Black Like Me: How Political Communication Changes Racial Group Identification and Its Implications

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Abstract:
People who are highly identified with a particular group are likely to make choices in line with that group's interest. But, in the realm of politics we know very little about how group identification transitions into a salient political identification. What is the mechanism that makes this transition happen? I argue that this transition and prioritization hinges on political communication that makes a group member believe that they are relevant to the political group. To engage this argument I focus on Black political identification due to the strong empirical evidence that demonstrates that this Black political identification, or linked fate, is fundamental to explaining political decisions and behavior of Black Americans. Using experimental research, I test the effects of racialized political discourse by varying explicit racial messages about which segments of the Black community are being defined as a part of the broader "Black" interest. I find that Blacks that are marginalized in mainstream and intra-group discourse (moveable Blacks) show significant change in their strength of political identification with the racial group when their interests are being framed as major interest for the group.

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Introduction

On July 13, 2013, George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, was found “not guilty” in a Florida court for the death of an unarmed young Black man, Trayon Martin. Protest and deliberation over the racial meaning of Martin’s death and Zimmerman’s acquittal ensued. Into this contested landscape came the comments of President Barack Obama, who addressed the matter in a press conference. Obama connected Martin’s death and the anguish over the trial to a universal description of the challenge of being a Black man in the United States. “There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me.” Obama thus painted the loss of Trayvon Martin as a symptom of a challenge faced by the African American community. He was a loss to all because his fate could have been that of any Black man—even the President. Obama’s statements made an average Black male’s fate linked with the entire group’s.

Obama’s remarks are an example of what I call an inclusive message. Inclusive messages are messages that heighten belief among a subset of the Black population that their interests are significantly linked to comprehensive group interest. In this example, racial profiling experienced by Black males is framed as a salient and prominent racial group interest. His rhetoric is inclusive of their condition in a way that clearly acknowledges experiences of Black men but places the blame for these circumstances on systemic racial biases rather than their behavior. This attempt to explicitly discuss the practice of racial profiling by Obama is exceptional. This kind of inclusive political discourse is explicit in publicly recognizing the plight of all Black men. Obama’s public acknowledgement of racial profiling brings an issue that disproportionately victimizes a politically overlooked subset of the Black community (Black men) to the forefront of the mainstream discourse as a broader Black interest. My argument is that exposure to this type of political communication will result in heightened belief among
Black men that their individual interest is significantly linked to the comprehensive group interest.

My investigation into the effect of political communication that frames segments of the political racial group as included or excluded from the broader Black interest on political attachment with the group (i.e linked fate) is a departure from previous work on linked fate. The focus of the research has been on the development of a linked fate with the racial group due to a shared historical experience (Dawson 1994; Gurin, Hatchett and Jackson 1989) and the strength and stability of the group-based attitude in the face of economic polarization within the racial group (Dawson 1994). Thus, linked fate has been treated as a static predisposition—not an attitude that moves with context.

More generally, despite advances in our understanding of how foundational linked fate is to Black politics in which group interests are often prioritized over self-interest (Dawson 1994) and the role that political communication has on activating these racial group considerations (White 2007) the dynamic nature of linked fate has yet to be examined. Most studies do not include data or analysis that accounts for the malleability of linked fate attitudes. They also do not consider the contextual factors that influence expressions of this attachment with the political racial group. What effect do these more inclusive messages have on political attitudes for segments of the racial group that find their concerns passed over when the broader racial group interest are formed? Does the inclusivity of political communication about Black interest shape the way in which Black individuals see their own fate tied to that of the racial group?

The purpose of this article is to advance our understanding of the effects of political communication on group-based politics by answering the previous questions. To answer these questions I engage literatures on Black politics, political communication and framing. I offer and
test a theoretically based model that seeks to comprehend the effect of racially inclusive political communication on expressions of linked fate. This research seeks to distinguish the types of inclusive political messages that should result in greater variability in political identification with the racial group and seeks to isolate which members of the political racial group are more likely to be susceptible to malleability in their linked fate attitudes. I challenge the conventional wisdom that linked fate is a static predisposition by arguing instead that political context, in this case political communication, shapes the way group members see their own interests as connected with those of the group. Furthermore, by examining a political group that has demonstrated a consistent pattern in their prioritization of group interest, this study contributes to a broader understanding of group-based politics and the intra-group differences that can result in differences in expressions of political attachment.

The Effect of Political Communication on Strength of Political Identification with a Racial Group

African Americans as a political racial group present an ideal case to for examining the influence of political communication on the political connectedness that one has with a particular group. African Americans, in general, have been shown to have a strong connection with the group as the result of their shared experiences in politics on the basis of race (Dawson 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989). This political experience has resulted in political decision-making in which many Blacks tend to prioritize the group interest above self-interest. Linked fate is commonly used to describe the political attachment that Blacks have with the racial group.

Blacks who have a strong political attachment with the group tend to believe that what happens to the group has some effect on them as an individual. African Americans who would be expected to utilize other factors in their political decision making due to higher class and
socioeconomic status (SES) continue to express a strong political attachment with the racial group that is higher relative to other Blacks (Dawson 1994). This variation has yet to be well explained. Some have argued that these differences in linked fate within the Black racial group are due to variation in understanding of the economic status of the racial group (Dawson 1994). Blacks of higher economic status are more likely to believe in the economic subordination of Blacks (Dawson 1994).

I argue that the economic subordination argument does not delve deep enough to understanding this particular pattern in Black political behavior. I contend that lower levels of linked fate expressed by some Blacks is importantly connected to a sentiment that they are not included in the “we” that is Black political identity since they are to blame for their circumstances. Patterns of political communication establish some members of the community as marginal and others as more centrally seen as the embodiment of the political identity or the “Blackness” that we are talking about when the political racial group is invoked. Political communication for the purposes of this paper is discourse or information about politics that is disseminated through the news media. This political communication is essential to informing and reinforcing one’s standing in the political group. The discourse provides clear cues as to how the mainstream society views the group’s status as well as who is able to include themselves in the political identification. Thus, if the discourse were changed then more Blacks would see themselves as connected to the group.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

In making this argument, I draw on the political identification literature and the way in
which the political identity shapes a group member’s political lens. Which Blacks are going to be prone to movement in their linked fate attitudes based on messages received from political communication? I argue that the subset of Blacks that are neither those that are chronically included in group representations and those that are chronically excluded from group representations are the most susceptible to increases in their linked fate attitudes when short run political messages shape the broader racial group interest as including their interest. I refer to these individuals as “moveable Blacks.” Figure 1 provides a visual explanation of my framework. For the purposes of this framework, the line in Figure 1 is representative of the Black population. This line representation is not meant to imply that there is singular dimension of Black people. It is designed to represent groups within racial group. I contend that there are significant differences among Blacks in the ways that they receive messages from political communication. I define the broader group interest to be the issues that are prioritized as political goals for the improvement of the political racial group as a whole. Additionally, these broader interests are defined so that the condition and social standing of the racial group are attributed to institutional failings rather than individual shortcomings (Gurin, Miller and Gurin 1980; Miller, Gurin, Gurin and Malanchuk 1981).^2^  

In making this argument, I am drawing on a body of work that establishes that there are certain Blacks that chronically included as a part of the political racial group. Chronically included Blacks are those Blacks whose interests are habitually used to define the broader group interest. In Figure 1, chronically included Blacks are on the right side. Dawson (1994) argues that Blacks with high socioeconomic status report the highest levels of linked fate. He contends

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^2^ Part of the intra-group discourse entails Blacks legitimizing their group standing in society in a specific manner. African Americans that express a strong identification with the political racial group also tend to express a strong belief that the condition of the group is due to a racially unequal system. They believe that the fault of the condition faced by Blacks is due to a system that is unjust with matters that are tied to race. System blame legitimizes the Black condition. (Gurin, Miller and Gurin 1980; Miller, Gurin, Gurin and Malanchuk 1981).
that these individuals report high levels of linked fate because they have a clearer awareness and understanding of the subordinate status of Blacks in American society. This justification is lacking because many Blacks, beyond those that are of high socioeconomic status, are aware of the subordinate status of Blacks. Many Blacks across the socioeconomic spectrum go through experiences and live in conditions where their race can limit opportunities. I contend that Blacks with high socioeconomic status have high levels of linked fate because they are able to influence what gets defined as the broader group interests. In the process of defining what interests are going to be important to the political racial group they favor those interests that will benefit Blacks that are high SES or the Black elites. What allows for elite Blacks to determine the broader group interests? Elite Blacks have two advantages that allow for them to frame the broader group interests for the political racial group: 1) resources to engage in the intra-group politics where the group interests are defined and 2) the ability to strictly define who is a part of the political racial group.

The subset of Blacks that are chronically included have the resources, means and time to engage in intra-group politics in terms of defining the broader group interest (Strolovich 2007). They comprise the majority of the Black political interest groups and are the most active members in these organizations (Strolovich 2007). As a result, certain interests that will be the most beneficial for elite Blacks or those Blacks that are likely to become a part of this subset get prioritized. For example, affirmative action policy is presented in politics as a policy that will be beneficial for creating racial and gender equality in the academic and job arenas. Although prioritized by Black elites as a broader group interest, Blacks that will be able to benefit from this policy are those that are already part of the group’s elite or are likely to be individuals that will become a part of this elite subset. The consequence of this prioritization is that many
individuals that feel connected with the political racial group may not see their issues or interest reflected into the broader group interest. I contend that prioritization of interests that favor Black elites not only defines what is “politically Black” but will also shape the effectiveness of group based appeals that attempt to politically mobilize or influence racial group members. Who is defined as “politically Black” or as a part of the broader group interest will also be dependent on concerns that Black elites have about how the group is perceived by mainstream society.

Due to the negative images and connotations that have been assigned to Black identity in mainstream political discourse Black elites are very cognizant of how “political Blackness” is represented. Cohen (1999) argues that in the American political environment Blackness is constrained. Simply being a member of the racial group because of skin color does not mean that when the broader racial group interests are invoked in politics that they will be inclusive of all Blacks. There are segments of the Black community whose interests and issues are relegated outside of the boundaries of political racial group. Cohen argues that segments of the Black community that live lifestyles that appear to be in conflict with middle-class mainstream values are not only ostracized by the mainstream society but also by Black elites. This isolated segment of the Black community comprises those Blacks that are marginalized or chronically excluded. I argue that they are chronically excluded because in the defining the broader group interest their interest are not included. Figure 1 shows examples on the left hand side of groups that are cited as being excluded in political Blackness like Black intravenous drug users and Black LGBTQ (Cohen 1999). The apprehension by Black elites is that the marginalized subsets of the Black community present a problematic image of the community that will be looked down upon by the dominant White society and used to represent that political racial group as a whole. To ensure that the image of the political group is positive Black elites push interests that demonstrate that
Blacks are trying to be in-line with mainstream values. Chronically excluded Blacks are less likely to report high levels of linked fate (Dawson 1994). They report low levels of political attachment because they are repeatedly informed through means like political communication that they are not a part of the broader racial group interests in politics. Attempting to increase their political attachment would require a significant change in the way in which Blackness is evoked in politics that would demonstrate a continuous effort to incorporate their issues into the broader group interest.

The current literature provides substantial details on certain segments of the Black community. Chronically included Blacks who tend to have high levels of political attachment with the racial group play an integral role in how the broader group interests are defined. I contend that their high levels of linked fate reported by chronically included Blacks is because the broader group interest typically encompasses interests that are important to Black elites. Chronically excluded Blacks find their interest frequently defined outside of the political racial group interest due to the concern by Black elites that the lifestyle of marginalized Blacks is in conflict with mainstream political values. To maintain a positive image of the political racial group the interest of the marginalized will not be prioritized by the Black elite. Missing in the literature is an explanation for Blacks that are neither chronically included nor chronically excluded. They are the Blacks that are leftover. These Blacks are what I call *moveable Blacks*.

Moveable Blacks make up middle region of Figure 1. Moveable Blacks are not a monolith. In fact, they are not a clearly defined group. They are any and all Blacks that are not those that chronically included and chronically excluded. Within the moveable Black collective are smaller sets of definable groups like Black union workers, Blacks with some college, and lower middle class Blacks. These segments of the Black community are attentive to
how the racial group engages in politics but in many cases they find that appeals made to the racial group in politics do not include their interest.

Moveable Blacks face issues and concerns that differ from those that are chronically included, yet they get overlooked in the political discussion. Subsets of moveable Blacks are not as active with interests groups and organizations that work on behalf of the political racial group. However, most subsets of moveable Blacks are not in a space in which they seem to be in conflict with the image of the Black community desired by Black elites like those Blacks that chronically excluded. These Blacks are knowledgeable enough that they are aware of racial appeals in politics but they also recognize that these appeals about the political racial group are not always inclusive of their interests. When their interests are discussed in political communication they want their circumstances to be framed and legitimized with the same “institutional failings” narrative that is applied to the broader group interests. Blame for their societal position shouldn’t be presented as an individual failing but as the result of systemic problems due to society’s racial hierarchy. Thus, I argue that specific subsets of moveable Blacks will be show movement in their linked fate attitudes based on the targeting of inclusive messages they receive from racialized political communication. Moveable Blacks will redefine their understanding of the political racial group and express higher levels of linked fate when political messages are targeted to them. The broader interest of the political racial group is defined in terms of their interests.

**Racialized Political Communication Experiment**

Because I take political communication and discourse to be central to the construction and use of political attachment with racial group, I test my argument with an experiment that varies political communication about the political racial group by reframing which segments of
Blacks are being used to define the broader group interests. Using this type of experimental research is empirically valuable because it holds constant confounding factors (such as media content) that threaten direct causality between political communication and political attachment with the racial group as well as provide a clear comparisons to a baseline or control condition. Here I create differences in how the political racial group is framed (broader group or subset of moveable Blacks) in the political communication in order to present targeted inclusive messages to specific segments of the Black community. Again, inclusiveness of these targeted messages should result in changes in linked fate attitudes for segments of the political racial group.

I expect that the reframing of the broader group interest will be important to the linked fate attitudes held by the subset of moveable Blacks that often perceive that their interest are not incorporated. When a subset of moveable Blacks observes that their interests are being defined as part of the broader group interest they will not only redefine their political attachment to racial group but they will report increased levels of linked fate due to these “Black Like Me” appeals. The levels of linked fate reported by this subset of moveable Blacks will be comparable to the linked fate reported by chronically included Blacks. I also expect that Blacks that are chronically included (ex: high SES Blacks) will consistently express the strongest levels of linked fate regardless of how the political racial group is framed in political communication because their interests embody the broader group interests. Their chronic inclusion in the broader racial group interests makes them less susceptible to episodic change.

For the experimental design I use a post-test only design, where subjects were randomly assigned to be exposed to racialized political information in mainstream communication about African American performance in higher education or no such political information. The use of the mainstream press in the experiment was twofold. First, research on the influence of
racialized political communication on African American political identity has primarily focused on communication that occurs in indigenous sources (Harris-Lacewell 2004). Missing from the literature is how mainstream media informs the development of a political attachment based on racial group identification. Second, mainstream political communication plays a significant role in informing political attachment with the racial group due to the frequent exposure that African Americans have with this content and the negative bias that this communication tends to have in its coverage of the racial group (Gilens 1996; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon and Wright 1996). Mainstream political communication in this study is several fictitious New York Times articles about the achievement and failures of various Blacks in higher education.

Higher education was used as the main issue area in the experiment for a number of reasons. Collegiate performance is a political issue in which the Black community has had difficulty matching levels of achievement similar to that of their white peers. But, achievement in higher education is often framed in the mainstream discourse as an issue that is based on an individual’s ability and merit rather than a systemic success or failure. I contend that varying the inclusivity of messages about Black collegiate performance (a broader group interest) will create targeted messages that can appeal to a subset of moveable Blacks. The framing of the issue by using language about racial disparities for Black achievement in college also defines the issue as a group problem. These messages will also employ a systemic justification and acknowledgement for Black collegiate performance regardless of if it is good or bad. The subset of moveable Blacks that see themselves reflected in the targeted inclusive message (i.e. Black Like Me appeals) will not only redefine their identification with the political racial group but they will report higher levels of linked fate as a result. In this case the subset of moveable Blacks of interest is Blacks with some college education as shown in Figure 2.
This subset of Blacks is of particular interest because they are Blacks that have attempted to be part of the chronically included by moving up in socioeconomic status through academic attainment but for some reason they were unable to finish. They are also not a part of the chronically excluded because they are not in extreme conflict with middle class values of meritocracy and hard work. However, these individuals are in a situation in which they are dealing with a problem that is unique to their subset. The mainstream political communication that discusses educational attainment in higher education with regards to the political racial group tends to focus on Blacks who have graduated from college or Blacks that struggle to enter college. Additionally, those individuals who were not able to finish college aren’t typically engaged in the discourse in a way that frames their circumstances like the broader group interest, where institutional failings are to blame.

**Experiment Conditions**

In the study, I designed five conditions in which participants were randomly assigned after completing a brief set of demographic questions in the pre-questionnaire. Table 1 offers a general description of the experimental conditions.

In four of the conditions I vary the targeted inclusive messages in fictitious *New York Times* articles based on subset of moveable Blacks that I am interested in—Blacks with some college education. I contend that these targeted inclusive messages will result in changes in linked fate attitudes for moveable Blacks. In the first treatment participants receive a “vaguely inclusive
message” as shown in Figure 3. This article discusses an increase in college graduation rates for Blacks. This message is identified as vaguely inclusive because it is highlighting that the broader group has done well but it is not excluding any members that have not moved into the chronically included. It is simply stating information about the group without signaling to Blacks with some college that in acknowledging the achievement of the broader group they are also being excluded. The article also includes a quote from a fictional elite that is a representative from the U.S. Department of Education acknowledging the increase in college graduation rates for Blacks. The elite’s recognition of the achievement provides an acknowledgement of success by the system that caused a lot of the racial disparities in college education.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

In the second and third treatment Blacks are exposed to “targeted inclusive messages.” In the second treatment the targeted inclusive message is about low income Blacks having an increase in college graduation rates. The second treatment uses the same language as the first treatment except the framing of the group is specific to lower income Blacks. I contend that this is a targeted message because a sizeable portion of Blacks with some college will also be low-income. I argue that their low-income status will in part be due to the fact they were not able to complete college so they may find themselves working low wage jobs and industries. Therefore, this targeted message should be a “Black Like Me” appeal where they are receiving an inclusive message where they are being defined as a part of the broader group interest.

In the third treatment the article discusses a decrease in college graduation rates for low-

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3 Contingency tables that show the income categories of “Blacks with some college education” from the experiment survey can be found later in the chapter. Most Blacks in the sample that have some college education also had a family household income of $34,999 or less in 2011.
income Blacks. Like the other targeted inclusive message, the emphasis is on a specific subset of moveable Blacks—Blacks with some college. Since the message is about low-income Blacks and focuses on African Americans who have not finished college that they will also see this message as an appeal that is reflective of their circumstances. Additionally, the quote from the fictitious elite from the Department of Education also framed the issue so that the system is somewhat to blame for decrease in graduation rates for low-income Blacks rather than the individual. In this case, low income Blacks who have not finished college are given the same framing in political discourse that is applied to broader group interest for the political racial group. I expect that Blacks with some college will also be responsive to this “Black Like Me” appeal.

The final treatment is an article about graduation rates except it is focused on the college dropout rates for Blacks as a whole. This treatment details that college graduation rates have gone down for Blacks and that based on the quote from the political elite in the Department of Education the system is to some degree responsible for the situation. This condition is therefore “vaguely non-inclusive.” Although the treatment legitimizes the circumstances that Blacks are facing in college based on an institutional failing, a subset of Blacks is not specified hence, it is a vague message. Additionally, the message does not signal that any more Blacks are becoming a part of the chronically included. It also isn’t very different from many of the numerous messages that Blacks receive from the mainstream media about racial group underperforming in education. Without the targeted frame of the “Black Like Me” appeal I expect that this message will be ineffective at moving linked fate attitudes for Blacks with some college. In the control condition participants were exposed to a non-racial article about Facebook technology.

Immediately following the treatments participants were asked about their linked fate,
along with several questions about their racial and policy attitudes. Individuals were asked to report their views on affirmative action policy in higher education and hiring practice. Respondents were also asked their opinions on policies like federal spending on various programs as well as approval ratings for the President and Congress. The analysis conducted in this paper will be primarily focused on the participants reported linked fate.

The experiment was conducted online using a national (although not random) sample of five hundred and thirteen self-identified Black/African American adults. The study was conducted between March 13, 2012 and March 15, 2012. Participants in the study were 18 years of age and older. The participant pool was acquired through Qualtrics, a survey research company. The online survey was also administered using the Qualtrics survey software. The experiment took about twenty-five minutes for the subjects to complete. In order to empirically test the effects of the treatments I needed sizeable samples across the manipulations and my three Black categories of interest: the chronically included, moveable Blacks, and the chronically excluded. This level of variation in addition to the size of the sample would have been more difficult to obtain through a conventional convenient sample. Conducting the survey online also allowed ease of access for the respondents.

**Hypotheses**

First, because the control condition did not expose respondents to racialized political communication, they will report a baseline linked fate attitude.

In the three inclusive conditions (vaguely inclusive, targeted inclusive-low income Blacks increase, and targeted inclusive-low income Blacks decrease) I expect a subset of moveable Blacks—those with some college--will show increases in their linked fate attitudes to levels comparable to that of high SES Blacks. The political message about an increase in college
graduation rates for low-income Blacks shows moveable Blacks that they are improving and becoming a part of the chronically included. I expect that Blacks with some college will view that political message positively because they will see themselves reflected in the message. They will also seem themselves being presented as a part of the broader group interest. As a result, they will redefine how they perceive the group and in turn report a higher political connectedness with the racial group comparable to chronically included Blacks.

H2: Blacks with some college exposed the targeted inclusive message of conditions (2) and (3) will increase their linked fate attitudes.

H2a: Chronically included Blacks exposed to the targeted inclusive messages of conditions (2) and (3) will not have increases in their linked fate attitudes.

H3: Blacks with some college exposed to the vaguely inclusive message of condition (1) will increase their linked fate attitudes.

H3a: Chronically included Blacks exposed to the vaguely inclusive message of condition (1) will not increase in their linked fate attitudes.

Blacks with some college will not show increases in their linked fate attitudes when they are exposed to the vaguely non-inclusive message. Although the message is referencing an issue that they can identify with (not completing college) the message is not specifically targeted. Additionally, there is nothing in the message that signals to Blacks who are not chronically included that they are now a part of political racial group. It is not exclusive but it isn’t inclusive either.

H4: Blacks with some college exposed to the vaguely non-inclusive message of condition (4) will
have no change in their linked fate attitudes.

Chronically included Blacks—high SES Blacks—will express high levels of linked fate with the racial group across all the treatments because their interest embody the broader group interest. They will also express the highest levels of linked fate across all of the conditions because of their chronic inclusion as a part of the broader group interest. Regardless of the messages are targeted or vague they are less likely to be susceptible to episode change.

H5: Chronically included Blacks exposed to racialized political messages of conditions (1) to (4) will show no change in their linked fate attitudes

H6: Across all conditions, chronically included Blacks will express the highest levels of linked fate relative to other Blacks.

Results

In the experiment, linked fate is measured in the standard way-- by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they believe that what happens to Blacks in this country has something to do with what happens in their own lives (Dawson 1994). The strength of this attitude is then measured on a four point scale of none, not very much, some, and a lot. Linked fate is asked immediately following exposure to the experimental treatments. To assess my hypotheses, I simply conducted difference of means tests comparing the mean levels of linked fate.

4 Linked fate is asked as a two part question in the survey. In the first part of the question participants are asked: “Do you think what happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?” They are then given the option of indicate “yes” or “no.” If they respond “yes” then they are given the second part of the question. In the second part of the question they are asked: “You indicated that what happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life. Will it affect you a lot, some, or not very much?” They are given three answer responses: “a lot,” “some,” or “not very much.”
fate being expressed in the treatments to the mean linked fate reported in the control. The linked fate variable was also standardized to range from 0 to 1 to allow for clear assessment of the effect size of each treatment on the attitude. A significant difference between the condition mean and the treatment mean would indicate that the treatment has had an effect on linked fate attitudes. The differences in means across the experimental conditions are displayed in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Table 2 shows the data with Blacks aggregated as one category. The findings show that overall Blacks report an increase in their linked fate attitudes when they receive political messages about the aggregate racial group improving in higher education. The racialized political communication indicates that more Blacks are not only graduating from college but that they are also becoming a part of the chronically included which leads to higher expressions of political attachment with the racial group \( (M=.603, p<.05 \text{ (one-tailed)}) \) relative to the control \( (M=.511) \). These initial findings establish that strength of political connectedness with a racial group is significantly influenced by racialized political communication. How Black group interests are framed in the news media is vital because it determines the power that it will have on transitioning racial group identification into a meaning political attachment to a racial group. Yet, these basic findings do not provide a lot of information on the intra-group politics that are at play in the framing of political racial group interest. Dawson (1994) has argued that Blacks of

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5 These are tests between two sample means using a t-statistic. In this case the sample means are each of the linked fate means in the treatment and control conditions. To test for significance, the mean from each treatment is being compared to the control mean.
6 Linked fate ranges from 0 to 1 where 0 equals “no” linked fate, .333 equals “not very much”, .667 equals “some”, and 1 equals “a lot.”
7 The conventional level of significance is a p-value that is less than or equal to .05.
higher SES are more likely to express higher political attachment with the racial group. I contend that other Blacks, specifically moveable Blacks, will actually report higher levels of linked fate when the broader group interests have been defined in a way that is more inclusive of their interests. Also of importance is the framing of their issues in such a way that is legitimizes their circumstances in the same manner that is applied to the broader group interest (i.e. system blame). The next part of the results provide the disaggregated results based on salient group categorizations: chronically excluded, moveable Blacks, and chronically included.

In the second part of the analysis, I disaggregated the sample based on my categorizations of chronically excluded, moveable Blacks, and chronically included. The subset of moveable Blacks that are of interest in this analysis are those Blacks that have some college education. For the purposes of this paper, “some college” is defined as individuals that have started college but have not completed a bachelor’s degree from a four year institution. I use a conventional education measure in which I ask participants to indicate the highest degree that they have earned. Those participants who were considered having “some college” are those that indicated that they either have some college or that they have completed an associate’s degree from a junior or community college. Although those with an associate’s degree have received a collegiate degree I contend when collegiate graduates are typically discussed in political discourse they are referring to those individuals that have completed a bachelor’s degree. Chronically excluded Blacks and chronically included Blacks are also defined based on educational level.

Chronically excluded Blacks in this context are those Blacks that have not attended

8 To determine education level subjects were asked: “What is the highest degree that you have earned?” They were then offered six answer responses: grade school or less (0-8 grades), high school (12 grades or fewer, including non-college training if applicable), some college (13 grades or more but no degree), junior or community college (associate degree), college (Bachelor’s degree), advanced degree.
college at all. Based on the education question asked, chronically excluded Blacks were classified as those Blacks that have earned a high school diploma or less. Chronically included Blacks are those Blacks that indicated that they had earned a college degree, graduate degree, or a professional degree. These Blacks are high SES due to their educational attainment. Table 3 provides further justification for the categorization breakdown by also examining the importance of income distribution across the three categories of Blacks.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Table 3 is a contingency table for education and income for the experiment sample. Income was determined using a conventional measure in which participants were asked to indicate their total family income based on a five different income categories.9 Due to the small percentage of Blacks that made $70,000 or more the last two categories for income ($70,000-$119,000 and $120,000 or more) were collapsed into one category in Table 3. Table 3 shows that a significant amount of moveable Blacks with some college are not only without bachelor’s degrees but that they are also low-income. Approximately forty-nine percent of moveable Blacks have family incomes that are less than $34,999, forty percent with family incomes of $35,000-$69,999, and eleven percent with incomes of $70,000 or more. This is substantially different from the income distribution found for Blacks that are chronically included and Blacks that are chronically excluded. Sixty-five percent of chronically excluded Blacks are a part of the low-income category while the chronically included are distributed across each income category at roughly

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9 To determine income levels participants were asked: “Which of the income groups listed below best describes the total income of all members of your family living your house in 2011 before taxes? This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest and all other income. (IF UNCERTAIN: what would be your best guess)?” Participants were then given five income categories: less than $16,999, $17,000-$34,999, $35,000-$69,999, $70,000-$119,999, and $120,000 or more.
thirty percent per category. However, the chronically included have the largest percentage (37.12%) of individuals in the high-income category ($70,000 or more). This contingency table shows that the political messages in the treatments designed to target low-income college students are relatable to those Blacks with some college education. The appeals in the targeted conditions are “Black Like Me” appeals because they not only discuss their circumstances on an educational dimension but it is also targeted to their circumstances based on income.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Table 4 provides significant support for my hypotheses. The results in the control condition are consistent with previous work on linked fate attitudes. Dawson (1994) shows that high SES Blacks report the highest levels of linked fate relative to other Blacks. This is demonstrated in the control. Chronically excluded Blacks ($M=.466$) and moveable Blacks ($M=.455$) report lower levels of linked fate relative to chronically included Blacks ($M=.667$). Chronically included Blacks have a strong political attachment with the racial group due to the consistent incorporation of their issues as the broader group based issues. Chronically included Blacks report a high level of political connectedness with the racial group across all of the conditions in the third column of Table 4. Chronically included Blacks report high levels of linked fate regardless of the racialized political context due to their issues chronically shaping those of the political racial group (H5). In fact, their levels of linked fate are consistently the highest relative to chronically excluded Blacks and moveable Blacks (H6). The stability of the linked fate attitudes among the chronically included reiterates the effect that framing of the broader group interests can have on the strength of political connectedness that a Black
individual has with the racial group.

The results show that moveable Blacks are very responsive the framing of the broader group interest in racialized political communication. There is significant support that the framing of messages towards moveable Blacks indicating that they are included in the broader group interests leads to increases in their linked fate with the political racial group. Consistent with the third hypothesis, moveable Blacks that were exposed to the vaguely inclusive message about an increase in Black graduation rates reported significantly higher levels of linked fate ($M=.625$, $p<.05$ (two-tailed)) relative to the control. Additionally, the level of linked fate reported by moveable Blacks is statistically comparable in strength to the level of linked reported by chronically included Blacks in the same treatment ($M=.571$). Moveable Blacks reported higher levels of linked fate in this article because although the article discusses Blacks that have achieved more education than they have it does not problematize the circumstances of moveable Blacks. Moveable Blacks are not stigmatized because they have not finished college. The article also provides an indication that low-income Blacks are moving into the chronically included because many of them comprise portion of the Blacks in the article who have now graduated from college.

Targeted messages are also effective at heightening political attachment to the racial group among moveable Blacks. In the treatment in which moveable Blacks are presented with a targeted inclusive message about decreases in college graduation rates for low income Blacks they report high levels of linked fate ($M=.659$, $p<.05$ (two-tailed)) relative to the control ($M=.455$). Moveable Blacks in this treatment also report levels of linked fate that are statistically comparable to chronically included Blacks ($M=.615$). Both of these findings provide support for the second hypothesis (H2). The effectiveness of this political message on the
strength of political attachment expressed by moveable Blacks is its framing as a “Black Like Me” appeal.

In this context, the circumstances of moveable Blacks are being framed in politics as defining the broader group interest. There is acknowledgment that many low income Blacks are not completing college but the attribution of blame for this situation is that there seems to be some sort of external systemic factor. It is not the failings of moveable Blacks but that there are institutional failings that are responsible for this outcome. This political message does not stigmatize moveable Blacks for not graduating from college but it acknowledges the issues that they are facing with in higher education. As a result, moveable Blacks redefine the political racial group based on this message. The political message signals that the group’s broader based interests are much more reflective of their issues and in turn they report a stronger political attachment with the racial group. The findings from the vaguely inclusive treatment and this targeted inclusive treatment both demonstrate that there are segments of the Black community besides high SES Blacks can have high levels of linked fate. The levels of linked fate that are reported by moveable Blacks are highly influenced by the political context and messages that they receive. Those messages that show that they are being included as a part of the broader interest of the political racial group will shape the way they view group and their strength of linked fate.

The targeted inclusive message about increases in college graduation rates among low income Blacks leads to different results than those hypothesized. I hypothesized that this targeted message would appeal to moveable Blacks because this would be a “Black Like Me” appeal like the targeted inclusive message about decreases in college graduation rates for low income Blacks (H2). In the target inclusive message treatment that discusses increases in college
graduation rate for low-income Blacks moveable Blacks report a level of linked fate ($M= .521$) that is not statistically different from the control mean ($M= .455$). Although this is not consistent with my expectation I contend that the alternative finding can be explained by considering aspects of the political message that prevents it from being a “Black Like Me” appeal and to some degree problematizes the circumstances of moveable Blacks with some college education.

The emphasis on the success of low-income Blacks in the targeted inclusive message is not received as a “Black Like Me” appeal by moveable Blacks with some college education. The political message is indicates to them that there are low-income Blacks that have been able to complete college but within that same frame it also indicates there is a problem with those that have not. The article is sending a message that there doesn’t seem to be a valid reason for Blacks with some college to be struggling because there is a clear example of low-income Blacks that have been able to achieve without any hindrance by the system. Instead of moveable Blacks with some college seeing themselves reflected in the political messages it seems that the news frame is stigmatizing of their circumstance. The article does not provide any further information on why other low-income Blacks who start college may not be able to finish college. The low-income Blacks in the article that are able to graduate from college are also praised by the government institution on their accomplishment and used to define the broader group interest. The government acknowledgment does not include any commentary on the difficulties that low-income Blacks who have not finished college may be facing. I contend that although this appeal is positive this appeal is actually received as a negative. The framing of the political message about a specific set of moveable Blacks becoming part of the chronically included does not lead to a redefining of the political racial group for Blacks with some college. In fact, by highlighting
that some low income Blacks have received college degrees and become part of the chronically included problematizes the circumstances of low-income Blacks who have not been able to finish college.

The results also provide support for my hypothesis regarding the effectiveness of vaguely non-inclusive messages on moveable Blacks with some college education (H4). In the condition in which Blacks with some college were exposed to a vaguely non-inclusive message there was no significant difference in their linked fate attitudes ($M=.513$) relative to the control ($M=.455$). Receiving a political message about the decrease in graduation rates for Blacks did not create a “Black Like Me” appeal because it was not targeted. It is a very general statement about the Black community. The message does not provide any signals that moveable Blacks with some college are becoming anymore a part of the political racial group. It does not signal that that any set of moveable Blacks is becoming a part of the broader group interest. It is a not an exclusive message but it is also not inclusive either. It is a non-inclusive message. Consequently, the treatment does not lead to any significant increases in political attachment with the racial group for Blacks with some college education.

**Conclusion and Implications**

The importance of political context on the framing of political attachment for African Americans is part of linked fate narrative that has been overlooked in the literature. Thus far linked fate attitudes among Blacks have been treated as a static construct that is foundational for much of their group-based political behavior. The underlying assumption in this work is that African Americans are monolithic in their perception of the political racial group. The findings from this study demonstrate that there is much more variation in perception within the Black
community than previously understood.

Linked fate identification is malleable. In this study I demonstrate that a key mechanism for moving linked fate is political communication. The framing of political messages about the racial group can have significant consequences on linked fate attitudes. This movement occurs because the political racial group defines the broader group interest in such a way that certain segments of the Black population are not chronically included. There are those Blacks that find themselves regularly outside the boundaries of political Blackness (i.e. the chronically excluded). There are also those Blacks that are not chronically included and chronically excluded who I define as moveable Blacks. I demonstrate that moveable Blacks are uniquely susceptible to changes in their linked fate attitudes because they sit outside of both the chronically included and chronically excluded in political discourse. When political messages about the broader group interest are defined in terms of the interest of moveable Blacks they report higher levels of linked fate. These “Black Like Me” appeals signal to moveable Blacks that they are a part of the broader group interest and the political racial group has been redefined to be more inclusive of their issues. These “Black Like Me” appeals demonstrate to moveable Blacks have the ability to report levels of linked fate that are comparable to Blacks that are chronically included but it is highly influenced by the how the political racial group is defined in the political context.

The political implications for this study are numerous. First, moveable Blacks comprise a significant portion of the Black population which means that they are doing a lot of the work that goes in the linked fate politics. They also recognize that their interests are not always a priority when defining the broader group interest. It will be important for Black political elites and interest groups to be attentive to the types of appeals that they give about the racial group. Those appeals will be very influential for not only the activation of political attachment with the
racial group but the strength of the linked fate for moveable Blacks.

Linked fate has also been shown to have significant predictive power in Black political life including mobilization, policy attitudes, and support for African American candidates. High levels of linked fate increases the likelihood that Black individuals will act on behalf of the political racial group. Dawson (1994) shows that high SES Blacks are the most committed to racial group interest because they report the highest levels of linked fate relative to other Blacks but I demonstrate that they are not the only ones with a strong political attachment to the racial group. Moveable Blacks will also report high levels of linked fate when they see their issues are reflected in the broader group interest. My work is limited in that I have not demonstrated that these short-term changes in linked fate attitudes will also lead to changes in their linked fate. Testing for policy change would have been difficult due to the limited sample size of each category of Blacks (chronically included, chronically excluded and moveable Blacks). The treatment was also a very conservative test of the theoretical framework which seemed to have minimal effects on policy attitudes. In future work, I would want make the political messages stronger and explicitly policy oriented. I have preliminary experimental design that I would want to test in the next study.

The findings from this study also show that political communication also maintains linked fate. Previously, linked fate has been understood as a construct that is informed by the shared historical experiences of African Americans. This study demonstrates that political communication also serves an important role of informing and shaping linked fate. Individuals are updating their linked fate based on contemporary information like political communication. Political communication can in fact alter the distribution of linked for the political racial group. The levels of linked fate expressed by a Black individual will be influenced by the messages
received from political communication. The repetitive nature of political communication also maintains linked fate. Black individuals have to repeatedly assess their political connectedness to the racial group based on the varying political context. For instance, in a campaign seasons Black individuals may be repeatedly exposed to messages that appeal to their political connectedness with the racial group. The messages can shape the strength of that connection and the process of assessing one’s linked fate maintains the salience of this attitude in politics for Blacks. Further work is needed to be done on how linked fate is maintained over time.
Figure 1: Which Blacks Are Prone to Movement?

Which Blacks Are Prone to Movement?

- Chronically Excluded Blacks
  - LGBTQ
  - Intravenous Drug Users

- Moveable Blacks

- Chronically Included Blacks
  - High SES
Figure 2: Subset of “Moveable Blacks” Blacks with Some College Education
College Graduation Rates Increase Dramatically Across the Country for African Americans

By DAVID SMITH

WASHINGTON, DC- New data released by the Department of Education show that college graduation rates have increased dramatically for African American students across the nation. The percentage of African Americans graduating from U.S. colleges and universities has increased from 41 percent in 2007 to 60.5 percent in 2011. This is an all-time high for African American students and the greatest increase that has been observed over a four year period. African American college students have been viewed in the past as a group that is often struggling in higher education. Many observers believe that this increase is a major step forward for improving racial disparities. "By most measures we've seen substantial improvement in recent years toward the goal of equitable minority participation and success in higher education," said Robert Williams, the U.S. Deputy Secretary for The Department of Education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Facebook Technology (N=103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaguely Inclusive Message (1)</td>
<td>Increase in College Graduation Rates for Blacks (N=100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Inclusive Message (2)</td>
<td>Increase in College Graduation Rates for Low Income Blacks (N=104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Inclusive Message (3)</td>
<td>Decrease in College Graduation Rates for Low Income Blacks (N=104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaguely Non-Inclusive Message (4)</td>
<td>Decrease in College Graduation Rates for Blacks (N=102)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Differences of Means Test: Linked Fate Means and Standard Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.511</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaguely Inclusive Message (1)</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase in College Graduation Rates for Blacks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Inclusive Message (2)</td>
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<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in College Graduation Rates for Low Income Blacks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Inclusive Message (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decrease in College Graduation Rates for Low Income Blacks</td>
<td>(.035)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaguely Non-Inclusive Message (4)</td>
<td>.520</td>
<td>102</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decrease in College Graduation Rates for Blacks</td>
<td>(.038)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = p < .05 (one-tailed test). Treatment means are compared to the control mean to test significance. Linked fate is coded to range from 0 to 1 where 0 equals “no linked fate,” .333 equals “not very much”, .667 equals “some” and 1 equals “a lot of linked fate. Participants were randomly assigned to treatments.
Table 3: Contingency Table of Education and Income for Experiment Sample\textsuperscript{11}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chronically Excluded High School or Less</th>
<th>Moveable Blacks Some College/ Junior College</th>
<th>Chronically Included College or More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>34,999 or less</td>
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<td>170</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>35,000-69,999</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70,000 or more</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>75</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{11} The number in each cell is the number of participants that fall into that intersecting income and educational category.
Table 4: Difference of Means Test of Linked Fate Across Conditions Controlling for Group Categorization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chronically Excluded High School or Less (N)</th>
<th>Moveable Blacks Some College/ Junior College (N)</th>
<th>Chronically Included College or More (N)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.488</td>
<td>.455</td>
<td>.667</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>(52)</td>
<td>(23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vaguely Inclusive Message</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase in College Graduation Rates for Blacks</td>
<td>.580</td>
<td>.625**</td>
<td>.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>(56)</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted Inclusive Message</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in College Graduation Rates for Low Income Blacks</td>
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<td>.521</td>
<td>.675</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(26)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted Inclusive Message</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in College Graduation Rates for Low Income Blacks</td>
<td>.405</td>
<td>.659**</td>
<td>.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vaguely Non-Inclusive Message</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in College Graduation Rates for Blacks</td>
<td>.315</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td>.656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(52)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**=p<.05 (two-tailed test). Treatment means compared to control means to test significance. Linked fate is coded to range from 0 to 1 where 0 equals “no linked fate,” .333 equals “not very much”, .667 equals “some” and 1 equals “a lot of linked fate. Participants were randomly assigned to treatments.