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The New Racism in the Media: a Discourse Analysis of Newspaper Commentary on Race, Presidential Politics, and Welfare Reform

Joseph P. Rose
Georgia State University

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THE NEW RACISM IN THE MEDIA: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER

COMMENTARY ON RACE, PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS, AND WELFARE REFORM

by

JOSEPH ROSE

Under the Direction of Dr. Anthony Hatch

ABSTRACT

The presidency of Barack Obama has given racial framing in the news media a new salience particularly because of the role that media coverage plays in shaping ideas about race. The racial framing that unfolds through the news media reflects new forms of racism that work to justify and explain racial inequalities without explicit references to race. In this study, I analyze the media discussion of welfare reform following a 2012 Mitt Romney attack advertisement that claimed that President Obama "gutted" welfare reform. I use discourse analysis to analyze the prevalence of controlling imagery, colorblind racist rhetoric, and the white racial frame in 91 prominent newspaper articles and political blogs that discussed this controversial advertisement. This study aims to contribute to sociological knowledge about specific language and strategies used by the media to perpetuate racism, and to demonstrate the relationship between political and social welfare discourse and racial ideologies.

INDEX WORDS: Obama, Romney, Campaign, Colorblind racism, White racial frame, Controlling images

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JOSEPH ROSE

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JOSEPH ROSE

Committee Chair:	Anthony Hatch
Committee:	Adia Harvey
	Wendy Simonds

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Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my partner, Jenny Rose, and my parents, Elaine and Glen

Penton, who provided me with unwavering support. I also dedicate this thesis to my children,

Cohen Justice and Ephraim Sojourner, who motivate me to be my best.

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1   INTRODUCTION

Ronald Reagan was a master of using non-racial language to discuss racialized social policies. In his 1976 presidential run, Reagan brought the term "welfare queen" to a national audience while describing a woman on Chicago's South Side, a predominantly African American area. Reagan stated, "She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards, and is collecting benefits on four deceased husbands… She's collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names" (Douglas and Michaels, 2004: 18). He similarly spoke of a fancy housing project with a gym and a swimming pool (Levin 2013), and referred to the outrage of "working people" when the "strapping young buck" in front of them in line at the grocery store was buying T-bone steaks with food stamps. Reagan later changed this anecdote to refer to "some young fellow," due to the explicitly racial nature of the epithet "buck" (Carter 1999; López 2014).

These images and anecdotes are now permanently etched into American racial memory. This type of rhetoric was part of a broader political strategy to combat progressive anti-poverty programs from the 1960s that stoked racial fears and drew white America's attention to racial minority groups who were thought of as the primary recipients of welfare assistance (Gilliam 1999; Hancock 2003; López 2014). The news media used racialized images such as the welfare queen to create an emotionally charged political climate hostile to African American mothers and welfare recipients (Sparks 1998; Hancock 2004). Ultimately, these racial frames and images were an integral part of public support for cuts to welfare benefits (Gilens 1999; Gilliam 1999; Hancock 2004).

Welfare discussions have historically accompanied negatively constructed racial images that became linked to the presumed beneficiaries of the social safety net (Williams 1994; Gilens 1999; Clawson and Trice 2000). This theme emerged during the 1990s debates about welfare reform when the Clinton administration and Republican House Leader Newt Gingrich brokered major changes to social welfare policies such as placing a time limit on cash assistance and instituting new work requirements. While Representative Gingrich was campaigning for these changes to take place, he called on more negative images: "No civilization can survive for long with twelve-year-olds having babies, fifteen-years killing one another, seventeen-year-olds dying of AIDS, and eighteen-year-olds getting diplomas they can't read. Yet every night on the local news, you and I watch the welfare state undermining our society" (Gingrich 1995: 8-9). In addition, Gingrich suggested that poor African Americans needed to "change their habits" when it comes to wealth (Merida 1995), advocated denying welfare to women who had children out of wedlock or had more children while already on government assistance (U.S. House 1994), and suggested that children should be put in orphanages as an alternative to welfare (Jehl 1994). Gingrich was eventually successful in making some of his proposed changes to welfare with the help of President Clinton. These changes made welfare much harder to obtain for the poor, and in particular added a burdensome work requirement to welfare recipients (Blank 2002). After its passage, the media quickly labeled welfare reform a success, but continued to link welfare with African Americans, without explicitly framing the reform in racial terms (Clawson and Trice 2000; Shcrame and Soss 2001).

In 2008, the United States made history by electing its first African American President. Unsurprisingly, racial frames and racialized rhetoric were an important part of the presidential race, with the media spending extensive time on Obama's racial background,

religion, and the question of whether white America would vote for a Black person as president (Cobb 2000; Wingfield and Feagin 2010; Hughey 2012; McKittrick 2012). Welfare was also briefly mentioned in the 2008 Presidential race, such as when an ad for Senator McCain claimed that, "Obama [will raise] taxes on seniors [and] hard-working families to give welfare to those who pay none" (YouTube 2008). Four years later, as Obama was locked in a struggle for re-election against Mitt Romney, racialized rhetoric about welfare issues reemerged again after a Romney campaign ad accused Barack Obama of "quietly gutting" welfare reform during his time as president. In an ad that emerged late into the campaign, in August 2012, Romney claimed, "Under Obama's plan, you wouldn't have to work, and wouldn't have to apply for a job. They just send you your welfare check" (YouTube 2012). In actuality, Obama's policy merely gave states slightly more freedom in how they administered their welfare work requirements (Politifact 2012). Nonetheless, this claim and the ensuing debate became a topic of extensive media coverage in the months leading up to the election.

Since the civil rights era, critical race scholars have observed that a new, more subtle racism has become the dominant racial paradigm that works to justify and explain racial inequalities without explicit references to race. It is in the context of this new racism that public discussions on welfare have taken place, with politicians producing subtly racist discourses linking race and social welfare policies that were then circulated widely via the news media (Gilens 1999; Wingfield and Feagin 2013).

In order to see the impact of the new racism in discussions of welfare reform, it is important to observe a mouthpiece of elites: the news media. Newspapers and political commentary websites played a prominent role in the public discourse on welfare reform following Romney's ad. Historically, newspapers have been the primary source of news for

Americans. Newspapers have been an important agent of change, affecting policy, public opinion, society as a whole (Wallace 2005). In response to changing technology, many newspapers have moved online. Young people in particular are now getting their news from the internet, and political discourse on the internet has an observable impact on how people seek information and engage in political participation (Johnson, Zhang, and Bichard 2010; Bakker and Vreese 2011). While cable news is the most popular single source of news, the combined number of people who seek their news from the internet and who use printed newspapers is greater than those that use cable news, and these two sources cover a wider spectrum of people (Pew 2012).

In this thesis, I examine the discourses about race and social welfare in the 2012 presidential campaign, focusing explicitly on how media outlets framed discussion of welfare reform in the months following Romney's ad in ways that are consistent with the new racism. I argue that the news media specifically, and political discourse more generally, perpetuates forms of new racism while simultaneously condemning older, more explicit forms of racism. I draw upon cultural and media studies and critical race theory to guide my analysis of the following research question: How did media outlets use discourses about welfare reform and electoral politics to perpetuate the new racism in the 2012 presidential race? While previous research has helped to illuminate many racial tools used by the media, this study demonstrates the media's use of several specific racial themes in an electoral and policy context. This is valuable because policy discussion can have an enormous impact on public opinion, affecting political and racial realities, and influencing personal consequences for millions of Americans (Patterson,1997; Wallace 2005; Chong and Druckman 2007).

2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ANALYSIS

This study is grounded in two bodies of social research: 1) cultural and media studies and 2) critical race theory, particularly in regard to controlling images, colorblind racism, and the white racial frame. In order to outline this study's sociological foundations I will review several concepts from these fields which have been essential for our current understanding of race and politics in the media.

2.1   The News Media as a Political Actor

The news media have become a primary site and source of modern political discourse. This is in part due to a weakening of state-based political institutions, and the media's eagerness to organize political information in a way that is interpretive and profitable (Patterson 1997). In our society, the media are corporate-owned by powerful elites who wield great influence over modern life and governance. According to Patricia Hill Collins (1991), the ability to define symbols is a major instrument of power, and elites use this power to legitimize systems of oppression. Media and cultural studies scholars have studied the way that elites use the media to support the status quo at length. While the media may have initially only contributed to public debate by signaling events, now the media lead consumers to develop new understandings of public events and social policy (Patterson 1997). Ultimately, the media have grown to the extent that they have forced most mainstream political expression and discourse to take place in media space, fitting within the logic and structure that media elites set forth (Benson 2004). In contemporary media coverage, there is a significant focus on politics rather than governance, and on controversies rather than social conditions. Currently, interpretive style journalism is the dominant style of reporting in the U.S, with facts and interpretation intermingled together in

reports, giving the powerful elites behind media corporations even more opportunity to affect public opinion and political institutions (Patterson 1997; Callaghan and Schnell 2010).

The media shape public opinion through the framing of news events and through analysis. *Framing* is the conscious, strategic effort to fashion meaningful accounts of events and the issues at hand in order to legitimate certain perspectives and actions (Williamson 2011**).** Commentary and "punditry" are closely related to framing. Research confirms that the way in which a news story is reported has effects on the perspective and reaction of those listening. For example, consumers were found to be more open to a KKK rally when the news story discussing it framed the rally as a free speech issue (Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997). Another study demonstrated that certain portrayals of minorities prime racial attitudes, influencing evaluations of politicians by juxtaposing crime stories involving a minority with political stories (Valentino 1999). Framing and discussion are therefore a powerful force in forming public opinion.

Through the selection and discussion of issues and events, the media are able to construct social reality, guiding the public to act in ways that are most beneficial to those who control the media (Scheufele 1999). Framing and commentary are important because data indicate that the general population is ill informed, ambivalent, and contradictory on political issues, and that relatively small changes in the presentation of an issue can have an enormous impact on people's responses to political or social issues (Chong and Drukman 2007). The media can therefore frame issues in such a way that reinforces dominant understandings about race and justifies existing racial hierarchies. Specifically, the framing of race in the news media is part of a broader manifestation of race relations that have developed in our society in the past few decades, what critical race scholars call a "new" racism.

2.2 The New Racism

In the contemporary United States, most whites consider racism to be a problem of the past, and strongly condemn any acts of explicit racial discrimination while disavowing racism personally. Racial epithets and direct claims of genetic/biological racial inferiority have become unpopular. Despite society's racial and cultural progress in some areas, critical race scholars have observed new forms of racism that have evolved to continue perpetuating racial inequality. Patricia Hill Collins (2005) used the term "new racism" to describe this evolution of racism. According to Collins, the new racism is defined by three contemporary social realities: 1) corporatization and the concentration of capital, 2) globalization and the concentration of political power, and 3) a heavy reliance on mass media manipulation of ideas and perpetuation of hegemonic ideologies indicating that racism is no longer a problem.

This new, more covert form of racism can be observed in every facet of society, and has been thoroughly documented by critical race scholars. In this new racial paradigm, mechanisms that reproduce racial inequality have become largely invisible to many people (Shapiro 2004), while "safe minorities" gain prominent positions that signify a post-racial society (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Meanwhile, some whites also consider themselves to be victims of anti-white "reverse racism," in a zero-sum game of racial relations (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Norton 2011) The government also enforces the new racism. For instance, there has been a rearticulation of certain aspects of racism from the Jim Crow period, such as mass incarceration of African Americans (Alexander 2010), a re-segregation of public schools (Kozol 1991; Orfield and Eaton 1996) and continuing segregation of neighborhoods (Massey and Denton, 1993), and an assault on the voting opportunities for many people of color (Weiser and Nordon 2011).

The government's role in the new racism can also be observed in the erosion of the social safety net that was originally developed in part as a response to severe racial inequality. While corporate and business welfare (as in subsidies that benefit business owners) is reaching record highs (DeHaven 2012), we have seen welfare benefits slashed, in part due to the racialized anti-welfare campaigns discussed earlier in this thesis (Gillam 1999).

Whites are able to justify racial inequality within the framework of new racism because of very specific beliefs about the legacy of the civil rights movement and where that has put racial relations today (Kovel 1985). Specifically, whites laud the civil rights movement, and consider it successfully completed, meaning that racial inequality as it exists today is often due to a failure on the part of minorities (Brown et. al 2003; Winter 2000). Even well-intentioned white liberals preach that color doesn't matter, invalidating the experiences of minority groups, and preventing long-term racial reconciliation by attempting to speak a non-existent reality into existence as a quick fix (Williams 1997).

2.3 Controlling Images

Collins (1991) wrote about an important theme in contemporary race relations linked to the new racism, particularly its reliance on the mass media: controlling images of African American women that are created and disseminated through the media. Only the powerful have the media resources necessary to spread stereotypes and influence public thought in this way. According to Collins, the media are key in perpetuating controlling images that enable the domination of minority groups. Using negative controlling images, African Americans (and other marginalized people) are turned into "others," or cultural outsiders. These images are often gendered and heavily influenced by class. Collins detailed the background and reality of the images of the pushy and aggressive "bitch," the bad (Black) mother, the submissive modern

"mammy," the Black lady, the "educated bitch," the athlete, the criminal, the sissy, and the

sidekick. The media replicate images such as the mammy and the criminal in order to make

sexism, classism, and racism seem natural.

The use of controlling images is important to understanding racism in the news media, as

it is a tool that has been historically used by those seeking to preserve the racial status quo

(Collins 2005) persist in contemporary media practices (Collins 1991). Walker (2005) expanded

on the concept of controlling images, writing that images are created by the dominant group

without the consent of an oppressed group in order to justify current power relations specifically

by preying on the vulnerabilities of the oppressed. Numerous studies have demonstrated the

substantial impact and pervasiveness of the media's dissemination of controlling images

(Signorielli 1997; Sparks 1998; Haskell 1999; Kilborne 1999; Cape 2003; Crawford & Unger

2004).

2.4   Colorblind Racism

It is within the context of the new racism that whites have developed new frameworks, or

ideologies, for understanding and talking (or not talking) about race. One such ideology is

colorblind racism. Bonilla-Silva (2006) defines colorblind racism through four central frames.

Abstract liberalism frames racial issues in a classical liberal sense involving abstract concepts

such as equality and individualism, while opposing practical steps to address racial inequality.

Naturalization frames racial inequality as natural occurring phenomena. *Cultural racism*

attributes racial inequality to supposed cultural differences between races, and *minimization of*

racism involves suggesting that racism no longer has a substantial impact in the lives of racial

minorities. Bonilla-Silva's (2006) exploration of colorblind racism revealed that young, liberal

whites seem to make fuller and more extensive use of the rhetorical tools available to them through colorblind racism.

2.5   The White Racial Frame and the Obama Presidency

Adia Harvey Wingfield and Joe Feagin (2013) analyzed how racial frames and concepts were mobilized in the 2008 presidential election, providing valuable insight into the connection between contemporary racism and electoral politics. Working from the understanding that racism is fundamental and foundational to our society, Feagin (2006) defined the white racial frame as "an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate" (p. 25). Through the white racial frame, people see whites as inherently superior, and understand race along gendered lines (Wingfield and Feagin 2013). Wingfield and Feagin argued that the white racial frame could be seen through the expressions of both traditional (or "hard") and contemporary (or "soft") forms of racism in the 2008 election. Hard racial framing resembled the older, more explicit forms of racism, whereas soft racial framing used a colorblind framework to drum up white opposition to Obama's campaign. The 2008 presidential campaign involved more racial imagery than any election in recent history, and Obama's white opponents (including those in the news media) were more than happy to use racist imagery to attack him, including the controlling images of the dangerous Black man. The media participated in and helped to develop these colorblind frameworks, perpetuating negative images, all the while declaring Obama's campaign and victory as "post-racial," cementing the new racism in regard to presidential politics.

The second edition of Wingfield and Feagin's book (2013) demonstrates the continuing impact of racism and the white racial frame in U.S. electoral politics after Obama's 2008 election. Obama's policies were moderate and pragmatic, in part because of the delicate political

position he was in due to his race. He faced severe and often racialized criticism from the left

and the right. The primaries involved a significant amount of racialized language. One prominent

example of this was return of Newt Gingrich to national politics, using racialized language such

as the "food stamp president." The white racial frame was observable in the 2012 election when

Republicans used a multi-pronged strategy: Romney supposedly focusing on policy issues, while

other conservative groups engaged in racial and "culture war" attacks. However Romney

continued to make subtly racial remarks emphasizing his position as a "real" American (ibid). He

also criticized the supposed 47% of the country who don't pay certain types of taxes as moochers

who will therefore always vote for Obama in order to support their lifestyle (a critique often

leveled at African American voters as well.) The overwhelmingly white media were complicit in

these attacks, frequently making use of the white racial frame throughout Obama's first term and

the 2012 election cycle.

2.6   Race in the News Media

As Collins and other critical race scholars described, the media have been active

participants in this new racism, condemning overt discrimination or use of epithets, while at the

same time implementing tokenism, presenting negative imagery of people of color, and

minimizing anti-Black discrimination (Entman 1990; Collins 1991; Chiricos and Eschholz

2002). The elite-run news media use their status as political actors in order to influence the

public by implementing racialized language and imagery. Media scholars have demonstrated this

phenomenon by performing analyses of the news.

Several studies demonstrate that media framing affects how consumers understand and

view race. For example, Gilliam (1999) discovered that by changing the race of a welfare

recipient in a news story, consumers had markedly different perspectives on the individual

recipient and welfare as a program. Research indicates that in addition to altering opinions, news media can activate racial stereotypes that are linked to policy positions in news consumers (Domke 1999). To further exacerbate racial relations, the news media often uses negative framing to represent them (Entman,1990; Chiricros 2002).

The new racism can be observed through negative representation of minorities in media portrayals, and media scholars have done ample research in order to unveil such representation. Ted Chiricos and Sarah Eschholz (2002) examined how the local news media in Orlando was framing its crime reports in regard to race. The study found that news programing presented crime suspects of color in more threatening contexts than white suspects. Programs also were more likely to present people of color as criminals than victims or role models. Chiricos and Eschholz (2002) used several metrics to conduct their study, and found a significant racial bias in the presentation of criminal suspects and framing of stories.

Robert Entman defined the concept "modern racism," which is useful because it considers the more subtle form of contemporary racism, but applies it directly to the media and politics. According to Entman (1990), modern racist institutions appear to oppose traditional racism (such as beliefs in genetic racial inferiority) but then further other types of anti-Black sentiment. Modern racists express a lack of sympathy with African Americans and their political goals and well-being. They suggest that African Americans tend to be poor and face other problems because of individual and cultural deficiencies. From the perspective of a modern racist, discrimination is largely a thing of the past. Therefore, special rights and privileges should not be granted to African Americans. Modern racism as a concept is therefore similar to, but unique from other critical race theories in its focus on institutional white resentment to continued claims on sympathy and resources made by African Americans. To demonstrate that the media

as an institution further what he called modern racist sentiment, Entman (1990) collected a week of news programming in Chicago and found that African Americans were consistently given negative treatment in news regarding crime and Black politics. In addition, he observed a trend of using African American anchors who presented as middle or upper class and did not appear to sympathize with the African Americans being negatively portrayed, bolstering the idea that racial discrimination is no longer an important factor in Black people's lives.

Media representations of white America are more diverse and positive than images depicting Blacks (Entman 1994). News programs provide coverage that depicts African Americans as more threatening that whites, and Black activists and leaders as more demanding than comparable white activists and leaders (Entman 1990). Furthermore, the widespread hiring of Black media personalities exacerbates the problem by using tokenism and featuring successful and wealthy African Americans, implying that people of color have a voice in the public discourse, downplaying the effects of employment discrimination, and therefore making it appear that racial discrimination and segregation are no longer significant problems (Entman 1992). This practice contributes to and reinforces the ideologies behind the new racism, which explain the lack of wealth and power of African Americans as cultural or personal deficiencies rather than discrimination, and serve to oppress African Americans and elevate whiteness in new, more socially acceptable ways.

While previous research has helped to illuminate the racial tools used by the media, this study will update and expand upon our understanding of the media's racial framing and perpetuation of new racism in policy discussions in electoral politics. I will demonstrate their use of controlling imagery, colorblind-racist rhetoric and the white racial frame, and its connection to the racist rhetoric used in the 1990s when discussing welfare reform. I will

examine a specific and contemporary example of the new racism in the media: how newspaper media outlets used discourses about race to frame their coverage of welfare reform and construct racial ideologies in the 2012 presidential race.

The racial discourses observed in this study are particularly important because of the impact of election coverage in determining the outcome of elections, in addition to the role that attitudes about Blacks play in shaping whites' policy preferences. Finally, this study is situated in a uniquely relevant historical setting, because three years with an African American incumbent has provided opportunity to observe racially charged partisan attacks and backlash towards one of the most prominent potential changes in power dynamics between races in recent history.

3   RESEARCH METHODS

Discourse analysis is a qualitative methodology in which a scholar interprets meanings of texts in relation to the systems of power that shape and form them (Hoy 1999). Discourse analysis involves the systematic study of texts to find out how the meaning and presentation of words create social reality. It is an interpretive research methodology that explores how ideas and objects constitute social reality within historical relationships of power (Foucault 1970; Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004). Theorists who engage in discourse analysis are often intentionally ambiguous about the specific methods involved in this methodology, providing a flexible set of methods with a significant divergence in their execution by scholars (Hoy 1999; Perakyla 2005). This flexibility will allow me to analyze the underlying assumptions and power dynamics that were involved in the production of the text, providing a more contextualized interpretation (Foucault 1970; Hartsock 1990; Hoy 1998; Seale 1998; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011).

I use NVivo 10.0 to code, analyze, and document patterns of meaning that are consistent with the three sets of themes related to the new racism I outlined earlier: controlling images, colorblind racist rhetoric, and the white racial frame. I use these three themes of new racism along with historical context to document patterns of racial discourses constructed by the media. Ultimately, I analyze the racial discourse on welfare reform not to uncover what pundits think about the issue, but rather to understand how racial meanings are created and articulated through media discourse. In terms of controlling images, I document the use of racial imagery and stereotypes found in the articles and compare them to the controlling images explained by Collins (2005): "bitch," the bad (Black) mother, the modern "mammy," the Black lady, the "educated bitch," the athlete, the criminal, the sissy, the sidekick. Rather than attempting to document all manifestations of colorblind racism, I record instances of specific examples colorblind racist rhetoric provided by Bonilla-Silva (2006): ambivalence, incoherence, double-talk, projection and anecdote. For the white racial frame, I look specifically for four pillars demonstrated by Feagin (2010) that directly relate to ideas of white superiority: meanings consistent with a belief in white morality (or a lack of morality in other races); a belief in western civilization and white institutions as the pinnacle of human accomplishment; the assumption of whiteness and white emotions as the norm; and a denial of the prevalence of racism. In addition to these frames, I document any emergent themes that are germane to my research questions. I also work to reveal and document relevant discursive information that is excluded or missing from the mainstream media discourses, providing a more complete analysis (Rheinharz, 1992; Weiss, 1994; Charmaz 2010). A chart chronicling these classifications is available in appendix A.

4   DATA AND ANALYTIC PROCESS

I use discourse analysis to analyze all of the articles of the eight most circulated U.S. newspapers and five most visited political websites with unique content that discussed welfare reform and the 2012 Presidential race from August 7th -November 7th 2012, the three months leading up to the presidential election from the August 7th release of the initial Romney ad accusing Obama of "gutting" welfare reform. Using LexisNexisand Google website search, I have accessed all of the articles that dedicate more than a single sentence to discussing or explaining welfare reform and its effects, a total of 91 articles. The articles are listed in appendix B.

Using NVivo 10.0, I sort and label articles into three thematic codes: controlling imagery, colorblind racist rhetoric, and the white racial frame. After initially sorting the articles, I carefully reread all of them for overlapping themes and alternative interpretations, sometimes placing articles into multiple categories. As I reread the articles I also recorded any other themes of the new racism that do not fit into my previously mentioned categories. In each article I will make note of the person and position of power that the discourses are coming from, such as a media figure, a politician, or an academic. Additionally, I explore important themes that are being excluded from these mainstream media discourses.

5   RESULTS

5.1   Summary of Findings

Here are the recorded occurrences of new racist criteria in analyzed articles, including the emergent theme of anti-racism:

Table 1: Results

Controlling Images	Colorblind Racist Rhetoric	White Racial Frame	Anti-Racism
Any stereotype or controlling image that can be used to oppress minority groups or turn them into cultural outsiders, such as: "bitch," the bad mother, the Black lady, the modern "mammy," the "educated bitch," the athlete, the criminal, the sissy, and the sidekick	Ambivalence: 1 Anecdote: 3 Double-talk: 4 Incoherence: 1 Projection: 1	meanings consistent with a belief in white morality: 8 a belief of western civilization and white institutions as the pinnacle of human accomplishment: 7 the assumption of whiteness and white emotions as the norm: 5 a denial of the prevalence of racism: 3	Articles where racism was identified as relevant to the welfare reform debate, and subsequently condemned.
TOTAL: 3 articles	TOTAL: 10 occurrences in 7 articles	TOTAL: 23 occurrences in 14 articles	TOTAL: 10 articles

In my analysis, I confirmed several ways that media elites create and articulate racial meanings and through media discourse. In undertaking this study I asked how media outlets use discourses about welfare reform and electoral politics to perpetuate the new racism in the 2012 presidential race. I found that they do this, at least in part, through use of controlling imagery, colorblind racist rhetoric, and the white racial frame. Some of these articles had strong similarities with the articles that initially reported on welfare reform in the 90s, strengthening my argument about historically rooted racist discourse. I also discovered an emerging theme of anti-racism and the omission of the voices of poor people and people of color.

Despite featuring explicit use of controlling imagery, colorblind racist rhetoric, and the white racial frame, the vast majority of the articles were from a seemingly unbiased horse-race (competitive) election perspective, often providing very little policy or cultural commentary. Significant attention was given to Romney's welfare ad, and the more conservative publications

were more likely to sympathize with Romney's assertion that Obama is scaling back welfare reform. Most of the publications largely failed to critique the harmful effects of welfare reform, instead focusing on the accuracy of Romney's assertions, or the extent that Obama has changed welfare reform. Supposedly non-partisan fact-check articles were common, and avoided references to race, while overwhelmingly siding with the position of the Obama administration that the ad was factually incorrect.

The in-depth policy discussion that actually did take place was highly partisan in nature, but also avoided direct references to race. As a matter of fact, some of the authors attempting to defend Obama did so by arguing that he has been hard on welfare recipients, under the racist assumptions that those who receive welfare are lazy. The exception to this theme were the ten articles that were explicitly anti-racist, acknowledging that welfare reform is a racialized issue, and condemning the racism of welfare's opponents. These anti-racist articles were exclusively liberal/pro-Obama in nature. Furthermore, a significant amount of commentary was given "second-hand" by authors and publications. In such articles, authors would feature quotes by politicians and pundits that may or may not differ from their political persuasion, providing space for new racist ideologies.

5.2   Controlling Images

In the new system of racism, gaining rights has led to a new set of controlling images. This can be observed, for example, through the image of welfare queen. While controlling images are often associated with popular mass media aimed at African Americans, these images have also developed as a central component of racialized arguments surrounding welfare in U.S. discourses. Through pushback against poverty assistance that African Americans fought for, and political maneuvers intended to portray African Americans as the primary recipients of

government aid, Reagan's welfare queen has become one of the most prominent examples of controlling images. The welfare queen, which is associated with Collins' image of the bad (Black) mother, also demonstrates the gendered nature of racialized controlling images. Images like these are used to portray minorities as the undeserving recipients of a disproportionate amount of government assistance.

It is in that context that we saw instances of controlling imageries in the articles that I analyzed. One example of a controlling image was in the article "America has Become an Entitlement Society" (Borelli 2012). While talking about the "culture of dependency," the author writes about an interview of an Obama supporter:

> Responding to a question about her phone, she said, 'Yes! Everybody in Cleveland, low [income] minorities, got Obama phone. Keep Obama in president, you know? He gave us a phone!' Not surprisingly, she had a negative opinion of Mitt Romney, saying, 'Romney, he sucks! Bad!'

In this article, the author intentionally provides the race of Obama supporters while connecting their support to welfare gain. His chosen quotes use language that can be attributed to uneducated people, and claims that "those on the receiving end of government support will vote for Obama." This is the image of African Americans, Obama supporters, and welfare recipients that the author choses to present us with.

In another article, "A Poverty of Imagination," Laconte (2012) features a homeless drug addict that sold his government-provided clean needles to buy more drugs. The author claims that this addict, along with many other poor people, "don't even dare to hope for a measure of dignity or purpose in their lives." While Laconte does not explicitly state the homeless man's race (his name is Walter), he writes about him in the context of urban poor recipients of government aid, and indicates that these problems plague "particularly black America." He calls

the government's continued support of programs that provide material relief to people like this homeless man a "moral atrocity."

Several other articles invoke the controlling image of the lazy welfare recipient. In "Jordan- 'Poor Policies' from White House Caused Food Stamps Increase," (Bachman and Hobin 2012) Representative Jordan does so more explicitly, painting welfare recipients as people lacking a "work ethic" and adherents to a "culture of dependency." He repeatedly indicates that the government must force welfare recipients to work, and that they avoid employment if possible. This reference to a culture of dependency without a direct reference to race can be considered racial coding, but without more context it would be difficult to label them as explicitly using racialized controlling imagery.

It is clear that controlling images are still used to perpetuate the status quo in racial discourses. The example in "America has Become an Entitlement Society" is a clear reference to the welfare queen, a minority woman taking advantage of government benefits for personal gain. The image also bolsters Borelli**'s** partisan argument – it implies that President Obama won the election by bribing poor minorities that seek personal gain rather than the good of society through their civic participation. This sentiment was expressed repeatedly by various pundits and by Romney himself on several occasions, such as the infamous 47% speech and his post-election claim that he lost because Obama promised "gifts" to key demographic groups including African Americans, Hispanics and young women. This racist image of greedy minorities who are bought by Democrats through welfare works to enflame hostility against the political goals of African Americans and breeds opposition to social welfare programs.

The image of the homeless man featured in "A Poverty of Imagination" is similar to Collins' criminal. The author creates a frightening image of a dangerous 'hustler' who takes

advantage of government aid and is to blame for his problems. It justifies mass incarceration, and promotes the notion that poor minorities cannot be trusted with items of any value, even cheap items like needles that are intended to improve public health. In the 91 newspaper articles I analyzed, 88 of the articles did not contain explicit controlling images, which is encouraging. Unfortunately, those three articles with controlling images made it clear that racialized controlling images are still used to perpetuate inequality and inhibit the political goals of the oppressed.

5.3   Colorblind Racist Rhetoric

Seven articles engaged in the types of colorblind rhetoric mentioned in this paper that are used in order to justify racial inequality. Bonilla-Silva observed that when whites are confronted about racism, they sometimes accuse Black people of being prejudice, projecting their racism on to them. This pattern exists in the news media as well, such as when media personalities refer to the "Plantation of the Democratic Party," term that suggests that anti-poverty efforts led by African Americans are actually racist against African Americans and aim to ensnare the poor in dependency, or when Glenn Beck, the founder of one of the publications I am analyzing (The Blaze) claimed in 2009 that Barack Obama has a deep seated hatred of white people. In another example, in "The Racist Canard," Lowry (2012) defends Romney ads that were under attack for being racist. He claims that due to the desperation of Obama supporters, the campaign has moved from the "silly season" to the "racist season." In a case of projection, he argues against the claim that Romney's welfare attacks are racially motivated, writing, "According to this twisted reasoning, the Obama ads hitting Romney for wanting to end Medicare as we know it must be a naked racial appeal, the dastardly 'othering' of Romney's plans for entitlement

reform." Projection allows whites to express their opposition to racial justice by shifting their feelings of animosity and the blame to others.

The use of colorblind-racist anecdote is often similar to the use of controlling images. In the previously mentioned articles, "A Poverty of Imagination" and "America has become an entitlement society," the controlling images that the authors use of a homeless man and an Obama supporter are anecdotes meant to explain and justify inequality. A third article, "The Birthplace of Obama the Politician," by Paul Tough (2012), tells a slightly more sympathetic story about the poor people living in Chicago, but still tells stories that indicate that their situation is due at least in part to "shortsighted personal decisions." Rather than using statistical data about race, poverty, homelessness, and voting trends, some authors opt to tell stories that reinforce their position.

Several articles I labeled as containing colorblind racist rhetoric featured politicians making statements on the campaign trail. Perhaps the most prominent moment of colorblind racist rhetoric in the 2012 presidential election is a statement made by Rick Santorum that occurred during the primary season, and not during the general election. At a gathering on the campaign trail in early 2012, Rick Santorum, who later campaigned for Romney, stated that, "I don't want to make black people's lives better by giving them somebody else's money. I want to give them the opportunity to go out and earn the money and provide for themselves and their families" In a stunning show of incoherence and double-talk, Santorum later claimed that he actually said "blah" people (Milbank 2012). This was quoted in the articles that I analyzed for my study. The remaining occurrences of colorblind rhetoric involved similar, though less extreme, displays of double-talk and damage control. For example, politicians like Ryan, Romney, and Gingrich would make offensive arguments against the poor, but attempt to hedge

their statements by explicitly claiming to not be racist or arguing that the government shares the blame for Black people's failures.

Bonilla-Silva found that white people often become incoherent or self-contradictory when trying to explain racial issues**.** A similar phenomenon can be observed at the public level with politicians and damage control. In the political and media spheres, editors and publicists work to prevent incoherence in addition to explicit racism. While Santorum's change from Black people to "blah" people is one striking example, the articles also reference a "birther" joke by Romney that was never repeated but followed his condemnation of birtherism (Lowry 2012). One prominent example of this type of racial damage control that wasn't found in the articles is Reagan's change of anecdote from the young "buck" buying T-Bone steaks to a young man buying T-Bone steaks. This type of damage control that seeks to remove the appearance of racism is evidence that despite the continued existence of hard racial framing, explicitly racist sentiments are often less acceptable in mainstream discourse, causing those with anti-Black political sentiment to use other rhetorical tools to express and explain racism. Damage control as a response to hard racial framing in the public sphere warrants further attention, as it may be indicative of new strategies for perpetuating the new racism.

5.4   The White Racial Frame

The white racial frame was a more difficult concept to operationalize because it involves ideology and worldview as much as rhetoric. While it would certainly be reasonable to assume the white racial frame is informing the worldviews and policy conclusions of many of these authors, the scope of this analysis was to specifically observe recorded rhetoric, and look for explicit manifestations of the white racial frame as operationalized using the criteria I provided, of which I found several examples. I found evidence of all four themes of the white racial frame

that I selected for analysis: meanings consistent with a belief in white morality, a belief of western civilization and white institutions as the pinnacle of human accomplishment, the assumption of whiteness and white emotions as the norm, and a denial of the prevalence of racism.

I found that authors and pundits were quick to exalt white western U.S. institutions such as nation and church as the pinnacle of human accomplishment, and the values associated with those institutions as cultural norms. Rick Santorum attacked Obama by saying that he, "believes in government handouts and dependency, not the values of hard work that America was built on" (Summers 2012). References to the "American dream," a vision of America that is uniquely superior to that of other nations due to opportunities it supposedly provides, occurred several times. Santorum also referred to the unique importance of the "traditional family" and dedication to "restoring the home where married moms and dads are pillars of strong communities." Other articles I labeled as containing use of the white racial frame referred to work as a core American value, or for example "The American experiment - the more individualistic, energetic, innovative, risk-taking model of democratic governance" (Krauthammer 2012).

The white racial frame was more likely than colorblind racist rhetoric or controlling imagery to appear in liberal publications. Bill Clinton (2012) extolls American superiority and the "American dream," and authors from liberal publications like the *Huffington Post* (Loconte 2012) and *Politico* (Lowry 2012) do the same. Clinton writes about the American values of hard work that made the work requirement on welfare reform reality. While the vast majority of liberal authors fail to point out the impact of racism in a debate around welfare reform, some seem ready to discount it and minimize its importance, such as the authors of the *Politico* piece

"If Obama loses…" (Burns and Haberman 2012), who claim that Obama's race "failed to hobble" his campaign and that he found relatively high support among whites in 2008. In the article, "Mr. Romney Hits Bottom on Welfare," (*New York Times* Editorial Board 2012) liberal authors of the *New York Times* refer to Romney reincarnating the highly racialized Southern strategy, but manage to avoid any reference to racism, by writing, "that approach was favored by an earlier generation of Republican operatives, and it helped divide the country into warring political classes."

These articles make the pervasive nature of the white racial frame clear. Longer, more in-depth articles, and articles featuring speeches by politicians are the most likely to contain explicit evidence of the white racial frame. Authors are quick to make moral and cultural arguments, appealing to a "traditional" (ie. white, conservative, and heteronormative) values. Authors refer to the immorality of dependency and laziness, and extoll the moral superiority of hard work. While the explicit instances of the white racial frame conjure images of white and western supremacy, the less racially explicit claims that are supportive of welfare reform sill work to perpetuate a racial status quo.

While the white racial frame consists of both hard and soft racial framing, perhaps one of the more encouraging results of this study was that there was very little hard racial framing in these articles. While hard racial framing and explicit racism surrounding public policy certainly still exist in public and private discourse (Wingfield and Feagin 2013), and there is evidence that it could have increased under Obama (Wingfield and Feagin 2012), these mainstream publications made very little use of this form of racism in their discussions of welfare reform.

5.5   Emerging Themes: Anti-Racism and Missing Information

In my analysis of the articles another discursive theme emerged: articles in which the author acknowledged and condemned racism in the welfare debate. While an important component of new forms of racism is the disavowal and condemnation of explicit racism and epithets, most whites fail to acknowledge racism and racial inequality in its current systemic and institutional form. In a media environment in which the vast majority of commentators focus on horse-race politics and support welfare reform, articles that condemn the racist assumptions behind this partisan debate are worth closer consideration.

Anti-racist articles used both current campaign issues and historical context to discuss the role of racism in the Presidential race. One anti-racist article is called "The Nine Most Racist Moments of the 2012 Election" (Kane 2012). The author condemns the welfare reform ad, the birther movement, voter suppression efforts, Gingrich's bestowed title of "food stamp President," and a series of instances of hard racial framing involving racial epithets and threats. Another article, "Ghosts of the South," (Meyerson 2012) makes a more historical and cultural argument regarding racism in the campaign. According to Meyerson, changes in the economy, demographic shifts, and Obama's election triggered a new wave of racial resentment in whites, with the modern incarnation of southern confederates leading the Republican Party.

The theme throughout all of the ten anti-racist articles was an accusation that Mitt Romney was using subtle racism for political gain. The only potential divergence from this theme was a single article by the liberal publication *Salon* ("Obama Channels his Inner Reagan") that criticized Obama for responding to Romney's welfare accusations with anti-poor sentiments, and acknowledged that Obama presides "over a welfare system which leaves the poor to sell their blood," and a "post-reform status quo that drives women back to their abusers." This article,

along with "The Birthplace of Obama the Politician," (Tough 2012) are the only two articles that seem to acknowledge deep systemic problems leading to racism and poverty.

While the presence of anti-racist articles is encouraging and provides an important alternate perspective to the mainstream, it is important to note that nearly all of the anti-racist discourse was partisan in nature. Accusations of racism were leveled almost exclusively at Republicans. Even the anti-racist authors usually did not address systemic racism, instead accusing individual political opponents of explicit or intentional racism. This failure to acknowledge systemic racism centers the debate around accusations of personal prejudice instead of discussing the unavoidable impact of a system of racism on the lives of people of color. For this reason, these articles failed to challenge the new racism, and even perpetuated it by further providing the appearance of an anti-racist media without actually working to dismantle racism at its institutional roots.

Furthermore, while several liberal authors acknowledged and condemned racism in anti-welfare attacks, most liberal partisans, including the Obama administration, failed to do so. The 91 articles were overwhelmingly positive or neutral in regard to welfare reform. Furthermore, the fact that liberals condemned the accusation of gutting welfare reform so vociferously indicates a lack of sympathy with the political goals of African Americans and the poor. The authors failed to consider that perhaps "gutting welfare" wouldn't be such a bad thing. In fact, the Obama campaign responded to the ad by claiming that Mitt Romney was too kind to the poor and people on welfare during his time as governor, referencing a waiver request and a program that gave cars to welfare recipients under special circumstances (Eidelson 2012). At one time Obama claimed to oppose welfare reform; these articles contained very little evidence that this is still the case.

There is an absence of the voices and perspectives of African Americans and the poor in the articles I analyzed. U.S. media elites are overwhelmingly white and male, and newspaper authors are no exception (*Women's Media Center* 2014). This lack of representation particularly relevant in regards to an issue where vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected. None of the authors of the articles I analyzed openly identified as Black or welfare recipients. This leaves out an incredibly important perspective. Beyond that, authors spent little to no time speculating on the impact of welfare reform and the ensuing debate on welfare recipients**.** It was clear through this analysis that the news media prioritizes the concerns of the wealthy and powerful over those of the oppressed.

6   CONCLUSION

6.1   Policy Implications

The "gutting welfare" ad was hailed by the Romney campaign as their most effective campaign ad. President Obama won the election, but discussion about the ad and welfare waivers continued. In September of 2012, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan H.J.Res. 118, providing "Congressional disapproval of the welfare waiver rules proposed by the Department of Health and Human Services under President Obama." In March of 2013, the House passed the "Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act of 2013." Both bills died in the Democratic controlled Senate. Pundits and politicians accuse Obama of gutting welfare reform to this day, despite the fact that no state ever applied for one of the waivers.

President Obama's time in office has been characterized by repeated racialized attacks involving the social safety net. Around the time that Obama was accused of gutting welfare, he was given the title "Food Stamp President" by Newt Gingrich, and the title is still in

use by some conservatives. Furthermore, several mainstream pundits and commenters claim that Obama's healthcare plan is a form of reparations. It is likely that some future efforts to strengthen the safety net will suffer due to considerable backlash to Obama's welfare waivers, despite the fact that wealth inequality in the United States continues to increase.

6.2   Sociological Relevance

The results of my study further confirm previous research on racial discourses and welfare. Like the study by Harvey Wingfield and Feagin (2013), my study uncovered significant use of the white racial frame. Like Gilens (1999), I found that African Americans and the poor were underrepresented in media coverage, and like Clawson and Trice (2000) I found that the poor were generally portrayed as lazy and socially undesirable. Similar to Hancock's (2003) findings, these negative portrayals of the poor were bipartisan. As previous researchers have observed, it appears that the general support and acceptance of welfare reform has been cemented by the media. Throughout these articles there was evidence of the continued existence of new forms of racism as articulated by critical race scholars.

This study also uncovered some potential new developments that could help to illuminate which direction future studies on the racial discourses surrounding welfare should go. For example, the presence of anti-racist articles in mainstream newspapers provides a glimmer of hope, despite their failure to address racism as foundational to our society. The highly partisan nature of these articles is a deviation from other studies, but further research can reveal if that is simply a result of an electoral context. Finally, there have been changes in the media that have occurred since welfare reform was initially studied, such as online media and the proliferation of fact-checkers.

6.3   Study Limitations and Call for Research

I acknowledge that there are limitations to this type of study. My study cannot be generalized to all media and political speech; it is merely an analysis of some of the speech, identifying certain tools and ideologies that are used to construct racial meaning. The subjective nature of such an analysis may therefore lead to a less than robust inter-rater reliability. I would posit, however, that no study can provide universal, objective truth, and acknowledging our epistemological shortcomings is a valuable step in producing knowledge. This study is also limited in scope, as there are numerous other racial issues that could be observed, and it is likely that partisan politics had a confounding effect on the results (for example news outlets that are more sympathetic to a certain candidate may frame the welfare issue differently than they normally would in this context.) Finally, this study is far from exhaustive in nature. I selected a few operationalizable manifestations of new forms of racism to document, whereas critical race scholars have observed an enormous range of racist rhetoric, ideology, and behavior. Furthermore, I only studied articles from the most circulated U.S. newspapers and political commentary websites, therefore omitting important and alternative mediums and perspectives.

While the relative lack of racist rhetoric found in these articles could certainly be indicative of partisanship, an incomplete sample, or a lack of interest in the racial components of this particular issue by media elites, the emergence of a series of anti-racist articles suggests that the media may be developing new racial frameworks and strategies for perpetuating racism. More studies should investigate the editorial decision processes that influence excluding race analysis and racist-rhetoric damage control. Explicitly anti-racist articles also merit further study**.** Such investigations could lead to the discovery of new strategies that whites use to explain and justify racism. This highlights the continuing importance of further research of this type.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Table 2: List of Discursive Themes

Colorblind Racist Rhetoric	Controlling Imagery	White Racial Frame	Emerging Themes	Missing information
Ambivalence; incoherence; double-talk; Projection; anecdote	Any stereotype or controlling image that can be used to oppress minority groups or turn them into cultural outsiders, such as: "bitch," the bad mother, the Black lady, the modern "mammy," the "educated bitch," the athlete, the criminal, the sissy, and the sidekick	meanings consistent with a belief in white morality; a belief of western civilization and white institutions as the pinnacle of human accomplishment; the assumption of whiteness and white emotions as the norm; a denial of the prevalence of racism	Information relevant to my research questions that cannot be directly categorized as colorblind racist rhetoric, controlling imagery, or the white racial frame	Important themes involving the new racism and welfare reform that are being excluded from mainstream media discourse

Appendix B

Table 3: Articles for Analysis

Blaze, The (www.theblaze.com)		
Date	Title	Author(s)
September 18th, 2012	"Audio of Barack Obama in 1998: 'I Actually Believe in Redistribution'"	Adams, Becket
September 19th, 2012	"Report: Number of 'Able-Bodied' Adults on Food Stamps has Exploded with Suspension of Welfare Requirement"	Adams, Becket
November 3rd 2012	"So How Long Has Obama Been Using That 'Fairness' Rhetoric? We Explored and Here's What We Found"	Johnson, Charles C.

Huffington Post, The (www.huffingtonpost.com)		
August 7th 2012	"Mitt Romney Ad Criticizes Obama For Welfare Policy Romney Supported As Governor"	Delaney, Arthur
August 8th, 2012	"Ron Haskins, GOP Welfare Reform Architect, Blasts Mitt Romney Ad"	Terkel, Amanda
August 13th 2012	"Obama Campaign Responds To Romney's 'Complete And Utter Lie' On Welfare"	Delaney, Arthur
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August 29th 2012	"Poverty: The New Growth Industry in America"	Baker, Dean
September 5th 2012	"Bill Clinton Convention Speech Defends Obama From Welfare Attacks"	Delaney, Arthur
September 13th, 2012	"House Welfare Bill Pushes To Stop Obama Policy"	Delaney, Arthur
September 20th 2012	"Paul Ryan Joins House Vote To Block Welfare Rule Republicans Sought"	McAuliff, Michael
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August 8th 2012	"Rep. Blackburn Defends Romney Welfare Ad"	Bachman, John and Varin, Andra
August 10th, 2012	"Gingrich: Obama Welfare Move 'Clearly Illegal'"	Meyers, Jim and Walter, Kathleen
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October 19th 2012	"Jordan: 'Poor Policies' From White House Caused Food Stamps Increase"	Bachman, John and Hobin, Patrick
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August 7th, 2012	"Gutting Welfare"	Rosenthal, Andrew
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August 8th, 2012	"Romney attacks Obama on welfare reform"	Rucker, Philip and Turque, Bill
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August 9th, 2012	"Spin and counterspin in the welfare debate"	Kessler, Glenn
August 9th, 2012	Will Romney return his insurance rebate?	Dionne, E.J. Jr.
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August 12th, 2012	"Romney plays the race card"	Milbank, Dana
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September 5th, 2012	"Cautious Confidence"	Sargent, Greg and Rubin, Jennifer
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