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Tali Mendelberg: The Race Card

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A Theory of Racial Appeals

AMERICANS REMEMBER the presidential election of 1988 as the Willie Horton election. A young black man convicted of murder and sentenced to life in a Massachusetts prison, Horton escaped while on furlough and assaulted a white couple in their home, raping the woman. George Bush made Horton a household name by repeatedly mentioning Horton's story and pinning the blame on his Democratic opponent, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis. Several years after the election, when voters were asked what they remembered about the 1988 campaign, they provided three names: Dukakis, Bush, and Horton.¹

The Willie Horton message was obviously about race. Or was it? During nineteen of the twenty-two weeks of the campaign, no one in America seemed to think so. Bush and his aides spoke only about criminal justice, and they never mentioned Horton's race. Dukakis and his running mate, Lloyd Bentsen, said nothing about the racial element of the message. No other Democrat even hinted at the possibility that the message was racial. Journalists, too, seemed blind to the racial element of the story; not one of the hundreds of editorials, articles, or television news stories about Horton noted the racial aspect of the Horton appeal. Horton's race was repeatedly shown in menacing photos, but it was never spoken. Horton may as well have been French and his victims Swedish for all the notice his race drew.

Not so after October 21. On that day Jesse Jackson, the eminent civil rights activist who had been runner-up for the Democratic presidential nomination, accused the Bush campaign of using Horton with racial intent. The Horton story was an appeal to white voters' racial fears, Jackson charged; it was a political play on injurious stereotypes whites had developed about black men's proclivity to rape white women. From the moment Jackson made his charge, race pervaded media coverage of the Horton story and of the campaign. Bush and his campaign officials vehemently denied the charge of racism; Jackson and Bentsen (though not Dukakis) repeated it; and journalists and commentators considered whether the charge was true, most concluding that it was not.

Although he had finished the primary season far behind Dukakis in the polls, Bush's prospects shot up in June with his first mention of the Horton story. In October, when the Horton message reached its greatest intensity, Bush pulled ahead decisively. Soon after race entered the discussion, however,

¹ Based on the focus group transcript in Jamieson (1992, 15–16).

Bush's ratings began a steep slide. In the end, of course, Dukakis lost the election. The debate about race came too late to completely undo the effect of the Horton message. It was not until Bush's veto of the 1990 civil rights bill that Jackson's charge was adopted by journalists as the conventional interpretation of the Horton appeal. That the Willie Horton campaign was about race was obvious only three years after it transpired.

In the aftermath of the campaign, scholars and commentators concluded that Bush won through negative attacks that distorted the truth and mangled the issue of crime, attacks that Dukakis was too inept to counter. But for all that the Horton story has been vilified as the epitome of dirty campaigning, we still have not grasped the most significant aspect of the campaign: it communicated about race implicitly. In fact, *the racial message was communicated most effectively when no one noticed its racial meaning*. When people finally noticed, the racial message lost much of its power. Despite all that has been written about the 1988 election, it has gone unremarked that Bush's fortunes suffered just when race went from subtext to text.

The most important and underplayed lesson of the Horton message is that, in a racially divided society that aspires to equality, the injection of race into campaigns poses a great danger to democratic politics—so long as the injection of race takes place under cover. When a society has repudiated racism, yet racial conflict persists, candidates can win by playing the race card only through implicit racial appeals. The implicit nature of these appeals allows them to prime racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments while appearing not to do so. When an implicit appeal is rendered explicit—when other elites bring the racial meaning of the appeal to voters' attention—it appears to violate the norm of racial equality. It then loses its ability to prime white voters' racial predispositions. As a consequence, voters not only become more disaffected with the candidate, but also prevent their negative racial predispositions from influencing their opinion on issues of race. Political communication that derogates African Americans does little harm if it is widely, immediately, and strongly denounced. In an age of equality, what damages racial equality is the failure to notice the racial meaning of political communication, not the racial meaning itself.

The Horton story is not an isolated case. With more or less racial intent, many party officials, candidates, and campaign officials have conveyed implicitly racial appeals, and some have reaped the electoral benefits. The presidential campaigns of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Richard Nixon in 1968 relied on implicitly racial appeals, the former driven by Goldwater's southern backers and the latter by Nixon's own ambition. Ronald Reagan came to political prominence nationally in part through his use of the welfare queen anecdote, perhaps not told with racial intent but likely with racial result. The 2000 presidential election featured the third presidential candidacy of Pat Buchanan, who in his infamous 1992 Republican National Convention speech attacked the be-

havior of inner-city residents, who are disproportionately black. In the 1996 primaries, Buchanan proved to be Bob Dole's main challenger, winning in New Hampshire and several other early states. He ardently defended South Carolina's practice of flying the Confederate flag above the state capitol as a symbol of southern heritage, and advocated building a wall at the border to restrict Mexican immigration, which he linked to welfare dependency and crime. Buchanan, however, has been the least successful of these presidential candidates, in part because he has been the least subtle. His use of the term "José" to refer to Mexican immigrants, his aides' well-publicized ties to anti-Semitic, paramilitary, and racist groups, and similar aspects of his campaigns led 54 percent of a national sample of Americans in 1996 to consider him too extreme.

The issues of welfare and crime have a long history of entanglement with race and a continuing salience in American politics. When officials disparage welfare recipients or focus attention on the perpetrators of violent crime, they often convey a racial message—not always intentionally, not always consciously, nor even inevitably. Still, they or their campaign aides sometimes consciously convey implicit racial meaning, and, regardless of the campaigners' intent and awareness, implicit racial meaning is often communicated by the media and received by voters.

Because candidates need not be fully intent on conveying a racial message, implicit racial messages are conveyed not only by conservative but by more moderate candidates, too. In 1994, when 42 percent of Americans named crime as the nation's worst problem, moderate Republican gubernatorial candidates in California (Pete Wilson), Illinois (Jim Edgar), and Texas (George W. Bush) ran ads showing blurry black-and-white images of (fictional) gun-toting rapists. Jim Edgar also ran an anti-welfare ad featuring African Americans. Getting tough on welfare dependency is a strategy that George W. Bush pursued during his 1998 gubernatorial reelection campaign in Texas.

Candidates for Senate, Congress, and lesser offices rely on implicit racial messages, too. David Duke, who ran as a Republican for the Senate and then for governor in Louisiana (followed by a run for president), is perhaps the best known and least successful in this category, having been unable to fully shed the baggage of his Ku Klux Klan past. James Glaser, in his recent study of competitive congressional elections in the South, found that in fact implicit racial messages are central to the Republican strategy and that, indeed, "some racial appeals seem to arise in nearly every election" (1996, 73).

Implicit racial appeals can be found in campaigns at all levels, and although they may be more evident in the South, they are not confined to that region. In northern states with a substantial racial minority, electoral campaigns often include implicit racial messages with oblique, subtle references to race. For example, in his 1999 reelection campaign, New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani put out a press release entitled, "Ruth Messinger Throws a Party for a Mur-

derer,” charging that his Democratic opponent had hosted a party for an inmate convicted of killing a guard during the racially charged Attica prison riots in 1971. Republican governors who have risen to prominence in recent years, such as Tom Ridge in Pennsylvania, Jeb Bush in Florida, and George Pataki in New York, all ran election campaigns that featured ads attacking their opponents for being lax on violent crime. These messages, by design or by circumstance, whether on their own or as conveyed by the news media, tended implicitly to refer to violent black criminals. Other prominent Republican governors were elected in part by highlighting their tough anti-welfare stance, a message that the media often conveys with visual references to African Americans. As the Republican party evaluated the reasons for its humiliating showing in the 1998 congressional elections, Republican governors argued that the party should move away from religious issues and focus in part, as the governors said they had done successfully in 1998 and before, on crime and welfare.

Thus some of our most salient political issues are entangled with race, and so are many of the campaign messages that discuss these issues. When public figures discuss matters of welfare or crime, they often—though not always—do so in a way that conveys derogatory references to African Americans. Often—though not always—these references are conveyed implicitly. To understand the relevance of race to the party system and to the conduct of electoral campaigns, implicitly racial communication must be understood.² We must understand what makes a message implicit rather than explicit or nonracial. We must also understand the causes of implicit messages and their consequences. To understand when, how, and why implicit meaning exists in campaigns, and when, how, and why it does not, we must understand party strategy, norms, and voters’ political psychology.

The power of implicitly racial appeals today is due to the coexistence of two contradictory elements in American politics: powerful egalitarian norms about race, and a party system based on the cleavage of race. Politicians convey racial

² Several caveats should be kept in mind about this book. First, I assume that white politicians are running in majority-white areas. Racial appeals made in majority-black areas will likely be detected and denounced, causing the candidate to lose the election. Candidates inclined to make such appeals are likely not to run. Second, this book sets aside implicit pro-black appeals. Democrats who wish to mobilize black voters without alienating whites have incentives to make pro-black statements but mask them in some way. The way such a strategy tends to find expression, however, is not with implicit references to race but via a “surgical” approach, using black radio and black churches (Glaser 1996; McCormick and Jones 1983; Persons 1983; Perry 1991). This strategy is important and worth investigating, but it is beyond the scope of this book. Third, subtle appeals to race are also important in biracial contests featuring white and nonwhite candidates, as Reeves (1997) has shown, but this book focuses on white-white contests as a “harder,” less obvious case. In biracial contests, as Reeves argues, “we can assume that race is always a factor” (1997, 30), but in white-white contests, race is a variable rather than a constant. Finally, my book does not directly examine anti-Latino appeals because they are still in their infancy. However, Chapter 9 moves my argument well beyond the American black-white dynamic.

messages implicitly when two contradictory conditions hold: (1) they wish to avoid violating the norm of racial equality, and (2) they face incentives to mobilize racially resentful white voters. White voters respond to implicitly racial messages when two contradictory conditions hold: (1) they wish to adhere to the norm of racial equality, and (2) they resent blacks' claims for public resources and hold negative racial stereotypes regarding work, violence, and sexuality. Today, these conditions hold for most Republican politicians and for many—arguably most—white voters. The contradiction among these conditions can be resolved most effectively through implicit racial communication. Politicians appeal to race implicitly because in order to win they need to mobilize whites' racial resentment while adhering to the norm of racial equality established during the 1960s. In other words, they face incentives to mobilize race in the age of equality. White voters respond to implicitly racial messages because they do not recognize these messages as racial and do not believe that their favorable response is motivated by racism. In fact, the racial reference in an implicit message, while subtle, is recognizable and works most powerfully through white voters' racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments.

To understand implicitly racial appeals, we need to understand the role of consciousness in public opinion—voters' consciousness of the racial meaning of a message and of their racial response to it. And we need to understand why elites might try to communicate indirectly rather than directly. Are the sender and receiver aware of the full meaning of an implicit message? Does the receiver know which of her own predispositions is activated by the message? These are general questions that matter for our understanding of public opinion, elections, and political communication. The case of racial politics, however, sharpens these questions like no other. Race is perhaps the central social cleavage of American political life. Yet American society has committed itself to making race irrelevant. The tension between the existence of racial conflict and the inability to express it produces indirect forms of communication, and makes consciousness a central variable in the political psychology of white citizens.

To understand why implicit appeals exist, why they work, and why they cease to work when they are explicit, we must understand the influence of racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments; party coalitions based on race; and the ability of a message to prime racial predispositions in white voters' minds. But while indispensable, these causes are insufficient. They cannot explain why a candidate would choose to convey a message under cover of some other issue. And they cannot explain why the candidate's supporters would respond more positively to an implicit message. Norms and consciousness are the necessary and missing factors. White Americans recognize that it is no longer acceptable to seem like a racist, not for elites or for citizens (Schuman et al. 1997; van Dijk 1991). Most people want to avoid not only the public perception that they are racist, but also thinking of themselves as racist. The norm of racial equality explains why racially conservative candidates seek to avoid the

perception that their message is racial, and why their opposition's most effective strategy is to uncover the racial meaning of the message. Voters' awareness that the message violates the norm, and their awareness that their response to the message violates the norm, varies. This variation explains why the same voters respond to the message when it is hidden but repudiate it when it is obvious.

The history of racial norms reveals that as the racial norm changed during the twentieth century from inegalitarian to egalitarian, racial communication was transformed. The century began with highly explicit political communication about race, but as the century progressed, the explicit turned implicit. When the norm is inegalitarian, racial messages must be explicit to be effective. Otherwise, they fail to convey the commitment of the speaker to racial inequality. An inegalitarian norm causes white voters to expect candidates to establish racist credentials. Conversely, when the norm is egalitarian, explicit messages backfire, and only implicit messages, which appear to adhere to the norm, can succeed. When an egalitarian norm prevails, an inverse relationship exists between the explicitness of the message and its effectiveness in mobilizing voters, and a direct relationship exists between the implicitness of the message and its effectiveness. The reason is that voters can respond to the racial meaning of a message without being aware that the message has a racial meaning or that they are responding to that meaning. Without understanding the relationship between elections, norms, communication, and consciousness, and the dynamics of that relationship, it is difficult to evaluate just what has changed and what remains the same in the politics of race. To understand these dynamics is to understand the ongoing mobilization of race in the age of equality.

IMPLICIT VERSUS EXPLICIT COMMUNICATION

What exactly is the difference between implicit and explicit messages? First, consider what makes an appeal explicitly racial. By my definition, a racial appeal is explicit if it uses racial nouns or adjectives to endorse white prerogatives, to express anti-black sentiment, to represent racial stereotypes, or to portray a threat from African Americans. An explicit message uses such words as "blacks," "race," or "racial" to express anti-black sentiment or to make racially stereotypical or derogatory statements.

Explicitly racial appeals have nearly disappeared, but contemporary examples can still be found. Jesse Helms, for example, charged in 1984 that his Democratic opponent in the North Carolina senatorial contest was colluding with Jesse Jackson to register "hundreds of thousands of blacks" who would vote as a bloc against him (Luebke 1990, 131). Northern examples exist, too. The 1983 mayoral election in Chicago marked the first time that a black politi-

cian, Democrat Harold Washington, was elected to that office. This was, not coincidentally, the first time that Chicago's black citizens mobilized in a concerted effort to gain greater representation for themselves. White backlash to Washington's primary victory in the overwhelmingly Democratic city and to the historic mobilization of black voters was loud and far from subtle. "No matter what anyone tells you, this election has come down to *race*," stated an anti-Washington campaign flier distributed in police stations (Pinderhughes 1987).³

Implicit racial appeals convey the same message as explicit racial appeals, but they replace the racial nouns and adjectives with more oblique references to race. They present an ostensibly race-free conservative position on an issue while incidentally alluding to racial stereotypes or to a perceived threat from African Americans. Implicit racial appeals discuss a nonracial matter and avoid a direct reference to black inferiority or to white group interest. They forego professions of racial antipathy and do not endorse segregation or white prerogatives. They convey a message that may violate the norm of racial equality by submerging it in nonracial content. In an implicit racial appeal, the racial message appears to be so coincidental and peripheral that many of its recipients are not aware that it is there.

Implicit racial appeals can be generated with words alone. But finding words that have a clear racial association yet seem to be nonracial is a difficult undertaking. Visual images are a more effective way to communicate implicitly. Images play an important and distinctive role in the way people perceive their world. Communication research has long argued that television is a unique (and highly influential) medium because it is primarily visual (Jamieson 1992). Indeed, visual images have proven to be powerful cues for evoking racial stereotypes (Hurwitz and Peffley 1997). Stereotypical or threatening images can communicate derogatory racial meaning in a more subtle way than an equivalent verbal statement.

Consider, for example, the stereotypical images of black men broadcast by local television news programs to millions of viewers in metropolitan areas across the country (Entman 1992; Gilliam et al. 1995). These images constitute a "crime script" that portrays violent crime "with a black face," implicitly suggesting that black men pose a physical threat to whites. Imagine if a television journalist were actually to announce, "Today violent black men once again victimized innocent whites." The journalist who says this would be fired, or at least publicly rebuked in the strongest terms. White viewers are likely to perceive the words, much more than they did the images, as racist, and reject the

³ Many observers also considered Republican candidate Bernard Epton's campaign slogan—"Epton . . . Before it's too late"—an explicitly racial appeal; however, according to my definition it was not, because it contains no verbal reference to race.

messenger and the message. Racial images on their own can communicate their derogatory message much more effectively than images joined with words. Perhaps the most important example of implicit campaign appeals is the Willie Horton message as it existed for much of the 1988 campaign. The Horton message was a conservative message about crime and criminal justice that made no verbal mention of race, but included visual cues to racial resentments, fears, and stereotypes.

What makes implicit appeals distinctively effective is also their Achilles' heel. To counter an implicit appeal one can render it explicit. Today, this can be done by using racial words to describe the content or intent of the message. There are two ways to do so. One way, which the news media can pursue, is to communicate an implicit campaign message with an overlay of racial words. Rather than convey a message with a racially derogatory image but without racial words, the news media can convey the story with racial words, thus making clear that race is the subject of the message. Doing so will make voters aware of the racial nature of the message. The other way to render the message explicit is to point out that it steps outside the bounds of the norm of racial equality and thus of acceptability.⁴ Doing so not only makes white voters aware of the racial nature of the message, but reminds them of their commitment to the norm of racial equality and invites them to apply it to the campaign.

RACIAL VERSUS NONRACIAL COMMUNICATION

While racially tinged issues lend themselves to implicit racial appeals, they are not only about race. Racially tinged issues also represent nonracial dilemmas. States' rights in the 1950s and 1960s, criminal justice in the late 1960s, 1980s, and 1990s, and welfare dependency from the late 1960s onward are cases in point. These issues involve matters of race, but they also raise nonracial questions. What is the optimal division of power between the federal government and the states? How should we balance the rights of crime victims and the rights of the accused? What are the most effective means to end welfare dependency? It must be possible to make a conservative appeal on these issues that is not racial. Not every defense of states' rights is designed to keep blacks down; not every appeal to end welfare is a derogation of African Americans; not every exhortation to crack down on criminals is a call for racist action.

Criminal justice and welfare dependency can undoubtedly be discussed as part of a nonracial strategy of appealing to conservative considerations—con-

⁴ This is not a perfect classification scheme. For example, highly stereotypical visual references would be classified as implicit rather than explicit because they are visual. Still, this classification scheme provides clear decision rules and allows me to proceed with analyses that yield intuitive yet new results.

cern about crime, or anger over undeserving welfare recipients. A candidate may genuinely aim to address nonracial concerns rather than appeal to racial predispositions or mobilize white voters. And when candidates are elected, their anti-welfare or anti-crime policies are not necessarily motivated by race. Nevertheless, some candidates or their campaign aides intend to refer to race when they run campaigns. Those who brought the implicit strategy to national prominence, including southern politicians and Richard Nixon and his aides, seem to have been quite conscious of the fact that the voters they targeted for mobilization were white and had racial concerns. Many Republican officials from the 1960s on knew that the racial make-up of their winning coalition was no accident. Similarly, as the evidence in Chapter 5 shows, the Willie Horton appeal in 1988 was in fact designed largely, though not exclusively, as a racial strategy; other implicitly racial campaigns, such as those discussed in Chapter 3, also show a consistent pattern of racial intent. Still, intent is a cause, not a characteristic, of racial appeals. We cannot rely on intent alone to distinguish between implicit and nonracial appeals.

How, then, can we distinguish purely conservative appeals from implicitly racial ones? First we must define an implicitly racial appeal as one that contains a recognizable—if subtle—racial reference, most easily through visual references. People can debate at length the question of whether a verbal reference has racial associations. But a visual image is much less ambiguous. Of course, the racial significance of a black image can be ambiguous, and it is this ambiguous significance that allows the image to be used with deniability. But once the visual image is noted in a conscious way, and linked to a violation of the norm of racial equality, its negative racial reference becomes much less ambiguous. An appeal on welfare or crime that avoids images of African-American welfare recipients or criminals, if it is communicated this way by the media, distances itself from implicit racial appeals.

However, the clearest way for a candidate to separate an implicit racial appeal from a purely conservative appeal is to refer to whites in place of blacks, even if indirectly. A truly nonracial appeal is a counter-stereotypical appeal. This definition is validated by the finding that an anti-welfare message accompanied by images of white welfare recipients does not activate racial predispositions, while an identical message accompanied by images of black welfare recipients does. An unflattering image of blacks makes the message racial. An image of whites transforms the same message into a counter-stereotypical communication. This simple distinction makes a significant difference to white voters' racial response. A conservative message does not activate racial predispositions if it is accompanied by counter-stereotypical images of whites. Thus, the strict definition of a nonracial appeal on an issue entangled with race is that it replaces derogatory or threatening images of African Americans with similar images of whites.

With a clear definition in hand of implicit, explicit, and counter-stereotypical messages, I must now distinguish between voters' racial and nonracial responses. Just as it is possible for candidates to intend purely conservative appeals, it is possible for voters to endorse appeals out of nonracial considerations. A white citizen may vote for a candidate or oppose a policy out of many different considerations, only some of which are racial. Just because an implicit appeal strengthens opposition to affirmative action, for example, does not necessarily mean that the appeal worked because it was racial. Meaning is in the ear of the listener, as Just, Neuman, Crigler and their colleagues have shown (Just et al. 1996; Kern and Just 1995; Neuman et al. 1992). The question is how to tell whether the listener hears "race" as part of the message.

The optimal measure of the racial impact of a message is racial priming: an increase in the effect of racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments, leading to increased opposition to racial policies (such as government aid to blacks) and to greater support for the candidate who conveys the message. Each study I conducted was designed to contrast the strength of racial priming obtained with an implicit appeal against that obtained with other types of appeals. But racial priming does not settle the question of nonracial impact. A message might also result in racial priming but in simultaneous, and more powerful, nonracial priming. The key to knowing whether a message has a racial impact or not is to contrast the increased effect of racial predispositions against the increased effect of nonracial considerations. A message about crime that shows a black criminal will, I expect, evoke racial predispositions more strongly than it evokes nonracial worries about crime. A message about the need to reduce welfare payments that features black welfare recipients should, by the same token, prime racial predispositions more powerfully than it does a conservative orientation toward politics.

I have now considered three aspects of racial messages: whether they are constructed with racial intent or awareness; whether they are racial; and whether they work through voters' racial predispositions. The key to classifying a racial appeal is not through the first or the last, but through the middle: a racial appeal is defined by its content, not by its cause or by its effect. Having clarified my definitional scheme, I turn to the matter of cause and effect.

NORMS MATTER, NOT JUST PARTY COALITIONS

More than any other cleavage, race now serves as the line dividing the two major parties. This can be seen in Table 1.1, which displays the difference that each salient social cleavage makes to the Democratic vote for president. During the past decades, the electoral fortunes of the two major parties have been strongly tied to the cleavage of race. Moreover, the social cleavage of race divides the parties far more than does any other social cleavage. The distinctive

TABLE 1.1
Relationship of Social Characteristics to Presidential Voting, 1944–1996

	Election Year													
	1944	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996
Racial voting ^a	27	12	40	25	23	36	56	57	48	56	54	51	41	47
Regional voting ^b														
Among whites	—	—	12	17	6	-11	-4	-13	1	1	-9	-5	-10	-8
Among entire electorate (NES surveys)	—	—	9	15	4	-5	6	-3	7	3	3	2	0	0
Among entire electorate (official election results)	23	14	8	8	3	-13	-3	-11	5	2	-5	-7	-6	-7
Union voting ^c														
Among whites	20	37	18	15	21	23	13	11	18	15	20	16	12	23
Among entire electorate	20	37	20	17	19	22	13	10	17	16	19	15	11	23
Class voting ^d														
Among whites	19	44	20	8	12	19	10	2	17	9	8	5	4	6
Among entire electorate	20	44	22	11	13	20	15	4	21	15	12	8	8	9
Religious voting ^e														
Among whites	25	21	18	10	48	21	30	13	15	10	16	18	20	14
Among entire electorate	24	19	15	10	46	16	21	8	11	3	9	11	10	7

Source: Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode (1996, 103).

Note: All calculations are based on major-party voters.

^a Percentage of blacks who voted Democratic minus percentage of whites who voted Democratic.

^b Percentage of southerners who voted Democratic minus percentage of voters outside the South who voted Democratic.

^c Percentage of members of union households who voted Democratic minus percentage of members of households with no union members who voted Democratic.

^d Percentage of working class that voted Democratic minus percentage of middle class that voted Democratic.

^e Percentage of Catholics who voted Democratic minus percentage of Protestants who voted Democratic.

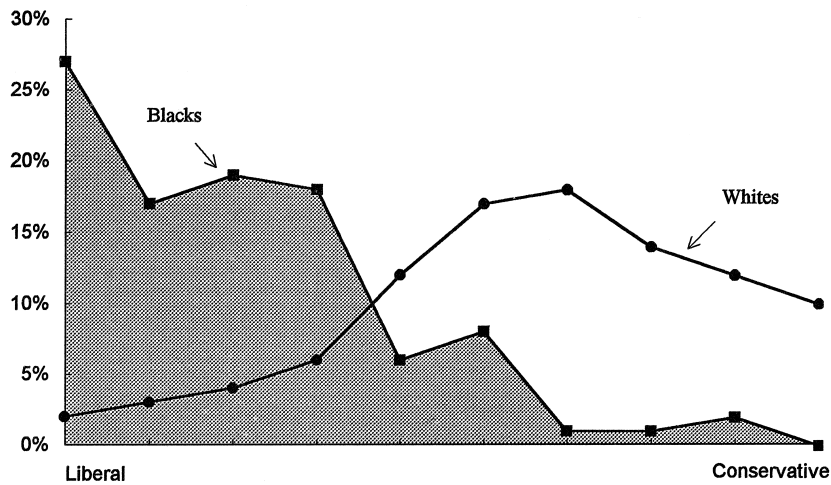


Figure 1.1. Opinion on race policy, separately for blacks and whites. Opinion on race policy is an unweighted average of answers to six questions about what should be done to ameliorate racial inequality, including questions about guaranteeing equal opportunity, providing federal aid to African Americans, and practicing affirmative action. The figure displays answers to these questions, arranged from the most liberal—favoring more action in these areas—to the most conservative—favoring less action in these areas. The circles represent the percentages of whites; the squares represent the percentages of African Americans. Reprinted with permission from University of Chicago Press. (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 27)

power of race does not surprise when we consider Figure 1.1, which displays the distribution of whites' and African Americans' opinions about racial inequality. Actually, Figure 1.1 shows not one but two distributions—one black and the other white, one favoring active government intervention in matters of race and the other opposed. The distributions overlap, suggesting that there is some common ground between blacks and whites, but are still clearly separate. Race is not only an important divide in electoral politics; it is, in the words of Kinder and Sanders, “a divide without peer” (1996, 27).

Thus, the landmark breaks with legal discrimination did not remove race from electoral politics. In fact, these changes only enhanced the importance of race in elections. On the matter of government intervention in racial inequality, the Republican party moved to the right, the Democratic party to the left. As Carmines and Stimson (1989) and Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt (1989), among others, have shown, white voters formerly loyal to the Democratic party began to

defect to the Republican party, especially in presidential contests, in large measure because of race. African-American voters decisively deserted the party of Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation for the party of Lyndon Johnson and the Civil Rights Act. The result is a party system firmly rooted in the cleavage of race. Commenting on the partisan alignment in the contemporary South, Earl Black noted:

Because they drew almost all of their votes from whites and won much higher shares of the white vote than the black vote, the victorious white Republicans both symbolized and perpetuated the *rule of white majorities*. Whether or not they resorted to overt racial appeals—and few did in 1994 (at least not of the sort traditionally recognized as craven attempts to win white support)—the white Republicans' thoroughgoing conservatism was ideally designed to attract substantial white majorities in districts where most voters were whites. . . . White Democrats [however] . . . could not possibly succeed without doing well—in different ways—among both whites and blacks. . . . White Democratic victories rested upon the *rule of biracial coalitions*. (Black 1998, 602–604; emphasis in the original)

To a large extent, Black's story about southern elections fits some elections in other regions, too, and it fits national elections. Figure 1.2 shows the percentages of black and white major-party voters who voted Democratic in each presidential election from 1944 to 1996. The Democrats won over 50 percent of the white vote in three of the six elections held between 1944 and 1964, but in only two of the eight elections since 1964. The Democrats won an absolute majority of the total white vote in two of the six elections between 1944 and 1964, but never since then (Abramson et al. 1998, 101–102). In election after election, a majority of white voters has shied away from choosing a Democrat for president. For their part, the Republicans have received almost no black votes since symbolically turning their back on civil rights in 1964 by nominating for president one of the few senators to vote against the historic Civil Rights Act. And while 1964 is a watershed for the racial party system, Figure 1.2 shows that race is no less a divide in the 1990s. In fact, the racial gap was larger in the 1990s than in 1964.

Each party thus faces a distinct combination of racial pitfalls and incentives. Democrats win when the white vote is split among Republican and third-party candidates, when they avoid alienating moderate whites, and when they mobilize blacks. The Democratic party thus must walk a fine line between alienating blacks, its most loyal constituency, and losing further support from racially conservative whites. Republicans, on the other hand, win with effective appeals to whites; the party's challenge is to mobilize racial conservatives without alienating moderate whites (Axelrod 1972, 1986; Carmines and Huckfeldt, 1992; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt 1989; Kinder and Sanders 1996).

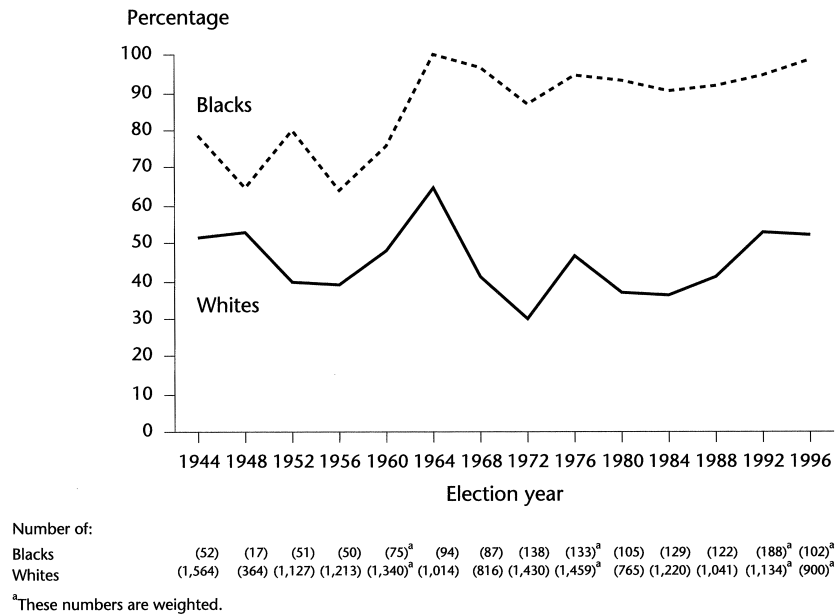


Figure 1.2. Percentage of major-party voters who voted Democratic for president, by race, 1944–1996. Reprinted with permission from Congressional Quarterly Inc. (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1996, 102)

But to fully understand the Republican dilemma, and the range of strategic choices open to Democrats, it is not enough to know how parties cobble together groups with clashing preferences. True, the need to appeal simultaneously to racially conservative and moderate whites can explain why Republicans try to appeal to racial conservatives without alienating racial moderates. But the need to balance electoral demands by itself cannot explain why Republicans embed their racial message in messages about other issues and deny that they are discussing race. The balancing act cannot explain why even racial conservatives might be more effectively mobilized by implicit appeals.

A coalition-based analysis also falls short of a full explanation of the Democratic strategy. The logic of electoral coalitions predicts that Democrats would remain silent on race, as they in fact often do. But that is not the beginning and end of the Democratic strategy. The Democrats' most effective counter-strategy—which, as I show, they do pursue, albeit occasionally—is to point out how racial the Republican message really is. But why would Democrats benefit from highlighting race in the Republican message? If Democrats always

lose when race is on the agenda, as the pure coalitional model predicts—because their core constituency demands a racially liberal position that is anathema to the moderate voters the Democrats need—then it is never in the Democrats’ interest to raise the issue of race. The pure coalitional model cannot explain why Democrats might benefit by bringing race to the surface. Yet highlighting the racial element of the opposition’s implicit appeals is the Democrats’ most effective strategy short of abandoning their racial liberalism, adopting the Republican position on race, and foregoing their attempt to represent the interests of blacks.

The missing link in the pure coalitional model is the norm of racial equality. The social prohibition against making racist statements in public acts as a constraint against playing the race card in a recognizable fashion. Violating this norm is costly for Republicans. In fact, as I will show, it is costly even with their core constituency of racially resentful whites. The norm of racial equality is the only factor that drives Republicans to engage in implicit rather than explicit messages. If Republicans fail to conform to this norm, they risk losing supporters from their own base. The norm of racial equality also renders the strategic choice for Democrats into a decision of whether to be silent in the face of an implicit strategy or to make the implicit message explicit. Campaign messages are of course shaped by electoral strategy, by a calculation of what the core constituency demands, and to what swing voters will object. But decisions about campaign messages also respond to norms of public discourse.

What is a norm? I use the term to describe an informal standard of social behavior accepted by most members of the culture and that guides and constrains behavior. Cialdini and Trost (1998) point out that although laws and material punishments or rewards can reinforce a norm, a norm by definition exercises a social force independent of laws and material costs and benefits. According to DeRidder and his colleagues, perhaps the most distinctive aspect of a norm is its “obligatory character” (1992, 22). But the obligation is of a specific kind. People follow a norm not because they fear the arm of the law or physical punishment but because they wish to avoid social censure or the pangs of conscience. Put more positively, people follow a norm because they seek social approval or a virtuous conception of self.

A new political norm often arises from the concerted actions of a social movement seeking to ameliorate the powerlessness of a group. To gain substantial numbers of adherents, however, a new political norm must be communicated actively and deliberately by influential leaders. The cooperation of influential leaders is necessary especially if the new norm competes with an opposite established norm. The most effective way to combat an old norm and establish a new one is to pass landmark legislation, to issue momentous judicial rulings, and to engage in other highly salient signals of commitment to the new norm. Discrediting the adherents of the old norm is also an effective way to under-

mine the old norm, but must be supplemented by actions that actively establish the new norm. Once the new norm has passed this initial stage, it may be communicated more passively. Candidates imitate the successful strategies of other candidates who adhere to the new norm. Politicians strive to anticipate and avoid the censure of influential elites who have signaled a commitment to the norm. Voters learn about the new norm from cultural elites and socialization agents in a gradual process of cultural and social diffusion, with successive generations internalizing the norm in an increasingly more effective way. The norm then becomes *descriptive*—providing information about what a typical member of the culture does, about how everyone acts; and, more importantly, *injunctive*—providing information about what actions a typical member of the culture approves or disapproves, about what everyone condones. At its most powerful, the norm is internalized and becomes *personal*—specifying how one's ideal self would act.⁵

The norm of racial equality in the United States was established in just such a fashion. Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, and even more so in the 1950s and 1960s, segregation, disenfranchisement, lynching, and a host of other racist practices came under increasing cultural attack. Cultural leaders increasingly communicated the notion that racial inequality was an immoral principle. The norm of racial equality gained momentum through landmark legislation and court rulings that signaled that racial equality should now be the injunctive norm. The norm of racial equality was also furthered by the civil rights movement, through its moral rhetoric and through actions that prodded and enabled landmark legislation and discredited the white southern adherents of the old inegalitarian norm. The practices of racial inequality, and the ideology of white supremacy that justified them, were challenged, deliberately and directly.

Thus, over the course of the twentieth century, and particularly during the 1960s, influential elites became increasingly committed to basic racial equality, in particular to equal opportunity. African-American political organizations mobilized against white supremacy with growing effectiveness. The central political institutions of the United States gradually aligned themselves in opposition to this ideology and to the legal segregation it defended.⁶ The idea of biological inferiority was discredited. The racist rhetoric of the era of segregation was gradually retired. Citizens' endorsement of basic racial equality became nearly universal. In the age of equality, neither citizens nor politicians want to be perceived or to perceive themselves as racist. The norm of racial equality has become descriptive and injunctive, endorsed by nearly every American.

⁵ This terminology is usefully laid out by Cialdini and Trost (1998).

⁶ The landmark legislation and court rulings had a far greater normative than material impact. The actual number of people who were formally found to be violators of the law and who suffered adverse material consequences as a result is small (Hochschild 1999; Rosenberg 1991). These laws mattered a great deal, but perhaps as cultural norms more than material punishments.

For most white Americans, it is a personal norm as well. Whites do not simply pay lip service to equality and continue to derogate blacks in private. Almost all whites genuinely disavow the sentiments that have come to be most closely associated with the ideology of white supremacy—the immutable inferiority of blacks, the desirability of segregation, and the just nature of discrimination in favor of whites. In this sense, nearly every white person today has a genuine commitment to basic racial equality in the public sphere.

This dramatic and hugely significant change in norms, however, coexists with a racial divide embedded in the party system. The change in norms did not eliminate racial conflict. Neither did it mitigate the racial base of the party system. Because the civil rights era came and went without fully resolving the problems of racial inequality, individuals and institutions are forced to continue to reach decisions about racial matters, matters that count among the most difficult of our national problems. Racial segregation and inequality have lessened to some extent. But in some ways they are now even more entrenched than they were before the civil rights era (Farley and Allen 1987; Hochschild 1984; Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987, 1996). The problems of race still simmer, periodically getting a turn on the political front burner. Government did not withdraw from the arena of racial problems after the landmark laws and rulings of the 1960s guaranteed African Americans the right to use public accommodations, to have equal employment opportunities, and to cast the ballot. Since the 1960s, a variety of policies designed to cure the ills of racial inequality, including affirmative action in government contracts, in employment, and in higher education, and equal financing and desegregation of public schools and public housing, have been debated, and often resisted by a majority of white voters. So have policies related to racial inequality, including liberal measures in the areas of criminal justice and assistance to the poor. Republicans have incentives to appeal to white voters' racial resentments and fears over these matters, and to the stereotypes that many whites still have about race, crime, and poverty. Democrats in turn must hang on to at least some of the resentful white members of their biracial coalitions but keep up black support. Conflict over race has become institutionalized in the party system.

The norm of racial equality thus restricts but does not eliminate candidates' racial appeals. The norm makes white citizens' response to those appeals contingent on awareness, but does not eliminate it. Egalitarian norms, a racial party system, and white voters' racial stereotypes and resentments jointly explain why race is virtually absent from the surface of campaigns but very much present underneath. Racially conservative candidates avoid the words "black" and "white" and respond to accusations of racism as if they were accusations of immorality of the worst kind. But the electoral incentives and costs they face lead them to try to convey conservative racial meaning in an implicit way.

THE POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF IMPLICIT MESSAGES

The tension between egalitarian norms and negative racial predispositions also explains why many white voters respond quite differently to a racial message depending on its implicitness. The norm of racial equality has not eliminated all racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments, but it does regulate when and how much whites rely on these racial predispositions in making political choices. Whites rely on racial predispositions in reaching decisions about politics when they can do so in a way that is indirect and deniable, not just to others but to themselves as well. The norm of racial equality is not only a public norm that shapes what people do when in the company of others; as we will see in Chapter 8, even a confidential decision is shaped by the norm. Thus, in the case of race, white citizens' opinion is motivated to a significant degree by negative stereotypes and resentment of blacks, but also by egalitarian considerations, including internalized moral views about the need for equal opportunity. The tension between equality and racism allows messages to influence the political response. Some messages allow the egalitarian norm to win, while others allow racial predispositions free reign.⁷

The key to the outcome is awareness of racial priming. Racial predispositions can be activated without the awareness of those who hold them. The likelihood of racial priming without awareness is greater with exposure to implicit than to explicit appeals. An implicit appeal is less likely to be perceived as having violated the norm of racial equality. It is likely to be perceived not as a statement that derogates blacks or suggests a threat from blacks, but rather as a message that includes race only incidentally and neutrally. The same message made explicitly is likely to be perceived as having crossed the line of public acceptability, and it will be rejected. In rejecting the appeal, citizens are likely to become more vigilant about their own racial response. As a result, they reject their racial predispositions as grounds for reaching decisions. I will discuss the various psychological mechanisms at greater length in Chapters 4 and 8. For now, the important point is that implicit appeals work through racial priming—activating negative racial predispositions—and that this happens when self-censorship mechanisms, triggered by a violation of the norm of racial equality, fail to work. Implicit appeals are more effective than explicit messages because they bypass the self-censorship mechanisms of whites.

Political campaigns do not much change people's racial resentments, stereotypes, and fears, as will become evident in later chapters. A longstanding tenet in the literature on voting is that campaigns mobilize rather than convert (Berelson et al. 1954). Campaigns thus rarely alter racial predispositions, but they

⁷ My definition of implicit appeals is related to but separable from the concept of implicit racism developed by psychologists. See Chapter 4.

do activate or deactivate racial predispositions in the mind, leading citizens to give greater or lesser weight to them. Several recent studies of racial attitudes have demonstrated that the connection between long-standing racial predispositions and political choices grows or shrinks with political circumstances (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears 1998). Huckfeldt and Kohfeld (1989) underscore the point in their discussion of Chicago's highly racialized 1983 mayoral election: "Were there significantly fewer racists in Chicago during the 1979 mayoral election than during the 1983 mayoral election? Probably not, but conditions in 1983 provoked levels of racial animosity that were unimagined four years earlier."

What these studies have not considered is that today, campaigns often activate racial predispositions without voters' awareness. In fact, campaigns are most successful when they rely on messages that contain racial cues but are not perceived by most voters as racial.

WHAT WE KNOW—AND DON'T KNOW—OF IMPLICIT APPEALS

It seems, then, that knowledge of implicit appeals is important to our understanding of race, elections, and political communication. However, we know very little about how racial messages operate, in electoral campaigns and in political discourse more generally. What determines when a candidate will use an implicit or explicit racial appeal, and how is each appeal neutralized? How do American political institutions, particularly the media and parties, assist or neutralize implicit racial appeals? Do white voters read the message as a covert yet clear signal of the candidate's racial ideology—or do they view the message as a principled, nonracial conservative stand? These questions must be answered if we are to understand how racial meaning is communicated in American politics. But studies of communication, voters, and campaigns have not yet turned their full attention to these questions. To understand what is to be done in the study of implicit communication, we must first understand what we have not yet done.

The notion that campaigns attempt to appeal to racial predispositions without appearing to do so is not novel, of course. The term "code word"—which means a deniable verbal reference to race—is now fairly common among journalists. Kathleen Hall Jamieson's analysis of the 1988 presidential campaign suggests that the Bush campaign's manipulation and distortion of fact, journalists' amplification of that distortion, and white voters' inclination to allow their racial fears to shape their interpretation of the facts all combined to create a racist response. But how do we know whether the response was racial? And was 1988 a fluke, or part of a pattern? What explains the decision to use a racial appeal? To obtain the answers, we need a systematic effort to discover what makes a message racially coded and how it works. We need to understand

the historical circumstances that gave rise to implicit messages, and to investigate effective counterstrategies. Finally, we need to compare communication about race with communication about other social cleavages.

Although most political observers and some scholars now take the existence of implicit racial appeals for granted, they nevertheless tend to neglect their significance. The conventional view seems to be that they are used, at some times and places, but as just a minor variant either of explicitly racial appeals or of purely conservative appeals. This has led scholars to underestimate just how common and powerful racial communication is.

For example, in the 1970s edition of his classic *Dynamics of the Party System*, James Sundquist argued that the issue of race might have become a source of partisan realignment, but had not because it was abandoned by the Republican party. He believed this largely because he believed that local Republican organizations, in the South as well as the North, were unwilling to engage in blatant appeals to racism, and it would take such a blunt tool to make a dent in conservative Democrats' party affiliation.

In the 1983 edition of the same book Sundquist moderated his conclusion only slightly. Even the local Republican organizations in the Deep South, he claimed, were divided on whether to try to recruit George Wallace voters. They knew it could be done: "The Democrats could be labeled the 'black man's party' and the GOP established as the defenders of southern racial traditions" (1983, 364). But many Republicans "had no stomach for such an overt appeal to racism. . . . No one arose to take Wallace's place as leader of a southern protest movement based on race, and the region entered . . . a period marked by the rapid and pronounced abatement of the powerful racial issue that had dominated southern politics through most of history." Instead of making appeals to race, Republicans chose to mend fences through such symbolic overtures as appointing token African Americans to their staffs. Sundquist did not consider the possibility that Republicans might come to rely on the "interlinked" issues of race and crime (and race and welfare) to make less overt racial appeals. He believed that the Democrats had moved to the right in tandem with white opinion and thus forestalled Republican gains from subtle racial appeals.

As a consequence, Sundquist underestimated the extent to which party coalitions were becoming fundamentally shaped by issues of race. And he overestimated the continuing resistance of racial conservatives to identification with the Republican party (e.g., Giles and Hertz 1994). Sundquist knew, while he was writing during the 1970s and 1980s, that racial conservatives split their tickets with a vengeance. But he assumed that this was as far as the Republicans could get. He made a mistake in part because he neglected the frequency with which Republicans relied on implicit racial appeals, and the influence such appeals had on white voters. He briefly noted Nixon's implicitly racial tactics, but dismissed their effect: "Nixon . . . used the 'code words' and created the 'symbolism' that appealed to segregationists. But that did not mean they had

realigned as Republicans” (1983, 370). Sundquist believed that Nixon’s was an isolated case, and that his appeals had only limited influence over voters.

Studies of elections outside the South have also passed over the significance of implicit racial appeals. In their comprehensive study of mayoral elections, Metz and Tate (1995) made clear their intention to study implicit appeals. They defined racialized elections as those in which

one or both of the two major candidates make explicit appeals to members of their own racial group; when the major candidates limit their campaign appearances to members of their racial group, and when the candidates raise issues that are *explicitly or implicitly* racial. . . . The types of issues that candidates raise can be overtly racial, such as the city’s affirmative action policy, or *covertly racial*, as sometimes is the case in a candidate’s exclusive focus on the city’s crime (read: Black) problem. (263, 267; emphasis added)

However, Metz and Tate did not measure implicit appeals. They conclude that white candidates’ racial appeals have declined since 1969.⁸ Their measure of racialized campaigns, however, misses the important distinction between explicit and implicit rhetoric. Had they measured implicit and explicit appeals separately, they likely would have found an increase in the first and a decrease in the second. Ignoring implicit appeals leads to an underestimate of the importance of racial appeals today. It also results in a murky view of how racial appeals change over time, what leads candidates to use them, and how voters respond to them.

Plaintiffs in voting rights cases and scholars who testify on their behalf have also tended to neglect implicit appeals in pressing their case. The greatest opportunity for testifying about implicit appeals presented itself before the 1990s, while the courts still relied on a “totality of circumstances” test to decide whether a violation of the Voting Rights Act had occurred (but see Grofman and Handley 1998a). Even then, however, because subtle appeals to race were difficult to prove, they were little discussed in the courts, despite the explicit inclusion of “overt or subtle appeals” in the list of seven factors used to establish a violation of Section 2 (Grofman 1992, 200–201; Thernstrom 1987, 194–195). The single exception seems to be the sociologist Paul Luebke, who has documented instances of implicitly racial campaign appeals in North Carolina (1990; Grofman 1992, 208). While testifying as an expert witness in *Gingles v. Edmisten*, he defined a racial appeal this way: “One candidate calls attention to the race of his opponent or his opponent’s supporters, or if media covering a campaign disproportionately call attention to the race of one candidate or of

⁸ The highest-scoring elections are the 1983 Chicago mayoralty, characterized by quite explicitly racial appeals (Kleppner 1985), and the 1979 Birmingham contest in which candidate Frank Parsons stated, “Whites need to vote to prevent a Black mayor.” No implicitly racial campaigns make their way to the top of the scale.

that candidate's supporters" (Grofman 1992, 206–207). But how are judges to decide that a candidate called attention to race if he never used any explicitly racial references? Is the common use of the phrase "bloc vote," for example, meant as a racial reference, and does it evoke associations with the "black vote"? "Because overt racial appeals may be absent," wrote Grofman, "testimony about more subtle and covert forms of racial appeal such as the use of code words and of themes associated with white supremacy and antiblack sentiment may be required if this element of the totality of circumstances test is to be proved" (1992, 208). Yet how can such testimony convince if "a racial campaign appeal, like pornography, is in the category of 'I know it when I see it'" (1992, 206)? We need a more systematic definition of implicit appeals, and a theory of how they work, in order to proceed with Grofman's exhortation.⁹

Scholars of parties and elections have not been alone in their neglect of implicitly racial appeals. How an implicit racial message might be received by the audience is a question that has been passed over by the field of public opinion. Studies of public opinion long underscored the view that citizens do not think coherently or do not think much at all (Converse 1964). More recently, scholars have explored the possibility that citizens think several thoughts at once, generate opinions without forethought, make use of values and feelings, and think in shortcuts (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Marcus et al. 1995; Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Zaller 1992). We now know that people's minds are sometimes empty, sometimes unmade and disorderly, often ill-informed, and often ambivalent or uncertain, and we attend to the implications of this. We also understand that the media does not have "minimal effects," that it can shape opinion in part by priming one consideration over another (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). All this is important to know. But it does not explain—or even ask—how implicit communication works. It does not tell us whether implicit communication matters, or how it might matter. It does not speak to the possibility that voters respond to some messages with full consciousness and to others without. It does not explain why the overt content of some messages (for example, crime) may affect opinions on an entirely different issue domain (for example, affirmative action).

Political communication is the most likely field to have engaged in an intensive study of implicit campaign appeals, but for the most part it has joined the other fields in neglecting the subject. Studies of political communication have moved toward a constructionist model of communication in which politi-

⁹ Jamieson (1992) and Himmelstein 1983 are the only studies I know that focus on implicitly racial appeals. Kousser (1991), Luebke (1990), Pettigrew and Alston (1988), and Reeves (1997) engage this phenomenon in a more limited way. To my knowledge, Black's (1976) analysis of southern governors and Metz and Tate's (1995) chapter on racial strategy are the only systematic treatments of changes in white candidates' racial rhetoric over time, but they do not focus on implicit appeals. Holly (1989) provides an interesting though brief and general exploration of politicians' implicit communication.

cians, journalists, and citizens actively construct messages and interpret meaning (Crigler 1996; van Dijk 1988). But the constructionist view has rarely led scholars to attend to the distinction between overt and covert meaning. With few exceptions (Jamieson 1992 and van Dijk 1991 important among them), political communication scholars, when they analyze multiple layers of meaning, skim over the possibility that the subtext of a message does much of its work. The few exceptions do not provide evidence about the impact of implicit messages. Thus we do not know how voters process implicit messages versus other kinds of messages. We do not yet understand implicit political communication.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Part I of this book explains how and why many white politicians make racial appeals, and when these become implicit. Part II shows how the racial meaning of implicitly racial appeals is conveyed by the news media, and how it is received by white audiences, influencing voters without their full awareness. Part III asks what is distinctive about race in relation to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and immigration, and offers remedies to the damage that implicit communication inflicts on equality.

Using historical analysis, Chapters 2 and 3 establish the importance of two causes of implicit racial campaign appeals: the norm of racial equality and a party alignment based on race. Racial appeals—implicit and explicit—are only used when the party system is structured by the issue of race. They are most prominent following a large shock to the status quo, such as the emancipation of slaves in the nineteenth century or the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in the twentieth. Explicit racial appeals were common in the national elections of Reconstruction and in the southern elections of the disenfranchisement period, as Chapter 2 shows. However, for a brief time, while Radical Republicans were in power, the norm changed, and explicit appeals waned somewhat in favor of slightly more implicit appeals. Implicit appeals, then as now, allowed politicians to appeal to white voters' racial predispositions without triggering condemnation from egalitarian-minded elites.

Norms about race changed slowly but radically after 1930, and politicians increasingly tried to legitimize their racist discourse as a result, as Chapter 3 shows. Southern politicians made increasingly implicit references to white supremacy, black inferiority, or black threat, and decreased their reliance on explicit references to race. In the 1960s the Republican party forged a national strategy that relied on implicit appeals to build, eventually, winning Republican coalitions in presidential elections and, with time, in southern congressional and gubernatorial elections. As in the nineteenth century, a race-based

party system is producing racial appeals, but now the norm of racial equality is so strong that these appeals must be made implicitly.

Part II explains the success of implicit racial messages in the contemporary period. In Chapter 4 I lay out a psychological theory of implicit appeals. Implicit appeals prime white citizens' racial resentment while circumventing their mechanisms of self-censorship. The enormous shift in public norms of racial discourse, documented in Chapter 3, created a near-universal tendency to self-censor. Some people censor themselves because they aspire to be egalitarian, others because they wish to conform to the social pressure of norms of discourse. Implicit appeals are more effective than explicit appeals because they avoid the conscious perception that they derogate African Americans and thus circumvent self-censorship.

Chapter 5 examines in detail how the tactic of implicit racial appeals is implemented by elites and how it is conveyed by the news media. It also examines how that tactic is challenged and how the challenge is in turn conveyed by the media. My conclusions are based on a comprehensive content analysis of television and newspaper coverage of the story of Willie Horton, beginning with the 1988 presidential campaign and ending ten years later.

Chapters 6 through 8 test the implications of the theory for white voters. Chapter 6 analyzes the real-time vote choices of a national sample exposed first to an implicit and then to an explicit phase of a presidential campaign. Chapter 7 reports on an experiment designed to test the distinct effects of otherwise identical implicit and explicit racial messages and to contrast these with a counter-stereotypical message that shows white welfare recipients. I conducted this study in the homes of a random sample of Michigan voters, lending the results a rare degree of external validity. Here the issue is welfare rather than crime. Chapter 8 investigates the impact of norms and of the perception of the message by adding an additional manipulation in which New Jersey voters were provided with false feedback that placed them either within or outside the norm.

Throughout these chapters I will ask two questions: how strongly do racial messages prime racial predispositions? And by contrast, how strongly do they prime nonracial predispositions? My findings show that implicitly racial messages are much more effective at priming racial than nonracial predispositions; that they influence opinion on racial much more than on nonracial policies; and that they do all this much more effectively than either explicit messages or nonracial messages. Racial resentment exercises the strongest impact when politicians and the media convey implicit racial messages. The effective way to counter implicit messages is to expose their underlying racial meaning. Chapter 8 finds that voters' feelings about the norm, and their perceptions of racial messages, can each inhibit the impact of racial appeals.

Part III generalizes the framework and concludes with implications for racial equality, egalitarian change, and democratic politics. Communication between

elites and citizens is far more complex than scholars generally recognize, with the subtext at times more powerful than the text. Voters' political psychology is also more complex than commonly assumed, with consciousness at times playing a central role. Before the benefits of a liberal exchange of information can be realized, communication must shift from the implicit to the explicit level. As long as it remains implicit, voters cannot process information with full awareness of the message or reach decisions based on consciously selected predispositions. As long as implicit communication persists, efforts to improve the status of African Americans will be resisted by a white majority that believes it is living up to the promise of racial equality. And implicit racial communication will persist—until the party system realigns on an issue other than race. The argument I develop about racial communication explains why African Americans' position in American politics is distinctive relative to the position of other subordinate groups. The electoral politics of race is different from that of gender and sexual orientation because of the uneasy coexistence of a norm of equality with political conflict. But the same logic that illuminates the politics of race applies to other situations in which egalitarian norms are strong, yet conflict persists over the status of a subordinate group.¹⁰ Chapter 9 suggests how the logic applies to anti-ethnic and anti-immigrant politics in Europe.

This book is my attempt to advance a comprehensive theory of implicit messages, to tell a full story about this form of political communication: its causes, its institutional and psychological mechanisms, and its political consequences. Implicit appeals are driven by cultural, political, and psychological forces. They require an analysis that recognizes all three forces, one that is anchored by norms, electoral strategies, and voters' psychology.

As the next chapter will show, in the nineteenth century, a party system based on the issue of race emerged in the United States, generating explicit appeals to race. But the party system was not the only cause of the rise of explicit racial appeals. The norm of racial inequality was the other factor.

¹⁰ In this book I use the terms "dominant" and "subordinate" to refer to the general difference in power, privilege, influence, resources, and status between white Americans and African Americans, men and women, heterosexuals and gays, and citizens and noncitizens. Of course, no pejorative meaning is intended in my use of "subordinate."