

EXECUTING HORTONS

RACIAL CRIME IN THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

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George Bush opposes gun control and favors executing Hortons. I would guess Willy [*sic*] Horton doesn't. (A white focus-group participant, Texas, October 1988)¹

Introduction

Contemporary historians of the South, following in the steps of Du Bois and Woodward, have recognized that racial campaigns can affect far more than voters' behavior at the ballot box. Given the right conditions, a racial campaign can reinforce a variety of racially conservative views and actions (e.g., Lewis 1993). Scholars of public opinion have been slower to explore the possibility that elections have broad consequences for public opinion. This article seeks to remedy that neglect. It examines the way in which racial campaigns prime racial predispositions in whites' views of government policies designed to ameliorate racial inequality.

The 1988 presidential campaign's Willie Horton episode is my vehicle of choice. Perhaps no other campaign tactic has come to represent better the race card in contemporary elections. Yet, to date no evidence exists that the Willie Horton story was effective. More generally, few direct quantitative studies exist of the impact of racial campaign communication.² Here I use the Horton episode to test the ways and extent to which

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1. Quoted in Jamieson (1992, pp. 32, 35).

2. Exceptions are Kern and Just's study of the Helms affirmative action ad (1995); Metz and Tate's (1995) investigation of the impact of racial campaigns on turnout; and Kinder et al.'s (1989) survey-based study of the impact of the Horton appeal on whites' vote. Jamieson (1992) provides examples of voter response to Horton, drawn from focus groups. West's study focused on the content of the Horton story rather than on its effect on the public (1993).

elite trafficking in racial symbols shapes whites' thinking about policies designed to assist African Americans. I test two competing hypotheses: (1) by activating whites' racial prejudice, the Horton appeal weakened the already uncertain public will to remedy racial inequality; (2) the Horton appeal did no such thing; instead, it caused whites to give greater weight to concern over crime when considering various crime control measures. The first hypothesis is drawn from a broader view of the campaign as a racialized one, while the second hypothesis is drawn from a view of the campaign as a racially neutral one, or at least one that featured race only incidentally.

THE IMPACT OF CAMPAIGNS

Both hypotheses share in common the assumption that what elites say during presidential campaigns may have important consequences for public opinion. More than any other event, presidential elections are institutionalized, periodic opportunities to set the public agenda, to define collective problems, and to discuss publicly the future course of the nation. More than at any other time in their elective cycle, politicians have strong incentives to be persuasive, to capture public attention, to mobilize voters' sentiments, and to gain and maintain adherents. Elections are a time in which the symbolic power of political ritual is at its height (Edelman [1964] 1985). What politicians say during their campaigns for office may, on average, prompt stronger and more far-reaching public reaction than what they say during any other time of the electoral cycle. Carmines and Stimson put it this way: "Mass political involvement and issue discourse are episodic and discrete. Largely absent most of the time, they occur during political campaigns and particularly during presidential campaigns" (1989, p. 136).

All of this, however, is largely speculative. While the impact of campaigns on vote choice has preoccupied scholars since the pioneering election studies of the 1940s (Kinder and Sears 1985), there has been no systematic attempt to delineate the breadth of campaign effects. We lack knowledge of the distinctive impact of candidate messages, relative to other kinds of elite communication, on opinions about issues. Issues have been studied as explanatory variables in models of vote choice, not as dependent variables susceptible to campaign shifts. At the same time, studies of opinion about issues, including studies of media agenda-setting, have neglected the causal role of campaigns. Neither mass media studies (e.g., Iyengar and Kinder 1987) nor studies of elite opinion leadership on issues (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Zaller 1992) have specifically examined campaign effects on issue

positions, though Carmines and Stimson do draw attention to elite influences on issue constraint.³

Furthermore, it is not as if politicians have abandoned the race card. The white public has certainly moved away from biological racism and segregation and toward endorsement of the principle of racial equality (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985). But debate over implementation of that principle has, if anything, accelerated since the height of the civil rights movement (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Candidates for office no longer promise to “fight relentlessly to prevent amalgamation of races,” as did J. Lindsay Almond of Virginia along with most southern gubernatorial candidates in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Black 1976). But they find a variety of ways to appeal to whites’ concerns about government attempts to ameliorate racial inequality. Metz and Tate (1995), for example, have documented the continuing use of racial appeals in urban campaigns. Others have begun to study ways in which candidates code their racial appeals, making implicit references to race while claiming no racial intent (Himmelstein 1983; Jamieson 1992; Kinder et al. 1989; Mendelberg 1994). Nor should we expect race to fade away from electoral politics anytime soon now that it has worked itself into the fabric of the party system (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt 1989). Electoral campaigns, it seems, continue to rely on racial appeals for political advantage, and they do so because of the structural imperatives of American politics. In that case, studying the impact of racial appeals on public opinion opens a window on the way in which the status of African Americans has been negotiated since the civil rights movement reintroduced race into party politics.

DO RACIAL APPEALS MOVE WHITE PUBLIC OPINION?

Here I answer three questions about racial appeals: Do they move public opinion? If so, do they move opinion by priming racial antagonism? Or do they move opinion by priming concern about nonracial matters? For the 1988 presidential election, the questions become: Did the Horton appeal move whites’ opinion on issues? If so, did it prime racial antagonism in opinion about racial policies (and racially tinged welfare policies)? Or did it prime concern about crime in opinions about crime policies? In other words, does public reaction cast the Horton appeal as a race card or, instead, as a straightforward vehicle for discussing universal, race-neutral concerns like criminal justice?

3. McGraw (1991) found variations in the effect of politicians’ accounts of their issue votes on public endorsement of those issues, but has not focused on campaigns.

THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

During the fall of 1988, the criminal record of Willie Horton became a centerpiece of the presidential campaign. The story of Horton as relayed in George Bush's stump speeches, presidential debates, Republican campaign literature, and political advertisements was that of a young black man convicted of a grisly first-degree murder and sentenced to life without parole in a Massachusetts prison. While on a weekend pass he escaped, and kidnapped and brutally assaulted a white couple in their home, raping the woman and stabbing the man (Drew 1989; Jamieson 1992).

While the release of the Horton advertisement by a group technically unaffiliated with the Bush campaign sparked a heated exchange between the campaigns, the debate was brief, came quite late in the campaign, and mostly steered clear of race. Lloyd Bentsen and Jesse Jackson did accuse the Bush campaign of playing racial politics with the Horton case, but much of the debate did not deal with this charge. For one thing, Bush and his aides immediately and vigorously denied it.⁴ Lee Atwater, the Republican strategist who much later apologized for the Horton appeal, at the time admitted no link with it: "Our campaign made no TV commercials about Willie Horton" (O'Reilly 1995, p. 387). Even as he later confessed to having approved the Horton appeal, Atwater still claimed it was not about race at all.

Those who denied the charge of racism implied that the Bush campaign's discussion of crime in general, and the furlough issue and Horton's case in particular, were simply about crime and had little to do with race (O'Reilly 1995). The journalist Robert MacNeil, in summarizing the Horton appeal's impact, reported that voters' response was, "I'm going to vote for George Bush because I can't vote for a man who lets murderers out of jail."⁵

The mass media for the most part did not seriously consider the possibility that the Horton appeal was a play of the race card and inadvertently aided in communicating it (Jamieson 1992, p. 28). Some newspapers handled the questions about the appeal's racism as if they were simply a dirty tactic. The closest journalists came to condemning the Horton appeal was to label it a negative partisan tactic, not a negative racial tactic (Jamieson 1992). Only after the campaign was over did the Horton appeal develop a reputation as an obvious play of the race card.

4. Kristin Clark Taylor, Bush's assistant press secretary and a black woman, countered that it was not Bush who sent Horton "out galavanting around on a weekend party pass" (O'Reilly 1995, p. 386).

5. In Jamieson (1992, p. 33). See also Barone and Ujifusa's summary (1989). A different version rested on the supposed truth in the notion that black men are especially prone to violence. "The average voter . . . just plain don't [*sic*] feel guilty for being scared of black criminals," explained one commentator. ". . . They [*sic*] didn't understand why it was racist to talk about reality" (O'Reilly 1995, p. 387).

Neither did the Horton appeal have any overt racial content. Not once did the official Bush campaign organization make a direct reference to race—the news media (unwittingly) and unofficial pro-Bush groups (wittingly) jointly provided the menacing mug shot of Horton and made his victims' white race salient. On the surface, the story seemed to be a dramatic, overly individualized, somewhat distorted, but largely legitimate way to discuss crime. While Horton's case was only one of several elements in Bush's discussion of crime, it was, as the most symbolic element, a rich composite of crime-related issues and concerns, especially drugs, victims' rights, and misguided social reform policies.

The Horton case, however, was saturated with racial meaning as well, largely through images of Horton. The configuration of the criminal (a young black man), the victims (an ordinary white middle-class couple), and the crime (physical assault in the victims' home, kidnapping, and—most notable—rape) has a long and sordid history as a stereotypical myth about the sexual aggression of African American males that, unchecked, directs itself particularly at innocent white women (Fredrickson 1971; Jordan 1968). The message may have worked as a symbol of misguided crime policies, but it may also have worked as a symbol of misguided racial-crime policies.

INTERPRETING THE 1988 CAMPAIGN

The Horton story, then, plausibly—but debatably—qualifies as a strategic use of a racial symbol, and its apparent effectiveness in advancing Bush's candidacy makes it a good case for a preliminary test of the power of racial campaign communication. To test the hypothesis that Horton was important about race, we need to find out whether the Horton message primed whites' racial prejudice. Several ways are available for thinking about what form contemporary racial beliefs and sentiments might take. One of these is variously known as symbolic or modern racism, and refers to a particular constellation of racial sentiment, moralism, and traditional American values. There is by now ample evidence that racial prejudice, defined in this way, is an important determinant of opinions on racial matters, and leads to resistance to racial equality as principle and policy. In its various incarnations it has been found to be a powerful predictor of vote choice in local and national elections, and of opposition to various race policies such as busing and affirmative action. It is much more prevalent today than biologically oriented racism, which centers on the notion of blacks' inherent biological inferiority to whites, and it may be on the rise (Kinder and Sanders 1996). The modern racism scale used to measure this kind of prejudice makes no explicit reference to racial inferiority; rather, it assesses hostility and moral indignation regarding blacks' current social, political, and economic status (see Sears [1988] for an overview and validation).

The hypothesis that racial symbols work by priming racial prejudice rests on the assumption that racial prejudice is dynamic, that its power waxes and wanes depending on the prevailing racial mood of the country and the moves of its politicians. This premise rests on an important contribution of cognitive social psychology, namely, the notion that racial stereotypes are more or less used in judgments depending on the information environment (Devine 1989). Personal racial isolation and certain racial issue frames can increase the impact of prejudice on various racial policies (Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Nelson and Kinder 1996). Perhaps prejudice is also primed by candidates' racial messages, finding greater expression in whites' policy views as a consequence.

However, if the Horton story did not appeal to whites' racial inclinations, but, as its defenders claim, dramatized the problem of crime, we would expect that racial prejudice would not play an enhanced role in shaping whites' political views. On this view, the Horton message was simply a public airing of the problem of crime and what the government might do about it. While many commentators now view the Willie Horton case as a clear racial appeal, in 1988 it was widely perceived as primarily a message about crime and misguided liberalism, not race. Furthermore, some observers and scholars continue to downplay its racial element. A recent journalistic profile of public response to what it called "Willie Horton" crimes ignored race altogether (Anderson 1995). According to Barone and Ujifusa's *Almanac of American Politics*, voters inferred from the Horton episode the obvious and not altogether inaccurate message that Dukakis might carry liberalism to unreasonable extremes. They argue that "such an inference was neither racist nor irrational" (1989, p. xxxvi). Hagen similarly argues against the "fascination in some quarters with the hidden meanings—especially the hidden racial meanings—of campaign rhetoric and political advertisements, to the exclusion of more obvious and pertinent considerations" (1995, p. 80).

On this view, the Horton appeal may have activated predispositions that match the "more obvious" content of the Horton story: concern about crime. The alternative hypothesis I test, then, is that a rating of crime as an important problem played an enhanced role in shaping public preferences about government crime initiatives. The Horton case would lead those who considered crime a problem to endorse measures designed to reduce crime to a greater extent than they might do otherwise.

Method

To test the two hypotheses, I designed an experiment that allowed me first to measure racial and crime predispositions, then to control exposure

to the Horton message (or to a control message about Boston Harbor), and finally to gauge the impact on whites' opinion.⁶ The experimental method avoids the common pitfalls of most survey-based attempts to study the impact of elites' opinion leadership (see McGraw [1991] for a similar argument). Ordinarily, these attempts lack strong causal inference because they employ correlational designs and bivariate statistical models. An example of this, notable for its originality and sophistication, is Carmines and Stimson's argument that the rearrangement of public opinion around the civil rights issue was driven by partisan shifts at the elite level (1989). Carmines and Stimson make a passing reference to the dramatic actions of Johnson and Goldwater in 1964 as largely responsible for important public shifts on race (pp. 47, 54). But their evidence on this point simply suggests that elite-partisan patterns crystallized in advance of public-partisan shifts. Many other events were underway at the time that public opinion changed on race; and assessments of racial attitudes in the 1940s and 1950s show a distinct movement toward tolerance well ahead of the legislative fiats and electoral maneuvering of 1964 (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985).

Kinder et al. (1989) undertook an analysis of 1988 National Election Study data aimed, in part, at assessing the effect of exposure to Horton messages over the campaign, using respondent's date of preelection interview to index level of exposure. They found that the longer the exposure, the greater the influence of prejudice on vote choice. But their effort is clouded by uncertainty about which individuals received what level of exposure (if any). And their general measure of campaign exposure is unable to tease out the effects of Horton messages from concurrent campaign messages and events. Neither can it ensure that recipients of the Horton message are different from nonrecipients only in exposure. Finally, there is the vexing problem of estimating the impact of Horton messages on the public while controlling on the impact of the public on elites and controlling on spurious, mood-of-the-times factors (such as a more general shift toward conservatism).

The most elegant solution to these methodological problems is controlled experimentation. By controlling the exact content and circumstances of exposure to political events, the problem of tracking the unique and unbiased effect of a particular elite move disappears. Of course, we should still worry here about the primary weakness of experiments—the problem of external validity. To partly alleviate this problem, I have taken the unusual step of using actual news segments broadcast during the campaign.⁷ This step, and survey-based replication (see the Conclusion),

6. I will rely on "exposure to Horton" as a shorthand to "exposure to the Horton message."

7. The usual trade-off between external and internal validity in this case means that there is less precision in locating the source of the effect than there would be if I had artificially

should give us some confidence in the results, though cautious interpretation is in order.

PARTICIPANTS AND MEASUREMENT

Seventy-seven white non-Hispanic students enrolled in introductory psychology at the University of Michigan participated in the experiment for course credit. The median age was 18, and the group was about evenly divided by gender (58 percent female). Participants were administered the modern racism scale (see McConahay, Hardee, and Batts 1981), which assesses the more subtle prejudice described previously and minimizes socially desirable answers. The scale was administered to the entire class as part of a multistudy prescreening questionnaire.⁸ Prejudice was then coded as zero for those lowest and one for those highest.

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

Participants were randomly assigned either to the experimental condition, in which they viewed a Horton news segment, or to the control condition, in which they viewed a news segment about pollution in Boston Harbor. They were scheduled in small groups for a 50-minute session. Written and oral instructions informed them that after watching a few news segments they would be asked to evaluate the amount of horse race versus substantive coverage, and that they would be asked about their political beliefs so that we could hold these constant in the analysis. It was crucial that the full purpose of the experiment not be revealed, to avoid demand characteristics that might bias the results. Debriefing protocols suggest I succeeded in this.

limited the content of the stimulus. So, e.g., creating a condition in which the Horton message is conveyed without Horton's image would strengthen the internal validity of the design, but at the cost to external validity (since a manufactured news segment is usually not the same as a real one).

8. The scale was constructed by averaging seven Likert items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$). With $N = 844$, the mean is 2.14 ($SD = .68$; range = 1.00–4.86), which is substantially less than the sample mean of the 1988 National Election Study (3.05, $SD = 1.1$; derived from results reported in Kinder et al. [1989]). To ensure a sufficiently large prejudiced group, I selected participants from the upper and lower deciles of the modern racism distribution (a random sample yields almost no prejudiced people). Because the student distribution is liberal, sampling its extremes creates one group of highly unprejudiced people and one group of people who are moderately prejudiced. The fact that the prejudiced group in this study is at the same level of prejudice as the large and politically consequential group at the center of the national prejudice distribution is fortuitous, since it means that findings about the prejudiced group in this study are more plausibly generalizable to the average voter in 1988. Another advantage of using a student sample is that it is less likely to have been exposed to 1988 campaign coverage at the time it unfolded (debriefing revealed very few instances of Horton recall). A probability sample of adults not exposed to Horton coverage would be better, but such a sample is logistically quite difficult to assemble for an experimental design that requires much more time and energy than normal survey participation.

Those in the Horton condition watched three news segments from 1988 network evening news broadcasts, borrowed from the Vanderbilt News Archives. The segment covering Horton's case was placed in the middle.⁹ It featured, in part, the Horton ad (on the increasingly blurry line between news and ads, see West [1993]). The control condition replicated the Horton condition in every respect except the middle segment, which consisted of a story about the pollution of Boston Harbor. The two middle segments were similar in tone, length, the emotional and symbolic nature of the criticism of Dukakis and the factual nature of the rebuttal (see Mendelberg 1994 and appendix for details).

Finally, all participants completed a questionnaire on their political views. It included questions on implicitly racial policies like welfare, on government policies addressing racial inequality, and on perceptions of racial conflict. In addition, participants were asked about their ideology and demographic characteristics and for opinions on nonracial and crime-related issues.¹⁰

Results

We are now in a position to answer two central questions about the Horton appeal: Did it have an impact on public opinion? And if so, was the impact carried by whites' racial prejudice rather than their concern about crime?

EXPLICITLY RACIAL VIEWS

To test the hypothesis that the impact of racial prejudice increased on opposition to race policies with exposure to the Horton appeal, I estimate

9. See (Mendelberg 1994) for justification of this particular segment. The Horton segment was 3 minutes, 1 second, long; the three segments together lasted 10 minutes, 34 seconds. Abbreviating a standard half-hour evening news broadcast in such a drastic way, and including in it a full 3-minute story, may seem to stack the deck in favor of Horton effects, but on the other hand, the single-exposure treatment may underestimate them (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, p. 25).

10. Several elements of the design reduce the study's demand characteristics, a particular concern for the unobtrusive study of racial views. First, the modern racism items were embedded among several dozen others. Second, the experiment itself took place several weeks after the administration of the modern racism items, to avoid residual priming effects and to dissociate that scale from the experiment. Third, care was taken to avoid the presence of people of color during the experiment (by selecting white fellow participants and experimenters). Fourth, the cover story directed attention to an aspect of the news coverage unrelated to any issue or to race, so as not to artificially call attention to the study's purpose. Fifth, the treatment story and its control counterpart were placed in the middle to avoid drawing undue attention to them. Sixth, the postcoverage questionnaire included items that reinforced the cover story, and nonracial items preceded explicitly racial ones. Debriefing revealed only a few participants who guessed the focus on African Americans, though they made no link with the news stories. The study took place in the spring of 1992.

the following model of opinions on race policies and racial conflict, where Horton and prejudice are 0–1 dummy variables:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Race opinion} = & a + b_1(\text{prejudice}) + b_2(\text{Horton}) \\ & + b_3(\text{Horton} \times \text{prejudice}) + b_4(\text{crime salience}) \quad (1) \\ & + b_5(\text{conservatism}) + b_6(\text{gender}) + b_7(\text{class}). \end{aligned}$$

If the Horton story activates racial prejudice, then we should see a positive interactive effect of Horton and prejudice (b_3). Such an effect would suggest that exposure to the Horton story enhances the effect of prejudice on racial views above and beyond its baseline impact under conditions of nonracial communication. Even in the control condition, where there is no exposure to the Horton story, the effect of prejudice (b_1) is expected to be large and positive, because prejudice does not require activation to influence policy. But prejudice should have a greater impact on race policy when it is activated by a racial story. No net effect of the Horton message is expected, since I expect the effect of the message to be interactive (so b_2 may well be zero).

These effects should hold even when other determinants of public opinion on race, which are associated with prejudice, are taken into account. The truncated nature of the sample takes care of this concern for some of these variables: age, region, and education. The rest—crime salience (the tendency to view crime as an important problem), class identification, gender, and ideological conservatism—are included as controls in the right-hand side of equation (1).¹¹

I examine nine dependent variables, divided into two categories: policies and perceptions. The first is the extent to which the government should intervene in racial problems: make a special effort to aid blacks, increase spending on blacks, bus school children to achieve desegregation, and engage in affirmative action in school and workplace. Four of these five items are averaged into a race-policy index.¹² The second category is perceptions of African Americans’ position in society or of racial conflict: whether blacks’ position has improved recently, the chances that a white person will lose a job or promotion because of an equally or less qualified black person, and whether civil rights leaders are pushing too fast.

Table 1 presents unstandardized ordinary least squares (OLS) coefficients on the normal, baseline effect of prejudice (b_1) and on the interactive effect of prejudice under exposure to Horton (b_3), with the standard

11. Conservatism has been measured by the usual 7-point self-identification question (from NES), and was included as a conservatism-liberalism continuum. The correlation between prejudice and conservatism is high ($r = .72$), and the estimated coefficients on prejudice and the interaction are smaller when conservatism is included, though the standard errors are not affected.

12. Busing’s interitem correlation was at least 40 percent lower than the rest, so it was excluded.

Table 1. Baseline and Incremental Effects of Prejudice on Racial Views

Racial View	Effect of Prejudice in Control Condition (Baseline)	Effect of Prejudice in Horton Condition (Incremental)
Race policy:		
Government aid	.28** (.09)	.12 (.10)
Spending on blacks	.17** (.10)	.31** (.11)
Busing	.31** (.14)	-.09 (.17)
Affirmative action, jobs	.27** (.08)	.07 (.10)
Affirmative action, schools	.28** (.09)	.13* (.10)
Race policy index	.25** (.07)	.15** (.08)
Racial conflict:		
Blacks' position improved	.13 (.11)	.34** (.13)
Blacks get white jobs	.19* (.13)	.25** (.15)
Civil rights push too fast	.22** (.10)	.09 (.11)

NOTE.—Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). Incremental effects must be added to baseline effects for the total effect. Explanatory variables not shown are conservatism, crime salience, gender, and class. $N = 77$. Prejudice and Horton are 0–1 dummy variables. The same equation applies to all dependent variables in a given table. All variables in all tables were recoded on a 0–1 interval, with 1 as the conservative end (so positive coefficients are expected).

* $p \leq .10$, two-tailed test.

** $p \leq .05$, two-tailed test.

errors in parentheses (the dependent variables are all recoded from their original metrics to the 0–1 interval scale, with 1 as the conservative end, so OLS is appropriate). Each equation is represented by a row. Taking the left-hand column first, the baseline coefficients on prejudice are clearly and consistently large, and with two exceptions they are statistically significant by the standard ($p \leq .05$) criterion. While in two of the three racial-conflict equations the effect of prejudice is small or nonexistent, it ranges from .17 to an impressive .31 in the race-policy equations. All this

is consistent with previous findings about the effect of prejudice under average political conditions.

Moving to the right-hand column, which displays the interactive, incremental effect of prejudice with exposure to Horton, it is evident that exposure to the Horton coverage increases the effect of prejudice. The interactive, incremental effect of prejudice on the policy index is a statistically significant .15, which, added to the baseline effect of prejudice (.25), yields a substantial total prejudice effect of .40. The political significance is this: without Horton exposure, prejudiced individuals are 25 percentage points more likely than unprejudiced people to oppose racially egalitarian policies; with exposure to Horton, prejudiced individuals are 40 percentage points more likely to do so than unprejudiced people.¹³

This pattern is even more striking for the racial conflict items. Here the average baseline coefficient on prejudice is lower than it is in the race-policy equations. In at least one of the three equations, the baseline prejudice coefficient approaches zero. Comparing the baseline coefficients with the interactive coefficients in the right-hand column shows that exposure to the Horton condition activates prejudice where it was nearly dormant. For example, in the case of the question of whether blacks get white jobs, the coefficients change from a baseline of .19 to an interactive effect of .25, yielding a total effect of .44 (a 132 percent increase in the power of prejudice). This suggests that, when it is activated by a racially implicit symbol like the Horton story, prejudice will lead to perceptions that African Americans' position has improved and to a sense that whites are losing their jobs to African Americans. While prejudice may not always operate noticeably in the absence of racial communication, when such appeals are made, prejudice becomes a formidable influence.

Taken together, this set of results shows that Horton inflated the mostly substantial, sometimes weak impact of prejudice on opinions about racial matters. It suggests that people who are prejudiced become even more resistant to racial equality with exposure to Horton than they would be without it. But perhaps the increase in the effect of prejudice simply means that individuals low on prejudice reacted against Horton and moved in a more liberal direction, that racial tolerance rather than prejudice was activated, while the prejudiced remained as before. In that case, we can conclude that Horton did not lead people with racial resentments to vent them when making public policy choices and that the public reacts to racially implicit appeals by bringing its tendency to reject stereotypes to bear on racial matters. This, however, does not seem to be the case, as b_2 is essentially zero (table A1 in the appendix illustrates this).

13. The magnitude of the effect is not an artifact of the policy index. While some of the coefficients in the five race-policy equations are not much larger than their standard errors, they represent an average incremental increase of 54 percent over the baseline effects.

Table 2. Baseline and Incremental Effects of Prejudice on Nonracial Views

Nonracial View	Effect of Prejudice in Control Condition (Baseline)	Effect of Prejudice in Horton Condition (Incremental)
Defense	.07 (.09)	.01 (.11)
Limit imports	-.07 (.15)	-.08 (.18)

NOTE.—Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). Incremental effects must be added to baseline effects for the total effect. Explanatory variables not shown are conservatism, crime salience, gender, and class. $N = 77$. Prejudice and Horton are dummy variables. The same equation applies to all dependent variables in a given table. All variables in all tables were recoded on a 0–1 interval, with 1 as the conservative end (so positive coefficients are expected).

NONRACIAL VIEWS

But what if the Horton message activated prejudice generally, moving opinions on nonracial issues as well as on clearly racial questions? If it did, the argument that Horton worked as a racial symbol is considerably weakened. Table 2 presents the impact of prejudice on opinions on nonracial policies. Equation (1) has been reestimated, for the entire sample, but this time the dependent variables are foreign-relations policies (all variables are scaled on the 0–1 interval, with one as the most conservative response). The numbers look quite different in table 2 than in table 1. In both equations in table 2 the interactive effect is statistically indistinguishable from zero. The Horton story did not activate prejudice in nonracial areas.

WELFARE VIEWS

The impact of Horton is clear on views about matters that explicitly involve African Americans, and it is just as clearly absent on views about matters that are not racial. But there is a middle ground. Perhaps Horton exposure also moves opinion on implicitly racial matters, specifically, those that mix race and the traditional American values of self-reliance and hard work. Welfare is such an issue. Given that the majority of whites endorse stereotypes about African Americans' dependence on welfare (Bobo and Kluegel 1991; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995), and that endorsement of these views leads to more opposition to welfare (Gilens 1995),

Table 3. Baseline and Incremental Effects of Prejudice on Welfare Views

Welfare View	Effect of Prejudice in Control Condition (Baseline)	Effect of Prejudice in Horton Condition (Incremental)
Blacks can do without welfare	.17** (.10)	.21** (.12)
Workfare	-.21** (.10)	.21** (.12)
Reduce welfare benefits	.17** (.10)	.11 (.12)
Welfare spending	.26** (.12)	.06 (.14)
Welfare feeling thermometer	-.12 (.10)	-.19** (.12)
Welfare index	.10 (.07)	.19** (.08)

NOTE.—Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). Incremental effects must be added to baseline effects for the total effect. Explanatory variables not shown are conservatism, crime salience, gender, and class. *N* = 77. Prejudice and Horton are dummy variables. The same equation applies to all dependent variables in a given table. Except for the feeling thermometer, all variables in all tables were recoded on a 0–1 interval, with 1 as the conservative end (so positive coefficients are expected).

** *p* ≤ .05, two-tailed test.

it is reasonable to suspect that prejudice plays a heightened role in opposition to welfare under exposure to the Horton story.

With this proposition in mind, I asked whether most blacks on welfare could do without it if they tried, whether welfare recipients should be required to work, whether welfare benefits should be reduced to make working for a living more attractive, whether spending on welfare should be reduced, and whether feelings toward people on welfare are essentially negative. I constructed an index averaging the responses to all the welfare items (Cronbach’s alpha = .46). All variables are scaled on the 0–1 interval, with 1 as the most conservative response except the feeling thermometer.

The results show that the Horton story inclines prejudiced whites to reject the legitimacy of welfare programs and to endorse the idea that African Americans can do without them. Coefficient estimates derived from equation (1) are displayed in table 3 (with the welfare items as the

dependent variables). Table 3 makes clear that prejudice is an important influence on welfare opinions, though not uniformly so. The baseline coefficient on prejudice is large and statistically beyond question in four of the five individual equations, though in the workfare equation it takes the wrong sign (negative coefficient expected in the feeling thermometer equation). And in the case of feelings toward welfare recipients, Horton activates racial prejudice where it lies dormant, moving the coefficient from a nonsignificant $-.12$ baseline to an impressive total effect of $-.31$. The same pattern appears for the index of welfare items. Again, b_2 is zero, suggesting that Horton exposure moved opinion toward greater resistance to welfare among the prejudiced, while leaving the unprejudiced unaffected. Welfare has become a racial and illegitimate government program in the minds of a significant proportion of the white public, and the Horton message increases the tendency of the prejudiced to reject it.

AN ISSUE OF CRIME?

Before we conclude that Horton worked as a racial appeal, however, the alternative hypothesis must be tested. This view's proponents argue that the Horton story was an appeal about crime, that it was only coincidentally about race. Even if the Horton story did activate racial sentiments, that is an unfortunate and peculiar side effect of an essentially nonracial message. To test this possibility, the first order of business is to treat the salience of crime in the same way I treated prejudice. To do this, I evaluate the extent to which exposure to Horton changes the baseline effect of crime salience on matters of crime. With this purpose in mind, I estimate equation (2):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Crime opinion} = & a + b_1(\text{prejudice}) + b_2(\text{Horton}) \\ & + b_3(\text{Horton} \times \text{crime salience}) \\ & + b_4(\text{crime salience}) + b_5(\text{conservatism}) \\ & + b_6(\text{gender}) + b_7(\text{class}). \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

This equation is identical to equation (1) but replaces prejudice with crime salience in the interaction term. Of interest in this equation is b_3 , the interaction of crime salience and exposure to Horton. I contrast this coefficient with the baseline effect of crime salience (b_4) to see if there is a difference between the effects of crime salience among those who saw the coverage of Horton and those who saw instead the control story. If the Horton case functioned as a means of discussing crime, pure and simple, then Horton exposure should lead people who care about the crime problem to implement this concern in their opinions on crime-related matters to a greater extent than people who are concerned about crime but did not view the Horton coverage.

Table 4. Baseline and Incremental Effects of Crime Salience on Crime Views

Crime View	Effect of Crime Salience in Control Condition (Baseline)	Effect of Crime Salience in Horton Condition (Incremental)
Capital punishment	-.06 (.18)	-.24 (.29)
Law enforcement spending	.27** (.16)	-.05 (.26)
Spending on war on drugs	.63** (.24)	-.29 (.38)
Bush tough on crime	-.02 (.15)	-.12 (.24)
Dukakis weak on crime	.00 (.16)	-.03 (.25)
Which candidate will solve crime problem	.12 (.18)	-.22 (.28)

NOTE.—Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). Incremental effects must be added to baseline effects for the total effect. Explanatory variables not shown are conservatism, prejudice, gender, and class. *N* = 77. The same equation applies to all dependent variables in a given table. All variables in all tables were recoded on a 0–1 interval, with 1 as the conservative end (so positive coefficients are expected).

** *p* ≤ .05, two-tailed test.

The crime alternative, then, predicts that Horton coverage may incline people worried about crime to favor capital punishment for persons convicted of murder and to favor increased spending on law enforcement and on the war on drugs. If Horton coverage worked as an appeal about crime, it might plausibly lead people concerned about crime to think Bush was tough on crime and Dukakis was not, and to think that Bush would do a better job addressing the problem of crime than Dukakis.

Table 4 presents the baseline and interactive effects of crime salience.¹⁴ The baseline effect of crime salience is inconsistent, ranging from a huge .63 in the case of spending on the war on drugs, to the wrong-signed -.06 in the case of capital punishment. This is not a reliable baseline with which to compare the interactive effects under exposure to Horton. Nevertheless,

14. See appendix for measurement of salience of crime as a problem.

it is apparent that Horton did not bring out the power of crime salience. None of the estimates of the interactive effect of crime salience even reach their standard errors, and all have the wrong sign. There is nothing in equation (2) that redeems the crime hypothesis, not even a single significant Horton coefficient (b_2).¹⁵

Perhaps, however, the Horton appeal affected views of crime in a more direct way. It may be that the priming model I have used for racial prejudice simply does not fit when it comes to views about crime. Instead, the Horton story may have exercised its impact by making people aware of the severity of the problem of crime. By dramatizing and personalizing the often impersonal and anonymous face of crime, the Horton appeal may have made crime a much more salient concern. To test this version of the crime hypothesis I regressed the salience of crime on exposure to Horton. The results show that exposure to Horton did not move perceptions of the importance of crime as a problem ($b = -.01$, $SE = .06$). Crime, it seems, was not a more salient problem as a consequence of the Horton message.¹⁶

Of course, it is possible that exposure to Horton did not affect worries over crime across the board, but did heighten concern about crime among more prejudiced whites. Iyengar and Kinder (1987, p. 41), for example, found that white viewers hostile to blacks were most likely to emphasize the importance of unemployment after viewing a white victim of it. To test the possibility that racial prejudice plays a similar mediating role for crime salience, I included a prejudice \times Horton interaction term in the equation for crime salience. Doing this, however, yielded an insignificant unstandardized coefficient estimate ($b = .08$, $SE = .12$; the baseline prejudice effect = $-.09$, $SE = .11$).¹⁷

Given the absence of interaction effects on crime views, the absence of Horton-exposure effects on the sense that crime is an important problem, or any other sign of life from the crime hypothesis, I tentatively conclude that exposure to Horton had no effect apart from its enhancement of the influence of prejudice on political views regarding race. A caveat is in order, however. It is possible that the measure of crime salience misses the power of concern about crime. Perhaps an alternative measure

15. On the hypothesis that Horton moved crime opinions by activating racial prejudice, I included a Horton \times prejudice interaction term, but the coefficient on this term was substantively minuscule and statistically insignificant. Including this term did not affect either of the crime coefficients or their standard errors.

16. Crime salience was measured after exposure to Horton. This would have made the entire crime salience analysis suspect, if crime salience had varied with exposure to Horton, but as reported, this was not the case.

17. Adding crime salience \times Horton to the race opinion equations does not change any of the prejudice estimates by a meaningful amount (or their standard errors). The interactive effects of crime salience fluctuate wildly from one racial equation to the next, have very large standard errors, and the total effects range from $-.37$ to 0.05 .

that relies on a rank order of national problems would yield better results. Also I measured crime salience with only one item, while my dummy-variable measure of prejudice derives from a multiple-item scale. The baseline effect of the crime-salience measure I used was unexpectedly weak. All this suggests that the crime hypothesis deserves additional tests with different measures.

Conclusion

The Horton appeal was, judging by its effects in this study, about race rather than crime; it mobilized whites' racial prejudice, not their worries about crime. The consequences of this mobilization were greater resistance to government efforts to address racial inequality, heightened perceptions of racial conflict, and greater resistance to policies perceived as illegitimately benefitting African Americans. The experiment I conducted has limitations, of course. It is unclear how long the effects lasted, whether the conclusions apply to cases other than the 1988 election, and whether a nonstudent sample would have yielded similar results. However, Kinder et al.'s (1989) analysis of the 1988 National Election Study corroborates my finding that the Horton message was an effective play of the race card. This replication is especially reassuring given its reliance on a national sample of voters and the fact that it documented effects not after a single exposure but over the course of the campaign.

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) argued that stories about a given issue only affect views of that issue, partly as a by-product of the fragmentation of public opinion. When it comes to racial discourse, however, agenda setting and priming effects do not seem to operate normally, failing to reflect, contrary to Iyengar and Kinder's findings, the surface content of the messages that spark them (1987). Without this specificity, television's power in the domain of race may not be as limited as we might like to think. Whether or not violation of the specificity of priming reflects the special, integrative role of race in whites' public opinion deserves further study.

While the focus here has been on the Horton message in particular, given its prototypical profile, the results, though tentative, speak to racial communication more generally and to the institutional side of racial politics. We are now in a position to conclude, albeit preliminarily, that racial messages probably do matter, that they activate racial prejudice, and that they have serious consequences for public preferences regarding racial inequality. By establishing a three-way link between individuals' prejudice, their racial opinions, and racial appeals generated by the macrolevel dynamics of political campaigns, I have attempted to show how prejudice is activated in political contexts, transformed from an individual trait to collective obstacle.

The 1988 presidential campaign had, on its face, little to do with race (the Democratic primaries were another matter, of course, due to Jesse Jackson's candidacy). But closer attention to one of the more significant messages of that campaign reveals that race can operate even where it is absent on the surface: in a contest featuring white candidates, a large majority of white voters, and communication that carries few overt references to race. Attention to campaigns that seem to be devoid of race can reveal one way in which prejudice remains a potent political force among whites. It also demonstrates how racially modulated electoral strategies are implemented, and how they reinforce the gap between the opinions of African Americans and whites.

One of the significant aspects of Goldwater's 1964 candidacy was his success in conveying a racially conservative message without appearing to espouse segregation, and thus, without appearing to be a racist. But though the Horton appeal followed in the footsteps of the original southern strategy, it was nevertheless path breaking. It took place during a presidential election that was largely devoid of racial issues, certainly more so than the 1964 election, which took place in the wake of the Civil Rights Act. The Horton communication was, in 1988, very much a deniable play of the race card. It netted more political capital than any of its predecessors with the possible exception of Nixon's appeals in 1968 (Mendelberg 1994). As a result, Drew was correct in predicting that the negative style of the 1988 presidential campaign—in particular, its racial component—would be emulated by future campaigns. The racial campaign style of 1988 was echoed in such statewide campaigns as the 1990 Helms-Gantt contest in North Carolina, the 1991 gubernatorial election in Mississippi, the 1991 Duke-Edwards gubernatorial contest in Louisiana, the 1992 presidential bid of Patrick Buchanan, and Wilson's and Huffington's 1994 campaigns in California. All these campaigns included racial symbols: discussions of the supposed rising welfare underclass, condemnation of unfair federal quota bills, or a less subtle discussion of the loss of white jobs to undeserving minorities. While the tactic of coded appeals may have emerged from a national-level struggle for the allegiance of racially conservative whites, it has become a routine tool in the arsenals of candidates at all levels and of both parties.

That a racial campaign message may powerfully shape opinion on issues underscores the scope of presidential campaigns. The influence of elections may extend well beyond voters' choice of parties or candidates to encompass citizens' views of significant national problems. Elections are the linchpin connecting elites and masses, one that allows influence to flow not only from masses to elites, but from elites to masses. When presidential candidates use racial appeals, they raise racial stereotypes and resentments to the national agenda, displacing white individuals' more

democratically desirable considerations. Should whites rely on nonracial ideological guidance in response to appeals about issues that implicate subordinate groups, the power of racial appeals may not lessen, but at least their democratically troubling consequence would be muted. But as long as racial appeals prime racial prejudice, we have cause to worry about the health of elections as an instrument of liberal democracy, with its requirement that citizens act out of tolerance rather than factional interests. As long as racial appeals continue, electoral campaigns will be lost opportunities for bridging the nation's racial chasm.

Appendix

Horton News Segment

The segment used was an *NBC Evening News* broadcast. The story was the lead story on October 7, 1988, and was introduced by Tom Brokaw as Bush conducting a "well-orchestrated attack on Dukakis' record on law and order." The story opened with the reporter, Lisa Meyers, saying Bush accused Dukakis of having an "ultra-liberal, ultra-lenient approach to crime." Bush is shown in a rally, saying that "when it comes to the plight of the victims and their families, there is an astounding lack of sensitivity and human compassion." Bush is reported to have recounted in gruesome detail the case of Willie Horton, "a first-degree murderer from Massachusetts who raped and tortured a Maryland couple while out of prison on a weekend furlough." Barnes, one of Horton's victims, is introduced next, speaking at a news conference. He is reported to have said that he and his wife would have been murdered if they hadn't escaped and to have accused Dukakis of insensitivity. Barnes is shown saying, "There's never even been an apology for what happened to us. Whenever it's been brought up it's been treated as an aberration, one failure in a successful system, which is a blatant lie." The reporter says Bush claims he is not faulting Dukakis for the Horton case alone, but because Dukakis refused to meet with crime victims trying to end the furlough program, and because even after Horton, he refused to change the program until public pressure became overwhelming. Bush is shown saying, "As far as I know, the governor has never acknowledged that his furlough program was a tragic mistake." The reporter says the Dukakis camp accuses Bush of trying to exploit a tragedy. Senator DeConcini is shown defending Dukakis's record on crime. The reporter outlines Bush's newly released crime package, which includes tougher sentencing, requiring all criminals on parole to remain drug-free or go to jail, rehabilitating first offenders, and the death penalty for "cop killers and drug kingpins." The reporter says the estimated cost is \$300 million a year, but Bush has not said how he will pay it. She ends by saying, "Bush aides believe crime is one of their most powerful issues with Reagan Democrats and independent voters. They claim it takes but two words to raise serious questions about Dukakis's judgment: Willie Horton."

Question Wording

Unless otherwise noted, responses to all items were recoded on the 0–1 interval, “don’t know” responses in the middle, 1 = conservative. The Modern Racism Scale was used to select participants; the prejudice variable in the actual analysis was a 0–1 dummy, 0 = lowest decile, and 1 = highest decile.

MODERN RACISM SCALE (5-POINT LIKERT FORMAT)

1. It is easy to understand the anger of black people in America.
2. Blacks have more influence upon school desegregation plans than they ought to have.
3. Discrimination against blacks is no longer a problem in the United States.
4. Over the past few years the government and news media have shown more respect to blacks than they deserve.
5. Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.
6. Over the past few years blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve.
7. Blacks should not push themselves where they are not wanted.

CRIME SALIENCE

How about the crime problem in the U.S.? Do you personally feel that this problem is: Very important (74 percent); Somewhat important (23 percent); Not much of a problem, (or) Don’t know (3 percent)?

RACE POLICIES

1. Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale? (7-point)
2. If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which of the following programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased? Programs that assist blacks: Increased; Same; Decreased; Don’t know.
3. In general, do you favor or oppose the busing of black and white school children from one school district to another? (Favor; Oppose; Don’t know)
4. Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say such preference in hiring and promotion is wrong because it discriminates against whites. (5-point Likert; Don’t know)
5. Because of past discrimination it is sometimes necessary for colleges and

universities to reserve openings for black students. Others oppose quotas because they say quotas give blacks advantages they haven't earned. What about your opinion—do you favor or oppose quotas to admit black students? (5-point Likert; Don't know)

RACIAL CONFLICT

1. Over the past few years we have heard a lot about improving the position of black people in this country. How much improvement do you think there has been in the position of black people in the past few years? (A lot; Some; Not much at all; Don't know)
2. What do you think the chances are these days that a white person won't get a job or a promotion while an equally or less qualified black person gets one instead? (Very likely; Somewhat likely; Not likely; Don't know)
3. Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel they haven't pushed fast enough. What do you think? (Too fast; About right; Too slow; Don't know)

CRIME POLICIES

1. Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? (5-point Likert scale; Don't know)
2. Law enforcement spending (federal budget spending series).
3. Spending on war on drugs (federal budget spending series).
4. Here are some phrases people may use to describe political figures. For each tell me whether the phrase describes the candidate extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all. George Bush: Tough on crime and criminals.
5. Michael Dukakis: Tough on crime and criminals.
6. Which candidate do you think would do a better job solving the crime problem? (Bush; Dukakis; Neither; Both; Don't know)

Table A1. Effect of Horton on Racial Views, by Prejudice Level

Racial View	Effect of Horton among Prejudiced	Effect of Horton among Unprejudiced
Race policy:		
Government aid	.12** (.06)	-.02 (.08)
Spending on blacks	.17** (.08)	-.14** (.08)
Busing	-.12 (.13)	-.04 (.12)
Affirmative action, jobs	.01 (.06)	-.06 (.08)
Affirmative action, schools	.15** (.06)	.02 (.09)
Race policy index	.11** (.05)	-.04 (.07)
Racial conflict:		
Blacks' position improved	.19** (.10)	-.16** (.09)
Blacks get white jobs	.27** (.11)	.02 (.10)
Civil rights push too fast	.14** (.08)	.07 (.08)

NOTE.—Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). Explanatory variables not shown are conservatism, crime salience, gender, and class. $N = 77$. Horton is a 0–1 dummy variable. The same equation applies to all dependent variables in a given table. All variables in all tables were recoded on a 0–1 interval, with 1 as the conservative end (so positive coefficients are expected). Estimates are derived from eq. (1), estimated separately for each of the two prejudice groups: Race opinion = $a + b_1(\text{Horton}) + b_2(\text{crime salience}) + b_3(\text{conservatism}) + b_4(\text{gender}) + b_5(\text{class})$.

** $p \leq .05$, two-tailed test.

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