

Priming the Common Enemy

According to a 2002 poll conducted by the New York Times and CBS News, 53 percent of black respondents agreed that race relations were generally good in New York City. In fact, the majority of Hispanics and whites also believed that race relations were generally good in 2002. What is surprising about this finding is that it is markedly different from that obtained when the same question was asked two years earlier; in 2000 only 16 percent of black respondents characterized race relations so positively (Murphy & Halbfinger, 2002). The most apparent catalyst for this opinion change is the September 11th terrorist attacks. Faced with a common threat, groups that were once divided in conflict seemed to have cast aside at least some of their hostilities toward one another.

Similarly, in the 2005 Los Angeles mayoral election, Latino candidate Antonio Villaraigosa defeated white incumbent James Hahn to become the city's first Hispanic mayor in more than 100 years. His success is in part attributed to capturing a larger percentage of the city's black vote than when he ran against Hahn in the previous election, where Villaraigosa faced out-right hostility from blacks. Considering that Los Angeles Times reporter Earl Hutchinson (2007) refers to the animosity between Latinos and blacks as the "worst-kept secret in race relations in America," it is perhaps surprising that black and Latino voters would unite in support for a political candidate. But, once Hahn lost black support for firing the city's black police chief, Latinos and blacks become allied against a mutual outgroup candidate, making their vote choice seem appropriate.

In both these examples, groups that typically engage in intergroup conflict have abated their hostility toward one another and allied to form a common group against a mutually threatening outgroup. In other words, the presence of an additional group changes the scope of the ingroup for these previously conflicting individuals. While scholars have documented this phenomenon, none have specifically looked at whether the mere priming of a common outgroup effects ingroup members' attitudes toward another outgroup, or whether it can alter evaluations of political candidates. I predict that simply priming members of competing groups to think of a common outgroup can affect their feelings of favorability toward an otherwise threatening group. In short, priming members of groups A and B to consider mutually threatening group C can increase feelings of favorability of group members A and B toward one another. Furthermore, not only will these groups be less hostile toward one another, but they will also rate political candidates from the respective groups more favorably. This study will specifically examine blacks, whites, and Latinos favorable attitudes toward one another when each group is primed to consider a mutually threatening outgroup.

Race and Intergroup Conflict

While in this particular study the specific groups studied will be based on race or ethnicity, one could easily contrive numerous other groups in society that could be similarly paired. The race relations between blacks, whites, and Latinos, however, is an ideal dynamic with which to test this potential priming effect. Clashes among various racial groups, particularly in the United States are often among the most salient group conflicts. It is clear, for example, that blacks and whites remain divided by their attitudes toward one another and by their attitudes on political policies, particularly those

regarding race (Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). Thus, black and white intergroup relations remain a significant source of conflict. Furthermore, the influx of Latino immigrants and their recent eclipsing of blacks as the single largest ethnic minority in the United States is likely creating a new racial dynamic with additional group conflicts. There has been, for example, much discussion regarding the relationship between Latinos and blacks. Los Angeles Times writer Hutchinson (2007) explains this dynamic poignantly:

For years, Latino leaders have pointed the finger of blame at blacks when Latinos are robbed, beaten and even murdered. Blacks, in turn, have blamed Latinos for taking jobs, for colonizing neighborhoods, for gang violence. These days, the tension between races is noticeable not only in prison life and in gang warfare (where it's been a staple of life for decades) but in politics, in schools, in housing, in the immigration debate. Conflicts today are just as likely –in some cases, more likely – to be between blacks and Latinos as between blacks and whites. In fact, even though hate-crime laws were originally created to combat crimes by whites against minority groups, the majority of LA County's hate crimes against blacks in 2006 were suspected to have been committed by Latinos, and vice versa, according to the county Commission on Human relations.

Political scientists have also examined the potential for Latino and African-American coalitions (Kaufman, 2003; Meier et al. 2004). Kaufman (2003), for example, argues that perceptions of commonality among blacks and Latinos could foster political alliances among these groups. She argues that they share similar objective circumstances in the United States. At the same time, these two groups often face competition over jobs, educational resources, housing, and political power. Her research suggests that blacks and Latinos may be primed both to see each other as competitive outgroups *and* to perceive each other as common group working for collective goals. Normatively, this is not to suggest that Latinos and blacks should be primed to think of whites as a threatening outgroup, thereby escalating the conflict, but that they may be strategically cued to

consider whites as a third outgroup whose political priorities are a threat to their own collective political goals, thereby creating a viable coalition. Based on the significance of these conflicts, it is no surprise that the body of literature on intergroup relations has focused heavily on race relations.

Theories of Intergroup Conflict

Several theoretical approaches aim to explain intergroup behavior and ingroup favoritism. Particularly in the political science literature, several social-psychological theories have been adapted and constructed to explain prejudice, racism, and discrimination. While many of these theories have been concerned with addressing whites' attitudes toward minority groups, they have been extended to other groups as well. The most relevant approaches in this study of conflict in the face of a common enemy are theories that imply the ingroup members' negative response to the outgroup and favorable response to their own group are driven by perceptions of threat.

One of the simplest of socio-psychological models, realistic group conflict theory, seeks to explain intergroup behavior such as war, domination, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, and discrimination (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Campbell, 1965; Sherif 1966). It argues that negative attitudes toward the outgroup are driven by conditions (or the perception of conditions) of zero-sum competition over material or symbolic scarce resources. As Campbell (1965) summarized, the perception that one group's gain is another's loss translates into the perception of group threat, in turn causing prejudice against the outgroup, negative stereotyping of the outgroup, ingroup solidarity, awareness of ingroup identity, and internal cohesion, including intolerance of ingroup deviants, ethnocentrism, and discriminatory behavior. Campbell also added that when group goals

are compatible, positive relations are likely to exist, which suggests that when two groups share a common goal that is threatened by a third outgroup, members of these two groups may be more inclined to identify positively with one another.

A more sociological version of realistic group conflict theory, the group position model, asserts that when groups are in a state of power imbalance, the more powerful groups will strive to maintain their dominant position over less powerful groups. This theory has been emphasized by Blumer (1958) who explained that Whites will resist social policies they perceive to be designed to redistribute power and privilege to other groups, particularly blacks. Bobo and Hutchings (1996) extended this theory by examining its application among whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians. They find that significant numbers of individuals from all racial backgrounds see group relations in zero-sum terms. They also argue that in general, perceptions of threat involve aspects of several social-psychological processes that cannot be reduced to a single cause. Thus, there is no particular all-encompassing explanation for perceptions of group threat in the literature, but instead an agreement among many scholars that conflict is indeed driven by some social perceptions of threat, whatever the dynamics. What Bobo and Hutchings do specifically find, however, is that individuals who perceive members of their own group as generally facing unfair treatment in the larger social order tend to be more likely to regard members of other groups as competitive threats. This finding suggests that some groups may be more likely to perceive conflict than others, and so in this study, certain pairings of conflicting groups may be both harder to unite favorably and may more strongly perceive a particular outgroup as a threat than others.

Two other theories of intergroup conflict are important to mention. In contrast to realistic group conflict theory and group position theory, symbolic racism theory argues that whites' negative attitudes toward blacks (and other groups) is driven by a belief that blacks do not sufficiently adhere to cherished traditional American values like hard work and patriotism (Sears, 1988; Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Thus, for whites, minorities may pose a threat to particular values. Finally, social identity theory argues that perceptions of zero-sum competition are not necessary for the presence of outgroup hostility or discrimination. Simply being assigned to arbitrary groups is sufficient to create outgroup negative attitudes, and rather than resources being at risk, it is positive group identity and self-esteem that are at stake. While providing further support for these theories is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to understand that perceptions of threat, based on a variety of social-psychological sources, do indeed drive outgroup hostility. Furthermore, this previous work provides a theoretical framework for the nature of the threats that will be primed in the experimental conditions.

The Common Enemy

Social scientists and historians have already documented the reduction of intergroup conflict among two groups in the presence of a common enemy. In his classic Robber's Cave experiment, for example, Sherif (1953) divided boys at his fabricated summer camp into two competing groups. Members of each group developed intense hostility and antagonism toward outgroup members, even those they had initially been friends with prior to the involuntary group divisions. Sherif attempted several methods to decrease conflict between the groups, including having them work together on

superordinate goals.¹ He finds, however, that the most effective event for decreasing conflict was to construct a camp-wide softball game in which the best players from both ingroups, as elected by the entire camp, competed with a group from the neighboring town. In this manipulation, the two ingroups united to form a common group of campers competing against a third outgroup, and a sense of pride and camaraderie developed across the camp.²

In an earlier study, Brophy (1945-1946) examined prejudice among merchant seamen. He found that the number of times white seamen had shipped with black seamen was negatively correlated with prejudiced attitudes. More importantly for the purposes of this paper, he found that those white seamen who had been under enemy fire with their black crew members were significantly less prejudiced than those who had not been subjected to enemy action. Thus, conflict between racial groups was mitigated by the experience of fighting a common enemy.

Consistent with the results of the previously mentioned New York Times and CBS news study on race relations, Traugott et al. (2002) studied public reactions to 9/11 and found that feelings toward ethnic minorities changed after the terrorist attacks. Survey respondents completed “feeling thermometer” questions regarding how they felt toward several ethnic and racial groups. The results revealed that American racial groups including blacks, Hispanics, and white Americans all received higher thermometer ratings than they had prior to 9/11. Furthermore, Middle Eastern ethnic groups in the

¹ Sherif defines these as “goals which are compelling and highly appealing to members of two or more groups in conflict but which cannot be attained by the resources and energies of the groups separately” (1958).

² It is important to note that Sherif rejects this measure for two reasons. First, he argues that united hostile groups to defeat another group is simply creating conflict on a larger scale. Second, he suggests that throughout history there is an abundance of examples in which conflicting groups joined together to face a common enemy only to resume the same conflicts once the enemy was defeated.

United States received generally lower ratings than African, Hispanic, Asian, or white Americans. Thus, racial groups like Hispanics, blacks, and whites who are otherwise in conflict received higher ratings, while groups more likely associated with the threatening outgroup received lower ratings. As Traugott et al. explain, “The survey results paint a picture of Americans rallying around each other, concerned and even distrustful of foreigners. This is a kind of patriotism of mutual support more than a jingoistic reaction to all foreigners or even immigrants.”

Priming Group Identity and Conflict

It is clear that racial attitudes and group conflict are a significant force in American society and politics. The specific question this study seeks to explore in regards to this conflict is whether simply priming the identity of a common outgroup is sufficient to alter ingroup members’ perceptions of group dynamics. The aim is not to suggest that elites or other individuals ought to manipulate group members by expanding conflict, but since we do observe this shifting of intergroup relations in the political and social world³, it is important to understand the mechanism and ease by which changes in attitudes toward groups may occur. Can individuals shift their group identities and perceptions simply by being primed to think about a common outgroup? Furthermore, this research does have normatively positive implications for some in that it may suggest that conflict among groups like Latinos and blacks may be mitigated by uniting them in the political arena against policy threats from whites who may have incongruent policy goals.⁴

³ Some might argue that American political leaders adopted this common enemy strategy post 9/11 to garner electoral and legislative support.

⁴ The argument here is that in a democratic political system, the rights of groups to demand that government provide certain benefits is acceptable and desirable. In other words, certain groups battling it

Previous work on priming argues that cognitive accessibility moderates priming effects (e.g., Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Kinder & Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001; Price and Tewksbury, 1997; Valentino, 1999). That is, the ideas and considerations that are more salient and available to an individual are more likely to be used automatically in decision-making tasks (Taylor & Fiske, 1978). Valentino, Hutchings, & White (2002) argue that when it comes to racial priming, these responses must be automatic (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) because of the social undesirability of expressing race-related attitudes and behaviors. If it is true that these reactions are automatic, then we would expect primes that relate to threatening outgroups to effectively induce automatic responses toward these outgroups and make perceptions threat salient. Whether this same response *also* alters an individual's attitude toward a non-primed outgroup remains to be examined. What one should expect, however, is that in order for primes to automatically mediate individual's attitudes toward multiple *groups*, the individual must consider conflict in group terms to begin with. Thus, I expect that individuals who identify with their own ingroup strongly and who see their own fate linked to that of their group to be most effected by outgroup primes.

Miller et al. (1981) argue that group consciousness is most salient among advantaged groups when they perceive their position in society as being threatened or challenged by one or more subordinate groups. Thus, whites who are primed to think about a threatening outgroup should strengthen their own sense of group identity and their animosity toward the outgroup. Miller et al. also argue that group identity is also made salient when members of a subordinate group see the dominate stratum as a

out in the political arena to obtain policies and services beneficial to them is a socially acceptable expansion of conflict.

reference for comparison and express discontent with the influence they perceive their group to have relative to the outgroup. Therefore, both blacks and Latinos, when primed to think about whites, should not only increase their own group identity but their dislike for whites as well. Whether these primes will change the scope of the perceived group remains to be seen. Furthermore, what this study may demonstrate is that instead of group members revising their perception of the ingroup, they may instead develop a deeper attachment to their immediate ingroup and subsequently express increased hostility toward *all* outgroups. I argue, however, that if the threat other outgroups create is not salient in the ingroup member's mind, then they will be less likely to express their dislike.

Miller et al. find that blacks have strong levels of group consciousness, and Dawson (1994) argues that blacks have a sense of linked-fate with their group. These findings suggest that at least for blacks, group identity is already salient and if blacks are more likely to conceive of the world in group terms prior to being primed, priming outgroups may have a stronger effect on them than on whites or Latinos. Furthermore, scholars have found that generally, whites do not have a strong sense of group identity (Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997; Sears & Savalei 2007). Therefore, whites, who may be less likely to perceive the word in group terms, may also be less likely to adopt favorable attitudes toward either Latinos or blacks upon being primed.

Research Methods

The best manner with which to test the effects of priming a common enemy on feelings of favorability and candidate support among otherwise competing groups is with a series of experiments. I propose six experiments that explore the effects of priming on

favorability and that determine whether merely priming the common outgroup is sufficient to induce an increase in favorability, or if a prime that more explicitly suggests the *threat* the common outgroup poses is necessary. All subjects will view campaign advertisements for political candidates and several unrelated product commercials. Subjects in the experimental conditions will also view either commercials or local news preview clips designed to prime a particular outgroup.

The design of this experiment seeks to manipulate conflict among Latinos, blacks, and whites by priming each group as the common outgroup, respectively. Thus, there will be six independent studies, each with a control and a treatment condition. In the first study, Latinos and blacks will be primed to consider whites as the common threatening outgroup with a subtle prime that only features the outgroup. The second study will be identical except that the prime will more explicitly cue the threat whites pose as an outgroup.⁵ In the third study, Latinos and whites will be primed to consider blacks as the common enemy, with the fourth study featuring a more explicit prime. In the fifth study, blacks and whites will be primed to consider Latinos as the mutually threatening outgroup, and the sixth study will more directly feature Latinos as an actual threat. Subjects for each study will only be of the race or ethnicity of the two conflicting groups being paired against a common outgroup.

Subjects will be randomly assigned to two control groups and two treatment groups. In the first control group, members of both groups will view a short, generic campaign advertisement from a candidate of a race or ethnicity of one of the paired groups. In the second control condition, both groups will view an identical advertisement,

⁵ The terms explicit and subtle are not to be confused with the explicit and implicit cues used in earlier work to distinguish between implicit and explicit cues (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). In my study, the distinction is between calling attention to the group and calling attention to the group + the group threat.

but the ethnicity of the candidate will be of the opposite paired group. The advertisement's narrative and images, however, will be the same. The experimental conditions will be identically constructed, with one campaign advertisement featuring a candidate of one race or ethnicity, and second featuring a candidate of the other race or ethnicity. The narrative and images will remain the same as those in the control condition. The only difference in the experimental manipulation will be the prime to which the subjects are exposed. The primes are designed to activate both subtle and explicit common stereotypes that relate to each group. The subtle primes are designed to call attention to the outgroup, but not to necessarily suggest any threat to the ingroup. The explicit prime is designed to specifically activate perceptions of threat among ingroup members. Furthermore, each explicit prime is designed to invoke a threat that both paired groups share.

Experimental Design

In the Latinos+blacks(1) condition, prior to watching the campaign advertisement, respondents in both experimental conditions will view a commercial featuring a stereotypical image of whites.

Study 1⁶

Latinos+blacks(1)

Conflicting Groups	Latinos + Blacks
Common Enemy	Whites
Control Condition 1	Latino candidate
Control Condition 2	Black candidate
Experimental Condition 1	Latino candidate
Experimental Condition 2	Black candidate
Prime (subtle)	Advertisement for a local country club golf course featuring images of

⁶ Please refer to Appendix A for all six charts illustrating each of the six different studies.

	white individuals
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In the second Latinos+blacks(2) condition, the prime will more explicitly suggest whites are a threatening group to Latinos and blacks. Subjects will view a news clip preview for a story on support for a proposed proposition to outlaw affirmative action featuring an image of white citizens. This threat is consistent with both realistic group conflict theories and symbolic racism theory. It suggests that for Latinos and blacks, a resource for the group may be taken away, and it is a policy that whites will realistically support on the basis that affirmative action both eliminates opportunities for their group to get ahead and is incongruent with the traditional American value of individualism.

Study 2

Latinos+blacks(2)

Conflicting Groups	Latinos + Blacks
Common Enemy	Whites
Control Condition 1	Latino candidate
Control Condition 2	Black candidate
Experimental Condition 1	Latino candidate
Experimental Condition 2	Black candidate
Prime (explicit threat)	Local news preview clip featuring a story on a local proposition to outlaw affirmative action coupled with an image of white citizens

In the Latinos+whites(1) condition, before viewing the campaign advertisement, respondents in the experimental condition will view a local news story clip featuring a local all-black high school team paired with images of the players. In the second Latinos+whites(2) condition, the more explicit prime will be conducted by having subjects view an eleven o'clock local news preview clip that mentions a featured story on gang violence coupled with an image of a black male suspect. Not only does gang

violence pose a real physical threat, but it may be consistent with Blumer's group position theory in that gangs can threaten the dominance of one group over another.

The first whites+blacks(1) experimental condition will have respondents view a commercial for a new Mexican restaurant prior to viewing the candidate campaign advertisement. The second whites+black(2) condition in which the prime is more explicit will feature an eleven o'clock local news preview clip where the reporter mentions a story on a proposed law to allow illegal immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. This threat is consistent with realistic group conflict theory in that both blacks and whites may believe that more resources in terms of things like jobs and social welfare assistance to immigrants (Latinos in particular) may mean less for them.

After viewing the campaign advertisement, subjects in both the control and the experimental conditions will answer a series of survey questions. In addition to answering a battery of demographic questions, they will also evaluate the candidate they viewed by rating him or her on a 100 point feeling thermometer scale. Following this, they will also answer feeling thermometer questions to gauge their perceptions toward the outgroup they are being paired with and the common outgroup they are being primed to consider threatening. Lastly, participants will be asked questions designed to measure the degree to which they identify with their own ingroup. While the ultimate aim is to see whether the primes alter individual's feelings of favorability toward the political candidates of the paired outgroup, it is also important to measure any changes in attitudes toward both outgroups in general and in attachment to the ingroup. This design is ideal because not only does it allow one to determine whether feelings of favorability increase for the political candidate of the normally conflicting outgroup, but also for the candidate

belonging to one's own ingroup. In order to determine whether the prime is successful, the mean feeling thermometer ratings obtained in the control groups will be compared with the mean ratings obtained in the experimental conditions.

Hypotheses

H1: Individuals primed in the experimental conditions to consider a mutually threatening outgroup will, on average, give the candidate of the normally conflicting group with which they are now paired a more positive evaluation on the feeling thermometer.

H2: Blacks, who most strongly identify with their racial group, will be most susceptible to these priming effects (i.e., there will be a significant positive change in the feeling thermometer ratings for the outgroup political candidates between the control and experimental conditions).

H3: Latinos, who have lower levels of group consciousness than blacks, will be less susceptible to these priming effects (i.e., there will be less of a change in feeling thermometer ratings for the outgroup political candidate between the control and the experimental conditions).

H4: Whites, who have low levels of group identity, will not be significantly affected by these primes when it comes to more positively evaluating the outgroup candidate.

H5: All groups were more positively evaluate the political candidate corresponding to their own ingroup in the experimental condition.

H6: All groups will more negatively evaluate the primed opposing outgroup and will more positively evaluate their own ingroup.

H7: Blacks and Latinos will more positively evaluate the paired outgroup in the experimental condition. For whites, there will be no significant change in evaluations of the paired outgroup candidate.

H8: For blacks and Latinos, whose group identity is more salient, the subtle primes will be sufficient to alter evaluations. For whites, the more explicit prime will be necessary to change attitudes toward outgroups.

Further Research

Previous research suggests that because white Americans have such low levels of ingroup identity, theories of group position and realistic group conflict do not explain

their attitudes toward minority groups well (Sears & Savalei 2007). For this same reason, whites, compared to blacks or Latinos, may be less susceptible to the primes in this experiment. If this is indeed the case, it may be worthwhile to extend the study to see if first priming whites to consider their own ingroup identity and then priming them to consider a threatening outgroup changes the effects. While ingroup identity for whites may not be as readily salient as it is for other groups, it is possible that priming their identity makes it sufficiently strong to observe changes in attitudes toward other groups.

Another study could explore particular groups' attitudes toward Arabs or Arab Americans as the threatening outgroup. This study would have two purposes: First, it could seek to determine whether priming the threatening group is sufficient to alter attitudes toward other groups, and second, to distinguish whether it is merely the threat that changes individual's attitudes or if it is the outgroup itself. Because the political power of uniting conflicting groups against a common enemy may prove to be a powerful political tool, understanding how sensitive to these primes individuals may be is important.

Finally, the dynamic of uniting conflicting groups against a mutually threatening outgroup can be transferred to numerous situations. Political leaders in authoritarian regimes may use the strategy to unite otherwise competing factions.⁷ Entire countries may unite against a common enemy, backed by the support of their respective citizens. One could create a long list of potential groups in difference sizes and of different scopes that could be manipulated in such a way. Therefore, understanding individual's

⁷ Turner argues that Hitler invoked race and the "Jewish threat" to unite his social democratic and Marxist opponents (2005).

sensitivity to primes that may foster this dynamic may prove worthwhile to our greater understanding of intergroup relations.

Appendix A

Study 1

Latinos+blacks(1)

Conflicting Groups	Latinos + Blacks
Common Enemy	Whites
Control Condition 1	Latino candidate
Control Condition 2	Black candidate
Experimental Condition 1	Latino candidate
Experimental Condition 2	Black candidate
Prime (subtle)	Advertisement for a local country club golf course featuring images of white individuals

Study 2

Latinos+blacks(2)

Conflicting Groups	Latinos + Blacks
Common Enemy	Whites
Control Condition 1	Latino candidate
Control Condition 2	Black candidate
Experimental Condition 1	Latino candidate
Experimental Condition 2	Black candidate
Prime (explicit threat)	Local news preview clip featuring a story on a local proposition to outlaw affirmative action coupled with an image of white citizens

Study 3

Latinos+whites(1)

Conflicting Groups	Latinos + whites
Common Enemy	Blacks
Control Condition 1	Latino candidate
Control Condition 2	White candidate
Experimental Condition 1	Latino candidate
Experimental Condition 2	White candidate
Prime (subtle)	News clip of local high school basketball team featuring all black students

Study 3**Latinos+whites(2)**

Conflicting Groups	Latinos + whites
Common Enemy	Blacks
Control Condition 1	Latino candidate
Control Condition 2	White candidate
Experimental Condition 1	Latino candidate
Experimental Condition 2	white candidate
Prime (explicit)	Local news preview on gang violence with image of black male

Study 4**Whites+blacks(1)**

Conflicting Groups	Whites + blacks
Common Enemy	Latinos
Control Condition 1	White candidate
Control Condition 2	Black candidate
Experimental Condition 1	White candidate
Experimental Condition 2	Black candidate
Prime (subtle)	Commercial for a Mexican restaurant

Study 5**Whites+blacks(5)**

Conflicting Groups	Whites + blacks
Common Enemy	Latinos
Control Condition 1	White candidate
Control Condition 2	Black candidate
Experimental Condition 1	White candidate
Experimental Condition 2	Black candidate
Prime (subtle)	Local news story on law allowing illegal immigrants to obtain driver's licenses

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