

IS AMERICA “POST-RACIST”?

How *AC 360* and *The O’Reilly Factor* discursively constructed the Charleston church shooting

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This study used critical discourse analysis to examine Anderson Cooper 360° (AC 360) and The O’Reilly Factor coverage of the 2015 Charleston, South Carolina church shootings and the subsequent controversy surrounding the removal of the Confederate Flag from South Carolina government grounds. While AC 360 used a “Good versus Evil” discourse to structure its reportage, suggesting that the shooting represented a series of battles between right and wrong, The O’Reilly Factor used the Charleston tragedy as a launching-off point to defend the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution. Although both shows drew attention to racism, they ignored the structural context of racism that makes racist violence thrive. Their coverage implied that America has moved into a post-racism era.

KEYWORDS Anderson Cooper; Bill O’Reilly; Charleston; Confederate Flag; Critical Race Theory; discourse analysis; racism

Introduction

On June 17, 2015, a young white man, Dylann Roof, opened fire inside the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine black worshippers who were attending a Bible study. Roof fled the scene, but was arrested shortly after his escape. This mass shooting, one of the deadliest in recent American history, received intense media attention. Given its clear racist motivations, the shooting also renewed calls for the removal of the Confederate Flag—seen by many as a racist symbol—from the State House in South Carolina (Eversley 2015).

The Charleston church shooting further fueled “Black Lives Matter” movement protests, which intensified in late 2014 following several police-perpetrated shootings of young African-Americans. “Black Lives Matter” protesters are opposed to police brutality and what they call America’s “White supremacist structure” (Democracy Now 2015).

In the days after the Charleston church shooting, two popular American cable news networks, CNN and Fox News, devoted much of their primetime programming to the tragedy. We analyzed coverage of the mass shooting on two of the most watched programs on the respective networks—CNN’s *Anderson Cooper 360°* (AC 360) and Fox’s *The O’Reilly Factor*. AC 360 “was the highest rated show on CNN” in August 2015, while *The O’Reilly Factor* “remained [the number one show] for all of cable news with 3.016 [million viewers]” in the same month (Mediaite 2015). It is important to know how two enormously popular news shows seen as representing different ideological perspectives—CNN is

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perceived as more politically liberal while Fox News is perceived as more conservative (Turner 2007)—unpacked a story of significant sociopolitical weight. We chose CNN and Fox News because we thought their coverage may differ in important ways, but also because we thought there might be interesting discursive overlaps. Similarities between moderately liberal and right-wing conservative networks would demonstrate the relatively limited utility of the liberal–conservative ideological continuum, and draw attention to larger, macronational American ideologies about race.

Our study used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine eight talk show episodes, four episodes of *The O'Reilly Factor* and four episodes of *AC 360*. The shows aired on Thursday June 18, 2015 and Friday June 19, 2015, two days following the Charleston church shooting, and Monday June 22, 2015 and Tuesday June 23, 2015, two days following calls for the removal of the Confederate Flag. In addition to drawing from scholarly research into ideology, our analysis drew insights from Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Literature Review

Fox News and CNN

A growing body of literature assesses patterns of coverage in American broadcast news, with several studies focusing on either Fox News or CNN, or both. Much of the research suggests that, while problems related to sensationalism and a lack of journalistic professionalism exist across news networks, the more conservative Fox News network is more likely than other networks, including CNN, to exhibit blatant ideological bias.

Coverage in the context of war and terrorism. Several studies have examined either Fox News or CNN coverage of American-led wars in the Middle East. For instance, Aday's (2010) content analysis of NBC and Fox News coverage of the Bush administration's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq found that, while both networks "underplayed bad news" (144) about the wars, Fox News was "much more sympathetic" (144) to the Bush administration than NBC.

Aday, Livingston, and Hebert (2005) examined objectivity and balance in news reports about the Iraq war on Fox News, CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, and Al Jazeera. Results showed that, in spite of ignoring key aspects of the war, all of the studied networks—except Fox News—exhibited significant balance. The authors found that the "overwhelming number of stories" on CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, and Al Jazeera "were neutral" (17) in tone, while most Fox News reports were biased in favor of the Bush administration line.

Harmon and Muenchen (2009) analyzed Fox News, CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNBC coverage of the Bush administration in the one year following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, finding that while all networks were supportive of the Bush administration's push for a war in Iraq, Fox News was the most likely to use "pro-war framing terms" (12) and least likely to use "anti-war words" (25).

The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2002) found that Fox News supported the official Bush administration line in the months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Another study directly compared CNN with Al-Jazeera (Jasperson and El-Kikhia 2003), examining coverage of the American war in Afghanistan. Findings suggested that Al-Jazeera focused on the human toll of the war, including the suffering of Afghani civilians. CNN adopted a pro-Bush administration tone, focusing on American military strategy and the precision of US airstrikes (Jasperson and El-Kikhia 2003).

Coverage of presidents and presidential candidates. Several studies have examined Fox News and/or CNN coverage of American presidents and presidential candidates. For instance, Brubaker and Hanson (2009) found that Fox News provided significantly more favorable analysis of Republican George W. Bush than Democrat John Kerry following a 2004 presidential debate. The study found that CNN provided more balanced analysis. A study by Groeling (2008) analyzed coverage of presidential approval polls during the terms of two different presidents, Democrat Bill Clinton and Republican George W. Bush. As predicted, results found that Fox News favored good polling news for Bush and bad polling news for Clinton.

Two studies suggest more balance on Fox News than CNN in coverage of American presidents and presidential candidates. A content analysis by Edy, Bisel, and Overton (2015) showed that while conservative Fox News used honorifics similarly to describe Presidents Obama and Bush, mainstream CNN was more likely to use honorifics to describe Obama, a Democrat, than Bush, a Republican. Meanwhile, a study by Fico et al. (2008) suggested that Fox News provided structurally balanced coverage of 2004 American presidential candidates George W. Bush and John Kerry.

Ideological slant. Other studies have focused on issues that often divide Americans along liberal-conservative lines. A study by Peck (2014) suggests that Fox News pundits employ rhetorical strategies that favor business elites. A content analysis by Feldman et al. (2012) showed that Fox News is more likely to toe the official American conservative line on global warming.

A pair of studies focused on Fox's *The O'Reilly Factor*. Conway, Grabe, and Grievies (2007) suggest that O'Reilly's "Talking Points Memo" segments—during which O'Reilly provides analyses of current events—are more blatantly propagandistic than speeches delivered by mid-twentieth-century propagandist Father Charles Coughlin, known for his transparent pro-Nazi propaganda. Peters (2010) argued that *The O'Reilly Factor* represents a significant departure from traditional journalism and popular notions of objectivity, even though the program claims to uphold basic professional tenets. According to Peters (2010, 834), O'Reilly is a "belief-driven journalist" who intertwines belief and truth in ways previously unknown to American journalism.

Research About American News and Race

Much of the research into American news coverage of race has compared depictions of African-Americans to those of whites in the context of crime news, with some studies focusing on sourcing and stereotyping. Much of the research suggests the continued presence of a subtle racist ideology in American news.

A series of studies have found that African-Americans are overrepresented as criminals in American news (see Dixon and Linz 2000a, 2000b; Dixon and Azocar 2006; Dixon and Williams 2015), while Entman (1992) found that blacks are less likely to be humanized than whites, who are often depicted as victims of black crime. Some more recent research shows evidence of fairer coverage patterns on television news (see Dixon, Azocar, and Casas 2003; Dixon and Williams 2015).

Some studies provide empirical evidence that African-American and other minority voices are underrepresented and that white voices are overrepresented in mainstream American news (see Owens 2008; Zeldes and Fico 2010).

Other studies have used qualitative and quantitative methods to examine specific cases, including a couple of studies that explicitly compared Fox and CNN. For example, Shah and Yamagami (2015) textually analyzed broadcast transcripts of the Shirley Sherrod controversy—when Sherrod, an African-American politician, was recorded making allegedly anti-white remarks—on CNN, Fox News, Fox Business, MSNBC, ABC, and CBS. Results suggest that Fox News initially misrepresented facts about the case, and that CNN played a key role in changing the narrative. A study by Zuniga, Correa, and Valenzuela (2012) was based on the premise that Fox News broadcasts are less supportive of Mexican immigrants than CNN broadcasts. The study found that both conservative and liberal viewers of Fox News were more likely to hold anti-immigration attitudes than viewers of CNN. Viewing CNN was not associated with negative attitudes toward Mexican immigration.

Hodges' (2015) study examined American cable news discourses about the 2012 fatal shooting of 17-year-old African-American Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer. Hodges argued that CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC focused on the possibility of the shooter's individual-level racism while ignoring the possibility of American institutional-level racism.

A pair of qualitative studies closely examined in depth newspapers' series about race. A discourse analysis by Parisi (1998) suggested that a Pulitzer Prize-winning *Washington Post* story about Washington, DC poverty constructed poor, urban blacks as morally depraved and fundamentally criminal. Meanwhile, Meyers (2004) carried out a narrative analysis of a newspaper series about "crack mothers" published in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The analysis suggests that the newspaper depicted African-American women negatively, while representing white people as saviors.

A content analysis of American newspaper photographs about Hurricane Katrina by Kahle, Yu, and Whiteside (2007) found that African-Americans were negatively stereotyped, while whites were portrayed positively. Whites were significantly more likely to be portrayed in active roles, as prepared for the disaster, and as helpers. Blacks were portrayed primarily as passive, helpless, and waiting for "handouts."

Ideology

Ideology is a determining factor in how news is framed and perceived. Hall (1985, 99) argued that ideologies are mental structures that people employ "to figure out how the social world works, what their place is in it and what they ought to do." These mental structures have "discursive" and "semiotic" connotations that affect how the world is represented to us (103). Preston and Silke (2011, 48) argued that ideology is "the ideas and beliefs (whether true or false) that symbolize the conditions and life experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class."

Althusser (2009, 88) adopted a Marxist approach to the study of ideology, arguing that "the agents of production" are utilized in a manner that serves the ideology of the ruling class. Thompson (1990) argued that ideology and power are intertwined, with prevailing ideological meanings often resulting from powerful socio-political systems.

Ideology lends itself to internal and external tension between the "self" and the "other." This is embodied in what van Dijk (2000, 301) referred to as the "ideological square," or the struggle between "positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation." This polarized approach suggests that the others "are enemies who 'attack' us,

and We defend—as an ‘immune system’—legitimacy and decency” (279). The “We” is “largely implicit and presupposed.” In the context of American discourse, the “We may variously be all non-blacks, or whites, or all those opposed to multiculturalism, affirmative action and state interference” (281).

The conflict that is captured in the “ideological square” is often exemplified in news discourses which rely on lexical, syntactic, and linguistic choices to achieve positive or favorable representation of the “Us” group and negative or unfavorable representation of the “Other” or the “They” group (Shojaei, Youssefi, and Hosseini 2013). This polarization strongly indicates that discourses, in general, and news discourses, in particular, are not neutral, but have a tendency to tilt toward the mainstream and dominant ideologies held by the institutions of power (Cheng 2012).

The spectrum of ideological bias(es) among various news media, which ranges from liberalism to conservatism, highlights the importance of analyzing the political messages of ideologically slanted media “by looking at media outlets which are a reflection of both the left and the right” (Holbert, Hmielowski, and Weeks 2012, 209). In an American context, however, thinking only in “left” and “right” terms might obfuscate important realities, especially since American liberals and conservatives are subject to larger, macro-ideologies about the nation. CRT offers a useful framework through which to consider macro-ideologies about race and racism in the United States.

Critical Race Theory

Racism has figured prominently in both the establishment of the United States and the nation’s sociopolitical history. In America’s post-civil rights era, racial tensions and injustices have been compounded by “structural” or “institutional” racism, which is the collective marginalization of minority racial groups (Pappas 2002, 291).

The dimensions and repercussions of structural racism have been addressed by CRT, which is a “movement ... [involving] a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado and Stefancic 2012, 3). Building on civil rights scholarship, CRT examines how contemporary political, historical, and economic issues affect, and are affected by, race and ethnicity (Delgado and Stefancic 2012).

CRT emanated from critical legal research in the 1970s with the purpose of delineating the roots of American racism and highlighting problems inherent in civil rights legislation (Yosso et al. 2009). CRT proponents called for fundamental transformation of the legal rights of racial minorities and aimed to achieve what American philosopher Cornell West described as “a gasp of emancipatory hope that law can serve liberation rather than domination” (Price 2010, 150).

CRT scholars opposed “claims of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity, asserting that these claims camouflage the self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups” (Yosso et al. 2009, 663). Bonilla-Silva (2006, 3) argued that the post civil rights movement era in America has witnessed a rise of “New Racism” in which practices of racial injustice have been recreated, but in a “subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial” manner. Bonilla-Silva is opposed to the trend of “color-blind racism”—the tendency for contemporary white Americans to ignore or downplay institutionalized racism while claiming that they do not see race or think in racial terms. Color-blind racism is advanced by a soft and spontaneous strategy of blaming external

factors and racial minorities, rather than whites, for racial disparities. Bonilla-Silva (2006, 2) noted that “whites rationalize minorities’ contemporary [inferior] status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks’ imputed cultural limitations.” Along the same lines, Wallace and Brand (2012, 346) blamed color-blindness for nurturing a sense of “White supremacy” that “positions Whiteness as normative or standard and Blackness as other.”

Research suggests that American media representations have exacerbated the problems of color-blind racism and white privilege. For example, Solorzano and Yosso (2001, 4) argued that American news media often frame racial minorities as “dumb, violent, lazy, irresponsible and dirty.” Along the same lines, Delgado and Stefancic (2012, 84) argued that American media exoticize racial minorities, often portraying them as “over-sexed” or alien-like. Bonilla-Silva (2006, 99) argued that US news media report from the perspective of the dominant white racial group. “News reports on minorities ... tend to be presented as morality tales that support the various racial stories of the color-blind era.”

Nielsen (2013) found *The New York Times*’ framing of the appointment of Sonia Sotomayor to the US Supreme Court highlighted the possibility that Sotomayor, a Latina, would be biased toward Latinos.

In another study, Luther and Rightler-McDaniels (2013) conducted a discourse analysis on the representation of interracial marriages between blacks and whites in two mainstream magazines—*Newsweek* and *Time*—and two African-American magazines—*Ebony* and *JET*. Findings showed that all four magazines stressed the black–white division by highlighting antagonistic feelings still held against couples in black–white marriages, in spite of the noticeable increase in such marriages in the American society.

Method

This study used CDA to examine a total of eight talk show episodes: four episodes of *The O’Reilly Factor* on Fox News Channel and four episodes of CNN’s *AC 360*, which is hosted by Anderson Cooper. *The O’Reilly Factor* episodes that were selected for the analysis aired on June 18 and June 19, 2015 (two days following the church shooting in Charleston, SC in which a white gunman killed nine black people) and June 22 and 23, 2015 (two days following the controversy surrounding calls for the removal of the Confederate Flag). The same dates were chosen for *AC 360* episodes. *The O’Reilly Factor* episodes were podcasts downloaded from the Fox News website and transcribed. The CNN website provided transcriptions of *AC 360* episodes.

CDA is a “systematic, detailed and theory-based analyses of actually occurring structures of text and talk” (van Dijk 2000, 198). CDA, as a method, lends itself to multiple disciplines, and its theoretical and operational frameworks can produce more than one genre (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). CDA can be conducted at a micro level by looking into words and sentences and at a macro level by looking into discourse topics and universal meanings of discourse (van Dijk 1997).

CDA looks into how lexical choices reflect ideological meanings and themes that are contextualized in the course of their relationship with society. Analyzing a text helps in reproducing socio-political and socio-cultural values that shed light on power dynamics in certain contexts (Viboonchart and Gampper 2014). Hence, CDA has textual and contextual dimensions. “Textual dimensions account for the structures of discourse at various levels of description. Contextual dimensions relate these structural descriptions to

various properties of the context, such as cognitive processes and representations or socio-cultural factors" (van Dijk 1988, 25). Analyzing discourse, then, entails not just studying a body of text, but immersing oneself in a social act. CDA formulates an interactive process, taking place between the analyst and discourse (van Dijk 1988). The analyst's job is to attempt to "coherently and cohesively connect parts of texts together, and connect texts with their situational contexts" (Fairclough 2003, 27). These contexts can be "local, global, social and cultural" (van Dijk 1997, 29). Since any analysis of a text is selective in that specific angles and dimensions are investigated, it should never be assumed that an analysis is exhaustive or definitive (Fairclough 2003).

In our analysis of the eight episodes' transcripts, we looked into sentence structures and word choices and came up with several ideological themes and meanings.

Results

AC 360

On June 18, 19, 22, and 23, 2015, CNN's AC 360 provided intensive, comprehensive coverage of the Charleston shooting and the controversy surrounding the removal of the Confederate Flag. Over these four days, show host Anderson Cooper reported live, on the ground from Charleston, close to the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church where the shooting took place. Cooper, along with his team of field correspondents and legal analysts, provided firsthand access to the shooting scene and the neighborhood where the church is located. The show featured a diverse selection of sources, including government officials, eyewitnesses, non-governmental organization spokespeople, and family members and friends of the nine shooting victims.

Our close reading of AC 360 coverage yielded one overarching discursive theme—"Good versus Evil"—capturing the polarized approach of van Dijk's ideological square concept by highlighting positive characteristics of the ingroup and the negative nature of the outgroup (van Dijk 2000). AC 360 set up the shooting and its aftermath as a battle between right and wrong, and proceeded to place ideas, people, and groups into the program's predefined categories of good and evil. Importantly, Cooper's coverage also reflected important assumptions of CRT. By suggesting that anti-black racism is rare and fundamentally inconsistent with mainstream American society, AC 360 elided endemic social problems that gave rise to Roof's hate crime.

Ingroup Good—the shooting victims. Unsurprisingly, Cooper and his team had an ideological bias toward the "ingroup Good." The "good" in their coverage was represented most notably by the shooting victims, who were clearly and consistently humanized by reports about their positive personal qualities and achievements, as documented by family and friends. For example, during the June 18 episode, Cooper said, "Well, the nine victims of the church shooting here in Charleston shared a love of family, a love of faith, six women, three men ranging in age from 26 to 87. They gathered last night here, the Emanuel Emi Church behind me for Bible study when they lost their lives. Tonight, we honor each of them, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. We remember each of the victims and look at how they made an impact."

In the same episode, Cooper referred to Reverend Clementa Pinckney, the church pastor who was killed in the shooting, as "a remarkable human being who died doing

the work that he always felt was right for him.” Cooper interviewed Pinckney’s cousin and Tim Scott, a US senator who knew Pinckney. Both talked about his accomplishments. Scott said, “He was a good man. He was an encourager. I’m a Republican, he was a Democrat, but none of that stood in the way. He was always looking for a way to cross the bridge to bring people together ... He was consistently looking for ways to make our community a model for the world to see. He just had an amazing heart and strong vision.”

During the June 19 episode, Cooper said, “We’re going to be focusing attention where it should be tonight. On those ... whose lives were taken away. Cynthia Hurd was a librarian with a passion for books who worked for three decades at the Charleston County Public Library ... Her brother shares fun memories coming out.” [Her brother] said, “She was full of life ... She loved her family. She loved her community and she loved God.”

Similar discussions were carried out about other victims, all of whom were humanized through personalization and glorified through praise.

Ingroup Good—the community at large. In addition to the victims, *AC 360* included the Charleston community at large as a force for “good.” The community was portrayed as a “success story,” with reports suggesting that it defeated the challenge of a racist crime with solidarity, resilience, grace, faith, and forgiveness.

In line with what CRT research has suggested is common practice in American journalism, it was implied that the Charleston community is a microcosm of the utopian “We” of American society, which transcends race. In this context, Cooper posed this question to Charleston Mayor Joe Riley on June 18: “Can this community recover? What is your message to African-Americans in this community?” Riley said, “Well, I think the message is what they felt in this community. I mean, we walk around the community and feel the outpouring of love from all citizens of all colors and backgrounds. This is a very together community. Black and white, and young or old.”

Along the same lines, on June 19 Cooper noted that the Charleston community “is hurting beyond measure, yet continues to show the world what grace and strength look like.” He described the vigil that was taking place at the church in the following way: “hundreds of people are waiting in line to try to get to the makeshift memorial ... People were leaving teddy bears. People were saying prayers. They just want to take part and show their solidarity with the people here.”

AC 360 consistently emphasized the community’s spirit of forgiveness by highlighting the forgiveness-related words of victims’ family and friends. For example, an unidentified female addressed the shooter during the June 19 episode, saying, “I forgive you. And have mercy on your soul. You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people. But God forgives you.” During the same episode, the mother of one of the victims also addressed Roof, saying, “Every fiber in my body hurts. And I’ll never be the same. Tywanza Sanders was [my] son, but Tywanza was my hero. But as we said at the Bible study, we enjoyed you. But may God have mercy on you.” CNN correspondent Martin Savidge commented on the community’s forgiveness in the June 19 episode by noting, “I did not expect to hear [forgiveness]; not so soon after this event.”

AC 360 consistently portrayed the goodness of the Charleston community, choosing to avoid larger discussions of crime and racism or other discussions of the conditions which may have made the mass shooting possible. The show discussed racism as an extreme

phenomenon limited to hate groups, which the June 22 episode argued represent only a "tiny" minority.

Outgroup Evil—Dylann Roof. The "outgroup Evil" in AC 360 coverage of the Charleston church shooting and its aftermath was concentrated in several players, one of whom was the shooter, Dylann Roof. It is worth noting that Roof was not identified by name or picture throughout the four days of coverage—the show has a policy of not naming suspects or showing their photos to avoid giving them recognition, as was repeatedly explained by Cooper. Roof was outcasted as someone who committed what Cooper described on June 18 as an "alleged hate crime" and "an act of domestic terrorism." According to Cooper, the shooter wanted to start a "race war," but failed. On June 19, Cooper said, "If this young man wanted to start a war, a race war in this country, it seems at least for now he has brought a lot of people together."

AC 360 also outcasted Roof by highlighting his troubled past, particularly his use of drugs, arrest at a local mall for trespassing, and overt racist tendencies. For example, on June 18 CNN senior investigative correspondent Drew Griffin said, "[The shooter's] grandfather told *The Wall Street Journal* he was concerned because his grandson was becoming a loner and espousing some very hateful, racial hatreds, talking crazy talk and very violent things about black people specifically." During the June 22 episode, Cooper noted that Roof "credits the website of the Council of Conservative Citizens [CCC] for changing the way he saw the world." According to Cooper, CCC was identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a hate group "that believes that the white race is under attack ... both in Europe and the United States and really across the world." In this context, Griffin said that the site seems to have "a white nationalistic agenda." Cooper said in the same episode that he read Roof's racist manifesto online, and "it's ... the kind of racist parable, the racist boiler plate that's been spewed by—I mean, by racists for a long, long time about black people, about Jews, about other minority groups."

AC 360 also portrayed Roof as a deceptive human being who betrayed his victims. For instance, on June 18 CNN correspondent Don Lemon said, "What's ... so sad ... is that he ingratiated himself within this group and ... led them to believe that he was one of them and wanted to come in and learn about God and learn about the Bible, when all the time he was planning this in his head."

Outgroup Evil—the Confederate Flag. Another symbol of "Evil" in the AC 360 coverage was the Confederate Flag, which was portrayed by Cooper and his reporting team as a racist symbol and a reminder of America's slavery era. During the June 19 episode, Cooper said, "Investigators [are] looking into where the shooter ... got his extremist views. And a lot of people tonight are saying that you do not have to look much further than the actual grounds of the South Carolina statehouse. It's there that the confederate flag is flying." According to Cooper, the Confederate Flag is a "symbol of hate for many people." On June 22, Cooper highlighted calls for the removal of the Confederate Flag from South Carolina Capitol grounds, including a plea by South Carolina Governors. Cooper interviewed South Carolina State Representative Doug Brannon, who said, "In honor of the Senator and the other eight people that were so tragically murdered the other night, it's just time ... That flag can no longer be on our state Capitol ground." In the same episode, Cooper alluded to Walmart's decision to remove all Confederate Flag commodities from its stores.

During the June 23 episode, Griffin reported that the overwhelming majority of representatives in the South Carolina State House voted for taking down the Confederate Flag and that hundreds of people gathered at the Capitol to support that decision. In this episode, Griffin interviewed South Carolina State Representative William Chumley, and asked him several leading questions that clearly reflected Griffin's bias against the Confederate Flag. Griffin asked, "But if hate groups have misused the flag and if hate groups have adopted it as its own ... why continue to fly it here at the state Capitol grounds?" Chumley responded, "We're focusing on the wrong thing here. We need to be focusing on the nine families that lived and see that this does not happen again." Griffin then asked, "Those nine families and every black person in South Carolina and all of the people, the white people who are against that flag believe it should not be on the state grounds. You are saying it should stay because your constituents want it to?" Chumley responded, "It stays there until the people of South Carolina say it should come down."

Although Cooper tackled the Confederate Flag controversy and called out the flag's racist symbolism, his treatment of the issue arguably perpetuates a type of "new racism." Cooper suggested that the ideology underlying the flag's significance is a minority one, and, importantly, something rooted in the distant past. Cooper implied that removing the flag would further civil rights objectives. Arguably, however, the flag's removal would not necessarily eradicate systemic racism.

AC 360 utilized a Good versus Evil discourse to guide its coverage and structure its approach to the Charleston shooting and the controversy surrounding the Confederate Flag. The "ingroup Good" included victims and people of all races and colors living in the Charleston community who, according to AC 360, faced this tragedy with grace, faith, solidarity, and forgiveness. The "outgroup Evil" is racism, represented in the shooter's act. While the program emphasized Roof's racist intentions, it failed to provide a structural context of racism as a longstanding and systemic problem in American society. This omission is significant, and, arguably, represents a powerful example of Bonilla-Silva's (2006) idea of "color-blind racism." By suggesting that racists are a tiny minority and that racism is most clearly represented through outward acts of bigotry—use of racial slurs, flying the Confederate Flag, and racist violence—AC 360 coverage gave the illusion that racism is a thing of the past and that the Charleston community was able to overcome it with unity.

Cooper's coverage treats Roof as an extreme outlier, and fails to interrogate the system that produces both racist violence and more subtle forms of racial injustice. Although likely unintentional, this lack of context can be seen as an example of the soft "new racism" that Bonilla-Silva and other scholars have warned against.

The O'Reilly Factor

The O'Reilly Factor provided extensive coverage of the Charleston church shooting on its June 18, 19, 22 and 23, 2015 broadcasts. *The O'Reilly Factor's* coverage did not focus much on the Charleston community, and included very little on-the-ground reporting from Charleston, particularly when compared with AC 360. The show also covered the Confederate Flag controversy less thoroughly than AC 360. For the most part, O'Reilly used the mass shooting as a chance to discuss important political issues affecting American society. Two main discursive formations were identified in our close reading of the *The O'Reilly Factor's* content: that the Second Amendment to the US Constitution should be protected

and institutionalized racism no longer exists in American society. Our close reading of *The O'Reilly Factor* also revealed that the show relied heavily on O'Reilly's personal opinions.

A defense of the Second Amendment. A discourse that may be titled, "a defense of the Second Amendment," emerged from our analysis of *The O'Reilly Factor*.

In the opening segment of *The O'Reilly Factor's* June 18 episode—and following a brief description of the Charleston church shooting and a prayer for the victims—O'Reilly formed a political argument about the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, which gives Americans the right to "bear arms." O'Reilly used as a launching-off point a statement made by President Obama suggesting that the government should regulate gun ownership more strictly. O'Reilly posited that Obama's perspective is misguided, that limitations on gun ownership cannot prevent mass violence, and that violence is the product of deranged individuals, not the American right to own guns.

O'Reilly said, "Pundits who say they can prevent individual acts of terror are misleading you ... Unfortunately, President Obama strayed into the theoretical today."

On June 19, O'Reilly made a veiled reference to proposed gun control legislation, saying, "There is evil among us and there is no solution to that evil." Also on June 19, he said, "The government cannot fix disturbed people like Dylan Roof," and one of his guests—UCLA Law Professor Adam Winkler—said, "there's always going to be someone who is crazy and is going to get their hands on a gun."

During the June 18 episode, O'Reilly took offense to the suggestion made by liberal pundits that America is uniquely violent. O'Reilly said, "Of course mass murder does happen in other advanced countries, even those with all-out bans on firearms. The president used the frequency line to give him cover, but again, preventing random mass murder is impossible, as is stopping the deranged acts of individual terrorists ... 'Talking Points' believe that President Obama was misguided in his comments on guns."

Late in the June 18 episode, O'Reilly argued, "This kind of thing happens all over the world ... It's a bunch of malarkey to say this is an American problem."

To support his argument that mass killings are unavoidable, O'Reilly emphasized psychopathy, which he argued cannot be prevented. On June 18, O'Reilly referred to other mass shootings, arguing that the perpetrators "are all the same person, psychotic sociopath losers ... whatever disease they have in their minds ... you can't stop them." Also on June 18, O'Reilly said, "That kind of pathology can never be stopped."

O'Reilly also engaged in a more direct, explicit defense of the Second Amendment, invoking it specifically and suggesting that gun ownership is an untouchable American right. For instance, on June 19, O'Reilly said, "the myth that these people are throwing out about the Second Amendment being removed—I just don't want to hear about it anymore. The Second Amendment is set in stone." Also on June 19, O'Reilly argued that gun control is a "fiction." He said, "Americans have the right to defend themselves with firearms and that right is not going to be abrogated."

An attack on the white supremacy thesis. Another discourse emerging from our analysis of *The O'Reilly Factor*—"an attack on the white supremacy thesis"—suggested that whites do not have an inherent advantage in American society and that institutional racism no longer exists. Insofar as this discourse downplays racial injustice and seeks to preserve the status quo by denying the existence of white privilege and white supremacy, it speaks directly to aforementioned assumptions of CRT. However, O'Reilly was often blunt

and explicit, rather than “subtle” (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 3), in his denunciations of the white supremacy thesis.

On June 19, O'Reilly played a sound clip from an unidentified male suggesting that “white supremacy” is a problem in American society. O'Reilly responded, saying, “What a bunch of bull that is—white supremacy. The race hustlers are making a living on it.” Later in the same episode, O'Reilly said, “White supremacy? Good grief!”

On June 22, after opening the show by playing two sound clips that suggested that racism is prevalent in American society, O'Reilly invited his guest, Juan Williams, to react. Williams, an African-American, essentially agreed with O'Reilly that institutional racism no longer exists in American society, describing the sound clips as “cheap rhetoric.” Williams argued that “When you start talking about white supremacy, things start to not add up. This is not Rhodesia ... this is not South Africa.”

On June 23, O'Reilly told interviewee John Stossel that “racism ... has vanished.” He then asked Stossel if he agreed. Stossel responded, “I think it definitely has vanished.”

O'Reilly also suggested that racism in American society operates in at least two, equal directions—white against black, and black against white. While interviewing Martin Luther King III on June 18, O'Reilly said, “Maybe it's not a good thing to deride people of the opposite color—that is done all the time by people on both sides.” During his June 18 interview with Bernie Goldberg, O'Reilly stated, “I think that on both sides, black and white ... that disparaging those of another color is too acceptable in America. That both sides do it.” During a June 22 interview with Juan Williams, Williams said, “Well yeah, I have seen white people who think black people are not as smart.” O'Reilly quickly interrupted, saying, “But we know black people who think that about white people.” Also on June 22, O'Reilly said, “These white power Nazi websites exist, but so do the black power websites exist, too, like the black Panthers.”

O'Reilly also attempted to deflect attention away from white-on-black racism by emphasizing black crime and violence. While interviewing King III on June 18, O'Reilly said, “Your grandmother was killed by a black man.” On June 19, he interviewed African-American Sherriff David Clark, who argued that black-on-black crime is a significantly more serious threat to African-Americans than white-on-black crime. Clark said, “I've talked to lots of black victims. They feel more danger from other black people than the offhand shooting [by a white person].”

Subjective analysis. To a large degree, *The O'Reilly Factor* revolves around the personality of the show's host, O'Reilly. In discussing the Charleston shootings, O'Reilly was forthcoming in providing personal opinions and took time to explain his views.

O'Reilly used his daily “Talking Points Memo” and the daily “Tip of the Day” to offer up personal analysis. He also injected his views during interviews with guests.

For instance, in his June 18 “Talking Points Memo,” O'Reilly explained why the Charleston mass shooting should be considered a terrorist attack. O'Reilly said, “No question that was an act of terror, no different than what ISIS and Al-Qaeda does.” O'Reilly also argued during the June 18 “Memo” that the American left was wrong to suggest that violence and racism are endemic to American society. O'Reilly said, “Sadly there are those who will condemn America as being a violent place, where racial animus is the rule, not the exception. But that is a lie.” The same June 18 “Talking Points Memo” argued that responses to the Charleston shooting that focus on gun control are misguided.

Later in the June 19 "Memo," O'Reilly proclaimed that "In the next segment, I'm going to tell you how gun crime can be curtailed." Upon returning from commercial, he offered his "solution" to America's violence problem.

Importantly, O'Reilly performed his ideology-driven personal analyses under the guise of objectivity, frequently championing himself as a watchdog. After reading viewer mail on June 18, O'Reilly said, "We are proud of our record looking out for viewers, even if it makes the establishment mad." O'Reilly signed off on June 18 in this way: "Please always remember the spin stops here, because we are looking out for you."

Strategic guest selection. For the most part, and with rare exceptions, O'Reilly strategically used guests to endorse his views and interpretations. O'Reilly used his personal opinions to structure his show, often asking guests to comment on his views.

For instance, O'Reilly began his June 18 episode—the first after the shooting—with an argument in favor of the Second Amendment, which grants Americans the "right to bear arms." O'Reilly interviewed Montell Williams, an African-American and well-known supporter of the Second Amendment. Williams said, "You are absolutely right. This is not a gun issue. I am 100 percent a supporter of the Second Amendment."

O'Reilly sometimes asked guests directly to endorse his views. After introducing Bernie Goldberg on June 18, O'Reilly asked: "[Do you] think I'm handling [the show] correctly?" Goldberg responded by saying, "Yeah, I would say the tone of the program so far has been reasonable and smart and most importantly not sensational."

During the same interview, O'Reilly repeated his earlier analysis of comments made by American liberals, including President Obama and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. He said, in part, "I don't think it was appropriate for President Obama and Mrs. Clinton to bring [gun control] up today because they know there are two sides to this story." Perhaps unsurprisingly, Goldberg, a regular on *The O'Reilly Factor* whose conservative views are well known, announced that he agreed with O'Reilly.

Later in the same June 18 episode, O'Reilly interviewed Fox News analyst Geraldo Rivera, who agreed with O'Reilly's description of the shooting. Rivera said, "First let me comment on your labeling this a terrorist attack. I completely agree."

On June 19, O'Reilly offered up a two-pronged solution to America's violence problem. First, O'Reilly argued for tougher punishments for gun-related offenses, something he said would "give judges ... huge advantages in wiping out the gang problem." Second, O'Reilly said there should be a registry for gun owners. O'Reilly's guest, UCLA Law Professor Adam Winkler, agreed with both suggestions.

On June 22, O'Reilly interviewed two guests, both of whom agreed with his assessment that racism was no longer a grave problem in American society. Later in the same episode, O'Reilly argued that hate groups represent a fringe minority in America. He then interviewed a hate group expert, Bryan Levin, who agreed.

Discussion

Coverage of the Charleston Church shooting on CNN's *AC 360* and Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor* differed in meaningful ways. *AC 360* went to great lengths to humanize the shooting victims and highlight outstanding qualities of the Charleston community as a whole. *AC 360* used a "Good versus Evil" discourse to structure its reportage, suggesting that the shootings and their aftermath represented a series of battles between right and

wrong. *The O'Reilly Factor* used the Charleston tragedy as a launching-off point to discuss other important issues affecting the United States. Specifically, the show offered up a defense of the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution and argued that institutionalized racism no longer exists in American society. O'Reilly's program was explicitly subjective—the host provided considerable personal analysis and strategically selected guests who were sympathetic to his ideological views.

The two shows also overlapped in key ways. Both shows suggested that the shooter, Roof, was evil, a loser, an outcast, and, importantly, that he did not represent a significant societal trend. Although both shows drew attention to racism—they said that Roof's crime was racially motivated—they arguably missed larger points about the root causes and continued effects of racism in twenty-first-century America. In this sense, both shows reproduced ideological biases consistent with what Bonilla-Silva calls "new racism."

Both networks went to some lengths to suggest that Roof and the hate groups that seem to have motivated him represent a tiny American minority. Also, both shows described racism as exceptional and portrayed the larger communities—of South Carolinians and Americans—as good and essentially non-racist. These coverage patterns implied that America has moved beyond structural racism and into a post-racism era, with the overwhelming majority of people rejecting racist symbols, racial slurs, and racist violence. Both networks, however, ignored the structural context of racism that creates the conditions under which racist violence thrives. Significant issues—geographic segregation based on race, the wealth gap between races, racial profiling, police brutality, and systemic racism related to the American criminal justice system, among other things—were ignored by both CNN and Fox.

These omissions are significant, particularly in light of the fact that the "Black Lives Matter" movement—which had repeatedly drawn attention to important underlying race issues—was in full swing by the time the Charleston tragedy took place. None of the guests interviewed on CNN and Fox News were asked to place the Charleston shooting in a larger context of racism, and notable race experts were ignored.

By ignoring important underlying race issues and suggesting that the Charleston shooting was entirely exceptional, *AC 360* and *The O'Reilly Factor* arguably reinforced the established ideology of white supremacy. Fox's coverage explicitly rejected the idea of institutional racism, while CNN's coverage arguably exemplified the notion of "color-blind racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Color-blind racism suggests, among other things, that racial inequalities persist in American society in spite of the contention—mostly by whites—that America has moved into an era of colorblindness, where the overwhelming majority of people are not racist and do not think in racial terms.

In particular, CNN's treatment of the Charleston community warrants attention. *AC 360* presented the Charleston community as a success story. The show presented community members of all races coming together to defeat racism, implying that racial harmony could be achieved as long as racial slurs and symbols and racist violence are shunned. This treatment of racism and race relations is superficial because it does not attempt to address or treat the contextual roots of racism in American society.

van Dijk's (2000) ideological square framework suggests that news (and other) institutions produce discourses that neatly divide events and phenomena along the lines of "us" versus "them". In this sense, CNN's *AC 360* suggested that the "us" in the Charleston tragedy is the overwhelming majority of Americans, representing all colors and races, while the "them" is represented by evil doers like Roof and other extremists.

In the end, both *The O'Reilly Factor* and *AC 360* reflected the ideological biases of their respective networks, Fox News and CNN. *The O'Reilly Factor* delivered an interpretation of events that was bluntly consistent with American conservatism and the Republican Party. O'Reilly's discussions of gun control and white supremacy may as well have been taken out of the American conservative playbook.

Assessing *AC 360*'s ideological slant is more complicated because the show was more nuanced and less blunt than *The O'Reilly Factor*. On the one hand, the show took a less conservative tone than *The O'Reilly Factor*, and, to a significant extent, reflected the positions of American Democrats, particularly on the Confederate Flag controversy. On the other hand, *AC 360*'s coverage could be criticized for failing to offer up a serious challenge to the elite American political establishment position on race relations. In one sense, then, both shows reflected the larger American establishment ideology on race, which is characterized by the notion that America is “post-racist” (Coates 2015). This finding demonstrates the argument by Thompson (1990) that ideology is a reflection and a product of the power structure in a given society. Importantly, the finding also suggests consistency between our analysis of CNN and Fox News and earlier research into American television news and race. Work carried out in the 1990s by Entman and Campbell demonstrated a consistent anti-black bias in mainstream American news broadcasts. Entman (1999) argued that ABC, CBS, and NBC consistently employed negative framing of black people and that Chicago's local television broadcasts both repeatedly suggested that “racism is dead” (Entman 1990, 333) and negatively stereotyped black people (Entman 1992). Meanwhile, Campbell's (1995, 3) study drew similar conclusions about Los Angeles television news, which, the analysis suggested, advanced a “racist mythology” that perpetuated racial stereotypes and latent racism against persons of color.

Coverage of the Charleston church shootings on *AC 360* and *The O'Reilly Factor* raises serious questions about race and ideology on two of America's most popular news shows and the larger issue of persistent, implicit racist ideologies present in mainstream American television news broadcasts. While *The O'Reilly Factor* provided what may be considered fairly predictable coverage consistent with its ideological slant, *AC 360* missed a chance to explore the racist underbelly that continues to shape aspects of the American sociopolitical system.

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