race forward
THE CENTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE INNOVATION

MOVING THE RACE CONVERSATION FORWARD

HOW THE MEDIA COVERS RACISM, AND OTHER BARRIERS TO PRODUCTIVE RACIAL DISCOURSE

PART 1

JANUARY 2014

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PART 1

PROLOGUE

Moving the Race Conversation Forward is a two-part report that first, describes some of the major impediments to productive racial discourse in the United States, and second, profiles and provides lessons from several recent interventions and initiatives that are breaking down significant barriers toward racial justice.

PART ONE: HOW THE MEDIA COVERS RACISM, AND OTHER BARRIERS TO PRODUCTIVE RACIAL DISCOURSE identifies and describes some of the key ways in which mainstream discourse in the United States unproductively approaches issues of race and racism. In this report, we present our expansive analysis of recent media coverage on race and racism (Section 2), and our description of Seven Harmful Racial Discourse Practices that occur not just in mainstream media, but in varied spaces where "race talk" takes place (Section 3). It also provides some everyday discourse recommendations applicable to everyone from racial and social justice advocates to media editors to leaders and members of religious groups to news consumers.

PART TWO: RACIAL DISCOURSE CHANGE IN PRACTICE provides case studies of recent interventions and initiatives advanced by the racial justice field to disrupt and supplant unproductive mainstream discussions of race and racism. The cases include a campaign entitled "Drop The I-Word," launched in September 2010 by Race Forward itself (at the time still known as the Applied Research Center). This second report also provides lessons gleaned from these interventions and initiatives, perhaps most applicable to racial and social justice advocates, but also relevant to others who are eager to respond to the dominant frames and stories that negatively impact people of color, and/or to proactively advance values and narratives that will lead our society toward a racially equitable future. These lessons are accompanied by important considerations for organizations to bear in mind when selecting spokespersons for racial equity communications. And finally, we also provide recommendations for those in philanthropy curious about current needs and opportunities to support the development of framing expertise, skills-building and collaboration.

While each report stands on its own, we hope that many readers will explore both, and engage with us and others who are reshaping and reforming the way we talk about race and racism in our country today and into the future.

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SECTION 1: Introduction
Moving the Race Conversation Forward

Standing in an elevator on her way to a cable television news program appearance in 2011, Race Forward executive director Rinku Sen was asked by a producer, "So what kind of work do you do?"[1] After learning that Sen leads a racial justice organization, the producer paused a moment before responding, unnerved: "Racial justice. Right, yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't quite get that, you know? You got Oprah, you got Obama. What more do you want?"

"What more do you want?" The question's key implication is that if even one Black person can achieve profound success by rising to a highly visible and powerful position, then racism must no longer exist as a significant barrier to millions of others. According to this line of thinking, modern-day racism must surely be an illusion that obscures the "reality" that personal responsibility and hard work are the true, sole and sufficient determinants of individual outcomes.

"What more do you want?" The question in this context suggests a lack of awareness about the issues that animate the racially stratified, lived experiences — in educational opportunities and school discipline; in immigration policies; in treatment by the criminal justice system, from police to the courts to prison; in hiring, wages, and promotion opportunities; in access to quality, affordable health care; within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) movement; even in access to the voting booth — of the nation's people of color.

"What more do you want?" The question reveals an all-too common impatience in the United States with efforts to even talk about race. It is an impatience that makes up part of a set of reluctances and aversions — to publicly and collectively confront our racial past, present, and future — that is not unique to political conservatives who claim we live in a "post-racial" society. It also takes the form of an attitude held by many in the social justice field who see race as too difficult or too divisive to address in their efforts to improve conditions and achieve fairness for all.

These varied aversions to talking about race demonstrate that our national conversation on race is stuck. One segment of the country wants to talk about race as little as possible – restricting the definition of racism to a very limited set of overt intentional acts or thoughts held by individuals. And another segment of the country is frustrated by the infrequent and stifled nature of how racism is defined and discussed. Both are eager to produce and advance positive images and stories about people of color and our communities in order to supplant the negative, ostensibly "race-neutral" or "race-silent" frames and stories that often dominate the general public's mind and decision-making. More is needed to move our race conversations forward in more satisfying, informed and productive ways.

How Race Forward defines Racial Justice:

Systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone.

KEY FINDINGS

From Our Original Content Analysis of 1,200 articles and transcripts from 2013 (see Section 2):

- **Most of the mainstream media's racism content is not "systemically aware."** On average, about two out of three articles on race and racism failed to include a perspective with any insight on systemic-level racism. Many of those cases, instead focused upon racial slurs and other types of personal prejudice and individual-level racism.
- **The amount of systemically aware content varies significantly by topic and by outlet.** While half of the race-related criminal justice content we analyzed was systemically aware rather than focused on individual-level racism, only about 8% of entertainment coverage was. And while neither The Washington Post nor The New York Times provided exemplary coverage of race and racism from a primarily systemic perspective, both of these national newspapers demonstrated higher rates of systemically aware content when compared with local papers and with CNN and Fox News programs.
- **Mainstream media discussions of race and racism very rarely feature prominent, robust coverage of racial justice advocacy or solutions.** Articles and op-eds that profiled or promoted major policies or reforms at the systemic level of racism, or that covered protests and organizing done with a racial lens, never constituted more than 3.3 % of any individual news outlet's coverage of race and racism.

KEY ARGUMENTS

From our identification of Seven Harmful Discourse Practices (see Section 3):

- When these harmful racial discourse practices succeed, either individually or acting collectively within a single narrative, they stifle the general public's understanding of systemic racism.
- They often reinforce the common misconception that racism is simply a problem of rare, isolated, individual attitudes and actions, and most damagingly — (and) posing a significant barrier to the success of people of color — racism is a thing of the past.
- Taken together, these harmful discourse practices often ostensibly promote a blanket standard of "colorblindness," while simultaneously promoting so-called "race-neutral" policies and practices that reinforce the power of white anxiety and fear in policymaking and decision-making.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

For those looking to move the race conversation forward (See Section 4):

- Expand your understanding of racism beyond personal prejudice and hate to systemic racism
- Focus on actions and impacts rather than attitudes and intentions
- Add a racial lens to conversations on class, gender, sexuality, etc.
- Cultivate discourse that centers the humanity and leadership of people of color

Cultivate discourse that centers the humanity and leadership of people of color.

KEY TERMS USED IN OUR WORK AND IN THIS REPORT

Race Forward's Levels of Racism

During the course of our three decades of in-person trainings and consulting for clients of various backgrounds and fields of work, Race Forward has developed definitions for "Four Levels of Racism" — two within the individual level of racism and two within the systemic level — that we re-introduce here. The key distinction is between the two levels of racism, individual and systemic. While we acknowledge the impact of individual acts of racial discrimination, we believe that it is critical to do so within a deeper analysis of systemic racial injustice.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RACISM

INTERNALIZED RACISM lies within individuals. These are our private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture. Internalized racism can take many different forms including racial prejudice toward other people of a different race; internalized oppression, the negative beliefs about oneself by people of color; or internalized privilege, beliefs about superiority or entitlement by white people. An example is a belief that you or others are more or less intelligent, or beautiful, because of your race.

INTERPERSONAL RACISM occurs between individuals. These are biases that occur when individuals interact with others and their private racial beliefs affect their public interactions. Examples include racial slurs, bigotry, hate crimes, and racial violence.

SYSTEMIC-LEVEL RACISM

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM occurs within institutions and systems of power. It is the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.) that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they reinforce racial inequities. An example is a school system that concentrates people of color in the most overcrowded schools, the least-challenging classes, and the least-qualified teachers, resulting in higher dropout rates and disciplinary rates compared with that of white students.

STRUCTURAL RACISM is racial bias among institutions and across society. It involves the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. An example is the overwhelming number of depictions of people of color as criminals in mainstream media, which can influence how various institutions and individuals treat people of color with suspicion when they are shopping, traveling, or seeking housing and employment – all of which can result in discriminatory treatment and unequal outcomes.

SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

What it is and why it's needed — Because the popular notion of racism is narrowly focused on personal prejudice and racial animus, a more complete analysis and presentation of race-related developments is needed. When racial dynamics are not sufficiently contextualized, it is easy to fall into the trap of victim blaming. A systems analysis adds context, reveals root causes and contributing factors, and surfaces possible corresponding solutions. A systems analysis involves an examination of questions: What institutional policies and practices are involved? What are the historical underpinnings and cumulative inequities? What cultural norms and popular ideas are reinforcing the problem? What is causing the racial inequities and tensions and what are possible solutions? If racial justice advocates adopt a routine and robust use of a systems analysis to inform our work — and the way we publicly communicate our issues — we can be a model for other advocates and journalists to do the same.

FRAMING DEFINITIONS

While definitions for the following key strategic communications terms vary, Race Forward offers the following interconnected definitions in the interest of providing clarity to our readers and in the spirit of fostering alignment to promote racial justice in national conversations on race.

A frame is a lens or worldview, often unconscious, through which human beings see an issue or problem. Frames are related to social cognition processes encoded in our brains that help us quickly make sense of complex information, and then make individual and collective decisions on that basis. These processes generate deeply embedded perspectives that are easily activated in the subconscious, especially through devices like images, stories, stereotypes and slogans. Framing for communication is a more active process than simply recognizing existing frames of cognition. When frames are applied to a social problem, they lead to conclusions about the nature of that problem, the responsibilities of various parties, potential solutions, and the actions required.

Narratives, whether real, exaggerated, or fictionalized, are specific stories used to convey or reinforce a given frame. Narratives must include characters (e.g. protagonist, antagonist, heroes, villains), settings (context, time, place), action (interconnected events that change the situation, leading to a climax and resolution), and a core idea that grounds the story.

Messages are the takeaway from frames and narratives that point to the specific action needed. At their best, messages are concise, memorable and "soundbite"-ready, flowing logically from the corresponding narratives and frames.

In Section 3 of this report, in particular, we identify how some of the dominant frames and narratives in the mainstream discourse on race and racism stifle racial progress and tend to be promoted by some of the Seven Harmful Racial Discourse Practices. Within Section 4, we also identify some of the dominant frames that our featured racial justice interventions and initiatives have sought to dismantle and/or supplant. Readers with a particular interest in these framing terms can find key examples of their use in practice throughout the report by taking note of the icons above.

A BRIEF WORD ON METHODOLOGY

The bulk of research and writing of this report was conducted by Race Forward Research Department staff with additional input from Executive Director Rinku Sen. In collaboration with the American Values Institute, Race Forward staff also helped organize a meeting in May 2013 with more than two dozen racial justice thinkers, organizers, strategists, and communications experts to examine and imagine the dominant frames and narratives that stifle racial justice in three broad issue areas — immigration, criminal justice, and education. Content from that all-day convening also informs this report.

As practicing experts in the coverage of racial issues in the media, Race Forward's Colorlines staff was consulted in the development of the Seven Harmful Discourse Practices. Sen and Race Forward's Thought Leadership and Practice Specialist Terry Keleher drew from three decades of experience and knowledge from Race Forward trainings and consultations to develop the Lessons and Recommendations in Section 5.

= FRAME

= NARRATIVES

= MESSAGES

EXAMPLE OF OPPOSING FRAMES, NARRATIVES AND MESSAGES WITHIN IMMIGRATION DISCOURSE:

Frame: Law & Order vs. Human Dignity

Narrative: Broke the Law vs. Harmed by Bias

Message: Only use the word 'illegal' when describing immigrants vs. Use alternatives

SECTION 2:
Content Analysis of Mainstream Media

As described in the introduction, the purpose of this report is to identify and describe some of the key ways in which mainstream media coverage and discussions of race and racism in the U.S. stifle our nation's progress toward racial justice. In particular, we will show that the bulk of the mainstream media's race and racism coverage concentrates on the individual levels of racism, rather than the less well-understood systemic levels described in the "Key Terms" on page 3.

Mainstream media coverage and discussions of race and racism in the U.S.stifle our nation's progress toward racial justice

To reach this important conclusion, we undertook a media content analysis to identify systemically aware racism content on a scale that has only rarely been attempted before, and we're hopeful that our findings will generate productive dialogue about the way society typically defines and discusses issues of race and racism.

We examined nearly 1,200 articles and transcripts from national and local newspapers, as well as cable television news transcripts from January through August 2013. Our researchers coded each article for the following:

- One of fourteen news outlets (three cable news networks, three national newspapers, and eight high-circulation newspapers from around the country).
- Systematically Aware racism content vs. Systemically Absent racism content (Figure 2.1 for a descriptions of each).
- One of nine different content areas (politics, criminal justice, entertainment, sports, etc.).
- Select stories that garnered significant attention in 2013 (e.g., Paula Deen, Voting rights, the George Zimmerman trial, etc.).
- Note: Please see Appendix A for a full review of terms and our methodology.

Our analysis yielded a unique and original data set. During our extensive literature review, we found minimal existing work that examines how race is used across both television and newspaper media content. Our analysis covered national newspapers, local newspaper and television, while much of existing research is confined to one state or metropolitan area.[5] We found, however, excellent work on how certain groups such as, African Americans, or Latina/os are portrayed in the media[6] that concentrates mostly on how they are stereotypically portrayed in the media, and especially how Latinos and African-Americans are disproportionately portrayed as criminals.[7] Moreover, the existing research tends to examine race in connection to a certain policy area, such as welfare, or it examines race in the context of certain events such as Hurricane Katrina.[8] Hence, our study is one of the few that examines the broad category of racism and how it is portrayed in the media. Our study is also one of the few that examines multiple media outlets across the nation. Our unique data set and methodology will serve as a source of information for other researchers and organizations that want to build on this work with related projects.

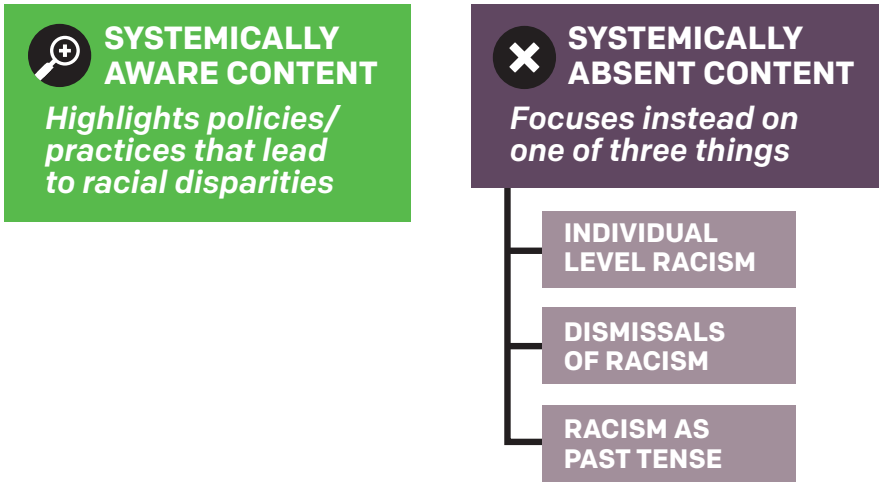
'SYSTEMICALLY AWARE' VS. 'SYSTEMICALLY ABSENT': DEFINING TERMS

Broadly speaking, this report contends that our mainstream media, public officials and political pundits would serve our country better by concentrating far more energy and resources investigating and discussing the systemic levels of racism, instead of the more commonly understood individual levels.

The term we use to capture the former in our Section 2 content analysis is systemically aware, in contrast to systemically absent content. **Systemically aware** content mentions or highlights policies and/or practices that lead to racial disparities; describes the root causes of disparities including the history and compounding effects of institutions; and/or describes or challenges the aforementioned. In contrast, **systemically absent** content focuses attention solely on individual-level acts of racism; dismisses and/or negates the existence of systemic racism within institutions or society more broadly; and/or describes racism as a past-tense condition. [See Figure 2.1]

While systemically aware news coverage, as we've defined it, does not necessarily incorporate the exact terms "institutional racism," "structural racism," "systemic racism," or "racial justice," we nevertheless find it worth noting that such coverage is far more likely to lay the groundwork for a more productive discourse on race and racism precisely because the discussions are less tied to particular individuals. Contrary to this is an obsession with asking questions that typify individual-level racism coverage such as "Is [insert celebrity / sports figure] a racist?"

FIGURE 2.1: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN "SYSTEMICALLY AWARE" CONTENT AND "SYSTEMICALLY ABSENT" CONTENT



1) Individual-level racism – e.g., coverage of the alleged use of racial slurs or of racial incidents that are explained as the product of the personal prejudice of an individual

2) Dismissals of systemic racism – e.g., coverage that denies the existence of racism that is institutional or system-wide or perspectives that promote institutionally or structurally racist policies, such as the racial profiling of Muslims

3) Racism as past-tense – e.g., the mention or profile of explicit or overt racism from a previous era, as in an obituary

EXAMPLES OF 2013 ARTICLES RACE FORWARD CATEGORIZED AS SYSTEMICALLY AWARE:

- "Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor accused a Texas federal prosecutor Monday of tapping into a "deep and sorry vein of racial prejudice" in his questioning of a Black man facing a drug charge."[2] *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2013.
- "Two Hispanic advocacy groups are accusing the Lewisville Police Department of racial profiling. The groups say that Hispanic residents have been subjected to harassment, excessive use of force and civil rights violations."[3] *The Dallas Morning News*, January 26, 2013.
- "Far away from any courtroom, when it comes to the economy, there can be no debate. Racial inequality exists. The numbers don't lie. In jobs, housing and investing, African-Americans lag far behind whites."[4] *CNN, July 21, 2013.*

KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDING #1 – Most of the mainstream media's racism content is not systemically aware. On average, about two out of three articles on race and racism failed to include a perspective with any insight on systemic-level racism. Many of those cases focus on racial slurs and other types of personal prejudice and individual-level racism.

KEY FINDING #2 – The amount of systemically aware content varies significantly by topic. When looking at our nearly 1,200 articles and transcripts as a whole, only two subject areas — the economy and criminal justice — had at least half of their race/racism coverage categorized as systemically aware. On the other hand, only 10-20 percent of arts/culture and entertainment coverage of race and racism, tended to be systemically aware. (See Figure 2.2, "Which topics had the most systemically aware content?" for full results on our nine categories.)

KEY FINDING #3 — The amount of systemically aware content varies significantly by news source, with national newspapers, as a whole, outperforming local newspapers. Although neither The Washington Post nor The New York Times provided exemplary coverage of race and racism, both of these national newspapers demonstrated higher rates of systemically aware content when compared with the local papers and the CNN and Fox News programs. While MSNBC had, by far, the highest rate of systemically aware content, it also had the fewest number of transcripts/articles of any of the fourteen outlets in our sample. (See Figure 2.3, page 7.)

SUMMARY DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF OUR SAMPLE:

- Nexis.com search terms: "racial" OR "racist" OR "racism" OR "diversity" in the LEAD of article/transcript (i.e., the first three to five paragraphs depending upon article/transcript length)
- Database includes three cable news networks, three national newspapers, and eight high-circulation local papers, with two each from the West, Northeast, South, and Midwest regions
- Number of articles and transcripts included = 1,187
- Top-five content areas: politics (251 cases, 21.1% of total sample), criminal justice (193, 16.3%), entertainment (166, 14.0%), race relations/identity (132, 11.1%), and sports (127, 10.7%)

FIGURE 2.2
WHICH TOPICS HAD THE MOST "SYSTEMICALLY AWARE" CONTENT?

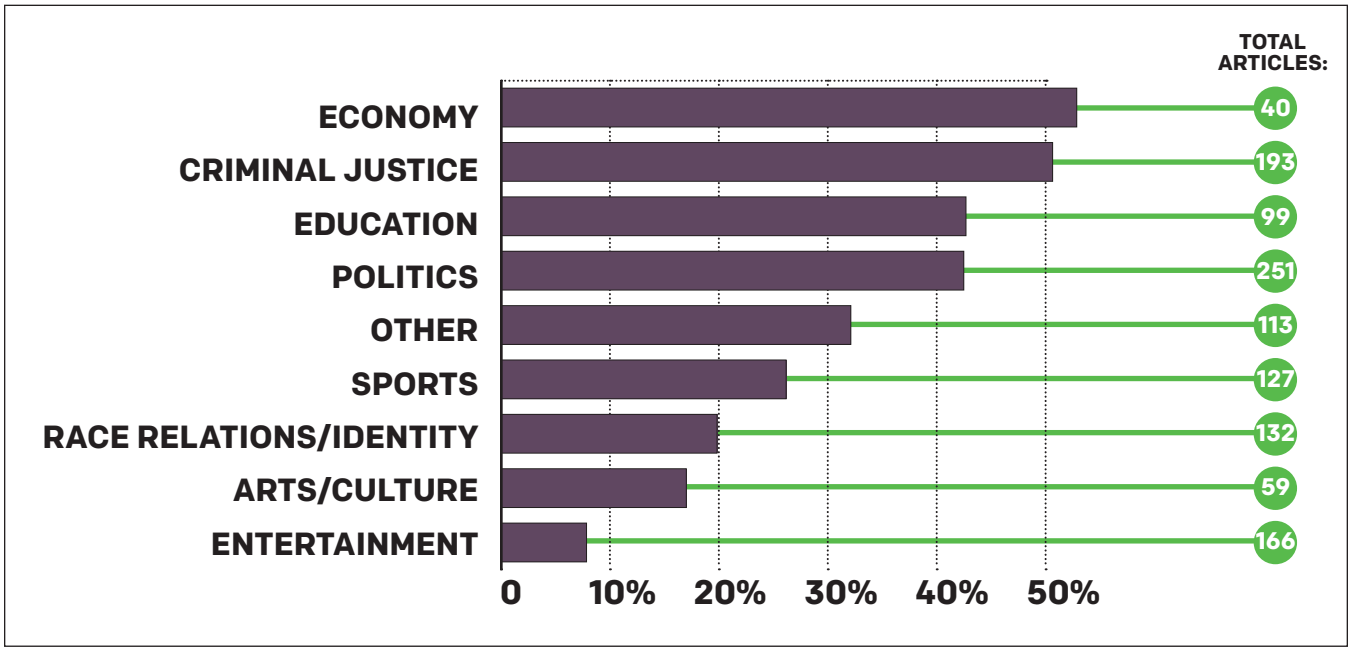
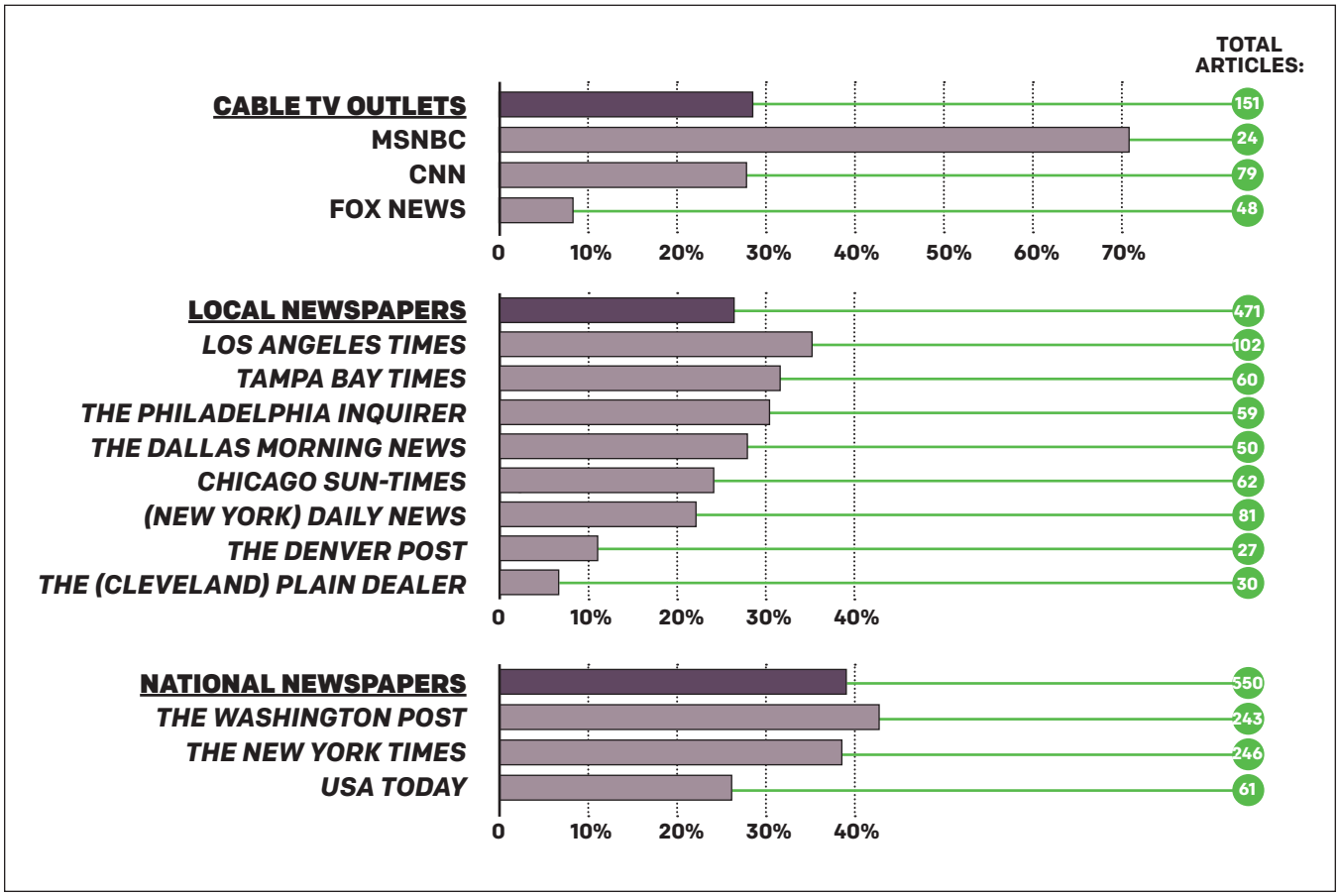


FIGURE 2.3
WHICH NEWS OUTLETS HAD THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF "SYSTEMICALLY AWARE" CONTENT?



KEY FINDING #4 – Mainstream media discussions of race and racism very rarely feature prominent, robust coverage of racial justice advocacy or solutions. Articles and op-eds that profiled or promoted major policies or reforms at the systemic level of racism, or that covered protests and organizing done with a racial lens, never constituted more than 3.3 % of any individual news outlet's coverage of race and racism. The highest incidences were found in *The Washington Post* (8 out of 244) and *Tampa Bay Times* (2 out of 61).

Examples included the coverage of the Dream Defenders, a group of student activists who protested for the repeal of "stand-your-ground" policies in the wake of the death of Trayvon Martin and the trial of George Zimmerman, and further demanded a law that addresses racial profiling and zero-tolerance policies in schools. The 50th anniversary of the March on Washington was also covered with profiles of certain robust calls for the nation to continue to address racism, inequality, and poverty in the United States. And coverage of Action United — a group of activists, clergy, and elected officials — presented analysis of the disproportionate impact the School Reform Commission's plan to close three dozen of schools in Philadelphia will have on students of color, poor students, and disabled students.

MAPPING THE MEDIA CONVERSATION
RACIAL COVERAGE IN U.S. NEWS, JAN. – AUG. 2013

TOTAL SAMPLE

- 1,187 articles and transcripts spread over fourteen news outlets – 3 national newspapers (555 articles, 46.8%), 3 cable T.V. (156 transcripts, 13.1%), 8 local newspapers (476 articles, 40.1%)
- Only one third (32.7%) of the race/racism content in the 14 newspapers/outlets was Systemically aware

CABLE TV OUTLETS

CNN (79 transcripts)
- Together, Paula Deen and George Zimmerman accounted for almost half of CNN's race/racism coverage
- 18 (88.9%) of Deen stories focused on individual-level racism

MSNBC (24 transcripts)
- Highest percentage of systemically aware transcripts (70.8%), but...
- Lowest number of race/racism-focused transcripts (26) out of all 14 media outlets

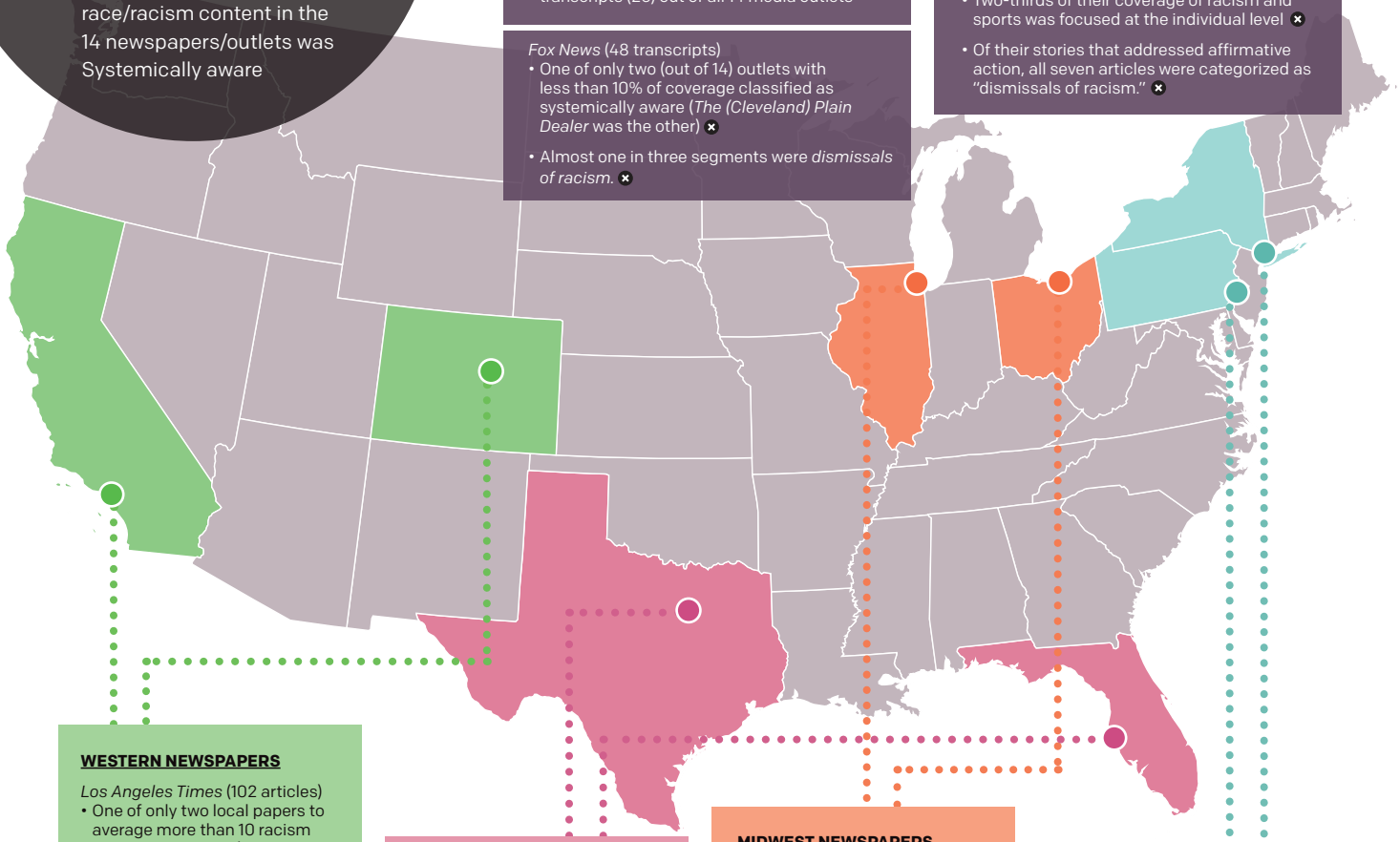
Fox News (48 transcripts)
- One of only two (out of 14) outlets with less than 10% of coverage classified as systemically aware (*The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer* was the other)
- Almost one in three segments were *dismissals of racism.*

NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

The Washington Post (243 articles)
- Comparatively high percentage of systemically aware articles (42.8%)
- More than two-thirds of George Zimmerman coverage that mentioned race did so in a systemically aware fashion

The New York Times (246 articles)
- Slightly higher than average percentage of systemically aware articles (38.6%)
- Nine out of ten stop-and-frisk stories that mentioned race did so in a systemically aware fashion

USA Today (61 articles)
- Almost one-quarter of its racism coverage is related to sports
- Two-thirds of their coverage of racism and sports was focused at the individual level
- Of their stories that addressed affirmative action, all seven articles were categorized as "dismissals of racism."



WESTERN NEWSPAPERS

Los Angeles Times (102 articles)
- One of only two local papers to average more than 10 racism articles per month (The other was the (*New York) Daily News*)
- Three-quarters of its criminal justice racism content was systemically aware

The Denver Post (27 articles)
- Racism hardly covered – lowest number of total articles among the eight local papers in our sample — and one quarter of its racism content was about sports

= SYSTEMICALLY AWARE CONTENT

= SYSTEMICALLY ABSENT CONTENT

SOUTHERN NEWSPAPERS

The Dallas Morning News (50 articles)
- One-third of its racism content was focused on politics
- 35.5% of its political articles were categorized as dismissals of racism while 35.3% of the political articles were categorized as systemically aware.

Tampa Bay Times (60 articles)
- One-quarter of its racism content was focused on politics
- Only two out of the 11 criminal justice articles (18.2%) were systemically aware compared with a 50.5% score for all local papers.

MIDWEST NEWSPAPERS

Chicago Sun-Times (62 articles)
- One in five of its racism content focused on race relations/identity
- Highest coverage of Paula Deen among local papers (14.5%), with eight of those nine stories focused on the individual level

The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer (30 articles)
- Racism hardly covered – second-lowest number of total articles amongst the eight local papers in our sample
- Lowest percentage of systemically aware content (6.7%)

NORTHEAST NEWSPAPERS

(New York) Daily News (81 articles)
- Almost one in five racism stories were about stop-and-frisk (second-highest behind MSNBC)
- 60% of the stop-and-frisk content was categorized as dismissals of racism.

Philadelphia Inquirer (59 articles)
- Almost one-third of its racism content focused on sports, namely NFL Player Riley Cooper's use of the n-word

THE ABSENCE OF ASIAN AMERICAN, NATIVE HAWAIIAN, AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS

Mainstream media stories that focus or cover the topics of race and racism very rarely include Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI). Such invisibilization of this community arguably gives readers the misleading and damaging impression that the AANHPI community needn't be considered when covering this topic . Of the 1,187 instances of news and television media content we analyzed, only 2.36% covered AANHPI stories. Five of the 14 newspaper and cable television outlets covered in our analysis featured no racism stories at all with any AANHPI actors or mentions (*The Cleveland Plain Dealer, Denver Post,* and the *Tampa Bay Times* amongst the covered newspapers, and CNN and Fox News on cable).

Of the local newspapers sampled, *The Los Angeles Times* and the *(New York) Daily News*, publications in the two metro areas with the largest AANHPI population, had rates of 5.83% (6 out of 103) and 3.66% (3 out of 82) for AANHPI inclusion in their racism coverage, respectively, (i.e., articles that used the terms racist, racial, racism and/or diversity in the lead). In 2012, the U.S. Census reported that 14.9% of the population in Los Angeles County identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander[9], with the corresponding figure in the borough of Manhattan standing at 12.02%.[10]

Coverage of racial justice advocacy or new solutions in racism coverage are even more rare.

CONCLUSION

Overall, we found that the media focuses on individual-level racism and other relatively unproductive approaches to racism, as opposed to leading with perspectives and frameworks that are inclusive of systemic-level racism. However, we did find some variation by news source and content area. For example, our national newspapers demonstrated higher rates of systemically aware content when compared with our other media sources. Moreover, only two subject areas — the economy and criminal justice — had at least half of their race/racism coverage categorized as systemically aware, compared with 80-90% of arts/culture and entertainment coverage that had a systemically absent perspective. Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders are very rarely included when the mainstream media covers the topics of race and racism, and coverage of racial justice advocacy or new solutions in racism coverage are even more rare. Our analysis shows that the leaders within mainstream media need to think critically about their discussions of race and racism and how these discussions are portrayed to the general/broader public.

We turn next to an articulation of seven harmful racial discourse practices that can be found not only in mainstream media, but in more general discourse about race and racism throughout the United States.

SECTION 3:
Harmful Racial Discourse Practices

This section of our report identifies and describes seven harmful racial discourse practices that are found not just in mainstream media, but also more broadly throughout our society. They are used by public officials and their staffs, by lawyers and judges, and by advocates of various political backgrounds, by cultural and entertainment figures, and by others with power and influence over public perception and behavior.

We provide definitions for the practices and describe the specific negative effects these practices have on racial discourse. Each practice discussion also contains an example or two of its use from recent events-some carried out by news media and other carried out by the aforementioned actors- with corresponding icons placed in the margins for the damaging frames, narratives and/or messages advanced by the example (See p. 4 for definitions of these terms).

Taken as a whole we argue that:

- When these harmful racial discourse practices succeed, either individually or acting collectively within a single narrative, they stifle the general public's understanding of systemic racism.
- The seven harmful racial discourse practices reinforce the common misconception that racism is simply a problem of rare, isolated, individual attitudes and actions, and most damagingly, that as a significant barrier to the success of people of color; racism is a thing of the past.
- Taken together, these harmful discourse practices often ostensibly promote a blanket standard of "colorblindness," while simultaneously promoting so-called "race-neutral" policies and practices that reinforce the power of white anxiety and fear in policymaking and decision-making.

Everyday recommendations for how readers can help overcome these harmful racial discourse practices follow in this section of the report, and case studies and profiles of deeper interventions and initiatives — advanced recently by racial justice organizations — can be found in Part Two of this report.

Seven Harmful Racial Discourse Practices

1. Individualizing Racism
2. Falsely Equating Incomparable Acts
3. Diverting From Race
4. Portraying Government As Overreaching
5. Prioritizing (Policy) Intent Over Impact
6. Condemning Through Coded Language
7. Silencing History

1. INDIVIDUALIZING RACISM

PRACTICE	INDIVIDUALIZING RACISM
PRACTICE DEFINED	Concentrating attention on thoughts or acts of personal prejudice.
EFFECT ON RACIAL DISCOURSE	Reinforces the common misconception that racism is simply a personal problem that should be resolved by shaming, punishing or re-educating the individual offender. Often leads to long, inconclusive debates about what's in a person's "heart," and whether or not they intended to be hurtful or discriminatory. Perpetuates false notions of individual agency in our national consciousness.

Georgia-based television cook Paula Deen emerged as the subject of one of the nation's most widely covered stories on racism in 2013. As the target of a lawsuit alleging racial and sexual discrimination, filed by a white woman who used to work for her, Deen admitted in sworn testimony to using the N-word in the past in her personal life, to tolerating racial jokes in her restaurants, and that she'd wanted to plan a "really southern plantation wedding" with an all-Black wait staff for her brother.[11] Public criticism was swift, and the media attention – particularly on television — only increased when Deen abruptly canceled an initial appearance on the NBC's Today Show, where the head of the multi-million dollar empire had been featured many times over the years.

Perhaps the most common characteristic of the mainstream media's treatment of stories on race and racism is the disproportionate share of attention that episodes and events of individual-level racism receive, as opposed to those situated within a deeper analysis of systemic racial injustice. While the rate of this infraction can vary greatly depending upon the subject matter and by media outlet — as described in Section 2 of this report — such imbalances reinforce for readers the misconceived message that racism is primarily a phenomenon of overt, intentional acts carried out by prejudiced individuals. Racial transgressions, such as Paula Deen's, are typically presented as simple, individual defects that need correcting and/or shaming.

CNN arguably provided the industry's most egregious example of this individual-focused phenomenon by the amount of attention it devoted to Deen's racial slur revelation, the subsequent public relations nightmare, the competing voices condemning or supporting the embattled celebrity chef, and her corporate fall from grace. More than one in five of all of CNN's racism stories were about the Paula Deen controversy. The network's hosts in all but one of these 19 CNN programs introduced the pieces with openings that centered the discussion on the "racist" label and/or the appropriateness of the punishment for her individual transgressions. [See Sidebar 'The Individual-Level Racism Angle, Sample CNN coverage of the Paula Deen controversy']

Racial transgressions, such as Paula Deen's, are typically presented as simple, individual defects that need correcting and/or shaming.

"The Individual-Level Racism Angle, Sample CNN coverage of the Paula Deen controversy"

• Jim Acosta, substitute host for Wolf Blitzer, introduced "The Situation Room" by saying, "And breaking news – the Food Network is dropping TV chef Paula Deen – that's right, Paula Deen, despite her videos apologizing for her use of racial slurs."[12]

• Don Lemon, hosting CNN Newsroom, reported at the top of the hour: "One of the most famous chefs in the country under fire and accused of being a racist. Outrage and support for Paula Deen across the country and at her restaurants as we speak." [13]

• CNN anchor Fredricka Whitfield told Sunday viewers that "although the Food Network says they are parting with Paula Deen for using a racial comment, some of her fans say it's best to forgive and forget. We'll tell you what else they're saying."[14]

• CNN "Around the World" anchor Suzanne Malveaux started the program by updating viewers: "Well, it was a tearful apology over using racial slurs, celebrity chef Paula Deen speaking out today about her troubles. Now we know that Caesar's Entertainment has dropped her. The company says it's going to rebrand the four themed restaurants.[15]

When mixed with our culture's obsession with fame and celebrity, this fascination with personal prejudice—particularly of the outwardly expressed variety–sparks debates of limited public value over whether or not a particular person is a racist. Even when they did include perspectives that discussed structural racism and other implications of the case that were more broad than Deen herself, CNN typically led the discussions with a "crisis management" context. [16]

To be sure, Deen's use of the word was reprehensible, as was her seemingly oblivious admission that she'd longed for a "plantation-style" wedding for her brother. But perspectives and investigations of racial discrimination and disparities in the restaurant industry — issues at the crux and the logical end of the racial and sexual discrimination lawsuit against Deen and her family business partners — were comparatively rare, and apparently of less interest to mainstream producers.

Collectively, mainstream media coverage of such stories offer little to no discussion of any changes required in any policies, rules or practices of various industries or institutions. Deen's was a tale that could have served as a significant window into the occupational segregation and racial discrimination rampant in the restaurant and food industry generally.[17]

When mixed with our culture's obsession with fame and celebrity, this fascination with personal prejudice sparks debates of limited public value over whether or not a particular person is a racist.

2. FALSELY EQUATING INCOMPARABLE ACTS

PRACTICE	FALSELY EQUATING INCOMPARABLE ACTS
PRACTICE DEFINED	Drawing a parallel between an act or expression of racial bias from privileged whites and from that of comparatively disadvantaged people of color, without taking into account the power differential between the two.
EFFECT ON RACIAL DISCOURSE	Provides an excuse for, or otherwise seeks to absolve, an individual who has expressed a racist idea or committed a racist act. Encourages the audience to apply a blanket standard of "colorblindness" without acknowledging that the biases of whites have a broader impact and get reinforced by institution and systems of power in ways that the biases of people and communities of color do not.

Rachel Jeantel was always going to be a witness of considerable interest to observers of the televised, second-degree murder trial of George Zimmerman in the summer of 2013. She was the last person to speak to 17-year-old Trayvon Martin on the phone, just minutes before the unarmed African-American teen was fatally shot by Zimmerman, self-appointed neighborhood watchman. Given Zimmerman's pre-confrontation 911 call in which he expressed frustration that "they always get away," and his subsequent refusal to obey the dispatcher's admonition against continuing his pursuit of Martin, the case brought further scrutiny to racial profiling—the practice of police, and others in (assumed) authority, of selectively following 'people of color- usually young Black and Brown - presumed to be suspicious or otherwise guilty of criminal activity.

Jeantel, the U.S. born daughter of Haitian and Dominican immigrants, was subjected to withering and condescending cross-examination by Zimmerman defense attorney Don West, who charged that while his client had been portrayed [the media and public] as the racist, it was, in fact, Trayvon Martin who was the true racist in this incident. An example of this is evident in the attorney's cross-examination of Jeantel:

WEST: What's one thing about what Trayvon Martin told you that made you think this was racial?
JEANTEL: Describing the person.
WEST: Pardon me?
JEANTEL: Describing the person that was watching him and following him, sir.
WEST: I see. And that's because he described him as a creepy-ass cracker?
JEANTEL: Yes.
WEST: So it was racial, but it was because Trayvon Martin put race in this?
JEANTEL: No.
WEST: You don't think that's a racial comment?
JEANTEL: No.
WEST: You don't think that "creepy-ass cracker" is a racial comment?
JEANTEL: No.[18]

Given Zimmerman's pre-confrontation 911 call in which he expressed frustration that "they always get away," and his subsequent refusal to obey the dispatcher's admonition against continuing his pursuit of Martin, the case brought further scrutiny to racial profiling.

Hence, West sought to equate the alleged use of anti-Black bias (vigilante racial profiling while armed) by an adult with white skin privilege, with the alleged use of an anti-white slur by a Black teenager spoken to his friend when he felt stalked by a stranger, as if the latter expressed sentiment could somehow absolve the former action, which caused the confrontation in the first place. As identified by CNN, the defense attorney was seeking to "turn the prosecution's racial narrative that Trayvon Martin was profiled on its head." The prosecution's more well-established narrative was that Zimmerman had been motivated to ignore the 911 dispatcher's command to stop following Martin by his animus toward the [African-American] "punks" who had allegedly been getting away with robberies in the neighborhood with impunity.[19]

Rather, the public – and particularly the predominantly white jury – were being discouraged by the Zimmerman defense to view Martin as an innocent young man, returning from a convenience store errand after dark, walking in a community where his own father lived. Depicting Martin as a racist weakens sympathy for him as a victim, and, in fact, paints him as a villain in West's new narrative under a "post-racial" frame. In truth, this was falsely equating incomparable acts at its most lethal implication.

In another example, Paula Deen also employed this false equivalency practice even further by reflecting — in her deposition for the employment discrimination lawsuit against her — upon what she viewed as the equality of race relations in the South. "Black folks played such an integral part in our lives. They were like our family, and we didn't see ourselves as being prejudiced," said Deen. "I think we're all prejudiced against one or another. And I think Black people feel the same prejudice that white people feel."[20] This sort of ahistorical attitude, expressed by Deen and so many others, restricts racism to a conflict of attitudes, divorcing those attitudes from their actual impact on policies and practices that have produced, and continue to reproduce gross racial disparities in not only employment, but virtually every other major socioeconomic sector in the nation.

Depicting Martin as a racist weakens sympathy for him as a victim, and, in fact, paints him as a villain in [defense attorney] West's new narrative under a "post-racial" frame.

3. DIVERTING FROM RACE

PRACTICE	DIVERTING FROM RACE
PRACTICE DEFINED	The practice of asserting that other social identities besides race, such as class, gender or sexual orientation, are the real determining factors behind a given social inequity.
EFFECT ON RACIAL DISCOURSE	Ranks systems of power and dismisses racism as a primary, or even legitimate, determinant of social inequity. This logic inhibits an understanding of intersectionality, promoting an either/or instead of a both/and framework, which is more sociologically and historically accurate than a single identity or non-racial analysis.

The summer of 2013 witnessed a re-emergence of media coverage around the merits of race-based affirmative action in higher education. As the Supreme Court's verdict on Fisher v. University of Texas came to light, many mainstream media outlets seized the opportunity to push a harmful agenda, namely, that class, rather than racial divisions are becoming "America's most worrisome trend."[21]

Coverage that pushes for class-based affirmative action impacts the racial discourse through its underlying assumption that racism, in and of itself, is no longer a salient factor in educational inequity. The narrative that accompanies this assumption is that prioritizing solutions to racial inequities diverts attention from the "real" problems such as classism, sexism, etc. The impact of this logic can inhibit public discourse from naming racism as a primary factor in societal hierarchy because there are more comfortable factors to blame. In its finality, an absence of public understanding and willingness to address racism head-on can eventually wither progressive policies and practices that specifically address issues of race with justice-based solutions.

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A significant number of newspaper articles covering class-based affirmative action either published or cited work by Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation. Kahlenberg's article published by USA Today, exemplifies how the practice of diverting from race functions to dismiss the distinct impacts of institutional racism and obscures that race intersects and is compounded by other social identities, such as this case, class.[22]

In laying out the Fisher case, Kahlenberg's article asserts that the court's decision requires universities to seek diversity indirectly through methods such as class-based affirmative action "before they resort to outright racial preferences," a phrase also used in the Supreme court's final opinion read by Justice Kennedy. The use of the term "racial preferences" — in contrast with the more useful, "race-conscious admissions" — serves to bolster Kahlenberg's ideological view that economic status is the strongest determinant of America's social inequity, and that racism is no longer as significant.

He writes: "Today, research finds that the economic obstacles to a student's performance on standardized tests are seven times as large as the racial obstacles. So if we want to identify talented candidates who have overcome obstacles and performed pretty well considering the odds, then we should count class much more heavily than race in college admissions."[23] This argument invisibilizes the distinct obstacles faced by people of color of all classes living in a society with practices and norms that privilege white people in virtually every aspect of political and social life, in addition to the compounding effects that being poor can have on a person who does not hold white privilege.

Kahlenberg fails to acknowledge the complex ways race and class interact to determine the outcome of one's social, economic, and political welfare. His position stands in stark contrast to decades of studies that prove that racial obstacles are often stronger determinants than class/income. For instance, the study "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal," recorded the callback rate for job applications whose sole difference in "qualification" was a name believed to be either white or African American.[24] The results revealed a 50-percent gap in callback rates, as many more callbacks for a white sounding name as an additional eight years of experience.[25]

The decision between race- and class-based affirmative action is not an either/or equation precisely because the two identifiers are not equivalent. While evidence shows that a class-based approach will indirectly result in promoting racial diversity, because of the disproportionate numbers of people of color that are low-income, it is just that, indirect. It is, as demonstrated by Kahlenberg's language, unnecessary and harmful to outright dismiss race just because classism is also a salient and entrenched system of inequity in the U.S.

Many advocates of class-based affirmative action have enlisted the backing of public opinions polls to demonstrate the nation's willingness to leave race behind while simultaneously pushing class issues to the forefront. What these polls are indicative of, however, is a public reluctance or fear to talk about race, and an even greater reluctance to acknowledge race's compounding effects on other identities such as class, gender, or sexuality. "Americans are uncomfortable with the idea of using race in admissions because they don't like the notion of skin color counting in who gets ahead. At the same time, Americans recognize that students don't face a level playing field, so by 2-to-1, the public supports preferences for low-income students of all races," cites Kahlenberg.[26]

The fact that the American public is comfortable acknowledging economic inequities, yet opposed to "skin color counting in who gets ahead" highlights a society-wide symptom of denial of systemic racism. The contradictory nature of this denial, for instance, is visible in the disparity between the public's treatment of affirmative action and a complete lack of national discourse around legacy admissions, a process that disproportionately benefits individuals from white, upper class backgrounds.

The decision between race- and class-based affirmative action is not an either/or equation precisely because the two identifiers are not equivalent.

4. PORTRAYING GOVERNMENT AS OVERREACHING

PRACTICE	PORTRAYING GOVERNMENT AS OVERREACHING
PRACTICE DEFINED	Depicting government efforts to promote racial equity and inclusion as misguided, unnecessary and/or improper.
EFFECT ON RACIAL DISCOURSE	Undermines support for a significant government role in dismantling systemic racism. Suggests that if government would just "get out of the way" (i.e., stop infringing on the individual freedom of whites), we could have a "colorblind" country once and for all.

The practice set forth by this case not only undermined cultural ties within the community, but tribal sovereignty itself.

The 2013 U.S. Supreme Court case Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl involved the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 and its jurisdiction over the parental rights of a Cherokee father to his child in the face of adoption by a white couple. Yet media coverage surrounding the complex case continuously undermined the value of federal protections for indigenous peoples and their tribal sovereignty, instead criticizing the federal law's impact on the white couple, their emotional plight, and the obstruction of their freedom to adopt a Cherokee child. Media conservatives, in particular, often portray ICWA, affirmative action and Civil Right Movement-era policies and practices – which were originally designed to remedy centuries of systematic discrimination against people of color – as examples of 21st century overreaching government.

Such charges from media conservatives are part of the narrative that claims contemporary racial justice efforts, rather than having far to go, have in fact gone too far. For example,

- In an op-ed in The Washington Post, columnist George Will decried the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's anti-white-privilege curriculum designed to educate and encourage students to think about how white privilege operates in their everyday lives. Will labeled it as "propaganda," and rejected this brand of "consciousness raising."[27]
- Sunday Fox News host Chris Wallace similarly condemned a City of Seattle memo that "prohibited [city employees] from using the term 'citizen' … because not all Seattleites are U.S. citizens."[28]

And without naming it directly, Sean Hannity, also of Fox News, takes aim at the Fair Housing Act (Title VIII of The Civil Rights Act of 1968) by labeling the Executive Branch of the federal government under Obama Administration control as "overreaching" for showing signs of enforcing desegregation law that have rather been often neglected by previous administrations. "[T]he Department of Housing and Urban Development is now implementing a new rule allowing the Federal government to track diversity in American neighborhoods," complained Hannity, using the same "diversity" code word that triggers so much ire on the Right. "Now, the policy called 'Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing' allows the Feds to gather information on zip codes and then try to remedy any potential cases of segregation or discrimination."[29]

The aforementioned ICWA was enacted to put a stop to the disproportionate number of Native American children who were taken from their homes and their cultural community for adoption by white families.[30] At the time the law passed the number of Native children adopted and fostered into white families had reached 30%, and some states with higher Native populations saw 90% of their Native children being raised in non-Native homes.[31] At its core, the ICWA delineates who has jurisdiction over the adoption of Native children; under the law, tribal governments — not state courts — decide who has parental rights to a child of their nation. The practice set forth by this case not only undermined cultural ties within the community, but tribal sovereignty itself.

Much of the news coverage, however, focused on passing judgment about the nature of the Cherokee father's parental devotion: He "had never met his daughter and, after the mother rebuffed his marriage proposal, played no role during the pregnancy and paid no child support after Veronica was born," reported the Denver Post.[32] Some media outlets even called into question the ethnic and racial identity of the father despite his status as a registered citizen of the Cherokee Nation. "Yet some on the bench noted the girl and her biological father were listed in legal documents as being less than 1 percent Cherokee," one CNN reporter wrote.[33] What this kind of reporting exposed is a tendency to put the white adoptive parents and their 'baby girl' at the center of the spotlight and move the ICWA's intended focus and impact on preserving tribal sovereignty and cultural sustainability to the periphery.

"You are relegating adopted parents to go to the back of the bus and wait in line if they want to adopt" a Native American child, the adoptive parents' attorney said according to a CNN report. "And you're basically relegating the child to a piece of property with a sign that says, 'Indian — keep off. Do not disturb."[34] This narrative that singularly extends a sense of compassion and fairness to white adopters and their potential children and nothing to a Cherokee father and his tribe is indicative of the continued existence of structural racism against Native peoples that called for the passage of ICWA in the first place. By questioning the very right of government itself to act in the favor of racial equity, this discourse practice serves to maintain the structures that perpetuate systemic racism, all in the name of individual freedom for whites over a just society for people of color.

As a young person of color, Alvin's experience mirrors the experience of countless young Black, Latino and other youth of color walking the streets of New York—and elsewhere—that are assumed to be suspicious.

5. PRIORITIZING (POLICY) INTENT OVER IMPACT

PRACTICE	PRIORITIZING (POLICY) INTENT OVER IMPACT
PRACTICE DEFINED	Focusing more on the intention of a policy or practice and far less, if at all, on the daily impact on people and communities of color.
EFFECT ON RACIAL DISCOURSE	Devalues rather than values the humanity and very lives of the people and communities of color that bear the brunt of a policy's implementation. Obscures the role of implicit bias in that policy's operation, and reinforces the power of white fear in policy and decision-making.

In Harlem on June 3, 2011, a young man named Alvin was walking home from his girlfriend's house as he was stopped and frisked by three New York City Police officers. The officers were unaware that Alvin was audio recording the policy and practice of stop-and-frisk in action. During this stop the officers pelted Alvin with racially charged language and threats of violence such 'f**king mutt' and 'I'm gonna break your f**kin' arm'.[35] This was not the first time Alvin had been stopped and frisked that evening, and certainly not the first time in his life. As a young person of color, Alvin's experience mirrors the experience of countless young Black, Latino and other youth of color walking the streets of New York — and elsewhere — that are assumed to be suspicious.[36]

Mainstream media and public officials sometimes opt to cover stories through the discourse practice of prioritizing (policy) intent over impact. This is the practice of focusing more on the intention of a policy or practice and far less, if at all, on the daily impact on people and communities of color. For stop-and-frisk, the policy intention is public safety, keeping crime down and keeping guns off the streets, which is where the mainstream racial discourse remained. Coverage of the New York Police Department's (NYPD) Muslim spying program is another example of the mainstream media's usage of the discourse practice prioritizing (policy) intent over impact. For the Muslim spying program, the intentions are to protect public safety as well as the need to combat terrorism through the monitoring of Muslim surveillance, mapping and infiltration.

For example, a *New York Daily news* article covering a lawsuit against the NYPD offers statements such as "The police department contends the surveillance is lawful and is designed to protect the city from terrorist attack."[37] And "A New York City Law Department spokeswoman said there's nothing illegal about the NYPD's "strategic approach to combating terrorism."[38] The article however fails to cover the impacts of this program on Muslims that result in ethnic and religious profiling as well as the violation of freedom of speech.

When media representatives fail to acknowledge the harm of racially biased policies in marginalized communities they aid in the continued protection of those policies within the national consciousness and therefore the public sphere of influence. For Alvin and the countless others who have been stopped and frisked the result has been a public sanction of racial profiling. In the lives of those like Alvin this policy has fueled feelings of humiliation and violated their civil rights, including that of unreasonable searches and seizures by the government under the 4th Amendment and the equal protection clause under the 14th Amendment. It has lead to discriminatory and unprofessional treatment by New York City Police officers as well as damaged the relationship between New York City Police officers and the communities they serve.

The discourse practice of prioritizing (policy) intent over impact devalues rather than values the voices and experiences of the people and communities of color that bear the brunt of a policy's implementation. The practice obscures the role of implicit bias in that policy's operation, and reinforces the power of whites and the fears that influence policy and decision-making. The mainstream racial discourse was overshadowed by a focus by legislators and the mainstream media on the intentions of the policy, allowing little to no room for a discussion of the daily impact on the lives of people and communities of color. The public officials narrative –stop-and-frisk is not a policy about race, but that it is a policy grounded in the intention to protect and serve all communities. The message –racial profiling is justified.

When the mainstream media and public officials employ this practice, it renders the discussion of systemic racism null by prioritizing the intention of the policy or practice over the actual and distressing impacts on the physical, mental, and spiritual lives of people and communities of color. In an article published by the Washington Post, written by the then Mayor Michael Bloomberg uses this communication outlet to lay several claims in the defense of stop-and-frisk and to combat the suggestion that this policy is a form of racial profiling. Bloomberg writes, "And yet this month, in two separate editorials, The Post lectured our police department about protecting the civil liberties of New Yorkers. The Post swallowed— hook, line and sinker — the attack leveled on the New York Police Department's (NYPD) practice of stopping, questioning and frisking by an ideologically driven federal judge who has a history of ruling against the police."[39]

The practice obscures the role of implicit bias in that policy's operation, and reinforces the power of whites and the fears that influence policy and decision-making.

In the words of Ben Jealous, then President of the NAACP, "It is time for Mayor Bloomberg to come to grips with the scale of the damage his policies have inflicted on our children and their families. No child should have to grow up fearing both the cops and the robbers."[40] Prioritizing (policy) intent over impact is a discourse practice that mainstream media and public officials use to discuss stories of race and racism. Jealous' words attempt to move the racial discourse by shifting our attention to the impact of the policy and away from the intention of the policy. The mainstream media has covered stop-and-frisk as a policy whose ends justify the means, more often than not. Even articles that hold the contradiction of this discourse practices quotes like the following appear, "But some New Yorkers, while conceding that the police show favoritism for one race over another, said the stop-and-frisk tactic's ends justified the means."[41] In other words, the intention of ensuring safety supersedes any intentional or unintentional impact of the policy on the lived realities of people of color.[42]

Racial justice advocates believe differently, understanding that the stop-and-frisk policy is an example of institutional implicit bias. Rinku Sen, executive director of Race Forward, explains implicit bias as "the phenomenon by which we are unaware of our prejudices. Our judgments about people don't qualify as prejudices because our brains are happy enough to have a coherent story about 'those people'." [43] The impact of this policy could no longer be dismissed as anything but a policy of indirect racial profiling and with this federal decision came a pivotal window to shift racial discourse away from prioritizing (policy) intent over impact.

6. CONDEMNING THROUGH CODED LANGUAGE

PRACTICE	CONDEMNING THROUGH CODED LANGUAGE
PRACTICE DEFINED	Substituting racial identity with seemingly race-neutral terms that disguise explicit and/or implicit racial animus.
EFFECT ON RACIAL DISCOURSE	Injects language that triggers racial stereotypes and other negative associations without the stigma of explicit racism. Fosters anxiety among and dehumanizes people and communities of color.

On August 18, 2006, a group of seven young Black lesbian women from New Jersey, known as the New Jersey 7, were harassed as they walked down the streets of New York City by Dwayne Buckle.[44] The women — Venice Brown, 18; Patreese Johnson, 19; Terrain Dandridge, 19; Chenese Loyal, 19; Lania Daniels, 19; Renata Hill, 24; and Khamysha Coates, 27 — were walking by Buckle when he sexually propositioned one of the women.[45] After they kept walking, he followed them, continuing with verbally and physically obscene behavior and threats of violence. The confrontation eventually led to a verbal altercation and then to a physical fight where Buckle shouted homophobic slurs and made threats of sexual assault to these women. The group of women and Buckle were physically hurt when the incident ended. The women were also friends of Sakia Gunn, another young lesbian woman of color who, only three years prior, was stabbed in the chest and killed by a man to whom identified herself as a lesbian and whose sexual advances she rejected.[46] The main difference between the New Jersey 7 and Gunn is that the New Jersey 7 survived; a survival, which led to incarceration for one, sentences that were appealed for several others, pleas that were taken for the rest, and condemnation for all by the mainstream media.

Mainstream media can opt to cover stories through the discourse practice of condemning through coded language. This is the practice of substituting racial identity with seemingly race-neutral terms that embody explicit and/or implicit racism. Below are a few excerpts of media depictions of the New Jersey 7:

- "A Gang of Angry Lesbians" – *(New York) Daily News*[47]
- "A Furious Lesbian Raged, 'I'm a Man!" – *(New York) Daily News*[48]

In the previous examples of coverage of the New Jersey 7 there is no explicit mention of the racial identity of these individuals. However, condemning through coded language leads readers and viewers to believe that the young women depicted are inherently criminal, and, therefore, likely Black women. This discourse practice injects language that triggers racial stereotypes and other negative associations without the stigma of explicit racism. It fosters anxiety and dehumanizes people and communities of color. "These are some of the standard images that have been around so long that few producers question them. They provide a certain comfort to the viewers and readers they hold in mind as their target audience. They are like an old song everyone already knows. Stereotypes don't need much explanation," explains Cutting and Themba-Nixon's Communication Guide for Racial Justice.[49]

The mainstream media can conjure up an image of a group of young Black lesbian women simply by utilizing the evocative words gang, pack, and raged. In these cases, the words are seemingly race-neutral terms, instead of explicitly racial identifiers. For many, the word "gang" conjures up the image of a group of young Black and brown bodies. An article published by the *The Public Intellectual* states that "overall, almost two-thirds of the articles characterized the women as angry lesbians in one way or another, and nearly half also used animal imagery or language."[50] The word "pack" suggests the victims were not human, but less than human, or even animals. This is a common trope identified with Black and brown bodies throughout U.S. cultural history. The narrative that emerges "is that these women were dangerously wild, masculinized monsters."[51] The message that emerges is that these individuals — young Black lesbian women — must be contained and feminized. The mainstream media is able to advance this narrative and message without once explicitly stating that these seven women were in fact Black women.

Perhaps more remarkable, is the lack of media attention the story of the New Jersey 7 received in the midst of a growing national mainstream predominantly white Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) movement focusing on marriage equality, bullying of mostly white LGBTQ youth, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). While this story was not completely omitted from mainstream media coverage, it was filled with the discourse practice of condemning through coded language, which removes the reality of racial identity and obscures individual and systemic racism as issues that demand attention and action. This practice invisibilizes people of color, especially LGBTQ people of color. This practice helps further promote the notion that all LGBTQ people are white and the issues they face do not include individual or systemic racism. When this practice is utilized, the notions that people and communities of color are inherently criminal and inhumane are propagated. Notions of the supremacy of white humanity are reified. Consequently, systemic racism becomes irrelevant to a national discourse that stridently is racist in subtext, even without mentioning race explicitly.

This discourse practice injects language that triggers racial stereotypes and other negative associations without the stigma of explicit racism.

7. SILENCING HISTORY

PRACTICE	SILENCING HISTORY
PRACTICE DEFINED	Omitting, dismissing, or deliberately re-writing history.
EFFECT ON RACIAL DISCOURSE	Isolates rather than connects present racial disparities, opportunities and attitudes from their historical context. Results in incomplete or inaccurate understandings of the root causes of these disparities, opportunities and attitudes. Obscures the pathway to illuminating what solutions are most viable or warranted. Miseducates the public.

Every contemporary issue, especially every racialized issue, has a history. It may be challenging to identify the degree to which a particular story ignores or manipulates history. With media content it is often difficult to examine what information is missing and how much that influences an audience's understanding and perspective on the subject/issue. The more we understand an issue's history, the more we can judge whether a frame is appropriately focused and the narrative and message within that frame are racially just and factually sound.

Mainstream media coverage around immigration to the United States is one of the main areas where ahistorical frames and narratives abound. The history of U.S. imperialism, foreign policy and domestic immigration policy is complex and rarely surfaces in newsrooms and print. One of the most pervasive and detrimental linguistic tools, however, has been one simple word: "illegal." One reason the term "illegal immigrant" has become so powerful is because of its insidiousness, its assumption of neutrality, and its claim to merely assert fact. It is useful to point out that rarely, if ever, does the use of the term "illegal" in reference to immigrants come with an explanation of how that word came to be.

Few people in our national dialogue have publically reflected on the history of the term's use, what person created the term, and for what purpose. Indeed the use of the term "illegal" has sharply risen over the past two decades, a staunch turnaround from the 1970's era when President Carter himself opted to use the term "undocumented" to describe migrating peoples.

A well-known memo by Republican communication strategist Frank Luntz in 2004 popularized the term as a major tool for advancing a conservative agenda on immigration. In the present day, "illegal" has become a leading term within a set of entrenched language that advances a strictly law-and-order frame on immigration policy used by progressive and conservative parties alike.[52] Recognizing the history of a term will allow us to see the strategy behind its use and therefore a path to interrupting the power of its message.

One of the most common debates circling the immigration debate in the past year centers on whether immigrants are a boon or burden to the U.S. economy.

Headlines from around the nation read as follows:

- "Giving Illegals Access to Welfare 'An Assault on U.S. Taxpayer,' Researcher Says" – *CNS News*[53]
- "U.S. Taxpayers Should Not Have to Pay for Illegal Immigrants' Healthcare"— *U.S. News and World Report*[54]
- "Illegals: Will They Be Taking Jobs Away From U.S. Citizens?" —*ABC News*[55]

One common thread that links these messages together is a lack of historical context as to why people are immigrating in the first place. We might ask: What role has the U.S. played in causing great migrations of people from Latin America and around the world?

A person well-versed in U.S. history, or in daily reality, may think of slavery, imperial wars, and colonialism to name a few. A deeper look at U.S neo-liberal policies such as NAFTA sheds light on why there is an increasing trend in migrating peoples from Latin America.[56] Ahistorical frames about immigration and their corresponding narratives allow us to relieve our own societal responsibility and instead problematize the "illegal other."

We could easily imagine the way narratives might be different if our frames expanded to include systems of globalization outside our borders and the role the U.S. plays in those systems. Dialogue that couples U.S. foreign policy with domestic immigration policy would signal more holistic look at comprehensive immigration reform. See the Migration is Beautiful intervention in Part Two and its popularization of the frame 'Migration is Natural' for ideas on promoting language and imagery that connect history to present realities of racism.

All of this is to say that if we cannot look at ourselves as a nation, both past and present, and the ways in which our "American" values have often fallen in contradiction with our actions, we will never be able to advance frames and narratives that lead to racially just and humane understanding or functioning of our social systems. We need to be able to consider tools of communication that allow us to see ourselves as active agents in the systems with which we interact. If we do not recognize the way decision-makers and media representatives systematically reframe our history we will continue to function without a societal mirror and the potential consequence is that our dialogue around these issues will remain stagnant.

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SECTION 4:
Recommendations and Conclusion

1 EXPAND OUR DEFINITION OF RACISM BEYOND PERSONAL PREJUDICE AND HATE TO SYSTEMIC RACISM

Racism in the United States has been traditionally understood and portrayed as overt and/or intentional prejudice or hatred of a white person(s) toward Black Americans or other racial and ethnic "minorities." And while the media clearly concentrates its coverage of racism on particularly shocking incidents of alleged racism (see the admitted or exposed use of racial slurs by celebrity chef Paula Deen or the NFL athlete Riley Cooper in 2013), this overrepresentation of such individual-level racism obscures the way that racism has operated and continues to operate far more broadly at the systemic level, to drastically limit access to resources and opportunities for people of color. Systemic-level racism also takes the form of discriminatory policies and practices in the criminal justice and immigration systems. Our national commitment to justice, fairness, and equality of opportunity cannot be realized without this expansion.

Expanding your definition of racism means engaging in conversations about the potential causes of racial disparities in our nation. That means examining what policies and practices create and re-create these disparities. The media should certainly increase the amount of systemically aware racism content that explores such policies, practices and impacts. Journalists and the general public could also re-examine stories of individual triumph — i.e., someone who overcomes many obstacles and barriers to reach success — with a racial justice lens. For example, why did a particular person and so many other people of color face similar or identical barriers in the first place? If racial justice advocates adopt a routine and robust use of a systems analysis to inform our work — and the way we publicly communicate our issues — we can be a model for other advocates and journalists to do the same.

2 FOCUS ON ACTIONS AND IMPACTS RATHER THAN ATTITUDES AND INTENTIONS.

One way to expand our definition of racism to the systemic level is to focus our attention on actions and impacts rather than the attitudes and intentions of allegedly racist individuals, policies or practices. Intentions matter, but impacts, regardless of intentions, are what matter most. Racial impacts—whether negative or positive—are what have the most weighty consequences on people's lives, and, thus, are where we can most usefully place our attention. Also, actions and impacts can be documented, whereas attitudes and intentions are debatable. We may not know what is in the hearts and minds of particular people, policymakers, or powerholders — and it's not worth the energy to make guesses or assumptions. But we can hold them accountable for their actions, commitments, and decisions, since those have bearing on outcomes.

While the media tends to concentrate attention on whether or not an individual is truly contrite or apologetic about their racist expression or action, the public should ask themselves what impact such attitudes and, more importantly, corresponding actions can and do have when perpetrated by others in positions of power. Instead of focusing on whether or not an individual or a policy intends to be "colorblind," we should concentrate on how color-coded the results of that individual's actions or that policy's actions are. Silencing all talk about race — and prematurely declaring that we live in a "post-racial" society, or that class trumps race — will not eradicate the continued racial disparities in our society. Practically speaking, our media content analysis demonstrates that the media could do more to make the experiences of people of color more visible, including by going beyond Black and Latino populations to impact of policies on various AANHPI and Native experiences. Rather than use the "intent doctrine" often practiced by our courts, which narrowly and wrongly construes racism as that which involves provable intentionality, we need to use an "impact standard," where disparate impacts are often the evidence of disparate treatment. We also can use tools such as Racial Equity Impact Assessments to guide decision-making in order to further equitable outcomes and avoid unintended consequences.

3 ADD A RACIAL LENS TO OUR CONVERSATIONS ON CLASS, GENDER, SEXUALITY, ETC.

Political conservatives do not have a monopoly on calls to silence racial justice voices. There's tremendous pressure from a vocal segment of political liberals to avoid talking about race, in part because the topic is viewed as too "divisive." But given the overwhelming evidence of racial disparities, it only makes sense that we would want to give race and racism specific, distinct, and sufficient attention. Yet, while we recommend addressing race explicitly, it does not mean we must or should address race exclusively. Other factors (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, immigration status, etc.) may be just as salient or even more so, at times. Often these other dynamics are compounded by race, so they need to be considered together. When addressing racial equity, we certainly don't want to undermine gender equity. We want to lift all people. Thus, we need to take the time to thoughtfully view our issues of concern from all angles, with consideration of different lenses and perspectives. This doesn't have to be an either/or choice. To promote genuine inclusion, we can and must talk about race alongside those other factors if we are to fashion effective solutions to our policy and societal challenges.

We should be explicit about race, and overcome our reluctance to say the word "white," so that we can reveal, acknowledge, and address the similar and different ways that white people and people of color experience poverty, sex discrimination and LGBTQ oppression. We can all learn from people who clearly see and even embody the connections between race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, religion, and other salient dynamics. Racial and social justice advocates need to take the time to thoughtfully view their issues of concern from all angles, with consideration of different lenses and perspectives. The best way to do that is to include a diverse set of stakeholders in the process of analyzing and framing issues, so that a wide variety of people can see their interests and identities represented in the selected strategies, solutions and frames. By developing inclusive issue frames, our work becomes complementary, rather than competing, and we can widen the base of investment and engagement in proposed equitable solutions.

4 CULTIVATE DISCOURSE THAT CENTERS THE HUMANITY AND LEADERSHIP OF PEOPLE OF COLOR.

Our public discourse and conventional reporting on race-related stories, when it lacks systemic awareness or analysis, often ends up demonizing, pathologizing, or victimizing people of color. The result is a normalization of narratives and language that dehumanize people of color, who are too often viewed by more privileged white people as the perpetrators of their own plight or hapless victims. Even racial justice advocates can contribute to these portrayals when we are not consciously thinking about ways to correct and counteract them. How can we lift up the lived experience and expertise of people of color, their resistance and resilience, their intelligence and creativity, their role as change agents and leaders? If racial and social justice advocates don't do this frequently and effectively enough in our own communications, how can we expect journalists to do this?
While making sure that the full humanity of people of color comes through in our messages, we also need to use every opportunity to make sure more people of color have the opportunity to be the messengers — as spokespersons, experts, leaders, newsmakers (see the considerations offered in the concluding chapter of Part Two). We also need to continue to advocate for more journalists of color and racial diversity not just in the newsroom, but in media access and ownership, since the messenger has such significant bearing on the message.

We have seen how discourse that refuses to acknowledge the humanity of every person fosters an environment where racially discriminatory policies and practices advance with impunity. Coded language that equates people of color to animals as in the case of the New Jersey 7 (see p. 21), narratives that stereotype immigrant communities as inherently criminal for crossing constructed borders, or frames that simplify/dismiss the complex and painful history of indigenous peoples for the sake of white individualism as occurred in the Supreme court ruling over ICWA all exemplify the very real cost to people of color and the nation more broadly. Our dialogues, both public and private, must ensure that we humanize people of color through word choice, representative voices, diversity of perspective (i.e. include non-white perspectives), and recognition of the root causes of racial inequity.

CONCLUSION

This report has explored the character of mainstream dominant racial discourse in two primary ways. First, we conducted a unique, original media-content analysis of mainstream media coverage of race and racism throughout much of 2013 that found disappointingly low levels of "systemically aware" content. Second, we described seven harmful racial discourse practices which, taken as a whole, reinforce the common misconception that racism is simply a problem of rare, isolated, individual attitudes and actions. Instead, we argue that racism is a cumulative and compounding product of an array of societal factors that, on balance, systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. We have also offered everyday recommendations for how readers can help overcome these harmful racial discourse practices. The news media, particularly local newspapers, could play a more productive role toward advancing racial justice in this country by focusing more of their coverage on "systemically aware" content, and exploring the policies and practices that lead to racial disparities.

In a companion report – *Moving the Race Conversation Forward – Part Two* – we go several steps further from the recommendations we specify here, to provide lessons through profiles from several recent interventions and initiatives led by racial justice organizations, artists, and others who are moving our nation's race conversation forward toward racial justice.

The cases discussed in Part Two include a campaign entitled "Drop The I-Word" ("illegal"), launched in September 2010 by Race Forward, a successful and well-timed divestment campaign led by Color of Change against an established organization that promotes policies based on racially discriminatory frames, and the origins and ongoing battles of The Advancement Project to dismantle the "School-to-Prison Pipeline." The lessons drawn from the cases — intended primarily for racial and social justice advocates as well as others eager to respond to the dominant frames and stories that negatively impact people of color — include telling stories that connect individuals to systems and using cultural and artistic media to reveal and explore systemic racism. They are accompanied by important considerations for organizations to bear in mind when selecting spokespersons for racial equity communications. Finally, we provide recommendations for those — in philanthropy or otherwise — who are interested in the current needs and opportunities for supporting the development of framing expertise, skills-building and collaboration in the field of racial justice.

Racism is a cumulative and compounding product of an array of societal factors that, on balance, systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.

SECTION 5:
Acknowledgments and Endnotes

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WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY: Dominique Apollon; Terry Keheler; Jillian Medeiros; Natalíe Lorraine Ortega; Julia Sebastian; Rinku Sen.

Executive Director: **RINKU SEN**
Research Director: **DOMINIQUE APOLLON**
Copyeditor: **KALIA ABIADE**
Designer: **STEFANIE CHUNG**

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SECTION 6:
Appendix A

CREATING THE DATASET - SEARCH TERMS AND TIME PERIOD

Before combing through mainstream media content to determine the extent to which mainstream discourse is focused on individual-level racism vs. systemic-level racism, we had to build an actual list of relevant articles and transcripts, rather than simply searching newspapers and television programs at random. Given production and publication deadlines, our selected date range was January 1, 2013, through August 31, 2013. Using the Nexis media database, we conducted a search within the "LEAD" section of articles and transcripts in each of our selected publications and television outlets on the following terms: "racism," "racist," "racial," and "diversity."

Limiting our searches to the "LEAD" section — a standard search option within the Nexis system that typically translated to the first three to five paragraphs of content, depending upon article size — helped us sift out many articles and transcripts where the topic of race or racism did not serve as a principal focus. Similar to how Race Forward Practice typically counsels organizers and organizations to "lead with race" when undertaking racial justice advocacy campaigns and communications activities, we chose to limit our dataset to articles and transcripts that indicated early on to their readers and viewers that race or racism would be a component to the content within.

CREATING THE DATASET - SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

We created our original dataset based on our analysis of articles and transcripts from fourteen media outlets, including cable television networks and national and local newspapers. For cable television outlets we chose CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News, based on the size of their audiences among U.S.-based, English-language news media. Our three national newspaper selections, based on circulation, were *The New York Times, USA Today,* and *The Washington Post.*

Finally, the selection of the eight local newspapers was based primarily on identifying the two local papers each of four regions in the country with the highest circulations. In cases where the two largest papers were in the same metropolitan area, we selected newspapers with lower circulations from different areas to gain a more geographically representative sample. Thus, for example, the two papers in the Midwest with the highest circulation were the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. To get a more geographically representative sample, we chose the third-most circulated paper in the Midwest, *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer.*

Hence, this method of choosing the local papers enabled us to gain a more geographically representative sample. The local papers in our sample are the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Denver Post*, in the West; the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer*, in the Midwest; the *(New York) Daily News* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* in the Northeast; and *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Tampa Bay Times,* in the South. The television and newspaper outlets yielded an overall sample of 1,187 cases.

VARIABLES CODED

Our original plan was to review the media content simply for the extent to which they either focused upon individual-level racism or systemic-level racism, but it quickly became apparent that at least two other categories would receive significant representation in our sample.

Some articles and transcripts – particularly some op-eds and cable television programs – mentioned perspectives or aspects of systemic-level racism principally to dismiss them as illegitimate or faulty. Some of these "dismissals of systemic-racism" went so far as to actually prominently feature official voices promoting public policies such as the NYPD's stop-and-frisk program, a program that most racial justice advocates consider to be institutionally racist.

A less common, yet still important fourth category, which unexpectedly emerged, was "racism as past-tense" discussions. Typically these instances took the forms of obituaries of figures from the civil rights era and/or discussions of films such as the Jackie Robinson baseball integration biopic. While not as short-sighted or damaging as the media's overemphasis of individual-level racism and dismissal of perspectives that illuminate systemic racism, taken in isolation, these "racism as past-tense" articles or transcripts give the impression that racism was a problem from our history that we have largely solved. These stories tend to fit rather neatly within the narrative that we are now a "post-racial" society because Barack Obama currently sits as president in the White House. This is understandable within the context of an obituary, but these articles and transcripts nevertheless give the impression that there are no lingering contemporary impacts from past eras of explicit racism.

Besides these four "focus" variables, we group into two factions (systemically aware vs. systemically absent), our research team also coded each of the nearly 1,200 cases for additional variables, including:

- Media outlet
- Content categories (such as politics, criminal justice, entertainment and sports)
- Select stories (Paula Deen, voting rights, affirmative action, stop-and-frisk, LGBTQ movement work, presence of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, or AANHPI actors/subjects, etc.)