, bringing racial issues to the forefront of the American agenda (Roberts and Klibanoff, 2007, p. 160-5).

Once racial issues were on the American agenda, they could be framed. At the Greensboro Woolworth sit-ins the media framed the Black protestors as polite and well behaved in contrast to the unruly and violent White supremacists (Roberts and Klibanoff, 2007, p. 224). This frame would gain mainstream White sympathy, as they did not want to be associated with such violent racists. The same was true for the Freedom Riders. Again, Black demonstrators were depicted as nonviolent while White opposition was depicted as violent and irrational. Images of the violence, angry KKK mob, and burning bus showed average Americans just how destructive racism was (Roberts and Klibanoff, 2007, p. 248). Americans were shocked by these images; this wasn’t the America they knew. And this wasn’t the America they would support. These violent images, depicting Blacks as victims of White brutality, helped gain mainstream sympathy for the cause. Photojournalism and visual framing was very important for the success of the movement.

These examples serve as evidence of the importance of a clear narrative and visuals. The frame of good versus evil was the dominant narrative in the national mainstream media. The side of good was the Civil Rights nonviolent demonstrators and evil was the violent White Supremacists. Graphic images helped to reinforce this
narrative, thus making it a reality for viewers who were otherwise blind to racial injustice. The Civil Rights Movement was also helped by the coverage of other horrific events. For example, the Sixteenth Street Church Bombing was used to shock Americans into support. A KKK bomb killed four young Black girls in the Church basement. Local Southern papers and the national mainstream media picked up the story depicting the violent White Supremacists as a threat to America (Roberts and Klibanoff, 2007, p. 349). This horrific violence helped gain mainstream White sympathy for the cause of racial equality. Had the media framed these events differently, they may not have gained mainstream support.

The media has the ability to help or hinder social movements. When protesters are framed as non-violent and just, mainstream Americans begin to support them. But when they are framed as “violent” or “radical” they lose mainstream sympathy. While it is evident that the media helped the Civil Rights Movement gain mainstream sympathy and support, sadly the same cannot be said for Students for a Democratic Society.

Todd Gitlin (2003) analyzed mainstream media coverage of Students for a Democratic Society, a New Left student activist movement founded in 1960. He argues that social movements use the media to organize, campaign and form their identities. While the Civil Rights Movement benefited from sympathetic coverage and sympathetic visual framing, the same was not true for Students for a Democratic Society (Gitlin, 2003, p. 1). The Civil Rights Movement framing shocked Americans into support of the movement, but Students for a Democratic Society framing shocked Americans into fear of the movement. The media framed Students for a Democratic Society as more radical
and dangerous than they were, ultimately hurting the movement with largely unsympathetic visual framing.

Gitlin performed a content analysis looking at CBS News and the New York Times coverage from 1965 (Gitlin, 2003, p. 14-17). Coverage in early 1965 was sympathetic, presenting the group as working for a national social cause, but got worse over time. In April 1965 coverage balanced anti-war voices with the ultra-Right asserting that there are two sides to this issue, similar to Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter or Blue Lives Matter coverage. By fall of 1965 Gitlin (2003) found the frames had entirely shifted from coverage of Students for a Democratic Society events to trivializing and denigrating the movement (p. 32). The mainstream media started linking Students for a Democratic Society with Communist movements, even though most members were not this radical. Visual depictions of Students for a Democratic Society activists with Vietcong flags and other anti-American symbolism made Americans fear the movement (Gitlin, 2003, p. 114). Unfortunately for Students for a Democratic Society they were portrayed negatively. The media depicted them as more radical and militant than they were, preventing them from gaining mainstream sympathy and thus support for their cause. This demonstrates how the media has the potential to undermine social movements based on how they are framed and portrayed.

**Black Lives Matter Background**

Black Lives Matter began in 2012 after the tragic murder of Treyvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman. The verdict affirmed to the nation Zimmerman’s right to be afraid of Blackness (Umoja, 2014, p. 14). In response, Patrisse Cullors, a leader of the movement, was one of the first to use the hashtag
#BlackLivesMatter. The term is meant to highlight racial inequality and police brutality in Black communities. The goal is to raise awareness of police brutality, treatment of Blacks, and to demand changes. Statistics show there is a disproportionate Black mortality rate at the hands of police. Police killed 307 Blacks in 2015 (Rodriguez, Geronimus, Bound & Dorling, 2015, p. 195). In 2017, reports show 23% of those killed by police were Black even though Blacks account for only 13% of the American population (“Police Shootings 2017 Database”). The hashtag gained more popularity after the murders of Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014, both unarmed Black men. Specifically, the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson sparked widespread protests. Movement leaders including Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi went to Ferguson to assist asserting, “hands up, don’t shoot” (Edwards and Harris, 2016, p. 8-10).

But not all Americans viewed these events the same. A Pew Research Survey from August 14-17, 2014 of 1,000 adults uncovered the racial divide in American public opinion. When asked if Ferguson raises important issues about race 80% of Blacks agreed but only 37% of Whites did. Among Whites, 47% believe that race is getting more attention than it deserves. Also, when asked about the subsequent police investigation into the shooting 76% of Blacks had little or no confidence in the investigation with 45% saying they had no confidence at all. Comparatively, 52% of Whites said they have a great deal of confidence in the investigation (Dost, 2014).

But when asked about racial progress 59% of Americans say our country needs to continue making changes to give Blacks equal rights with Whites (Smith, 2015). This data reflects some progress as in 2012, 60% of Whites felt race got too much attention with Treyvon Martin and George Zimmerman. Still, the statics show a deep racial divide
in public opinion on Black Lives Matter. For example, when asked about support of Black Lives Matter 41% of Blacks strongly support but only 14% of Whites strongly support the movement (Horowitz and Livingston, 2016).

This divide left some to assert alternatives, like #AllLivesMatter or #BlueLivesMatter. Many scholars have argued these alternatives will hurt the Black Lives Matter Movement by taking away from their core issues. Thus, these alternatives only seek to reaffirm the status quo and ignore racial inequality (Yancy and Butler, 2015). Some political commentators also say that Black Lives Matter supporters are criminals who promote assault on cops. In this demonization of Black Lives Matter, “Black Identity Extremists” have been added to the FBI’s counterterrorism division as they “pose a growing threat of premeditated violence against law enforcement” (Winter and Weinberger, 2017).

Black Lives Matter protesters in Ferguson and Baltimore have often been labeled “looters” and “thugs” in the media and “conditioned to accept the premise of black criminality,” most Americans do not question these frames (Rickford, 2015, p. 39). Malcolm X famously said, “If you’re not careful the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing” (Davary, 2017, p.11). This is why media framing matters, especially for social movements like Black Lives Matter.

**Media Coverage of Black Lives Matter**

Some scholars have already analyzed existing media frames surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement. Their analyses suggest that coverage of the Black Lives
Matter movement is often neutral in tone or negative. We would expect this type of coverage to undermine the movement based on what we know about framing effects.

Elmarsy and El-Nawawy performed a content analysis of newspaper coverage surrounding Black Lives Matter, expecting to find a majority of negative framing. They analyzed coverage of protests in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *New York Times* following the acquittal of Darren Wilson in November 2014 through early 2015 when protests intensified (Elmarsy and El-Nawawy, 2017, p. 858). Their coding scheme measured frame direction, positive or negative, and did not include a neutral frame option. Positive frames were operationalized as “all articles that focused primarily on the peaceful, organized nature of the protests, the cause of the protests, or violence and brutality of police,” while negative frames were operationalized as “all articles that focused primarily on the criminal actions of protesters or inconveniences caused by the protests for area residents” (Elmarsy and El-Nawawy, 2017, p. 865). The coding scheme also measured article length and any mentions of protestor crimes. They argue mentions of protestor crimes delegitimize the movement and hurt public perceptions of their cause, so it is coded as negative.

After analyzing 143 articles, they find that both newspapers devoted significant coverage to Black Lives Matter protests after the Michael Brown shooting. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* published more articles, but the *New York Times* published longer articles on average. While the majority of articles were framed positively, they also found a total of 43.4% of all articles mentioned protestor looting. Positive coverage was often mitigated by mentions of protestor crimes including arson, assault, firing weapons, throwing objects and other crimes (Elmarsy and El-Nawawy, 2017, p. 866-7). This
suggests the presence of negative features, like protestor crime, may undermine positive stories.

Elmarsy and El-Nawawy’s operationalization of positive and negative coverage is very helpful. Their analysis of protestor crime mentions delegitimizing the movement will help to inform my operationalization of positive and negative coverage. While their results show many positive frames, their findings cannot be extended beyond print media as they only examined the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *New York Times*.

Carney analyzed social media conversations around Black Lives Matter and had less positive findings. First, she addresses her subjectivity as a Black woman personally affected by this topic rather than claiming a “false objectivity” (Carney, 2016, p. 181). Drawing on Habermas’s public sphere, Carney asserts that social media like Twitter has largely become the new public sphere. Thus, it is important to analyze what the public is saying on Twitter. She selected tweets including the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter and/or #AllLivesMatter to examine the discourse on Twitter surrounding the movement. She included posts following the non indictments of officers in the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, between December 3 and 7, 2014 (Carney, 2016, p. 188).

Of the posts included in her analysis, Carney found 31% of users were Black and 27% of users were White while 19% of user identities were unknown. She found the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag received a lot of resistance on social media. Primarily “using #AllLivesMatter as a counter slogan to undermine the purpose and message of the #BlackLivesMatter call to action. Many social media users deployed #AllLivesMatter as a way to deny the specific and prominent violence against Blacks by appealing to a larger universal” (Carney, 2016, p. 189-190). She found many users, largely Black women,
pushed back against the #AllLivesMatter hashtag frame but ultimately users who promoted #AllLivesMatter maintained their positions. Her findings indicate that on social media there are significant counterframes to Black Lives Matter already present.

Freelon and McIlwain also performed a content analysis of Black Lives Matter Twitter mentions, but included other mentions on the Internet as well. They argue that although the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was created in 2013, it was rarely used until the 2014 Ferguson protests. Thus their content analysis included any online mentions of Black Lives Matter (Twitter and Internet) between June 1, 2014 and May 31, 2015. This search included Black Lives Matter interviews, open Web searches and Twitter content sourced from a list of 45 keywords related to police killings of unarmed Black people. Their final dataset included over 40.8 million tweets, 40 Black Lives Matter interviews and 136,587 Black Lives Matter related webpages (Freelon and McIlwain, 2016, p. 10).

Their findings suggest that activists can succeed in educating casual observers about Black Lives Matter and framing the movement positively. They found two strategies that helped activists frame the movement positively, “expressions of awe and disbelief at the violent police reactions to the Ferguson protests, and conservative admissions of police brutality in the Eric Garner and Walter Scott cases” (Freelon and McIlwain, 2016, p. 5). This is a very significant finding and will inform my operationalization of positive and negative Black Lives Matter frames. Additionally, they found six groups that consistently discussed police brutality on Twitter, Black Lives Matter, Anonymous/Bipartisan Report, Black Entertainers, Conservatives, Mainstream News, and Young Black Twitter, and the majority of these groups advocated against police brutality (Freelon and McIlwain, 2016, p. 5). Overall they found that while not all
content was positive, there is a clear strategy for educating average Americans about Black Lives Matter and framing the movement positively.

These findings will ultimately inform my research design. I will operationalize negative coverage as any mentions of protester crimes based on Elmarsy and El-Nawawy’s findings. Also, I will include relevant context to the issues of police brutality and racial inequality when operationalizing positive frames for Black Lives Matter, as Freelon and McIlwain found conservative admissions of police brutality helped activists to frame the Black Lives Matter Movement positively on social media.

From the review of the literature it is evident that media framing effects are real and that race has already been framed in the American news media. Previous scholarship exists as context of how race has been generally covered. It also provides context of the media’s reinforcement of stereotypes of Blacks as criminals and police as White. This lends itself to the expectation that, at least for White Americans, Blacks are viewed as less sympathetic and more criminal which means Black Lives Matter has to fight against a stereotype in their efforts. It is clear there is a racial divide in public opinion around the Black Lives Matter Movement, but still the majority of Americans recognize the need for racial equality. This means if framed properly, mainstream American support for racial equality could translate into support for the Black Lives Matter Movement. Conversely, those who don’t believe there are issues around racial equality will be harder to reach and unlikely to be persuaded. While previous scholarship shows some attention to the content of Black Lives Matter coverage and communication, no work has directly examined the framing effects of the group and their message. I will draw from previous research on positive and negative Black Lives Matter frames to test their effects.
Chapter 3: Research Questions & Hypotheses

In this study I was interested in understanding the potential effects of news framing of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

RQ: Does negative media framing of the Black Lives Matter Movement impact public perceptions about the organization and their cause?

To answer this, I performed an experiment, examining the effects of positive, negative, neutral framing of a story about a police shooting and Black Lives Matter protest compared with no Black Lives Matter framing. Experiments allow me to draw strong causal inferences about the effects of media framing and content. Based on existing scholarship, I expect to support the following research hypotheses. Negative framing will decrease support for Black Lives Matter ($H_1$). Positive framing will increase support for Black Lives Matter ($H_2$). Negative media framing will increase support for police and decrease support for issues Black Lives Matter advocates for, like systemic police brutality and racial inequality ($H_3$).
Chapter 4: Methods

I utilize an experiment in which subjects are exposed to different framed versions of story about a Black Lives Matter protest in order to understand how various elements used to frame the movement and Black Lives Matter protest events might influence opinion. I performed the experiment on April 3, 2018, a moment where Black Lives Matter was not dominating the news. In this experiment, individuals were told they would be participating in a 7-9 minute survey that examines how individuals learn from news articles. Participants were directed to read one or two news articles, then answer a brief questionnaire that measured attitudes. To understand the effects of news framing of Black Lives Matter, participants in the study were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in which they read either a positive, negative or neutral story about Black Lives Matter, or they did not read a story about Black Lives Matter at all. The first article read was always the framed content about Black Lives Matter and the second article was a filler story about a local school board asking for a tax increase. Those in the no framing condition did not receive a story about Black Lives Matter, they only received the filler story about a local school board. After reading the articles, all participants were then directed to answer a number of questions about current political issues including evaluations of Black Lives Matter and the issues it advocates for, whether respondents felt they understood the goals of the movement, questions about the story content and to provide demographic and other background characteristics including party identification, age, sex, race and ethnicity. See Appendix A for full survey questions.

All Black Lives Matter articles featured a story about the shooting of an unarmed Black man and the resulting Black Lives Matter protest. These articles were created for
purposes of the study in order to vary only the features that prior research suggested would produce more positive or negative framing. Every article featured the same headline, “Black Lives Matter Protest.” However, the frame conditions varied by sub-headline, opening quote, photograph, and portrayals of the movement as peaceful or violent. The positive frame condition included a story with the sub-headline “Peaceful marchers protest the fatal shooting of an unarmed black man.” The positive frame depicted the peaceful, organized nature of protests while also mentioning police brutality. It included relevant context and a sympathetic visual depiction of the Black Lives Matter movement. The positive Black Lives Matter frame provided relevant context to the viewer, explaining why the activists are angry and why police brutality and systemic racism are an issue. This context to the larger issues of police brutality and systemic racism are the main component of positive framing, as it depicts Black Lives Matter as sympathetic.

Conversely, negative Black Lives Matter framing is defined as mentions of protester crimes, which depict Black Lives Matter as unsympathetic. The negative frame condition included the sub-headline, “Protest turns violent and ends with multiple arrests.” Also, mentions of inconveniences Black Lives Matter activists or protests caused for area residents were included in the negative frame condition. The negative frame condition included unsympathetic, violent visual framing of Black Lives Matter. Finally, neutral Black Lives Matter framing only depicted the facts of the events. The neutral frame condition sub-headline read, “Black Lives Matter protests the Travis Woods shooting.” The neutral frame did not depict the movement sympathetically or unsympathetically, it simply presented the facts of the shooting and protest. The neutral
frame condition included an image, but did not include the visual framing element that the negative and positive frame conditions did. See Appendix B for the full treatments.

After viewing the articles, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. The key dependent variables were attitudes toward Black Lives Matter, attitudes toward police, views on police brutality and views on racial inequality. We also examined whether the framing had an effect on perceptions of knowledge about Black Lives Matter. Specifically, participants were asked to agree or disagree [response options coded as follows: strongly agree (1), agree (0.5), neither agree nor disagree (0), disagree (-0.5), and strongly disagree (-1)] with the following statements:

- Police brutality is an issue.
- More wore work needs to be done to achieve racial equality in the US.
- Systemic racism is an issue.
- Police are largely positive and protect our communities.
- I support the Black Lives Matter movement.

Participants were also asked about support for police in another question. They were instructed to pick which of the following statements were closest to their own opinion [response options coded as follows: fatal police encounters with Blacks are mainly isolated incidents (1) or fatal police encounters with Blacks are signs of a broader problem (0).

Sample

We recruited participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, an online marketplace where individuals do small jobs in exchange for payment. This sample is not representative of the US population as it’s overly young and Democratic. But this is
better than a student sample as it is more diverse. Participants were told they would receive $1.00 for 7-9 minute survey on news and politics. All study participants were above the age of 18. The sample included 403 participants, 46.65% women and 53.35% men. By party affiliation, 53.18% were Democrats, 34.1% were Republicans and 12.72% were true Independents. By race and ethnicity, 80.65% were White, 9.43% were Black, 3.23% were Latino, 6.2% were Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.5% were Native American. By age, 27.18% were between the ages of 18-29, 39.09% were between the ages of 30-39, 17.73% were between the ages of 40-49 and 16% were above the age of 50. We confirmed that randomization was successful and the conditions were balanced across demographic variables including age, sex, race and ethnicity, and party affiliation.¹

¹ ANOVAs examining demographics by frame condition find no significant differences across frame conditions (p>.10 in all cases).
Chapter 5: Results & Analysis

To estimate the effect of these frames I use regressions, with the control condition as the excluded comparison. Thus, the effects of the frames are relative to the control where participants did not read anything about Black Lives Matter, which should represent baseline views on the group and their issues. In each case, I ran the analysis first with the full sample and then with only White respondents. First I addressed my $H_1$ and $H_2$, that negative framing will decrease support for Black Lives Matter ($H_1$) and positive framing will increase support for Black Lives Matter ($H_2$). Support for Black Lives Matter was measured using responses to the item “I support the Black Lives Matter movement.” As Table 1 shows, the findings indicate that $H_2$ is correct but do not provide support for $H_1$.

The results indicate that the positive frame did increase support for the Black Lives Matter Movement relative to the control condition. This effect was statistically significant, with the positive frame increasing support for Black Lives Matter by 0.24 ($p<.05$) in the full sample model. The data shows that positive frames do significantly increase support for the movement. However, there is no significant difference in terms of support between those viewing the negative frame, the neutral frame and the no frame condition. In fact, when looking at support for the movement relative to the positive condition, the data indicates that positive effects are significantly different from the neutral and negative and Black Lives Matter framing conditions as well, with significantly more support for the movement after viewing the positive frame relative to all other conditions. Also, the results are very similar when looking at Whites only.
It is apparent that positive framing pulls you to support Black Lives Matter but negative framing does not pull you in the other direction. Also, the negative, neutral and no frame conditions have similar results. This pattern of results is stable when looking at White only respondents. These findings might suggest that the existing assumption most people have about Black Lives Matter is consistent with the negative frame. I cannot prove this interpretation, but it is consistent with my findings.

Next, I addressed my H3 that negative framing will increase support for police and decrease support for issues Black Lives Matter advocates for, like systemic police brutality and racial inequality. Again I use regression, with the control condition as the excluded comparison. I ran the analysis for each question first with the full sample and then again with White respondents. As Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 show, the findings do not provide support for support H3. No condition was statistically significantly different from the control. When looking at only White respondents, the results remain consistent. In short, framing does not increase or decrease support relative to the control condition when examining views on these issues. Thus, we find no support for H3.

It is evident that Whites are largely driving the results, as they make up 80.65% of participants. The data suggests non-Whites are more supportive of Black Lives Matter (thus estimate for support of Black Lives Matter in the full sample as indicated by the control condition is higher than estimate for whites only). Still, the positive frame condition produces a statistically significant increase in support for Black Lives Matter even when focusing only on Whites. Interestingly, the data also indicates that framing Black Lives Matter impacts views of the movement itself, but does not carry over to views on their causes, like police brutality and racial inequality. Taken together, the data
suggests the potential for positive media framing of the Black Lives Matter Movement to increase support for the organization. See the Figures below for the full regression analysis.

### TABLE 1: Framing effects on support for Black Lives Matter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>Whites Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Frame</strong></td>
<td>0.08 (0.0997)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.1102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Frame</strong></td>
<td>0.24 (0.0958) **</td>
<td>0.25 (0.1070) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral Frame</strong></td>
<td>0.11 (0.1051)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.1169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>-0.04 (0.0718)</td>
<td>-0.07 (0.0791)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>397</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>0.0171</td>
<td>0.0206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Table entry is unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses. *p<.10* **p<.05*** The control condition is the excluded comparison.

### TABLE 2: Framing effects on agreeing that police brutality is an issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>Whites Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Frame</strong></td>
<td>0.01 (0.0852)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.0941)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Frame</strong></td>
<td>0.04 (0.0808)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.0906)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral Frame</strong></td>
<td>-0.01 (0.0888)</td>
<td>-0.09 (0.0989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>0.36 (0.0608)</td>
<td>0.34 (0.0672)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>392</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>0.0017</td>
<td>0.0045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Table entry is unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses. *p<.10* **p<.05*** The control condition is the excluded comparison.
TABLE 3: Framing effects on recognizing the need for racial equality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>Whites Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Frame</td>
<td>0.02 (0.0852)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.0946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Frame</td>
<td>0.09 (0.0816)</td>
<td>0.14 (0.0914)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Frame</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.0904)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.1012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.33 (0.0613)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.0677)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>0.0061</td>
<td>0.0099</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Table entry is unstandardized regression coefficient with standard error in parentheses. 
* p<.10  ** p<.05   *** p<.01  The control condition is the excluded comparison.
### TABLE 4: Framing effects on support for police

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Most police officers work hard to protect their communities”</th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>Whites Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Frame</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.075)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Frame</td>
<td>0.11 (0.72)</td>
<td>0.14 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Frame</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.079)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.44 (0.054)</td>
<td>0.43 (0.595)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>0.0117</td>
<td>0.0129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Fatal police encounters with Blacks are mainly isolated incidents (1) OR signs of a broader problem (0)”</th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>Whites Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Frame</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.0716)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.0788)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Frame</td>
<td>-0.07 (0.0684)</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.0762)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Frame</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.075)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.51 (0.0514)</td>
<td>0.53 (0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>0.0031</td>
<td>0.0050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Media framing matters. Historically, the media has a legacy of helping or hindering social movements with framing. For example, the media helped the Civil Rights Movement by portraying them as nonviolent and sympathetic, but undermined Students for a Democratic Society by portraying them as radical and unsympathetic. Thus, media framing of the Black Lives Matter Movement could significantly impact support for the movement itself and their cause.

It is evident from my research that positive media framing of the Black Lives Matter Movement does have the potential to increase support for the organization. While these effects do not carry over to support for the causes Black Lives Matter advocates for, like ending police brutality and racial inequality, findings are consistent even among only White respondents. The data indicates that negative effects looked similar to neutral and no frame effects, suggesting that the negative frame might be the dominant frame most Americans already have about the Black Lives Matter movement, especially among White respondents only. But results show that negative framing does not spillover into support for police or recognizing the need for racial equality, which is good for Black Lives Matter if the dominant frame is already negative. Still, even if the negative frame is already the dominant frame, my study shows the potential for positive media framing to make an impact on support for Black Lives Matter.

Based on my findings, it would be strategic for Black Lives Matter to attempt to control their narrative. Right now, the movement is very decentralized, unlike the 20th century Civil Rights Movement, with social media, local and individual actors all saying and doing different things. Black Lives Matter would benefit from a more centralized
structure or leadership that sends one singular message. My results show that Black Lives Matter must only display themselves in a way that is in line with positive framing to gain mainstream sympathy and support. This means protesters cannot react chaotically or violently to racism or commit crimes during or after protests. During the 20th century Civil Rights Movement, leaders trained activists to not respond to violent racists spitting in their face and to not be afraid of threats or police violence. Black Lives Matter would benefit from this type of reactionary training, teaching restraint on social media and in real-life protests. They must control their narrative in-person and online as trolls attack the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. They must only be the perfect idealized positive protester frame to gain support from mainstream Americans.

While it is good that there is a clear strategy for Black Lives Matter to succeed and gain mainstream American support, it is disheartening that only this perfect idealized protester frame would work. Negative frame effects looked similar to no frame and neutral frame effects. This means any mention of Black Lives Matter without the perfect positive protester frame, even just the neutral frame depicting clear police brutality against an unarmed Black man, will not lead Americans to support the movement. It is troubling that the facts about police brutality alone do not lead Americans to support the movement. Only when they are presented a perfect pro-justice, nonviolent positive protester frame are they moved to support Black Lives Matter. It is unfair that the responsibility is put on the victims of police brutality to be perfect, nonviolent, have restraint and act strategically, only representing themselves as positive. It is also very difficult to be the “perfect idealized protester,” following the 20th century Civil Rights Movement’s strategy. But my results demonstrate that if Black Lives Matter wants to
succeed and gain mainstream American support, they must act strategically only representing themselves as the perfect idealized positive protestor frame.

This study does demonstrate the power of media framing of a social movement, but it is important to note that it is only a first step. My sample was very small with 400 people total (100 per condition) which means the study may be underpowered as we might not expect the effects to be large. To be more effective in the future, I would run this experimental model again, but with a much larger sample size to see if results become more significant. Ultimately, we’ve learned that positive framing has the most significant impact in my experimental model. The positive frame pulls individuals to support Black Lives Matter, but the negative frame does not pull individuals in the opposite direction. Also, these effects do not spillover into the issues Black Lives Matter advocates for, like ending police brutality and racial inequality. We know from past scholarship that social movements can be undermined when people portray them negatively. I find evidence that social movements, like Black Lives Matter, can also be enhanced when you portray them positively, as nonviolent and sympathetic.
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Appendix A

Survey Questions

First, we are interested in your general views on some issues that have been in the news. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:
(Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t Know)
1. The US should decrease defense spending.
2. I believe women should get equal pay for equal work.
3. Police brutality is an issue.
4. Climate change is real and deserves our immediate attention.
5. Women should have the right to access safe and legal abortion.
6. Marijuana should be legalized, regulated and taxed by the government.
7. The corporate tax rate should increase.
8. The government should enact common-sense gun reform.
9. The US should build and pay for a Mexican border wall.

Again, do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
(Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t Know)
1. I support the Black Lives Matter movement.
2. Most police officers work hard to protect their communities.
3. I understand the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement.
4. Local governments should work to reduce deficit spending.
5. Local taxes should be increased to support local schools.

Which of the following is closest to your own opinion?
- Fatal police encounters with Blacks are mainly isolated incidents.
- Fatal police encounters with Blacks are signs of a broader problem.

Should funding for public education be increased, decreased or kept about the same?
1. Increased.
2. Decreased.
3. Kept about the same.

Now we are interested in how much you remember from what you read. It is OK if you do not remember. Please just indicate you “don’t know” if you cannot remember from the article.
1. How many Black Lives Matter protestors marched on Sunday?
   a. Over 200
   b. Over 50
   c. Over 100
   d. Over 150
   e. Don’t Know
2. Why did Travis Woods die?
   a. A gunshot wound puncturing his right lung
b. A preventable disease

c. A car crash

d. An airplane crash

e. Don’t Know

3. Why is the Shelby Board of Education asking voters to approve a tax increase?
   a. To avoid deficit spending
   b. An increase in spending for sports programs
   c. Building a new elementary school
   d. An implementation of all day kindergarten
   e. Don’t Know

4. In what year did the state reimbursements to the Shelby Local Schools phase out?
   a. 2016
   b. 2018
   c. 2017
   d. 2015
   e. Don’t Know

Finally, we are interested in your general views on society. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following:
(Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t Know)
1. More work needs to be done to achieve racial equality in the US.
2. Racism and racial inequality get more attention in the media than it deserves.
3. People don’t succeed because of personal failures.
4. People don’t succeed because of society’s failures.

Which of the following is closest to your own opinion?
- We need a strong government to handle today’s complex problems.
- People would be better able to handle today’s problems within a free market with less government involvement.

Please answer the following questions about yourself:
1. In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat or Independent?
   a. Democrat
   b. Republican
   c. Independent
   d. Other/Don’t Know

2. IF SELECTED "OTHER/DON’T KNOW" TO #1: As of today, do you lean more to the Republican Party of Democratic Party?
   a. Lean Democrat
   b. Lean Republican
   c. True Independent
   d. Other/Don’t Know

3. IF SELECTED “INDEPENDENT” TO #1: As of today, do you lean more to the Republican Party of Democratic Party?
   a. Lean Democrat
b. Lean Republican
c. True Independent
d. Other/Don’t Know

4. What is your sex?
   a. Male
   b. Female

5. What race/ethnicity do you identify with?
   a. White
   b. Black
   c. Latino
   d. Asian/Pacific Islander
   e. Native American

6. How old are you?

**Thinking about your general news habits. How often do you…**
(Often, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, Never)

1. Read any newspapers in print?
2. Listen to news on the radio?
3. Watch local television news?
4. Watch national evening network television news (such as ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News, or NBC Nightly News)?
5. Watch cable television news (such as CNN, the Fox News Cable channel or MSNBC)?
6. Get news from a social media site (such as Facebook, Twitter, or Snapchat)?
7. Get news from a news website or app?
Appendix B

Treatment conditions. The visuals vary by condition, the text elements that vary by condition are highlighted in yellow.

Positive Treatment:

Black Lives Matter Protest

*Peaceful marchers protest the fatal shooting of an unarmed black man*

December 18, 2017

SHELBY COUNTY - Over 100 Black Lives Matter activists protested the fatal shooting of Travis Woods, 19, by a Memphis Police Officer on Sunday night.

“We are here because too many unarmed Black men are killed by the police every year in this country. Travis was my classmate, he was my friend, and he did not deserve to die for running away after a party got busted,” said Shanelle Jordan, a Black Lives Matter activist who went to school with Woods.

According to the Memphis Police Department, two officers, Stan Clark and Patrick Quinn, were dispatched to check on a noise complaint in the Stratum On Highland apartment complex. Upon arrival, police noted an underage party with drinking and took down participants’ information. Three men snuck out the back door and attempted to flee the scene on foot. Officer Clark ran after them and a brief chase ensued. At some point during the chase, Officer Clark discharged his weapon, striking Woods.
According to the Shelby County Medical Examiner’s Office, Woods died of a gunshot wound puncturing his right lung. Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland and Police Chief Mike Ryall have requested an official investigation into the Woods shooting.

“The Memphis Police Department is doing their part to ensure that justice is given to Travis Woods and his family. We must trust the process and the outcomes that are found through this investigation. If any police misconduct is found, the Memphis Police Department will not tolerate such behavior,” said Mayor Strickland.

At the protest, Black Lives Matter activist, Elijah Harris, said the organization has clear demands for the Memphis Police Department. “We want any footage from the incident to be released and an independent investigation. We demand justice!”

“We want answers. Why was Travis shot if he was unarmed?” said Harris.

The march and vigil began at 6:30 p.m. at the Glenview Community Center on South Darkdale St and ended on 3rd St in the Downtown Memphis area.

“This march was in honor of Woods and the others killed by law enforcement,” said Terrence Brown, a local resident. “I believe that Black Lives Matter and that no unarmed American should be murdered by police. This is unacceptable and we demand justice.”
SHELBY COUNTY - Over 100 Black Lives Matter activists protested the fatal shooting of Travis Woods, 19, by a Memphis Police Officer on Sunday night.

“I was on the way to see my mother when my car was stopped by some teenagers with traffic cones and Black Lives Matter signs. I’m all for justice for Woods and his family, but this march really escalated into something else. I saw kids spraying graffiti and fighting,” said Beth Anderson, a local resident.

According to the Memphis Police Department, two officers, Stan Clark and Patrick Quinn, were dispatched to check on a noise complaint in the Stratum On Highland apartment complex. Upon arrival, police noted an underage party with drinking and took down participants’ information. Three men snuck out the back door and attempted to flee the scene on foot. Officer Clark ran after them and a brief chase ensued. At some point during the chase, Officer Clark discharged his weapon, striking Woods.

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“The Memphis Police Department is doing their part to ensure that justice is given to Travis Woods and his family. We must trust the process and the outcomes that are found through this investigation. If any police misconduct is found, the Memphis Police Department will not tolerate such behavior,” said Mayor Strickland.

At the protest, Black Lives Matter activist, Elijah Harris, said the organization has clear demands for the Memphis Police Department. “We want any footage from the incident to be released and an independent investigation. We demand justice!”

“This protest was entirely out of hand and misdirected,” said Dave Turner, a local resident impacted by the protest. “One bad apple doesn’t discredit the entire Memphis Police Department. I agree police shouldn’t shoot unarmed citizens, but they launched an official investigation. Isn’t that justice?”

The march and vigil began at 6:30 p.m. at the Glenview Community Center on South Darkdale St and ended on 3rd St in the Downtown Memphis area.

“Shop windows were smashed. Graffiti saying ‘Black Lives Matter’ and ‘F*** the Police’ was painted on buildings. I was very afraid and I was forced to close my restaurant early,” said Tom Kinney, a local business owner inconvenienced by the events.
Neutral Treatment:

Black Lives Matter Protest

Black Lives Matter protests the Travis Woods shooting
December 18, 2017

SHELBY COUNTY - Over 100 Black Lives Matter activists protested the fatal shooting of Travis Woods, 19, by Memphis Police Officer on Sunday night.

According to the Memphis Police Department report, two officers, Stan Clark and Patrick Quinn, were dispatched to check on a noise complaint in the Stratum On Highland apartment complex. Upon arrival, police noted an underage party with drinking and took down participants’ information. Three men snuck out the back door and attempted to flee the scene on foot. Officer Clark ran after them and a brief chase ensued. At some point during the chase, Officer Clark discharged his weapon, striking Woods.

According to the Shelby County Medical Examiner’s Office, Woods died of a gunshot wound puncturing his right lung. Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland and Police Chief Mike Ryall have requested an official investigation into the Woods shooting.

“The Memphis Police Department is doing their part to ensure that justice is given to Travis Woods and his family. We must trust the process and the outcomes that are found through this investigation. If any police misconduct is found, the Memphis Police Department will not tolerate such behavior,” said Mayor Strickland.
The march and vigil began at 6:30 p.m. at the Glenview Community Center on South Darkdale St and ended on 3rd St in the Downtown Memphis area.

At the protest, Black Lives Matter activist, Elijah Harris, said the organization has clear demands for the Memphis Police Department. “We want any footage from the incident to be released and an independent investigation. We demand justice!”
No Frame Treatment:

Shelby School District Faces Possible Deficit Spending
Local school district outlines cuts and the need for additional funds
December 18, 2017

SHELBY COUNTY - The Shelby Board of Education has asked voters to approve a tax increase in June to secure additional operating funds to prevent the district from falling into deficit spending.

Officials warn at the start of next fiscal year, Shelby Local Schools are set to lose $1.9 million annually. Officials say they believe this is due to the elimination of the increased personal property tax rate in 2015.

The District’s Treasurer, Ruby Harlow, says the state provided reimbursements to the school district since then, but in 2017 those reimbursements phased out.

“The district has had to endure extreme losses since the state began to phase out reimbursements for the higher personal property tax rate no longer being collected,” said Harlow.

School officials say it is absolutely necessary to seek additional operating funds at this time.

Shelby Local Schools Superintendent, James McLaughlin, said, “It was apparent from our past, unsuccessful requests for additional funds that we needed to work harder to do
things with the funds available to us. However, at this time the district cannot function properly without increased funding or deficit spending. We believe a modest tax increase is the best solution.”

The proposed tax increase would raise $3.2 million per year and allow the district to avoid going into deficit spending.

Officials say the tax increase would cost the owner of a $100,000 home approximately $206 per year, which is a little over $17 per month or 53 cents per day.

In the meantime, budget cuts have been made in the school district. The district saw an additional $326,000 in savings by implementing all-day kindergarten without hiring additional teachers.

“We are being transparent about our fiscal condition because we want our community to know that revenue cuts from the state are real and they impact the quality of education that our children can receive,” said McLaughlin. “If we want to avoid deficit spending, our voters should approve this modest tax increase.”