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Color-Blind Stancetaking in Racialized Discourse

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Color-Blind Stancetaking in Racialized Discourse

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Abigail Christine Tobias-Lauerman
May 2017
ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine how language constructs and constrains racialized discourse in post-Jim Crow contemporary America. Drawing on rhetorical and sociolinguistic work set forth by Booth, Shotwell, Bonilla-Silva, Omi and Winant, and others, it is apparent that racial organization—and racial identities and categorization—in the US is reliant upon specific markers that signify racial meaning. Such markers are assimilated into wider, unconscious discourse through what Shotwell and Booth describe as seemingly inherent—yet ultimately constructed—matters of “common sense,” and are expressed through evaluative stance acts. I explore the origins and construction of these markers and the relationship between color-blind racism and language through the framework of Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus/doxa schema. Bourdieu illuminates the ways current racial language denies self-reflexivity, instead maintaining its own survival by way of “common sense.” To apply these principles, I analyze four public statements made during the 2006 racially-charged “Jena Six” situation in Louisiana—two who are critical of the Jena Six, and two who are in support of them—as the Jena Six case, trial, and surrounding public response provide numerous points of comparison to more recent racialized events. To analyze the four statements, I apply five rhetorical “rules” that I develop from Bonilla-Silva’s definitions of color-blind language, and I look at the ways in which the logic within each statement is mediated through a “common sense” racial knowledge and expressed through stancetaking. What is observed in the two statements that are critical of the Jena Six is a unified yet flexible system of racial thought that works to preserve current racial conditions, while the two statements made in support of the Six utilize language and logic that suggest avenues for boundary-breaking in regards to available racial language and subsequent racial realities.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

With no fewer than ten highly-publicized deaths of black males at the hands of law enforcement in the past three years, racially-charged— and at times violent— public protest and debate appears to be an ever-present component of political and social discourse in the United States. Yet, despite both public and political actions, it seems that lasting progress, or at least lasting change, is never made, and the conversations that surround such efforts seem to differ only in the particulars of the case at hand. If discourse in the United States— particularly that which erupts in times of highly-publicized and politically-charged conflict or confrontation where questions of race as a salient issue are debated— is both predictable and ineffective in bringing about significant and lasting change, what are the characteristics that make it so? What language strategies, particularly among the general public, are consistently used when discussing issues where race is a significant factor? Furthermore, why does such language appear to consistently fail in disrupting current racial attitudes and systems and in preventing further (often violent) conflict? In the research that follows, I will argue that:

a. The current racial system in the United States is organized by a logic that is deemed “color-blind,” but is in fact established in a way that maintains white racial and social dominance and can thus be called color-blind racism.

b. Color-blind logic in the US is a constructed and constructing system of thought that both provides and constrains the language available to conceive of and communicate about race and racial issues.

c. The language that color-blindness makes available, which I will call color-blind language, is identifiable and open to critique and challenge; yet, such identification is discouraged under the self-protecting and self-perpetuating structure and function of
color-blindness, thus limiting the extent and productivity of any given racial discourse.

To examine these questions, I turn to the public discourse surrounding the events of September 2007 and the trial of the six high school students from Jena, Louisiana who came to be known as the “Jena Six.” Briefly, the Jena Six were six black, male high school students who were convicted of assault on a white student that took place in November 2006 in the small, predominately white, town of Jena. While their guilt in committing the crime was not in question, public protest arose over the severity of the charges filed against them, especially in light of events that had been escalating in Jena in the fall of 2006. After the sentence of one of the defendants was announced in September 2007, Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson led a protest march in Jena that was attended by several thousand people. That march received widespread national media coverage, and in Chapter 4 I examine public statements that were made in response to the march the day after it took place.

While I further contextualize the trial of the Jena Six and its subsequent protest march in Chapter 3, I chose the Jena Six case, rather than a more recent high-profile and racially-charged subject of mass public discourse, for two primary reasons that I discuss further in the next section. First, unlike more contemporary instances of public racial discourse such as those recently seen following several highly-publicized deaths of unarmed black men at the hands of law enforcement, the events leading up to and resulting from the Jena Six, while complex and unclear at times, are generally established and are not presently being debated. That is, the answers needed to establish “what happened” are no longer a point of contention regarding the Jena Six case, trial, and sentencing. Yet, the points of conflict that the public debated in 2006 regarding the Jena Six—having largely to do with the fairness of the sentences given to the six defendants—are still being debated today, albeit under different circumstances. Debates over
systemic racism and race-based disparities within the legal system are still present, and evidence for such disparities is still seen. Furthermore, conceptions of black male lawlessness still play a significant role in forming public perceptions of innocence and guilt. Second, while immediate circumstances and causes for public protest have understandably changed, so too have the methods, organization, and technologies used to participate in protests against racial discrimination and disparity. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, I believe the Jena Six trial and protests mark the end of an era for a particular kind of protest, as rapid social and technological developments soon after the trial quickly transformed the nature of subsequent public responses even as the color-blind constraints on the productivity of discourse remain the same.

**Crime and Public Perception**

At the center of the debate surrounding the prosecution of the Jena Six was a significant critique of the seeming unfairness of the legal charges brought against the Six, including the role of the Six’s race in conjunction with their gender in the media coverage and public discourse regarding their case. It is within this public discourse that I am interested in considering the above-mentioned concerns of color-blind racism and color-blind language, yet because of the role that the seemingly racial nature of the case played in bringing national attention to the Jena Six, it is important to understand the legal precedent and stakes of the Jena Six trial. Despite the social progress made by the end of Jim Crow-era laws and the successes of the Civil Rights movement, racism and racial discrimination and inequality in a number of arenas did not immediately resolve itself with the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s. Instead, as I will further discuss in Chapter 2, what emerged was a subtler method and vocabulary for the perpetuation of racist attitudes and beliefs— a method and system of racial logic that became known as color-blind racism. While the language may have changed since the advent of civil
rights legislation, it is important to note that in many ways, especially within the legal system, significant racial disparities still remain.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) notes that at every stage in the criminal justice system—from initial stops and searches in public and in homes to sentencing in courts—racial disparities are present and perpetuated, resulting in longer sentences and higher incarceration rates for defendants of color. These disparities are often seen in two major areas of legal jurisdiction: drug crime and violent crime.

Racial Disparities in Drug Crime Enforcement

The civil rights advocacy group Human Rights Watch noted in 2000 that in seven states black defendants made up 80 to 90 percent of incarcerated drug offenders, despite the fact that rates of drug distribution and use were generally similar across all races and ethnicities in the US. Indeed, out of any ethnic or racial group, white youth were in fact the most likely to be guilty of drug possession or sales. As a study also published in 2000 by the National Institute on Drug Abuse found, white students used cocaine eight times as often as black students, and used heroin seven times as often. However, despite not making up the majority of people found guilty of drug possession or distribution, in 2006—the same year as the events in Jena—1 in 14 black men, and 1 in 9 black men between ages twenty-five and thirty-five, were incarcerated, compared to 1 in 106 white men. Furthermore, sentences given to black males within the federal


3 Ibid., 99.

4 Ibid., 100.
court system are on average 20 percent longer than those received by white defendants who have been convicted of similar crimes,\(^5\) resulting largely from mandatory minimum sentencing for drug convictions in many states, despite the fact that the racial makeup of drug use *rates* does not correspond to the racial makeup of drug use *conviction and incarceration.*\(^6\)

**Race and Violent Crime**

Additionally, despite homicide and other violent crime victimization between 1980 and 2011 decreasing among all races,\(^7\) there has been both a disproportional increase in rates of incarceration and a continued public belief in increased violent crime, and the disproportional incarceration of black males is often justified as being the result of higher violent crime rates within the black community and among black men.\(^8\) However, these high incarceration rates seem to be the result of ineffective and disparate drug violation laws and policies rather than due to a significant increase in acts of violent crime. On the one hand, homicide and violent crime convictions are responsible for a very small percentage of overall prison populations, and the same is true for more recent increases in incarceration rates. While homicide offenders made up 0.4 percent of population growth within the federal prison system between 2000 and 2011, almost 61 percent of population growth could be attributed to drug offenses, and as of 2009 violent crime offenders made up only 7.9 of the federal prison population.\(^9\) On the other hand,

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\(^5\) American Civil Liberties Union, “Racial Disparities,” 1.

\(^6\) Ibid., 3.


\(^9\) Ibid., 101.
despite an overall downward trend in violent crime rates, in 2009 blacks were 78 percent more likely to be victims of household burglary than members of other races, and in 2012 were 66 percent more likely than whites to be victims of assault and robbery. Yet, despite their much lower chances of being victimized, 73 percent of white respondents in a 2000 survey said that courts did not deal harshly enough with criminals and that punitive measures within the criminal justice system should be increased, compared to 64 percent of black respondents who answered the same, and 58 percent of blacks who said in a 2001 survey that “more money for education and job training” was their preferred crime reduction policy.

**Perceptions of Black Criminality**

What becomes apparent, then, is not only a disproportionate rate of incarceration compared to offense rates of black defendants, but also a division between perceived and actual levels of criminal activity. While certain types of crime are committed at higher rates by people of color, white respondents in 2010 consistently over-estimated the rates at which they believed blacks and Latinos committed those crimes. In contrast, when asked similar questions regarding the racial distribution of perpetrators of certain crimes, black respondents in a 2000 study answered that they believed crimes were committed at approximately the same rate by white, black, and Latino groups, suggesting that whites participated in “racial typification” much more strongly than people of color. Such findings correlate strongly with studies performed to examine implicit bias, such as the 1995 study that found that 95 percent of participants imagined

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11 Ibid., 9-10.

12 Ibid., 13.

13 Ibid., 14.
a stereotypical drug user as being black, despite the fact that in 1995 only 15 percent of drug users were African American.\textsuperscript{14} Implicit bias against black innocence— and even the construction of a “script” of black criminality and guilt— can also be seen in a 2000 study that found that when asked to recall news coverage of a crime, 60 percent of viewers falsely recalled that they had seen an image of the perpetrator when one had not been provided, and of those viewers 70 percent claimed that the perpetrator in the image was black.\textsuperscript{15} Or, in another study from 2001, where participants were shown images of white and black individuals holding either a weapon or a non-threatening object and had to quickly decide whether or not to shoot the person in the image, not only did participants consistently mistake images of black individuals as holding weapons when they were not, but also mis-identified white individuals as holding a harmless object when they were, in fact, armed.\textsuperscript{16} Such mistakes demonstrate internalized, unspoken assumptions about the rates and nature of black criminality, and play a significant role not only in the conviction and sentencing of black defendants, but also in the public’s perceptions and attitudes towards black defendants.

Similar public expressions of internal belief and perception were present in the discourse surrounding the Jena Six, and continue today; yet, as I will show in the next section, the nature of protest since Jena has changed considerably, thus I believe the Jena Six case provides an ideal moment for critical examination of the racial logic and language that was at play in the public’s discourse during the case and trial in 2006 and 2007. The trial and sentencing of the Jena Six remains relevant today, as the issues that were raised by protesters in 2007 are the same as those

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\textsuperscript{14} Alexander, \textit{The New Jim Crow}, 106.
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 106.
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 107.
\end{flushright}
still being raised: the concrete disparities that exist in the trial and sentencing of black
defendants, and expectations and assumptions about black male criminality. As I will discuss, the
guilt of the Jena Six was not in question in the case; rather, the point of public debate focused
largely around the six students’ intentions and the severity of their actions, and such assumptions
utilized previously-held understandings and assumptions about the nature of young, black males.
The Jena Six are worth examining, then, because while their case took place under very different
circumstances, recent attention given to several high-profile deaths of black men at the hands of
law enforcement suggests that presuppositions and unspoken “understandings” about black male
criminality still come with real, and even fatal, consequences.

**Contemporary Parallels**

Technological Changes

While I further detail the events surrounding the Jena Six later in Chapter 3, it is helpful
to consider the technological and social changes that were happening at the same time as the Jena
Six events, as they are the very changes that I examine in Chapter 5 in a discussion of how
technology and social networks have altered public racial discourse. Even though such changes
began around 2006, by 2013 and beyond I believe they fundamentally altered the stakes and
nature of public protest and discourse. First, the social networking site Twitter launched in
March 2006, and in September 2006 Facebook expanded its membership to allow anyone over
the age of thirteen to join, whereas prior to that date only individuals with valid .edu email
addresses could create an account. Although the growth of social media may appear unrelated to
both the Jena Six and the questions of racial discourse, in recent years social media sharing sites
such as Twitter and Facebook have come to play major roles as both organizational *tools* for
activism and protest, and *sites* of activism and protest, as can be seen in the now-familiar signal
of racial solidarity #BlackLivesMatter.

The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was first used on Facebook in July 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for his fatal shooting of the black teenager Trayvon Martin. Since then, it has been more widely used on Twitter, and in Twitter’s 10-year history #BlackLivesMatter has become its third most-popular hashtag. While it was not widely popular when it appeared on Facebook in reference to Zimmerman’s acquittal, the hashtag and the subsequent Black Lives Matter movement quickly grew in visibility in August 2014 after the fatal shooting of the black 18 year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri at the hands of a white police officer. In the three weeks following Brown’s death, #BlackLivesMatter appeared online an average of 58,747 times per day, and its used spiked again on November 25, 2014 when a jury decided not to indict Brown’s shooter; the hashtag appeared 172,772 times on the 25th, and in the next three weeks it was used 1.7 million times.

Looking at a period from July 2013 to March 2016, 38% of uses of #BlackLivesMatter has been directly positive or supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement, while another 12% has been neutral, 11% has been critical of the movement, and 39% has been found in statements that deal with race issues but not Black Lives Matter in particular. That is to say, use of #BlackLivesMatter since its first appearance on Twitter has not necessarily always been done with activist intentions. Yet, since its emergence it has become part of the public consciousness and conversations about race—with 11.8 million uses on Twitter between July 2013 and March 2016.

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18 Ibid., 16-17.

19 Ibid., 18.
— and it is difficult to examine or discuss racial activism or protest in the contemporary
crime and it is difficult to examine or discuss racial activism or protest in the contemporary
moment without encountering mentions of, and arguments for and against, the message and
efficacy of #BlackLivesMatter.21

The history of social media, and in particular “hashtag activism” efforts— in which
defined hashtags on social media sites are used to express solidarity with a particular “real
world” cause— such as #BlackLivesMatter, is important to note in relation to the history of the
Jena Six case. While the debates and protests that surrounded the Jena Six have many similarities
to more recent cases of seeming disparity and unequal treatment of young black men at the hands
of law enforcement and the legal system— including what I would argue are similar color-blind
ideological roots— they differ widely in the ways that the general public responded and voiced
opinions, opposition, and support. Namely, I argue that while the protests that took place in
September 2007 in Jena in support of the Jena Six stood as one of many in a long history of
protests where people, led by one or two prominent leaders, physically gathered in one location
and relied on media presence to gain national attention, the protests in Jena also marked the end
of those kinds of protests. After Jena, rapid technological changes— namely, the rise in the
popularity and use of social media and networking sites— would quickly and fundamentally
transform both the how and the who of public protest. No longer did a protest need to be
organized and led by one message-setting leader, nor did participants need to be physically
present to express solidarity. Instead, with the advent of Twitter and a more-public Facebook in

20 Ibid., 16.

21 It should be noted, incidentally, that Twitter hashtags— or words and phrases that are
labeled through the use of a hash or pound sign [#]— were not linked to send users to a search
result of all uses of a particular hashtag until 2009, and thus early users were limited in their
ability to see other users and tweets using the same tag.
the same year as the events of the Jena Six, I suspect that had the Jena Six trial taken place a year or two later, its protests and public involvement would have looked much more like the discourse that surrounded the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and subsequent others.

Generational Shifts

An additional distinction that should be made in order to understand the significance of the differences between the Jena Six and more recent public activism is that of both the nature of the leadership and the individuals appearing as the public “face” of public protests. As I argued above, the emergence of mobile social media and networking tools made it easier for people to discover and become involved in protesting on behalf of various issues. With this ease of access, demonstrated in the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and related advocacy organizations, the model of leadership for public demonstrations shifted from a single and identifiable representative to a decentralized and grassroots style of organization, with participants tending to be younger, anti-establishment, and not seeking to establish a visible, solitary representative to speak on behalf of the entire movement.22

As I will discuss, Al Sharpton is an individual who stands as perhaps the most easily-identifiable leader of older, more traditional models of protest and activism. He is noteworthy because while he organized the march in Jena in 2007, he also stands at the forefront of conflicts today between older and younger generations of activists who are debating how movements like Black Lives Matter will be led in the future. Although Sharpton has remained a figure of much debate and criticism throughout his career— which I discuss further in Chapter 4— he gained prominence organizing protests, marches, and rallies against specific instances of racial violence

and discrimination throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. In December 2014, Sharpton’s civil rights group, the National Action Network, organized a march in Washington DC named “Sharpton’s Justice For All March” to protest the Ferguson jury’s decision to not indict the white police officer who killed Michael Brown—a march that took place only weeks after the jury’s decision, which, as noted above, had marked a significant surge in online use of #BlackLivesMatter. While the December march attracted a sizable crowd, Sharpton’s presence and intentions for the march were a point of contention as it was reported that a member of the “Hand’s Up, Don’t Shoot!” activist group—closely related to Black Lives Matter, but coming more immediately out of the death of Michael Brown—criticized the purpose of the march, saying “I thought there was going to be actions, not a show. This is a show.” The central critique from younger members of newer organizations such as Black Lives Matter towards people like Sharpton and others from his era, it seemed, was the sense of his being “co-opted by the government and the administration and his position in terms of big commercial media,” which had been seen as a hindrance to more effective grassroots and independent activism and organization. Describing younger activists’ goals for the 2014 protest, Andy Stepanian, organizer of the progressive activism group Hands Up United, argued that “the demonstrations that are happening from coast to coast are largely organized by young people of color and young folks that have adopted an intersectional message of liberation… There is a changing of the guard.

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24 Laslo, “Al Sharpton Is Struggling.”

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.
that’s happening in this country. They’re doing so organically without the help of groups like the NAACP or Rainbow Push Coalition [Jesse Jackson’s political activism organization] and others.”

In response to the suggestion that there was discord between older and younger protesters at the march in 2014, Sharpton argued that “it’s [the accusation of disagreement] a lot of side show that really at the end of the day doesn’t matter.”

Nevertheless, with the evolution of both the goals and methods of more recent activism and protest efforts—including the increasing use of online and mobile networking, fundraising, and awareness-raising strategies—compared to those seen only four or five years ago, it appears that the incoming generation of political activists is bringing with it a fundamental shift in the messages, goals, and public leadership of groups and organizations fighting for civil rights and racial equality.

**Why the Jena Six?**

The Jena Six trial and subsequent commentary and protests, then, provide an opportune moment to examine the discourse that surrounds moments of racialized public conflict and debate. While the texts that I use are from members of the general public, rather than from individuals immediately involved in the events at Jena, I believe they are worth examining since they were made in response to a form of political activism and protest that I believe will continue to look less familiar as activism such as that seen in the de-centralized, grassroots protests in 2014, the rise of #BlackLivesMatter, and the presence of other online and social media-driven efforts continue to grow. At the heart of the protests, though—from the injustices handed down to the Jena Six through their sentencing to the death of Martin, Brown, and others—the issues at stake remain fundamentally the same.

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27 Laslo, “Al Sharpton Is Struggling.”

28 Ibid.
It is this continuation of racial inequality—despite changes in methods, people, policies, and aims—that I will explore in this project. I seek to answer two central questions: What is the language used to talk about and respond to instances of racialized conflict—that is, instances where there is significant public debate and where race is seen as a central factor in the initial event—and how does that language work to transform or maintain current racial conditions in the United States?

**Outline of Research**

To answer those questions, the paper that follows focuses attention on a speech analysis of four calls made to the September 21, 2007 broadcast of the C-SPAN morning news program, “Washington Journal,” in which four different callers provide their thoughts on the issues surrounding the students known as the Jena Six.

Chapter 2 will review the philosophical, racial, and methodological theories and principles that inform the work, as I attempt to answer the question of how language is used to maintain and/or challenge current racial conditions, although I conclude that the current system of racial language maintains much more than it challenges. I begin with Booth’s examination of language and value in light of the constructed and artificial nature of racial categories, suggesting that such categories—following the groundwork laid by Bonilla-Silva—are used to construct and maintain unequal racial hierarchies. I then turn to explore Bonilla-Silva’s conception of color-blind language in light of Shotwell’s theorization of “implicit knowledge” and Bourdieu’s habitus/doxa/field sequence to suggest that the notion of “common sense” is useful for understanding how racial hierarchies are made implicit and unidentifiable, and I identify Bonilla-Silva’s color-blind racial system as an instance of Bourdieu’s habitus in action. Connecting the role of implicit evaluation to the communication of racial attitudes through color-blind language,
I conclude Chapter 2 with a discussion of the expression of racial attitudes through speakers’ stancetaking and alignment in discourse.

In Chapter 3 I contextualize the immediate circumstances of the Jena Six case, and detail the methodology employed to conduct the analyses, which I summarize into five “Rules of Color-Blind Language,” drawing from Bonilla-Silva’s categories of color-blind language. These rules, I will argue, play a central role in organizing the language that facilitates color-blind racism and the continuance of the current racial system.

Next, in Chapter 4 I conduct my analysis of the four calls in light of the five rules, focusing largely on their use of color-blind language to take evaluative stances and express racial attitudes that are indicative of, and generally expected from, the conceptual frameworks of race that dominate contemporary racial thought and logic, although I will note some significant exceptions to the boundaries set by color-blind language.

Chapter 5 concludes my research, where I will discuss major conclusions, limitations, and implications drawn from the analyses performed in the preceding chapter. After looking at how the discourse surrounding the Jena Six pertains to comparable discourse today, I compare the ways that each caller from Chapter 4 utilizes color-blind language to evaluate a racial subject and offer some potential means for moving beyond the current system of racial discourse—a move which would, I believe, ultimately result in a move beyond current understandings of racial identity categories.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Only in imaginary experience…which neutralizes the sense of social realities, does the social world take the form of a universe of possibles equally possible for any possible subject. Agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not ‘for us,’ a division as fundamental and as fundamentally recognized as that between the sacred and the profane. The pre-emptive rights on the future that are defined by law and by the monopolistic right to certain possibilities that it confers are merely the explicitly guaranteed form of the whole set of appropriated chances through which the power relations of the present project themselves into the future from where they govern present dispositions, especially those towards the future.

—Pierre Bourdieu

In this chapter, I examine the philosophical and rhetorical foundations of current racial structures and discourse in the United States. Starting with the historical origins of race as a meaningful—yet arbitrarily constructed—identity category, I move to examine the ways in which color-blind language creates and maintains color-blind logic in the United States. Such logic, I argue, is dependent upon shared knowledge or what I call “common sense.” Using Bonilla-Silva’s conception of color-blind language, I theorize it in light of Bourdieu’s schema of habitus, field, and doxa. Finally, I move to examine stancetaking as a rhetorical and evaluative act that can be used as a strategy for the expression of racial attitudes while following the “rules” of color-blind language, which informs the methodologies and aims that will be employed in chapters three and four.

Symbolic Language and Value

I turn first to Booth’s examination of assent and the ways in which people come to have “good reasons” for changing their minds. Booth is critical of those who say that good reasons
can only come from objective, value-free judgement, as he argues that much of the rationale that is employed on any subject is the result of, essentially, a collective or group-made “best guess.” As I will show, however, I take issue with Booth’s reliance on the tendencies of collective decision-making when dealing with matters that cannot, by their nature, be dealt with objectively, and by extension the ways in which collective values self-reinforce their own stability regardless of social acceptability or desirability.

Booth examines symbolic language in order to draw out the ways in which, and reasons why, people assent to information, have “good reasons,” or change their minds, especially in instances where the information in question is not objective or able to be quantified as “true.” Furthermore, Booth suggests that in communication it is impossible to separate a word’s symbolic usage from some degree of intention to assert value. To the degree that language is representing a thing or concept that is not necessarily materially present, Booth claims that symbolic language is used with the intent “to call to mind’ and thus place some sort of value on what is not materially present.” This calling to mind, he says, is reliant upon the listener’s deferral to the speaker’s image of what is being referred to, and therefore such language comes with “an implicit ‘ought,’” as if to say that the listener “ought” to assent to the speaker’s perception and naming of the symbolically-represented thing.

While I agree with Booth’s critique of those who would say that good reasons can only result from value-free judgments, as well as his conclusions regarding language as an unavoidable vehicle for the transmission of value, Booth sidesteps the role of social forces in the


30 Ibid., 125.
construction of “common knowledge” or collective social knowledge. Booth is wary of those who assign all results of decision making to the influence of “social structures,” perhaps with good reason in attempts to preserve individual autonomy. But, in arguing for a “philosophy of good reasons, a way of discovering how motives become reasons and a way of showing how what we call ideas sometimes can and should affect our choices,” he neglects the instances in which those good reasons and ideals that in turn affect our choices are— put simply— wrong. Furthermore, in his disdain for over-reliance on explaining everything as being the result of a “system,” he avoids acknowledging the social structures and systems that do stabilize, shape, and maintain current social and ideological conditions— in the case of this project, conditions that are reliant upon the continuous exploitation of the collectively-accepted untruths that maintain color-blind racism and racial disparity in the United States.

To reach the systemic untruth that I am concerned with in this project— namely, the use of color-blind language to perpetuate race as a meaningful category of (mis)identification— I turn next to the history of race as a linguistic construct and the function that racial language has served in the United States, before looking at such language in light of Bourdieu’s conceptualization of social structures and the ways that individuals exist and act within them. Bourdieu’s description of social structures, when applied to Bonilla-Silva’s elaboration on color-blind language as a means for perpetuating false conceptions of racial categories and identity, offers an alternative to Booth’s understanding of how and why knowledge and social systems are formed— an alternative in which the “rules” that govern the perpetuation of such systems can be identified and challenged.

31 Ibid., 39.
**Race as Linguistic Construct**

It is crucial to note that the very basis upon which racial identity categories are made is at once entirely arbitrary yet not without real social effects. That is to say, while the inequalities and lived experiences that are involuntarily bestowed upon an individual because of their racial identity are real— and in many instances painfully so—the very concept of race as a point upon which real human differences can be made, as well as the perceived significance of those differences, is a fiction. Indeed, following sociologists and race historians Omi and Winant’s definition, “race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.”\(^{32}\) That fiction serves a real purpose: namely, the perpetuation of dominating systems. But, the significance of the biological, and later cultural, measures upon which those distinctions have been made have no real basis in scientific or social fact.

**Historical Constructions of Race**

While cultural and ethnic distinctions have been well-established as meaningful categories of identification, race as an identifying marker is a relatively recent invention with no biological or physiological basis. Ethnic groups can be defined by such markers as “common language, geographic locale or place or origin, religion, sense of history, traditions, values, beliefs, food habits, and so forth,” and often such distinctions are self-identified as constituting a discrete group identity.\(^{33}\) Race as an identifying factor, however, did not emerge until the late

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1700s when, as Ashcroft notes, rather than being used to distinguish between specific groups of "persons or things," it "came to mean a distinct category of human beings with physical characteristics transmitted by descent."⁴⁴ By 1764, when Immanuel Kant in his work *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* used the German phrase for "races of mankind," there was an established "vocabulary of discrimination" based on the ideology of *chromatism*, in which external physical characteristics had a "direct causal" link to a group’s internal dispositions and mental strength.⁴⁵ As Omi and Winant note, during the 18th and 19th centuries, leading theories of racial difference relied on the belief that visible markers such as skin color or facial features served as markers of internal differences in "[t]emperament, sexuality, intelligence, athletic ability, aesthetic preferences and so on."⁴⁶ The taxonomies of chromatism were largely reliant on skin color, and by the 19th century color was the "unquestioned sign" of a person’s internal qualities and abilities, even though the basis for color judgments— and the language used to make such judgments— was entirely arbitrary and subjective.⁴⁷ Many scholars ascribe the rise of “race” as a category to the need for Africans— as well as other colonized groups— to be thought of as sub-human in order to justify widespread slavery and European expansion in the 1700s and 1800s,⁴⁸ as “race” in its current meaning had

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⁴⁵ Ibid., 312-13.


not been deployed prior to that historical point.\textsuperscript{39} Furthermore, while “black” as an identifying category was employed to justify oppression, “whiteness” originated in the pre-American Revolution colonies as wealthy landowners attempted to deter rebellion and overthrow at the hands of their tenant farmers. As Buck argues, by giving certain poor laborers a perceived advantage— namely, the identity of “whiteness” versus being raced as “black”— over the equally poor “black” laborers, non-whites, rather than the wealthy, became the enemy of the white poor.\textsuperscript{40} Despite the multiple functions of the category of race, it began, and remains, rooted in its social utility rather than reflecting a real biological difference.

By the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, academic circles began to slowly shift away from thinking of race in terms of biological difference, and towards it being acknowledged as a social construct, which is the view taken in this paper.\textsuperscript{41} Among the wider general public however, race shifted to signify not “human biogenetic variation,” but rather the idea that physical features depicted inner behaviors and characteristics.\textsuperscript{42} As the next section will discuss, the shift towards external racial features signaling internal— and generally negative— characteristics falls neatly in line with the functions of color-blind racism, in which race itself is never directly discussed, but rather meaning-laden terms are used to signal perceived flaws or inferiorities.

\textsuperscript{39} Smedley and Smedley, “Race as Biology,” 19.


\textsuperscript{41} Omi and Winant, “Racial Formations,” 15.

\textsuperscript{42} Smedley and Smedley, “Race as Biology,” 19.
Durability and Artificiality of Race

Because of its historical origins and uses, as well as the ways in which its uses have evolved into the present era, race remains a category of identity that is ultimately grounded in arbitrary markers. Furthermore, unlike ethnicity— which is flexible and can be transmitted— racial identities are defined by rigid markers in which a person cannot be less than entirely one race, nor can an individual demographically change their race. Smedley and Smedley argue that the inflexible “rules” of racial identity result in racial categorization not only falsely exaggerating the degree of difference that racial identity signifies, but also in relying on the belief that such differences are permanent and immutable.

Thus, despite the artificial significance of racial categories, as well as the arbitrary basis on which a person’s racial identity is classified, such categories are not without real and significant consequences, and it has been widely argued that it is these real consequences of racial identity that have supported its continued existence as a category of identification. As Ashcroft notes, “[l]anguage…exists as much to conceal as to signify. The language of interracial relations is a demonstration of the importance of use in meaning. Whatever admirable relations such terminology signifies, the use of such language can be a way of embedding racist attitudes. Indeed, the embedding of such attitudes is fundamental to the language of race itself.”

As I discuss next, the racial structure of the United States is supported by, and indeed relies upon, specific rhetorical and semantic tactics— termed color-blind language— in order to continue without question, and indeed without knowledge of its existence.

43 Ibid., 20.

44 Ibid., 22.

Language and Race

Color-Blind Racism

Bonilla-Silva, in his work *Racism without Racists*, sees what he terms *color-blind language* as the means through which the ideology and system of white privilege are perpetuated. Although I will later attend to his conceptions of white privilege’s relationship to racial structure and racial ideology, particularly in relation to Bourdieu’s work, in this section I address the definition and function of color-blind language in maintaining current racial structures. For Bonilla-Silva, contemporary racial attitudes persist—like his title suggests—without the presence of the overt “racists” of the pre-Civil Rights era. That is, as strategies for maintenance of the racial hierarchy in the United States changed—without the hierarchy itself changing—there was no longer a place for overt, legally-sanctioned Jim Crow-era racial discrimination. What has replaced it, Bonilla-Silva argues, is “New Racism”—racial practices that are “subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial,” summed up in the idea of *color-blind racism.*

First, however, it may be useful to briefly define the system of color-blind racism, first in more theoretical terms, and then as it appears in contemporary and lived reality. Bonilla-Silva calls color-blind racism “racism lite,” in which overt Jim Crow-style racial oppression and

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46 While its proponents often present it as “colorblindness,” I will be hyphenating the term throughout as an additional signifier of the racialization that occurs despite the so-called “blindness.”

47 Although, with growing disdain of “PC culture” which in its own way served as a vehicle for color-blind racism, it seems possible that color-blind racism could give way to the variety of racism that openly declares its taking of race into consideration.

discrimination is exchanged for a more subtle— but no less effective— and unnamed institutional racial hierarchy, which Bonilla-Silva sees as being employed in the service of maintaining white privilege.  

While there is debate over whether or not a generalized white privilege is the ultimate telos of color-blind racism, it is nevertheless an ongoing and real socially-structuring system. By virtue of its structure, color-blind racism has racially-disparate effects, yet at no point is there an identifiable individual who can be blamed or labeled as an unquestionable “racist,” hence the lack of Racists in Bonilla-Silva’s examination of Racism.

Criminal justice scholars Van Cleve and Mayes note that with the historical turn away from biology-based justifications for racism and the shift towards a belief in the cultural and moral inferiority of non-white groups, racial discrimination or hostility was minimized as a possible explanation for persistent racial inequality and disparity, and instead individualized character and morality were highlighted as the primary determinant of a person’s success.  

Such attitudes towards the influence of a person’s racial identity has been deemed laissez-faire racism, in which overt and active hostility and violence on the basis of race has been replaced by what Van Cleve and Mayes call a passive “racism of convenience,” where the historically-grounded structural systems of inequality are ignored— and in many cases denied— on the basis that Jim Crow-era racism has been legislatively ended. Nevertheless, racialized disparities persist across a number of social domains, including incarceration— as discussed in Chapter 1— and the areas of “income, health, education, residential segregation, rates of surveillance and punishment, and a myriad of other indicators that measure social and physical well-being,” and in many cases the

49 Ibid., 3.

rates within these categories have not significantly changed since the pre-Civil Rights era.\(^{51}\)
While these disparities persist, the call of color-blindness to literally not see color results in ongoing, systemic, and seemingly non-racial disparities; following the logic, if race or “color” can no longer be a valid point of observation, then disparities that fall distinctly upon racial lines cannot be identified as possibly racist.

One well-known public utilization of color-blind logic was the opinion offered by Chief Justice John Roberts in the 2007 case *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*. In the case, parents of students in a Seattle school district brought action under the Equal Protection Clause against the district for reassigning students from overcrowded high schools using students’ racial classification data.\(^{52}\) Because the district allowed families to choose which high school their children could attend, the Seattle school system utilized a series of “tiebreakers” to determine which students could attend especially popular schools, and maintaining a certain ratio of white to non-white students in each school was a part of the tie-breaking process, which is to say that a student could be admitted or denied primarily on whether or not their attendance would help or hinder the target ratio. Ultimately, the court ruled that the districts’ taking students’ racial identities into consideration when determining which high school they could attend was not sufficiently “narrowly tailored” to guarantee the maintaining of racial diversity within all schools in the Seattle No. 1 district, and therefore the school district could not use students’ race as the primary factor for school location assignments. Significant, however, was Chief Justice Roberts’s final statement at the end of his majority opinion in favor

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 411-12.

\(^{52}\) *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701 (2007).
of the parents, when he observed that “[t]he way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” In this brief statement, Chief Justice Roberts summarized the heart of color-blind logic: ending race-based inequality or injustice is a matter of declaring that the inequality or injustice at hand is not about race, and therefore cannot be racist.

It should be noted that under the logic employed by the Chief Justice, any decision that is made based upon a person’s racial identity—regardless of the intentions behind, or outcome of, that decision—is “discriminatory,” and therefore undesirable and socially discouraged. Of course, as I will argue in the remainder of this chapter and through the rest of this project, declaring something non-racial, or claiming to not “see color,” does not eliminate the ways that negative and oppressive racial beliefs and attitudes are still present in social discourse and ideology. I further contend that acknowledgement of, or acting upon the basis of, racial identities should not be considered inherently discriminatory or racist. Indeed, color-blind racism relies in part on a refusal to acknowledge the influence racial categories continue to have outside of instances of overt racial violence and/or discrimination. This refusal is, in part, why color-blind logic continues to be so widespread and unquestioningly accepted. With the aim of examining how the color-blind system is communicated and perpetuated at the level of individuals, I return to Bonilla-Silva’s conceptions of color-blind racism, and the ways in which it is built upon the highly organized and stable system of color-blind language.

Color-blind racism, as Bonilla-Silva defines it, is that which “otherizes softly….without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards.” For instance, rather than ascribing the social inequality of minorities to an inherent, biological servility or weakness, color-blind racism

53 Ibid.

54 Bonilla-Silva, Racism without Racists, 3-4.
places the responsibility for ongoing inequality on a personal lack of motivation or hard work, or on cultural rather than biological determinants.\textsuperscript{55} For example, where people in the pre-Civil Rights era objected to interracial marriage on a “straight racial” or moral basis, color-blind racism allows for the continuance of such opposition, but with reasoning that must be grounded in such fears as “concerns over the children.”\textsuperscript{56} Bonilla-Silva identifies four specific rhetorical tactics that people use when attempting to use color-blind language to express racialized beliefs, but it is important to understand the invisible, unspoken way in which color-blind racism is perpetuated by those who know its “codes” and tactics.\textsuperscript{57}

Bonilla-Silva identifies four “central frames” of color-blind racism which provide “set paths for interpreting information”\textsuperscript{58} within the current post-Civil Rights racial system. These frames—abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism—act as consistent, albeit misrepresenting, interpretive lenses through which members of the dominant group explain and understand “racial phenomena.”\textsuperscript{59} One of the frames, abstract liberalism, is significant in the role that it plays in the sources I examine in Chapter 4. Applying the frame of

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\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{56} Also problematic, as Shotwell points out and as will be demonstrated below, color-blindness relies on seeing only similarities, which ignores the reality of real, lived differences of inequality. Subsequently, an individual may only act to correct an inequality if they are able to find a similarity between themselves and the mistreated group/group member, but will claim that there is no problem present if they are unable to see one (see Shotwell 104).

\textsuperscript{57} The popular term “dog whistle” is helpful in conceiving of this approach to racial language. Dog whistle racial language, the logic says, is there if you are able to hear it, but on its face it is not attached to any specific racial attitude, thus creating plausible deniability when charged with the more egregious claim of outright “racism.”

\textsuperscript{58} Bonilla-Silva, \textit{Racism without Racists}, 26.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 26.
abstract liberalism involves invoking the values of liberalism on a theoretical basis, with the intention of using the ideals and values as a way to justify racializing and/or discriminatory practices, beliefs, and attitudes. By using traditional liberal ideals such as “individual liberty” and “freedom from government interference” to justify opposing more immediate and practical attempts to end the lived manifestations and instances of racial inequality or discrimination, white individuals can claim the “moral” or “reasonable” path of racial strategy. At the same time, they can avoid expressing an attitude towards race that will either a. be seen as socially unacceptable within the rules of color-blind racism (which require such attitudes to remain unspoken) or b. require a change in their current attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors in order to enact what they (at least verbally) consider to be necessary changes on the road to racial equality.

Color-Blind Language

Looking at the specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies that Bonilla-Silva says white speakers in the US use when “playing by the rules” of color-blind racism, I will examine the ways in which individual speakers express racial attitudes, values, and beliefs. Historically, while the Civil Rights movement “shattered…the United States’ norms about public discussions on race,” it did not shatter the dominant ideology of white superiority, and consequently a new way to talk about race was needed that “encoded” formerly-explicit negative attitudes towards racial minorities. The strategies that resulted from this post-Civil Rights shift towards color-blind racism will, collectively, be referred to as color-blind language, as they form a complete set of “tools” from which white speakers can draw in order to express racial attitudes within the framework and ideology (or what I will later define as the habitus) of white privilege.

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60 Ibid., 28.

61 Ibid., 55.
The four linguistic strategies that Bonilla-Silva observes white speakers using when discussing matters of race include 1.) Use of rhetorical and semantic strategies to avoid talking directly about race, 2.) Projection, 3.) Use of diminutives, and 4.) “Rhetorical incoherence” when pushed to address “uncomfortable” racial issues. The first strategy uses evasive “semantic moves” such as “I’m not racist, but…” “I’m not black so I don’t know,” and comments such as “X is the result of economics, not racism” to avoid directly talking about race and racial issues. With this strategy, speakers utilize “rhetorical shields” such as denials of racial intent and claims of misunderstanding or ignorance in order to create disclaimers that can be employed if challenged on the grounds that they are being too racially explicit. The second strategy, projection, is employed through language that follows the “they are the racist ones” line of reasoning. This strategy is found in phrases such as “I think [blacks] segregate themselves,” or “blacks are more prejudiced against whites than whites are against blacks.” Bonilla-Silva says that the use of such phrases demonstrates a lack of self-reflexivity on the part of white speakers, since this strategy gives the white speaker the rhetorical means necessary to suggest that minorities, rather than whites, are the ones with a “problem.” The third strategy uses diminutives in a variety of ways to “soften the blow” of racial language. So, instead of direct racial language such as “I am against interracial marriage,” a diminutive such as “I am just a bit concerned about the welfare of the children” can be used to hedge a racialized—and otherwise

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62 Ibid., 57-68.

63 Ibid., 57-62.

64 Ibid., 57.

65 Ibid., 63-66.
socially-unacceptable—attitude by couching it in seemingly non-racial, color-blind language. Finally, Bonilla-Silva observes that certain sensitive race-related topics consistently result in white speakers descending into what he calls rhetorical incoherence. Such incoherence involves lengthy pauses, repetition of words and phrases, digressions, and the abandonment of the attempted statement altogether. While these “errors” all occur in natural speech, “the level of incoherence increases noticeably when people discuss sensitive subjects. Because the new racial climate in America forbids the open expression of racially based feelings, views, and positions, when whites discuss issues that make them feel uncomfortable, they become almost incomprehensible.” Some topics that Bonilla-Silva observes resulting in said incoherence include personal relationships between whites and blacks, interracial marriage, and self-segregation, and he suggests that because an individual’s response to questions on these topics require overt answers about personal experiences with race, the act of even answering the question seems “controversial” and outside the boundaries established by color-blindness.

While the previously-mentioned central frames—that is, abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism—serve as broad interpretive frameworks that an individual can use in their construction of racial attitudes, the above four rhetorical and semantic strategies provide more immediate ways for people to express and maintain their racial—and race-based—attitudes and beliefs. Because the overarching system of

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66 Ibid., 66. Note too how this strategy overlaps with the previously-mentioned frame of abstract liberalism: by claiming the virtuous position of “concern for the children,” the racialized position appears to be justified.

67 Ibid., 68.

68 Ibid., 68.

69 Ibid., 70.
color-blind racism requires that explicit racial language and attitudes not be directly stated, white speakers utilize the strategies identified by Bonilla-Silva in order to express their beliefs about race and racial issues while still following the unspoken rules of post-Civil Rights color-blindness, or what Bonilla-Silva calls “mythological nonracialism.” The point at which speakers’ responses “break down,” as it has been noted, is when they are asked to answer questions that require overt racial language which, for a variety of reasons, speakers are unable to “disguise” by using the other tactics of color-blind language. By using these linguistic and rhetorical strategies to “mend racial fissures, to restore a color-blind image when whiteness seeps through discursive cracks,” the frames of color-blind racism are made into “an impregnable yet elastic wall that barricades whites from the United States’ racial reality.”

**Color-Blind Language and Implicit Knowledge**

In order to depict how color-blind language satisfactorily works to perpetuate and function within the system of color-blindness, Bonilla-Silva discusses the roles that *racial stories* play in color-blind racism. While Bonilla-Silva discusses their role more expansively, I want to note the distinction he makes between *racial testimonies* and *racial story lines*. Racial stories are those which “evince the social position of the narrators,” and Bonilla-Silva sees them as frequently employed by white speakers to justify their particular racial views. *Racial testimonies* are the personal stories “in which the narrator is a central participant in the story or is close to the characters in the story,” such as Bonilla-Silva’s example of “I didn’t get that job

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70 Ibid., 70.
71 Ibid., 70.
72 Ibid., 47.
73 Ibid., 75.
because of a black man.” These stories are frequently used by the narrator in attempts to persuade or gain sympathy from the listener. However, because the testimonies are “often…understood and interpreted through the lens of more general racial narratives and understandings about the world,” the anonymous and vague “black man” in the above example is the product of a shared *racial story line*. While Bonilla-Silva identifies four major story lines that are used in the post-Civil Rights era of color-blindness, what is significant about his concept of story lines is that they are more ideological and vague than they are narrative and personal, and they take on fable-like qualities in the way that they are widely known and often utilize what Bonilla-Silva describes as an “of course” racial principle. It is their fable-like or “of course” quality that I believe makes them valuable for inclusion in the discussion on socially-shared implicit knowledge and common sense that I discuss in the next section; in particular, I am interested in how the absorption of racial story lines into the realm of common knowledge guarantees the perpetuation of color-blind racism.

Before I turn to common sense and its relationship to color-blindness, however, there is one such story line that will become relevant in Chapters 3 and 4—what legal scholar Katheryn Russell has deemed the image of the *criminalblackman*, in which “the young Black man is the symbol of American criminality…the symbolic pillager of all that is good and pure.”

As Alexander notes, the *criminalblackman* plays a significant role in displays of

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74 Ibid., 76.

75 Ibid., 77.

76 Ibid., 76.

implicit—or unconscious—bias, such as in studies that have indicated that jurors and law enforcement officers “become increasingly harsh when an alleged criminal is darker and more ‘stereotypically black’; they are more lenient when the accused is lighter and appears more stereotypically white.”\textsuperscript{78} Such biases cannot, as their name suggests, be conscious acts, but they rely upon a shared, generalized referent; namely, that of a vaguely threatening and almost certainly criminal black male. Furthermore, as Bonilla-Silva states that story lines must be impersonal, Russell argues that inherent to the \textit{criminalblackman} image is the ability to sweepingly apply the stereotype to any and all black males, and she notes that “[t]his \textit{criminalblackman} depiction permeates public and social institutions…Blacks, no matter what their level of social status, can rise no higher than the prevailing deviant image.”\textsuperscript{79} The success of the \textit{criminalblackman} stereotype, then, relies less on being true than it does on being broadly applied and accepted. It is important to note, however, that this stereotype is almost never explicitly named. While its effects may be observed—such as through the presence of anti-black implicit bias—references to the ever-present threat of the \textit{criminalblackman} will almost always be coded into non-racial language such as that seen in calls for “law and order,” or the late 1990s news commentator who noted that “[i]t is unnecessary to speak directly of race because speaking about crime is speaking about race.”\textsuperscript{80} Such coding, I believe Bonilla-Silva would concede, is what allows these racial story lines to continue.

In the section that follows, then, I will first theorize the definition and function of “common sense” as a way of understanding Bourdieu’s habitus/field schema, and briefly discuss

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} Alexander, \textit{The New Jim Crow}, 107.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Russell, “The Racial Hoax as Crime,” 606.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Alexander, \textit{The New Jim Crow}, 105.
\end{itemize}
ways to conceptualize Bourdieu’s habitus and field. Then, I consider what I have said about Bonilla-Silva’s color-blind language in light of Bourdieu in order to examine how both are dependent upon unspoken, yet collectively agreed-upon, “rules” for their survival, which are perpetuated through the use of coded, yet value-laden, symbolic language.

Common Sense

To resolve the gap left in Booth’s conception of how social knowledge is formed, Bourdieu’s work with, and linkage between, habitus, doxa, and field—which I define in the next sections—provides a useful framework for attending to the limitations of what Shotwell terms “implicit understanding,” or what can be understood as “common sense.”

Common sense, as I use it, is what I suspect Booth would consider to be the kind of language one shares when—albeit unconsciously—one attempts to shape others through the transmission of information. When value terms are put forward for a long enough time, and to a wide enough audience, they become, I suggest, a matter of common sense—that is, knowledge that is taken as unquestionably true or a “given.” Or, as Kristeva says quoting the French poet Francis Ponge, “I speak and you hear me, therefore we are,”81 which is to say that matters of socially-constructed value or beliefs become matters of common sense when they are made unquestionable and essential to the construction of an ingroup/outgroup identity. As I suggested in my discussion of the history of racial identity, such category-making is the implicit goal of identifying and placing persons within the constructed categories of race. Yet, both the goals and the means of racial identification—and subsequent placement into the racial hierarchy—are rarely given attention or questioned. Following Gramsci’s conditions for what characterizes

knowledge that becomes taken as a “given,” I define common sense as being necessarily: “[1] incoherent and [2] inconsequential, [3] in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is.” While I further elaborate on Gramsci’s conditions in my later discussion on the role of common sense in the formation of racial categories, it is important to note here that in Gramsci’s conception, common sense, or knowledge that is a “given,” is generally implicit and indistinct.

Yet, as I will argue, its nondescript nature does not mean that matters of common sense are without consequence—only that they appear to be so. Recalling Booth, the trouble with common sense that Shotwell draws attention to is that “[f]or common sense to be uncritically absorbed is for it to enter our consciousness un-interrogated, at a level beneath notice. Part of the difficulty, then, in any attempt to critically absorb common sense…might be that the very nature of common sense resists a critical view…[f]or something to be coherent and voiced is for it to no longer be commonsensical.” Furthermore, when Gramsci deems common sense as being “in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses,” it is, as Shotwell points out, creating a cycle “in which common sense conforms to the conceptions of most everyone and in turn shapes taken-for-granted understanding.” This cycle, as I will argue, is present at a theoretical level in Bourdieu’s habitus/field conception, but can also be seen more concretely in Bonilla-Silva’s analysis of the role of color-blind language in contemporary society: common sense understandings of race and racial significance are, in fact, not inherent or natural, yet by

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83 Shotwell, *Knowing Otherwise*, 33.

84 Ibid., 33.
appearing so they continue to shape and confirm generally-held attitudes about the role of a person’s racial identity. The inability to name these matters of common sense and implicit understanding is consequential for two reasons: on the one hand, common sense is used as a way to make sense of and organize our experiences, and on the other it is unavailable for examination and potential critique. As Shotwell explains, implicit understanding “names our background taken-for-granted understanding of being in the world: The implicit is what provides the conditions for things to make sense to us. The implicit provides the framework through which it is possible to form propositions and also to evaluate them as true or false, and is thus instrumentally important.”

Bourdieu’s *Habitus*

Shotwell refers to Bourdieu’s *habitus* as one of the potential sites of origination and subsequent storage for implicit knowledge or common sense, calling Bourdieu’s habitus “a matrix of implicitly carried and transmitted understandings [that] articulate a link between embodied understanding and the creation of certain common senses...[the habitus] persists over time, and can be deployed outside the context of its production.” Furthermore, Bourdieu’s habitus is able “to perpetuate the mode of attention and interaction it manifests,” as he defines a habitus as an arrangement of understanding that is durable in its ability to persist over time—not

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85 Ibid., x.

86 It is unclear if Bourdieu’s habitus is singular or plural. For my purposes, I follow the belief that while a person may inhabit multiple habitus simultaneously, the scope of this research is examining a singular habitus. Hence, as the situation warrants, I will alternate between referring to them in the plural versus the singular, i.e.—“the color-blind habitus.”

87 Shotwell, *Knowing Otherwise*, 12.

88 Ibid., 12.
limited to one particular temporal moment—and is transposable in that it can serve the individual across a range of purpose, acting as a holistic organizing framework among a variety of “theatres of social action.”

For Bourdieu, habitus are systems of knowledge and frameworks for understanding and interpretation that are able to organize an individual’s experiences and perceptions. That is, they are simultaneously structured in their origin, structures in their organization, and structuring in their function. Bourdieu’s habitus also explains the means by which on the one hand “social facts become internalized,” and on the other hand the way in which “the personal comes to play a role in the social.” In this sense, the habitus blurs the line between subject and object, as it is further removed from critique (through internalization) and reinforced in durability (through social objectification). At the same time, the habitus abides by purposeful, but non-explicit, construction, as Bourdieu describes the habitus as “objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing actions of a conductor.” In Bourdieu’s view, implicit knowledge never originates from its carrier; rather, its survival is dependent upon being at once part of, and a contributor to, a larger, unseen schema of organization. Indeed, Shotwell argues that “[a] key aspect of…the habitus as embodied is the notion that it is transmitted implicitly through a pedagogy that encodes practices in the body, thus rendering the practices it teaches

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90 Ibid., 51.

91 Ibid., 53.

significantly inaccessible.” The habitus finds expression through practice, and for Bourdieu the evidence of a habitus, rather than coming from seeing the habitus itself, is found in the resulting practices and beliefs that arise from it.

Bourdieu’s *Field*

To possess such a habitus, and therefore carry the implicit knowledge that constitutes it, is to exist in what Bourdieu calls a *field*. Put simply, the field is the “social space” in which the habitus— as embodied by the individual— is formed, interacts, and transacts. Or, more comprehensively, it is what Shotwell describes as “the objectified external history that corresponds to the incorporated history of the habitus.” Furthermore, each field follows “its own internal logics, rules and regularities,” which means that “[t]he field generates commonly held expectations and molds what counts as reasonable within it.” The “rules” of the field are present but inaccessible, and consist only of a logic that ensures its own survival or what Bourdieu calls a type of “objective consensus.” That is, a field’s rules becomes essentialized or subsumed into implicit, “given” understanding— the dark side, if you will, of Booth’s aforementioned collective understanding. Subsequently, “[w]hat is essential goes without saying

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97 Thomson, “Field,” 73.


because it comes without saying,”¹⁰⁰ and what begins as a communication or expression of value becomes a principle that is applied without formulation or question¹⁰¹ — such a principle is what I call a matter of “common sense,” and stands as the larger arena within which individual habitus can exist, communicate, and perpetuate.

For Bourdieu, to investigate or explore a particular field is to not only examine where the object of study is located in terms of “specific historical and local/national/international and relational context,” but it is “also [to] interrogate[] the ways in which previous knowledge about the object under investigation had been generated, by whom, and whose interests were served by those knowledge-generation practices.”¹⁰² As it will be demonstrated, Bourdieu’s conceptions of habitus and field act as a conducive schema for examining the role of language in the expression and perpetuation of particular attitudes towards race and racialized issues. More specifically, in conjunction with Bonilla-Silva’s presentation of color-blind language, Bourdieu’s habitus and field provide a productive basis on which to theorize the role that common sense plays in the formation and maintenance of racial beliefs and attitudes, as well as how individual beliefs and attitudes are shared through stancetaking.

Doxa is the term Bourdieu uses to describe the ongoing process by which the habitus exists within the field—doxa, in this sense, standing as the “commitment to the presuppositions”¹⁰³ or “pre-verbal taking-for-granted”¹⁰⁴ that must happen in order for the

¹⁰⁰ Bourdieu qtd. in Shotwell, Knowing Otherwise, 15. Emphasis in original.
¹⁰¹ Ibid., 15.
¹⁰³ Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, 66.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 68.
habitus (i.e.- the individual) to have a place in the field (i.e.- the larger historical system). As Shotwell notes, “[t]he formation of commonsense, self-perpetuating habitus in the form of doxa— that which goes without saying and therefore produces misrecognition— is thus unavailable for critical inquiry.” In order for matters of common sense to continue as matters of unquestioned and shared understanding that are communicated as “a given,” they must also remain tacit. Thus, a potential critique of the premises that form a matter of “common sense” is restricted, as is the construction of new understanding, or potentially even more liberatory modes of discourse and understanding. As it will be shown, by keeping racial logic in the realm of the unspoken and implicit, Bonilla-Silva’s color-blind system, and the color-blind language that facilitates it, can continue without evaluation or critique. It is important to remember, though, that per Bourdieu’s framework such avoidance of critique is not a convenient by-product of the habitus; rather, the unspoken and unspeakable nature of the habitus is fundamental and essential to its existence and survival.

**Bourdieu and Racial Common Sense**

I believe, then, that the color-blind system of racial organization is best understood in light of Bourdieu’s conception of habitus and field, as it is reliant upon both a shared collective knowledge of its structure and purpose, and a shared implicit understanding of the “rules” that

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107 Shotwell *Knowing Otherwise*, 15.
must be abided by in order to maintain and perpetuate its operation.

In order for the organizing system of color-blind racism to continue in a way that effectively maintains the assumed truth of white superiority, Bonilla-Says that a *racial structure* is needed. Because, as previously mentioned, race is an arbitrary and socially-constructed category of identification that nevertheless produces “real race effects,” Bonilla-Silva says that racial structures are the “totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege.”

Recalling Bourdieu’s conception of the field that hosts and maintains a habitus, Bonilla-Silva’s race structure acts as the “social space” and “objectified external history” that allows the habitus of color-blind racism to continue. The race structure, for Bonilla-Silva, is the set of unspoken or common sense “rules” that organize the overarching system of what race is and how it “works” in the United States. As Bourdieu states, “[a]n institution…is complete and fully viable only if it is durably objectified not only in things, that is, in the logic, transcending individual agents, of a particular field, but also in bodies, in durable dispositions to recognize and comply with the demands immanent in the field.”

It is the race structure—played out in the systemic yet real and embodied disparities between white and nonwhite groups—that allows the institution of white supremacy in the current racial hierarchy to transcend reliance upon individual actors and actions.

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111 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 58.
Race and Common Sense

The ubiquitous and systematic racial logic that organizes racialized social hierarchies in the United States is one that, in order for it to continue without question, must be implicitly transmitted. Echoing the ways in which common sense cannot be explicitly identified if its logic is to continue, to voice the logic of color-blindness is to bring it out of the domain of taken-for-granted and into the possibility of critique and potential discard. Within the common sense of racial logic we can see, too, Gramsci’s characterization of information that is taken as a “given.”

First, Bonilla-Silva’s examination of the “rhetorical incoherence” that results when individuals are pushed to answer questions that require direct racial language suggests that Gramsci’s first condition of incoherence is fulfilled by speakers who, while otherwise able to function within the system when not asked to explicitly discuss it, have a breakdown of internal logic when pushed to face the natural conclusions of their racial beliefs. Second, Gramsci’s condition of inconsequence is seen in both the use of abstract liberal ideals to justify racial beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes, and in the rhetorical strategies of avoidance and use of diminutives, seen in phrases such as “I’m not racist, but…” and “I disagree a little bit with affirmative action.” While the first demonstration of inconsequence—abstract liberalism—minimizes the consequences of racism by detaching the liberal value of, for instance, “fairness” from any obligation to enact concrete change, the rhetorical and semantic strategies of avoidance and diminutive use perform inconsequence by giving their speaker an “out” or a disclaimer from the accusation of direct racist sentiment. Finally, Gramsci’s third condition—conformity with the position held by most of the culture it exists within—is seen in the effect of color-blind racism itself. As Bonilla-Silva notes, color-blind racism, both in “category and practice,” continues despite the arbitrary and
damaging nature of “racial thinking” because it “benefit[s] members of the dominant race.”\textsuperscript{112}

Omi and Winant, too, examine the consequences of transforming racial structures into matters of “common sense,” when they observe that “[e]verybody learns…some version, of the rules of racial classification…often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation….Race becomes ‘common sense’— a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world.”\textsuperscript{113}

Cached under collective, implicit knowledge, the current racial structure is neither available for critique, nor is it one of multiple alternatives that may be chosen from. Instead, its historical place in the domain of common sense acts as insulation from critical examination and disruption.

The Habitus of Race

Bourdieu’s conception of habitus, then, finds its parallel in Bonilla-Silva’s definition of racial ideology: “the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify…or challenge…the racial status quo.”\textsuperscript{114} The habitus, in correspondence with Bonilla-Silva’s racial ideology, is the filter through which racial attitudes are maintained by individuals within the field of color-blind racism and racial hierarchy. For Bourdieu, the habitus acts as a sort of interpretive matrix through which one interprets experiences in light of the past in order to ensure the past’s survival into the future, as he notes that “[i]t ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all

\textsuperscript{112} Bonilla-Silva, \textit{Racism without Racists}, 9.

\textsuperscript{113} Omi and Winant, \textit{Racial Formation}, 60.

\textsuperscript{114} Bonilla-Silva, \textit{Racism without Racists}, 9.
formal rules and explicit norms.”¹¹⁵ The unspoken nature of the racial structure of the United States in this case, then, consistently shapes and influences the individual acting out of participation within that racial hierarchy and ensures that, on the whole, the choices and beliefs of individual actors will fit within the clearly-delineated, yet durable, “rules” of race. More specifically, the durability of Bourdieu’s habitus seems akin to the flexibility offered by Bonilla-Silva’s central themes of race and his color-blind rhetorical strategies. Namely, the themes and strategies allow the speaker to dodge self-reflexivity and awareness of their own complicity in perpetuating racialized hierarchies, while at the same time giving them the ability to retreat to disclaimers of ignorance and denial when faced with direct racial language or ideas that they are unable to fit into the frameworks offered by color-blind language. Thus, at the levels of personal linguistic usage and more theoretical interpretive practices, the habitus of color-blind racism is often self-repairing: cultivating its own survival through both rhetorical and linguistic defensive practices, and selectivity towards what it is willing to see. Such self-repair is observed by Bourdieu when he notes that the habitus defends itself against critique and change “through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and especially by avoiding exposure to such information.”¹¹⁶ Because of its function as an interpretive filter for all encounters with racial information and experiences, the color-blind habitus unconsciously discards that which does not fit into its predetermined framework of the “rules” of race.

¹¹⁵ Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, 54.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 60-61.
Who Gets Served by the “Common Sense” of Racial Systems?

The common sense of race, then, is an organizing structure that is replete with highly subjective and evaluative language which I will examine below, but it is important to first acknowledge the significance of how it is communicated and learned. Through the historical process of being classified under the realm of “given” knowledge that everybody just knows, what is in fact a highly artificial hierarchy is given real, unquestioned—and unquestionable—power, with real and continued effects and consequences. Furthermore, the present racial system determines possible futures in a way that allows it to continue largely unaffected and able to absorb challenges to its legitimacy, thus ensuring its own survival. While Bourdieu’s field can be thought of as the larger, socio-historical level at which color-blindness is maintained, its role in hosting individuals’ habitus gives it power over possible beliefs, attitudes, and actions that an individual may take or attempt. Additionally, the implicit nature of the racial habitus, as I have discussed, is not available for explicit identification. Furthermore, the habitus governs not only an individual’s present interpretations and dispositions, but also their relationship to probable outcomes and what is possible in the future. The habitus, ensuring its own survival, presents possible futures and potentials where it is still maintained and surviving, yet it is in perpetual contact with a person’s real, objective opportunities, actions, and choices. The common sense that governs the racial structure of the United States is one that both guides the options that an individual may choose from in the present, and also governs what kinds of “futures” are possible for the system as a whole.\(^{117}\) Omi and Winant note that the continued presence of racial ideology—including the racial myths and stereotypes that are by no means based in an essential, objective reality—in the US suggests that its racial system is not only durable, but has become

\(^{117}\) Ibid., 64.
in a sense essential to the continued survival of the US social order, inseparable from American identity itself. The hierarchy of race in the United States, then, is left undisturbed because to do so would disrupt the symbolic as well as real benefits that are given to the racial category of whiteness, and the majority of the United States population is not only under no incentive to disrupt such benefits.

Conclusions

While racial categories have a history of being constructed employed only to reinforce inequality and domination, the racial organization system in the United States relies on implicit shared knowledge in order to learn and understand how race “works.” At the same time, such knowledge requires coded, symbolic language in order to be communicated while still keeping up the unspoken and taken-for-granted nature of such information. What results, then, is a language that is understood only by those who know—even if at an unconscious level—its “code,” as well as the “true meanings” implied (but never directly stated) by the use of such language. Color-blind racism is reliant upon the tacit nature of color-blind language as a way to both guarantee its survival and continue to share racial judgments and evaluations that would otherwise be unacceptable. Following Booth’s claim that all individuals utilize “symbolic devices” through language in order to tacitly transmit judgment and evaluation with the intention of unconsciously changing (or maintaining) people’s minds, I argue that the symbolic and coded nature of color-blind language operates in a parallel way. While the structure of color-blind racism must remain unspoken, color-blind language uses coded strategies, such as those observed by Bonilla-Silva, in order to express meaning that is embedded with evaluative and value-laden statements, with the intention of furthering the durability and domain of the current

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118 Omi and Winant “Race Formations” 17.
In the final section of this chapter, I examine the theory behind the evaluative stancetaking that will guide my analysis in Chapter 4. The use of color-blind language is, consciously or not, expressing a judgment-laden statement of evaluation that is informed by the totality of the current racial system, and I will attempt to show that current work in the domain of positioning and stance theory provides a beneficial framework for understanding how, and to what end, such language is employed at the level of interpersonal discourse.

**Stancetaking in Color-Blind Language**

As Bonilla-Silva notes as a caveat, the use of color-blind language criteria to clinically delineate “bad racists” from “good non-racists” ignores the systemic forces and practices that organize and maintain racial inequality in the United States—inequality such as the racial disparities within the legal system that I discussed in Chapter 1. That being said, color-blind language is just one manifestation of color-blind racism, yet I believe it is important to consider due to its position as the most immediate and direct way for an individual to participate in the current racial system. Following the rules established by post-Civil Rights color-blindness, explicit racial language is considered socially forbidden, yet color-blind language gives its users a way to express racial sentiments without breaking the rules of social conventions. Because racial attitudes and beliefs are seemingly no longer allowed to be explicitly stated, in this section I will argue that stancetaking is a way that, in conjunction with the previously-discussed rhetorical and semantic moves, allows speakers to make evaluative expressions regarding racial topics. Stance-taking is seen as a rhetorical act of implied (and perhaps unconscious) attempted persuasion, and while there are many reasons for why a speaker may or may not be successful at

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persuading their audience with their evaluative stance-giving expressions, I hope to demonstrate why stance-taking should be seen as an additional element in the array of color-blind language strategies.

What is Stance?

Stance— and more specifically the action of stancetaking— has been the object of significant debate in attempts to define what it is, how to best study it, and how to evaluate its parts under study. I rely largely on the definition offered by Keisanen, who terms the study of stancetaking as “[t]he study of how people display affect, evaluation, or epistemic certainty (or doubt) toward some state of affairs, [and] negotiate their points of view and alignment with each other.”

Before I discuss the process of stancetaking, it is important to understand the intended recipient of a given stance act. Bell’s framework of audience design is helpful in understanding the ways in which stancetaking responds to an “other.” Communication, he says, is largely in response to other people. Yet, because not all communication takes place in the presence of an immediately present audience, Bell provides a hierarchy of potential audiences that move away from the speaker in both proximity and influence: the addressee, the auditor, the overhearer, and the eavesdropper.

The closest, the addressee, is known, acknowledged, and addressed by the speaker. The auditor is known and acknowledged by the speaker, but not directly addressed. Overhearers are

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known, but neither acknowledged nor addressed, and finally, the presence of eavesdroppers remains unknown to the speaker.\textsuperscript{122} Bell’s framework operates on a spectrum of relation to the speaker— with the addressee being the most influential, and likely the closest in physical proximity, while the overhearer and eavesdropper hold very little influence over the speaker’s choices, and are likely not as close to the speaker as an addressee or auditor.\textsuperscript{123} Thus, while the “other” may be another physically or immediately-present individual or group— such as in a personal conversation— I believe potential “others” should also include non-present individuals or groups, and even abstract concepts and institutions, even as they hold decreasing amounts of power over the speaker’s stancetaking strategies.

Put simply, stancetaking is the act of advancing an opinion, judgment, or evaluation that is, to varying degrees, aligned (or not) with whomever a speaker is in discourse with, and an act in which a speaker and their discourse partner(s) share the same object of evaluation. Englebretson concludes that in analysis of stance, five “key conceptual principles” often emerge, which I introduce here but will discuss in further detail in Chapter 3: First, a person’s stance is often made on the level of either physical action or place, personal attitude or belief, social morality or value, or a combination of the three. Second, stance is explicit and observable, and thus open to review by others. Third, stancetaking is conversational and done in response to other participants and stances. Fourth, stancetaking is indexical as it relies on sociocultural and physical contexts. Fifth, stance is made in the context of, and can result in, real, concrete consequences at both individual and institutional levels.\textsuperscript{124} As I will further discuss in the next

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 159.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 160.

\textsuperscript{124} Robert Englebretson, “Stancetaking in Discourse: An Introduction,” in \textit{Stancetaking in}
chapter as I describe my methodology, because stancetaking includes a broad range of evaluative language, all five of Englebretson’s principles— stance occurring at multiple levels, as well as being public and perceivable, interactional, indexical, and consequential— work in combination to identify occurrences and objects of stancetaking.

**Positioning Theory**

Early conceptions of stance theory are found in the work done by Harré and van Langenhove and what they call *positioning theory*. Seeing positioning—or the act of position-taking—as a more “dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role,” Harré and van Langenhove describe positioning in terms of performance, in which speakers in a discourse are given “fluid ‘parts’ or ‘roles’” that operate to “make a person’s actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts.” While the “roles,” as well as the purposes or aims for positioning, that are available to participants are much more narrowly-defined than necessary for contemporary stance theory, Harré and van Langenhove’s early theorizations are compelling in that rather than forwarding a stance, they see the evaluative moment-of-judgment that happens in positioning as an embodied moral position. They acknowledge that not all speakers are given equal voice, or even ability to take a position, which follows from their inclusion of identifiable “roles”— such as that of teacher and student, or patient and caregiver— that are present in a discourse. Rather, “[p]ositioning always takes place within the context of a specific moral order

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126 Ibid., 17.
of speaking….In other words, the rights for self-positioning and other-positioning are unequally distributed and not all situations allow for or call for an intentional positioning of the participants.”

As I will argue, stancetaking in the context of the color-blind racial structure is available only to those who on the one hand understand the message implicit in seemingly non-racial color-blind language, and on the other hand are in a position within the racial hierarchy to not be put at a disadvantage by its perpetuation.

Davies and Harré recognize that available discourse is the product of “an institutionalized use of language and language-like sign systems. Institutionalization can occur at the disciplinary, the political, the cultural and the small group level,” further elaborating on the ways in which systems of social thought, such as the racial structure, are in a cyclical relationship with the language they both give rise to and are reliant upon. Indeed, they note that once a speaker lays claim to a certain stance or position, they “inevitably see[] the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.”

The language available for use in discourse, then, functions to not only describe but also prescribe, and it limits possible future directions for not only communication but also lived experience and reality, echoing Bourdieu’s habitus and field. Such communication, though, is reliant upon an audience, and regardless of who or what that audience is or whether or not they are physically present, an “Other” is necessary. Furthermore, that Other must know and abide by the discourse

127 Ibid., 23.
129 Ibid., 35.
if the positioning is to succeed: “Any narrative that we collaboratively unfold with other people thus draws on a knowledge of social structures and the roles that are recognizably allocated to other people within those structures….We are thus agent…as well as author and player, and the other participants co-author and co-produce the drama.”130 For analytical purposes, I will rely largely on later theories of stancetaking, as positioning relies on overly rigid of roles for its discourse participants. However, positioning is valuable for its elaboration on the moral consequences of positioning in discourse, both in the circumstances giving rise to discourse and in what is accomplished by those who are both “allowed” to, and choose to, position themselves within a particular discourse.

Contemporary Stance Theory

Building on earlier theories of positioning, Du Bois characterizes stance as “a linguistically articulated form of social action whose meaning is to be construed within the broader scope of language, interaction, and sociocultural value.”131 Du Bois admits that the process of trying to systematically describe the construction and success of stance results in a “complex web of interconnections linking stance with dialogicality, intersubjectivity, the social actors who jointly enact stance, and the mediating frameworks of linguistic structure and sociocultural value…[that are] invoke[d].”132 For the purposes of this project, I am most interested in the “social actors” who utilize linguistic structures to communicate the “sociocultural values” that are invoked in the expression of stance. It is important to

130 Ibid., 42.


132 Ibid., 140.
acknowledge, though, that Du Bois notes the presence of dialogicality in stancetaking through the fact that, like Englebretson’s third principle, a speaker’s stance derives from, is reliant upon, furthers, and engages the stances that have already been offered,\textsuperscript{133} both within the immediate conversation and the larger, more theoretical, discourse community that the speaker is a part of.

This sense of dialogicality echoes work done by Kristeva discussing Bakhtin, as Kristeva notes that a text does not merely exist, but rather is generated in relation and response to another text.\textsuperscript{134} In Kristeva’s view, a text (or stance act, for my purposes) is never merely an isolated transmission between speaker and addressee, but rather an ongoing intertextual intersection of speaker, addressee, text, and the texts/context that have led to that point.\textsuperscript{135} As it will become more clear in the next chapter, within the color-blind racial structure of the US, dialogicality plays a central role in supplying possible options for what a speaker may say in regards to race, as well as in establishing the boundaries of where they may position themselves within that racial structure, recalling from the previous section Bourdieu’s discussion of possible futures.

Du Bois’s model of stance— which I rely on in this section and in the subsequent analysis— is depicted in his model of a “stance act,” in which a “stancetaker (1) evaluates an object, (2) positions a subject (usually the self), and (3) aligns with other subjects,” resulting in a triangular relationship between the speaker/subject, the object of evaluation, and another subject.\textsuperscript{136} For instance, in response to an immediately prior statement, a speaker may state “I want to do that too,” in which want provides a positive position towards the stance object, and

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\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{134} Kristeva, \emph{Desire in Language}, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{136} Du Bois, “The Stance Triangle,” 163.
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too is the positive alignment with the other subject. Alternatively, “I wouldn’t want to do that either” suggests a negative position towards the stance object (”would not”), but a positive and agreeing alignment with the other subject, as seen in the use of either. By offering an evaluation— or, recalling Harré and van Langenhove, a position— the speaker evaluates the object, thereby positioning themselves in relation to it, while also aligning themselves with the other subject, thereby also positioning that subject in relation to the stance object. The alignment with the other subject may be in agreement or disagreement “by subtle degrees,” and the term itself suggests the ability for the relationship between the subjects’ own stances to be “convergent or divergent to some degree,” rather than forced into “a binary choice between a positive pole (referred to as aligned) versus a negative pole (disaligned).” Furthermore, both “causal and inferential linkage” is present in the stance act, as both subjects position themselves while “evaluating a shared stance object,” and both subjects “define alignment with each other” while positioning themselves. While multiple actions are taking place within the triangle in a single stance act, Du Bois notes that it is critical for stance analysis that “all three of the three-in-one subsidiary acts”— that is, evaluation of the stance object, alignment with the other speaker, and the other speaker’s evaluative and aligning acts— are acknowledged, even if not all of them are directly stated in the actual stance utterance. Finally, although the stance act involves the speaker both aligning themselves with the other subject and positioning themselves in relation to the stance object, the entire stance act takes place “with respect to any salient dimension of value

137 Ibid., 162.

138 Ibid., 164.

139 Ibid., 164
in the sociocultural field,” recalling Englebretson’s principle that stance is indexical by nature as it relies on wider sociocultural values and beliefs in order to be recognized by others. That is, by taking a stance the speaker is “necessarily invok[ing] an evaluation at one level or another,” thus also invoking the larger sociocultural values that frame the stance act as a whole.

Stance and Color-Blindness

In defining the kind of work that a stance act can do, Du Bois identifies evaluation as the most common for undergoing analysis, although he acknowledges assessment and appraisal as similar tasks accomplished in stancetaking. The type of stance act, though, that is able to be both “affective and epistemic” in that provides both an evaluative judgement and an (in)validating statement about the nature of the stance object, is what he calls positioning.

Positioning as a specific kind of stance act is especially useful in relation to discussions of color-blind language, as it “can be defined…as the act of situating a social actor with respect to responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value.” Connections can be made, then, between the stance act of positioning and the use of color-blind language because, as has been discussed, use of color-blind language is both affective in the implicit values that are referenced by its users, and epistemic in its necessary invocation of, and reliance upon, the system of color-blind racism and the racial hierarchy.

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140 Ibid., 169.

141 Ibid., 141.

142 Ibid., 142.

143 Ibid., 143. Although related, this should not be seen as interchangeable with Harré and van Langenhove’s use of the word.

144 Ibid., 143.
Furthermore, the work of stancetaking advances the aims of color-blind language as seen in the five central principles that Englebretson identifies. First, stancetaking using color-blind language does express a personal attitude or belief, but it does so within the confines of the “social morality” of color-blind racism; and, it could be argued, the level of “physical action” that Englebretson notes could potentially be seen in the systemic, lived reality of color-blind racism’s effects. Second, Englebretson’s statement that stance is “public…perceivable, interpretable, and available for inspection” is complicated by the fact that the values communicated in color-blind language are, by their nature, non-explicit and encoded. Yet, despite its seemingly non-racial nature, the “dog whistle”-style function of color-blind language allows its unspoken intentions to be seen by those who know to look for it. Connecting the perception of stance to the non-explicit nature of the habitus, I consider the means by which a person “knows what to look for” as being a matter of “common sense.” As I have discussed, common sense is in fact not “common” in the sense that it is natural, but rather it consists of constructed and value-laden implicitly shared knowledge. In the case of color-blind racism and language, while its boundaries and “rules” are not explicitly available for observation or questioning, I believe those rules can be brought to light by bringing color-blind racial logic out of the unseen/un-seeable domain of common sense. Third, building from the previous principle, color-blind stancetaking relies on a shared use of color-blind language and the meanings intended in its application, thus fulfilling Englebretson’s condition of stance being “interactional in nature.” Fourth, as it has been shown, Englebretson’s principle of stance being indexical is present in the fact that color-blind language does not exist without the “broader sociocultural framework” of color-blind racism, while at the same time it works to reinforce that framework through its deployment. Finally, Englebretson’s fifth principle regarding the “real consequences”
of color-blind stancetaking is seen in the ongoing, lived disparities perpetuated within the larger system of color-blind racism and the United States’ overarching racial structure. Stance analysis, then, offers a productive way to examine the deployment of color-blind language in actual discourse, as it accounts for the implicit nature of color-blind language while providing clear avenues for analysis, as stancetaking itself is nebulous and varied in nature but able to be distinguished and isolated for study.

Using Bourdieu’s schema in conjunction with Bonilla-Silva’s color-blind linguistic strategies, color-blind racism is revealed as an organizing system of social domination that has been able to survive because of the benefits it confers upon those who are placed into the racial category of whiteness. At the same time, its covert nature denies the possibility of evaluation or change, which is supported by the (not at all) “common sense” of racial ideology in the United States. Such common sense, I have argued, is supported by—and gives validity to—the racialized attitudes and beliefs implicit in color-blind language strategies. In the next chapter, then, I turn to the historical context of the Jena Six, as well as the specific analytic methods that I will employ in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

In this chapter I both introduce the methodology that I will utilize in my analysis in Chapter 4, and provide an overview of the events leading up to the court trial and sentencing of the Jena Six in September 2007. What emerge from the case are not only numerous depictions of color-blind logic at work a la Bourdieu and Bonilla-Silva, but also real and significant implications for the people involved. To consider the ways that color-blind logic and language appeared in the discourse surrounding the case of the Jena Six, I examine transcriptions from four callers in the US who spoke about the events in Jena. I first provide historical context for the Jena Six trial, then I present my methodology for examining color-blind language, and I conclude with a more-detailed introduction of the sources used in my analysis.

Historical Background

While this project primarily looks at public responses to the Jena Six episode, the significance of the discourse surrounding the event, and the entirety of what is being referenced in discussions regarding the Six, should be understood within the circumstances prior to the actions of the Jena Six. The events surrounding the six students who came to be known as the Jena Six began in the fall and winter of 2006 in the small town of Jena in central Louisiana. According to the 2010 US census, Jena had a population of 3,400 residents, with 88.14% of residents identifying as white, and 11.33% identifying as black or African American.¹⁴⁵ According to numerous news sources, three nooses were found hanging from a tree in the yard of the Jena High School in September 2006, a day after a black student was seen sitting under a

shade tree which was generally known to be where white students assembled together.\textsuperscript{146} From that point, however, news coverage and reporting quickly became tangled and contradictory. After an opaque investigative process by the school’s administrators and district superintendent, three white members of the school’s rodeo team were found to have hung the nooses, and the students’ actions were declared a prank.\textsuperscript{147}

There was immediate debate in Jena over who the nooses were meant to be seen by, and whether or not their placement was meant as an act of racial intimidation or if it was meant as a prank directed towards other members of the rodeo team. It was widely reported that the students found responsible attended an alternative school for about a month and then completed two weeks of in-school suspension.\textsuperscript{148} It was believed by some, however, that the students received only three days of suspension, and believed the brief suspension to be the result of a decision by the district superintendent to override the principal’s suggestion to expel the students from the high school.\textsuperscript{149} More than ten years later, it is still difficult to untangle many aspects of what happened in the weeks leading up to December 2006 when the confrontation took place involving the teens who would come to be known as the Jena Six. An additional point of frustration within the community that preceded the Jena Six episode was in the fact that, although many thought the rodeo team members’ actions warranted expulsion or even arrest,  

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
under Louisiana law the hanging of the nooses could not be considered a hate crime. As LaSalle Parish District Attorney Reed Walters noted, in the state’s legal codes “[t]he hate crime statute is used to enhance the sentences of defendants found guilty of specific crimes, like murder or rape, who chose their victims based on race, religion, sexual orientation or other factors.” That is, the placing of the nooses in the tree by white students could not be investigated as, or considered to be, a hate crime on its own, regardless of the students’ intentions. Alternatively, the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Louisiana, David Washington, said that FBI agents visited the scene in September and determined that it “had all the markings of a hate crime,” but were unable to proceed with prosecuting it as such because the case did not meet federal requirements for the three white teens to be certified as adults, thus halting the case from proceeding as a hate crime investigation.

A series of violent encounters exacerbated racial tensions in the town, including a large fire that seriously damaged a wing of Jena High School on November 30th—approximately two months after the nooses were hung from the tree on school property. Rumors were spread of a gun being pulled the night after the fire on a sixteen year-old black student named Robert Bailey—later one of the Jena Six—who was beaten when attempting to enter a party attended largely by white students. When faced with the student holding the gun, Bailey managed to wrest the gun from him, and Baily took the gun home. Bailey was charged with “theft of a firearm, second-degree robbery and disturbing the peace,” and it is contested whether or not the

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152 Goodwyn, “Beating Charges.”
white student who initially pulled the gun on Bailey was charged—some sources say he was released without charges,\textsuperscript{153} while others report that he was charged with simple battery and given probation.\textsuperscript{154} Animosity ran high in the town over the weekend, culminating in an attack on Justin Barker, a white student at Jena High School.

On Monday, December 4— the Monday after the fire and the episode with Robert Bailey— Barker, whose only connection to earlier conflict appears to be that he was friends with the three white students who had hung the nooses from the tree but did not participate with them,\textsuperscript{155} was attacked by six black students— Bailey (17),\textsuperscript{156} Mychal Bell (16), Carwin Jones (18), Bryant Purvis (17), Jesse Ray Beard (14), and Theo Shaw (17)— and while he sustained injuries that required medical care, he was able to attend a school function later that day.\textsuperscript{157} It was the charging of the six students— who came to be known as the Jena Six— that turned the small town into a point of national focus and discussion regarding race relations in the small southern town and racial disparity within the legal system.

District Attorney Walters initially charged all six students with attempted second degree murder and conspiracy to commit second degree murder— a charge which carried a potential one hundred total years in prison if convicted of both charges.\textsuperscript{158} As jury selection for Bell’s case

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{154} Fears, “La. Town.”


\textsuperscript{156} Parenthesis indicate the ages of the Jena Six at the time of the attack on Barker.

\textsuperscript{157} Goodwyn, “Beating Charges.”

began, however, Walters reduced the charges to “aggravated second-degree battery” and conspiracy to commit aggravated second-degree battery, which carried a combined maximum 22-year prison sentence.\(^{159}\) When the cases of the six students went to trial in September 2007, all except Mychal Bell were charged as minors. Louisiana law allowed that because of Bell’s age at the time of the crime and the inclusion of an attempted murder charge, DA Walters had the “unreviewable discretion” to charge Bell as an adult.\(^{160}\) After rejecting a plea agreement that would have included a suspended sentence, Bell was tried as an adult in front of a jury rather than pleading guilty to the felony charges.\(^{161}\) Some sources claimed that Bell’s court-appointed attorney did not attempt to provide a defense in the courtroom, “instead resting his case immediately after two days of government presentation,”\(^{162}\) and all-white jury found Bell guilty on the battery charge.

However, Bell’s battery charge was overturned when a state appeals court determined that he should not have been tried as an adult due to Walters dropping the murder charge: without inclusion of the murder charge, and in combination with the fact that since he was sixteen at the time of the crime Bell would otherwise have been tried in a juvenile court, Bell’s case no longer warranted an adult trial.\(^{163}\) Judge J.P. Mauffray Jr. denied requests that Bell be


\(^{161}\) Witt “Charge Reduced.”

\(^{162}\) Goodwyn, “Beating Charges.”

released while the appeal to move his case back to juvenile court was being reviewed, and because of an unattainable $90,000 bail being set, Bell remained in custody during the proceedings before ultimately pleading guilty to the battery charge as a juvenile and serving eighteen months in a juvenile facility.\textsuperscript{164} Between the $90,000 bail being set on claims of Bell’s juvenile criminal record\textsuperscript{165} and the time it took for his trial and sentencing to be completed, it appeared to the public that Bell was being effectively imprisoned without cause. Seen as a miscarriage of justice and a blatant instance of a racial double-standard within the legal system, Mychal Bell’s imprisonment served as the impetus for the protests and marches in Jena that would summarize the public awareness of the Jena Six.

Racial Disparity in the Legal System

While it could be thought that the treatment of the Jena Six by the Louisiana legal system was in some way anomalous, there has been a long-established history of racial disparity among arrest and sentencing rates and sentencing lengths, despite similar offense rates between racial groups. In a report submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the ACLU reported that among defendants with similar criminal histories and charges of the same crime, prison sentences given to black males within the federal system were nearly 20 percent longer than those given to white males.\textsuperscript{166} For juveniles currently serving life without parole (LWOP), about 77 percent of them are black and Latino, while black juveniles are sentenced to LWOP at

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 513.


\textsuperscript{166} American Civil Liberties Union, “Racial Disparities,” 1.
rates about 10 times higher than white juveniles.\textsuperscript{167} Furthermore, the ACLU notes that “[t]he percentage of black juvenile offenders serving LWOP for the homicide of a white victim (43.4 percent) is nearly twice the rate at which black juveniles are arrested for the suspected homicide of a white person (23.2 percent).”\textsuperscript{168} Compared to the arrest rates of black youth for the homicide of white victims in relation to their sentencing lengths for the homicide of white victims, “white juvenile offenders with black victims are only about half as likely (3.6 percent) to be sentenced to LWOP for the homicide crime as their proportion of arrests for suspected homicide of a black victim (6.4 percent).”\textsuperscript{169} Thus, white juvenile homicide defendants, particularly when their victim is black, are sentenced to LWOP at a markedly lower rate than black homicide offenders of white victims. Criticism of such disparities were central not just to the protests against the arrest of the Jena Six and Mychal Bell’s trial, but also the criticism arising from the distinct imbalance in charges pressed against Robert Baily versus the white student who owned the gun.

Furthermore, racial disparities in criminal charging and sentencing is especially prevalent within the juvenile justice system. While black youth account for 16 percent of all youth nationally, they account for “28 percent of all juvenile arrests, 35 percent of the youth waived to adult criminal court, and 58 percent of youth admitted to state adult prison….Among juveniles who are arrested, black children are more likely to be referred to a juvenile court and more likely to be processed rather than diverted.”\textsuperscript{170} In a wave of criminal legislation reform in the 1990s, the

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 8.
majority of states made it easier for juvenile offenders to be tried and sentenced as adults, while they also increased the sanctions that could be placed on a juvenile defendant.”  

In Louisiana in particular, and thus with special bearing on the Jena Six, the reforms established two primary elements of statutory revisions within the juvenile justice system. First, the reforms shifted the focus of juvenile courts away from rehabilitation and towards “protecting the public,” especially in the case of violent crime. Second, discretion in giving authority to charge juveniles as adults was shifted away from the judiciary and towards prosecutors. Louisiana is especially notable in that its statutes include several ways for a juvenile case to be moved to adult court, and a prosecutor’s decision to make such a move does not, under state law, require judicial review.  

As Beale observes, Louisiana gives “wide discretion” in cases of “concurrent jurisdiction,” in which a prosecutor can pursue charges against a juvenile in either juvenile or adult court. Under Louisiana law especially, as Duke School of Law professor Sara Sun Beale notes, “the scope of concurrent jurisdiction is quite broad. It includes all juveniles fifteen years or older who have been charged with a wide range of crimes,” and while a juvenile’s case can be moved from the juvenile system to adult court, there is no legal means by which a juvenile defendant can be moved back to the juvenile system once their case has been transferred to the adult court system, even if there is good reason to do so. Without such a mechanism for returning their case to the juvenile system, and without a mechanism for challenging the prosecutor’s decision, the

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172 Ibid., 515.

173 It should be noted that in 2008 it was found that moving defendants’ cases from juvenile to adult court did not reduce recidivism (See Beale 545).

defendants were entirely reliant upon the prosecutor’s discretion in determining what system
would proceed with their cases.175

Reception in Jena

Jena’s white residents, who as mentioned above comprised about 88% of the town’s
population in 2010, generally agreed with the court’s decision and were critical of the protesters
Various national news media organizations reported Jena residents’ reactions and attitudes
towards the protestors. One man, identified only as “Jay,” stated that “They [the protesters] have
the freedom to march and the freedom of speech, but our town is not racist like this is being
depicted…the nooses were just a joke.”176 Or, as one unnamed woman noted, “I don’t agree with
all this, it’s just a mess, it’s ruining our town…we live a simple life and I’m not racist. This is
just blown completely out of proportion.”177 One of the few residents to identify himself, Ricky
Coleman—46, and white—asserted that “I believe in people standing up for what’s right….what
bothers me is this town being labeled racist. I’m not racist.”178 Finally, Alan, a 47 year-old white
man, claimed “There’s no racial thing here more than there is anywhere else.”179

175 Ibid., 525.


It should be noted that, unlike many others, one school board member, Billy Fowler, was willing to talk to the media. He, along with several other white leaders in Jena, agreed that the charges brought against the six students were unfair, even as he defended the intentions of the small town: “I think it’s safe to say some punishment has not been passed out fairly and evenly….I think probably blacks may have gotten a little tougher discipline through the years. Our town is not a bunch of bigots. They’re Christian, law-abiding citizens that wouldn’t mistreat anybody.”  

The defendants and their families, civil rights groups, and public critics of the Jena police and prosecution immediately saw the severity of charges brought against the six students as a blatant, racially-fueled double standard. Consider the encounters that preceded the December 4th attack on Barker: the three white students who hung the nooses at the high school were not charged with any criminal activity, and the white youth who beat Robert Bailey was charged only with simple battery while Bailey and three friends who were with him were charged with aggravated battery and theft after wresting away the gun that had been aimed at them.  

In contrast, Walters’s charging of the six defendants with attempted murder was perhaps the most prominent example of excessive pursuit of criminal charges, especially As Joe Cook, director of the Louisiana chapter of the UCLA commented at the time: “It appears the black students were singled out and targeted in this case for some unusually harsh treatment.”  

Or, as Anthony Jackson, one of two black teachers at Jena High School noted, “white students can do things and

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180 Goodwyn, “Beating Charges.”

181 Witt, “Racial Demons.”

182 Ibid.
receive a slap on the hand…[while authorities] want to throw the book at blacks.”

Political posturing through the use of racial appeals did appear to play a significant role in the sentencing of the six teens. The judge who originally oversaw Bell’s trial was removed from presiding over those of Baily, Jones, Purvis, Beard, and Shaw, as he stated before their trials began that the five teens were “troublemakers” and “a violent bunch.” In light of earlier discussions of color-blind language, it is difficult to imagine such language being isolated to a single judge or the isolated events of the Jena Six. Rather, it can be read as just one instance in a long tradition of seemingly non-racial language that implicitly implicates the vaguely dangerous vision of black male criminality; or, in other words, Russell’s previously-mentioned criminalblackman.

With the proliferation of public disagreement over whether or not the six teens were charged fairly, not to mention the difficulty of discerning the events that actually happened leading up to the events of December 4, it is easy to see how the Jena Six became a topic of national debate and contention. With major news outlets directly contradicting each other over a number of small but relevant details, it becomes obvious that from the start the general American public was in no way prepared, or empowered, to be thoroughly informed or knowledgeable about the prosecution of the Jena Six nor about the socio-racial climate in the small town of Jena.

While there is certainly an investigation to be made over how mainstream media covered the Jena Six—especially in light of Beale’s observation that “[r]eaders and viewers form well-developed expectations based upon stock stories and scripts,” such as Bonilla-Silva’s racial

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183 Goodwyn, “Beating Charges.”


185 Ibid., 539.
story lines that are subsequently simplified and perpetuated via mass media—I am interested in public perceptions of the six teens at the level of individual members of the general public. That is, I wish to examine the effects of said story lines versus their origins. In light of Shotwell’s elaborations on “common sense” and the ways in which it is created rather than inherent or natural, my analysis will focus largely on ways in which public stancetaking regarding the Jena Six belied socially agreed-upon matters of collective racial knowledge—and, more specifically, the ways in which it employed color-blind language to maintain and justify current racial conditions.

Methodology

To examine the four calls that will appear in Chapter 4, I will focus on the presence of the following five rhetorical and discourse strategies. This list draws from both Bonilla-Silva’s color-blind frames and strategies discussed in Chapter 3, as well as from the ways in which color-blind language defines and constrains the assertions of evaluation and belief that are available to a speaker. As it will be shown, while I will detail the characteristics of each element further, collectively I will refer to them as the Five Rules of Color-Blind Language.

1. Avoidance of direct racial language
2. Use of Diminutives/Minimization
3. Abstract liberalism
4. Appeals to shared knowledge or “common sense”
5. Evaluative stancetaking and alignment

In Chapter 4 I will analyze discourse samples that observe the ways that each of these five elements appear and function in natural speech given by four individuals remarking on the events surrounding the Jena Six trial and protest march. Chapter 5 will discuss at a more hypothetical
level the ways in which the rules, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, overlap and reinforce each other to form and maintain a whole and coherent *habitus* for racial thinking.

**Color-Blind Language**

1. **Avoidance of Direct Racial Language**

   Since the color-blind racial structure in the US relies on the continued, yet unacknowledged and unexamined, use of color-blind language to perpetuate its logic, one of the central, most general rules of color-blind language is the avoidance of direct racial language. Recalling earlier discussions, at the end of the Jim Crow era and with the ascent and establishment of the Civil Rights movement, overt racism and racial prejudice became socially unacceptable and taboo. Bonilla-Silva hypothesizes that while the social acceptability of overt racism declined in public discourse, so too did people’s available options for discussing anything explicitly race-related, regardless of attitudes or intentions. The result, he says, was an increase in heavily-coded and hesitant language when talking about race.\(^{186}\) Indeed, while the Civil Rights movement did produce beneficial results, the establishment of color-blindness as the social ideal for racial attitudes in the US, in which race no longer mattered—although, as I have said, this ignored, rather than solved, real disparities and inequalities that were distributed along the lines of racial categories—did not necessarily change attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions at the level of individuals who may have still held to beliefs of racial superiority.

   In order to express beliefs that are still negative towards people of non-white minority races, Bonilla-Silva argues that rather than violate the social prohibition against explicitly racial talk, people utilize a variety of color-blind language strategies.\(^{187}\) While all five of the rules will

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\(^{186}\) Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, 55.

\(^{187}\) Ibid., 57.
constitute the system of color-blind language, I place avoidance of direct racial language at the forefront both for the ways that it organizes color-blind talk in general, and for its prevalence and flexibility in everyday speech. Demonstrations of avoidance of direct racial talk which I will examine in my analyses include: denial of the racial nature of one’s beliefs (“I don’t believe that, but”) and claims of ignorance regarding the racial nature or impact of one’s statements (“I’m not sure if…”), both of which work as disclaimer-builders in combination with the other four rules to effectively express an impenetrable, unquestionably color-blind belief about race. That is, when indirect racial language is challenged, the speaker need only revert to the defense of “but I never said anything about race!” to maintain face and social propriety. To identify instances of this rule in Chapter 4, I will rely on the presence of statements that operate rhetorically in a way similar to those listed above: denial and claims of ignorance. However, because of the many ways that race as an explicit topic can be avoided while the speaker implicitly makes a racial argument, appearances of this rule that fall outside the basic two categories will be examined as they emerge in the following chapter.

2. Use of Diminutives/Minimization

Following closely from avoidance of direct racial language is another common, highly versatile strategy for color-blind language: use of diminutive or minimizing language. Similar to the ways in which indirect racial language such as “I’m not sure if…” or “it might be the case that…” is used by the speaker to create a sense of hesitation, or a disclaimer to fall back on in the case of a challenge, diminutive language is that which diminishes the rhetorical “size” of what the speaker is saying. In cases where a speaker’s views may be too explicit, Bonilla-Silva observes that they use diminutives or minimizing language to frame the position in a way that is
For instance, rather than saying that they are directly opposed to interracial marriage, a person may claim that they are “a little concerned for their children.” In that instance, the speaker is using minimizing language to express a position that on the one hand is not explicitly racial in a way that saying “I am against interracial marriage” would be, but on the other hand is still maintaining a perspective that in the end reaches the same outcome: opposition to interracial relationships.

Alternatively, a phrase such as “she shouldn’t take everything so seriously, it was just a joke” also employs minimizing language. In this instance, the minimizing language is embedded in the argument of “it was just a joke,” in which the speaker is minimizing the seriousness of “it” by saying that it was not meant as, or should not be interpreted as, anything more than a joke.

Diminutives, like the forms of “softening” strategies seen in Rule 1, are highly flexible in their form and are often used in conjunction with other strategies. However, in my analysis I will identify them as occurring both when narrowing, or minimizing words such as “too,” “just,” and “a little” are employed, and I will identify the subject of minimization.

3. Abstract Liberalism

Abstract liberalism, as I briefly examined in Chapter 3, is a color-blind language strategy originally identified by Bonilla-Silva in which the speaker invokes liberal values such as “liberty” or “justice” at the theoretical level as a way to justify or avoid addressing racializing practices and beliefs at a more concrete or actionable level. While Bonilla-Silva elaborates upon it largely as a “frame,” that is, as a broader interpretive filter through which a person can process

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188 Ibid., 66-67.
their racial experiences, I believe it is both possible and valuable to identify abstract liberalism as a strategy that is deployed in order to advance and maintain color-blindness. To observe instances of abstract liberalism in the texts that follow, I will identify them as references to values that, while generally accepted as positive and beneficial, are presented in a way that is markedly less-concrete than the point to which they are responding. For instance, “equal justice under the law” is one instance of the use of abstract liberalism that will be shown in the analysis.

In one speaker’s usage, “equal justice under the law” is used to collectively refer to the Jena Six, while the victim, Justin Barker is named and clearly identified. In that instance, while “equal justice under the law” is a widely-held and generally un-challenged value, it is also comparatively less-concrete than the person of “Justin Barker.” Because of the variety of ways this rule can appear, and because “abstraction” as it is meant here generally relies on an object of comparison, I will identify employment of the abstract liberalism frame as taking place when: a. a value that can be identified and is commonly accepted as beneficial, non-partisan, and desirable is referenced as something that the speaker supports, commits to, or wants, b. the value is invoked in in combination with something else as a point of comparison or contrast, and c. the value is presented as a counterpoint to its contrast in a way that is less concrete, personal, or action-suggesting, thus discouraging challenges to the speaker on the basis of their perceived allegiance to said value.

4. Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Common Sense

Building on my discussion in Chapter 4 of Bourdieu’s habitus and the way in which it is on the one hand a highly structured and structuring organizational schema, and on the other hand not explicitly identifiable and thus unavailable for observation and critique, I am interested in

\[189\] Ibid., 26.
observing the ways in which people communicate knowledge or values that is taken-for-granted as being shared between speaker and audience. Thus, to observe applications of this rule in my analyses I will look for statements or rhetorical acts that rely on, or assume, implicit agreement or understanding, signaling what I have called shared knowledge or “common sense.” As it has been argued, such “common” knowledge or sense is, in fact, often a matter of constructed and subjective assumption that provides and justifies expediency for the group that maintains it. What the speaker assumes their audience already knows, believes, or has in common with them, then, is often an expression of the speaker’s perception of their relationship to their audience, and an expression of what the speaker believes does not need to be explicitly stated. Further, I contend that what remains unsaid or assumed— the part that is being taken as “common sense”— is unavailable for critique, and in that sense it operates to maintain and further the habitus that it exists within and is generated by.

As I will discuss in my first sample in the next chapter, references to common sense or shared knowledge are often built upon “stock stories” that provide a basis for assumed knowledge, yet at the same time they are not tied down to a particular context and are able to be utilized in a variety of situations. In comparison to Bonilla-Silva’s racial story lines, stock stories are not necessarily used in reference to racial matters or in the service of color-blind language. However, they function in near-identical ways. One such stock story that I have already discussed is Russell’s *criminalblackman*, which operates as an unquestionable, all-encompassing image of black male criminality whose existence is taken to be a matter of “common sense”; when the presence of the *criminalblackman* is suggested, then, justification from the speaker is neither needed nor expected as the veracity of the story— as a product of the color-blind habitus— has so thoroughly been accepted as true by both speaker and recipient.
Use of the rule of appealing to shared knowledge or common sense, as I will identify it, will marked by either a. statements that are reliant upon an identifiable stock story or racial story line and are given as a statement of fact rather than opinion, and in addition are provided without justification for the validity of the claim, or b. an explicit signaling of knowledge that the speaker assumes is shared through the use of the phrase “you know” or “of course.”

5. Stancetaking and Alignment

As introduced in Chapter 2, stancetaking is the means by which people display affect, evaluation, and/or certainty towards an object, and includes the ways in which people negotiate their stance in relation to stance-giving others. Briefly, stancetaking— in which the statement of a single stance is defined as a stance act— can be understood using DuBois’s model of a stance triangle, originally introduced in the previous chapter.

Figure 1, above, depicts the relationships among the three primary parts of a stance act: the speaker, the stance object, and the other subjects with whom the speaker aligns as part of their

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positioning. As a speaker takes a stance towards an object—especially in evaluative stance—they are also aligning themselves with other speakers and discourse participants. If stance is the position a speaker takes towards the subject of their speech, then alignment is the degree to which the speaker agrees or disagrees with others.

Englebretson provides five central principles of stance,191 all of which I use to create a taxonomy of stance act identification. It is important to note that the five principles can work on their own or in conjunction to signify an instance of stancetaking.

1. Stancetaking occurs on the (often overlapping) levels of physical action, personal attitude or belief, and social morality. For my purposes, it is primarily the latter two that are significant, as most instances of stancetaking that will be observed are statements of either personal values or evaluations of social circumstances.

2. Stancetaking is “public, and is perceivable, interpretable, and available for inspection by others.” Stancetaking, as it appears in the analyses that follow, is generally performed as the identifiable conclusion, or at least companion strategy, of the other color-blind rules. I contend that, as I have defined it, stancetaking is by its nature the result of a combination of other color-blind strategies; as these strategies can be observed and interpreted, the sum total of the stance act itself can also be observed and interpreted.

3. Stance is interactional in nature. While the text samples in the following analysis are somewhat unusual in their non-conversational nature (i.e.-they are statements in response to a single, introductory question from C-SPAN’s news host and therefore do not include responses to prior statements between two or more speakers), they are statements that are made in response to Slen’s initial question, and they are statements made in regard to a specific subject. Namely,

the events surrounding, and issues at debate in, the court case and conviction of the Jena Six. By nature of the callers’ context—i.e.- Slen hosting “Washington Journal” the morning after the march on Jena—I believe the statements that the callers take are inherently interactional. While not conversational, they are prompted by a specific question and their statements are made in response to Slen’s query and ongoing discussion.

4. Stance is indexical. Relating to the above “stance is interactional,” Englebretson qualifies stance as being indexical, saying that it “evok[es] aspects of the broader sociocultural framework or physical contexts in which it occurs.” Similar to the way in which a stance act is in response to, or in interaction with, another speaker or its audience, the stance that a speaker takes is also situated within its particular context, and relies upon sociocultural values, attitudes, and expectations in order to be seen as a legitimate, applicable position that someone can hold in regards to the topic at hand. Inherent in the ongoing use of color-blind language is the understanding of what is a “legitimate” position and what is not; as I will argue in Chapter 5, arbitrary delineations of what is “legitimate” or “acceptable” in discussions about race work to constrain and maintain the boundaries of current racial systems and our understandings of those systems, thus limiting future possibilities for racial discourse.

5. Stance is consequential. While it is impossible to know what the consequences were for the four callers after they provided their statements on-air, the positions they take represent real and actionable ways of viewing the situation in Jena, and thus they are consequential. While I only discuss four samples, I suspect that for each of the callers there were many who agreed with their stated positions. At the same time, there were likely many more attitudes and positions towards the events in Jena that were not represented in any of the four calls. Nevertheless, the stance acts that I observe in Chapter 4 are grounded in ways of not only viewing and interpreting
real events, but also in ways of being and interacting in the world in meaningful ways.

I will use Englebretson’s five principles as the basis for identifying stance in the following analysis, and will identify both stance and the stance object, as well as degrees of alignment and the person or group with whom the speaker is aligning (or not) aligning themselves.

Analysis Source

The discourse samples that I examine in Chapter 4 are drawn from the call-in segment of C-SPAN’s morning news program “Washington Journal,” which aired on September 21, 2007, and was hosted by C-SPAN Senior Executive Producer Peter Slen. After speaking to Associated Press correspondent Mary Foster about her coverage of the march in Jena that had taken place the day before—which much of the show’s news coverage is in reference to—Slen invites viewers to call in to the show to offer their thoughts on the court proceedings and subsequent protest that had taken place in Jena. Telephone numbers for Republican, Democrat, and Independent lines are provided, although a caller’s choice of which number to use appears to be entirely self-selecting, and in the case of several callers Slen does not identify which line they chose.192

The content of the calls ranges from not addressing the topic at hand, such as one viewer who calls in to thank C-SPAN for their coverage of Jena, to callers who, to varying degrees, have a distinct opinion on the situation. I am interested primarily in the latter, and my analysis will

192 While the focus of this paper is not on the political aspects of the Jena Six situation or the political affiliations of the callers, it may be worth noting that the call-in segment of “Washington Journal” began around 8:40 a.m. ET, and most of the callers live in the Eastern Time Zone. A clock on the C-SPAN screen continuously updates what time it is on the west coast at the time of broadcast, and I suspect that a more geographically (and potentially politically) diverse range of callers would have participated had it not been so early in the morning.
focus on four calls—two from Maryland, one from Virginia, and one from Arizona—that take stances signaling varying degrees of approval and support towards the protesters and the Jena Six students, as well as varying degrees of commitment to those stances. Two are critical of the protesters, with varying degrees of intensity in their disapproval, while two seem to be generally in support of, or sympathetic towards, the protesters and the six students—again, however, the degree to which they commit to those positions are varied. Calls made into C-SPAN from across the country regarding the Jena Six, and not more-immediate statements made by people in Jena at the time, were selected for analysis because I intend to focus primarily on the discourse surrounding situations where the significance of race is being debated. The four C-SPAN callers provide statements that are fruitful for analysis, then, because their physical distance from the “action” in Jena results in statements that are generally subjective, opinion-based statements, rather than a reporting on what was happening in the town at the time. Furthermore, these four callers were selected because while they provide a range of positive and negative assessments of the Jena Six, their statements are all approximately the same length and they share a similar scope in terms of how many topics are discussed, thereby allowing for relatively straightforward comparisons to be made between them.

Transcription Methods

For clarity and ease of analysis, I will identify and refer to the callers’ genders based on the traditional understanding that a higher-pitched voice generally correlates to the speaker being a female, while a generally lower-pitched voice is correlated with male speakers. Furthermore, I will utilize pseudonyms when referring to the callers: Tammy, Karen, Linda, and Tyler, respectively.

Textual representation of the calls follows Chafe’s model of intonation units and DuBois’
transcription conventions. Chafe defines intonation units as “functionally relevant segments” of speech which correspond with the relationship between the length of a vocalization and the speaker’s need for inhalation. Based on Chafe, I divide the speech samples in the next chapter into intonation units using the following criteria, which can include any combination of: change in pitch, change in the duration of syllables or words, change in intensity or volume, changes in voice quality, and the alternation of speaking and pausing. See Appendix for a complete description of transcription conventions.


194 Ibid., 58.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

In the analysis that follows, as introduced in the previous chapter, I examine four speakers who called in to C-SPAN’s “Washington Journal” news program on the morning of September 21, 2007 to discuss the marches held in Jena the day prior. In the first two calls, both participants generally align themselves against issues raised by supporters of the Jena Six, while the last two calls are generally aligned positively towards, or in support of, those supporting the six defendants in Jena and marchers who protested the charges. While I will briefly summarize the major themes of each call in their respective sections, I will discuss the central findings and themes of all four calls together in Chapter 5. For each caller, the extent to which they seem committed to their evaluations and positions varies, and they differ the ways they navigate the constraints established by the unspoken rules of color-blind language. Ultimately, while each caller utilizes a variety of color-blind rhetorical and linguistic strategies to express their beliefs—both critical and supportive—regarding the Jena protesters and surrounding issues, they vary in how successfully they communicate their message. As it will be shown, the unspoken boundaries established by color-blind language and logic operate as expected by minimizing overt racialization. By constraining those who attempt to speak explicitly about race regardless of their intentions, the available options for racial discourse—including future developments and evolutions—are limited and fixed, and remain without a mechanism for expanding the boundaries of what can be accomplished within racial discourse.

Negatively-Aligned Speakers

Caller 1

In the first call, a woman from Bethesda, Maryland, “Tammy” generally aligns against the Jena Six, although the degree to which she commits to her multiple positions on the topic
vary. Throughout her call, Tammy demonstrates the rules of using diminutives, avoiding direct racial language, and employing abstract liberalism, while also exhibiting rhetorical incoherence which Bonilla-Silva considers to be a partial component of color-blind language use. I will first examine how these rules appear in Tammy’s call and look at how she uses the rhetorical strategies in conjunction with multiple hedging maneuvers to build a defense against objections raised about her statement. Then, I will conclude with a discussion of the ways in which her resulting stance acts, although they appear to be moderate and even self-doubting, are in fact quite stable and firmly-held. Below is a transcription of Tammy’s call, followed by my analysis:

Slen: Bethesda Maryland Republican, you are on the air. What do you think about the Jena Six situation?

Tammy:
1 (Good morning).
2 I just want to say that I am
certainly for equal justice under the law
3 but I `can’t understand,
4 why there’s `so /little,
5 uh,
6 spotlight on the
7 `victim of this case.
8 It’s all about you know the
9 `perpetrators
10 and now they’re made,
11 /almost as if they’re /heroes
12 And the it was
13 there was an /innocent
14 `victim
15 and I just don’t understand why the
16 press doesn’t
17 focus more on that `young `man.

From the outset, Tammy deploys two color-blind language rules in quick succession. First, her use of “just” in (2) falls under what I have identified as the use of diminutives to minimize the impact of what she is about to say. While Wilamová broadly defines hedges as
encompassing a variety of pragmatic markers that modify the strength of an argument, “downgrading” is a subtype of hedging devices that is utilized by the speaker to self-protect by preemptively lessening the weight or size of the claim they are about to make. “Just” accomplishes this downgrade by suggesting that what is about to be said is not all that can be said on the issue, and therefore Tammy is in some way being judicious about what she is choosing to discuss by focusing in on one particular element. This act of hedging can easily be considered as coordinating with the color-blind strategy of using diminutives, as both act as an “out” for Tammy, who to some degree suspects that what she is saying is in some way socially unacceptable or discouraged. While hedging can be performed in any conversation that could potentially become face-threatening for the speaker — such as in making a friendly request — its use in racialized discourse such as this call acts to minimize and guard against being seen as explicitly discussing, or making “too much” of, race in the situation.

Second, Tammy employs the rule of abstract liberalism by invoking personal commitment to the value of “equal justice under the law” (3) — a value which she apparently considers common enough to warrant no further contextualization or justification. Employment of the abstract liberalism rule, as it has been defined by Bonilla-Silva, consists of using politically and socially liberal ideals in an abstract manner to explain more-concrete, or de facto, racial matters. Tammy is using abstract liberalism in (2-7) as she compares “equal justice under the law” in (3) to the much more concrete and identifiable “victim of this case” (i.e. Justin

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196 Ibid., 89.

Barker) in (8). Since “equal justice under the law” has historically been assumed as a natural or inherent right for citizens, Tammy’s invocation of it is difficult to challenge or question on ideological grounds. Yet, even though equal justice under the law is not something that many would dismiss, in (4-8) Tammy disregards the legal case and individual people behind her invocation of “equal justice under the law”—i.e., the Jena Six—in favor of a more individualized consideration of the real and immediate “person” of Barker. Thus, in this instance the value of equal justice under the law acts to de-personalize or de-identify the people whom it concerns in the present moment. By claiming to value equal justice, Tammy is free to not acknowledge, or is free to identify as a non-issue, the primary point of contention in the Jena case—i.e., the charge of racial discrimination and lived experience that result from disparity in the legal system—while still maintaining that she values equal justice.

At the start of (4), Tammy transitions from abstract liberalism to avoidance of direct racial language through her use of “but,” which in this instance is acting as an expression of what Wilamová calls clausal mitigators. Following Wilamová’s definition, clausal mitigators are utterances that begin with but in order to explain the speaker’s motivation in the presence of a face-threatening act.\(^\text{198}\) That is, through the use of “but,” Tammy is providing explanation or justification for a belief that could otherwise be taken as unacceptable by the audience, and in that sense deploys a “face-saving” measure. Her use of “but” in (4), then, acts as a way for her to reach at least partial agreement and therefore maintain “harmonious relations between participants,”\(^\text{199}\) as she knowingly moves to take a position that some would consider impolite or unacceptable for public discourse. Since one of the central points of contention within the Jena


\(^{199}\) Ibid., 87.
discourse was the race of the victim compared to the race of the perpetrators, Tammy’s use of “but” mitigates a statement that could otherwise be read as too directly racial. Without “but” in (4), Tammy would simply be stating that she values equal justice and is concerned about the victim in equal part; but, since it appears that she wants to bring the racial identity of the perpetrators into her evaluation without violating the rules of color-blind language, “but” lets her rhetorically place her concern for the victim slightly higher than her concern for equal justice being given to the six defendants. It is important to note, then, that since she does not refer directly to race, her use of the abstract value of “equal justice” can be read as a euphemism for, or way to bypass, the role that race could be playing in the situation in Jena. Since direct racial language is discouraged within the system of color-blindness, Tammy first uses abstract liberalism and then “but” as an additional safety net as she avoids addressing the fact that the main point of contention is Jena is, in fact, over the presence of directly racial disparities. In (4-10), then, Tammy is fulfilling the fifth rule as she aligns against the focus of the protesters and media coverage, and such an alignment is further solidified in the declaration “I am certainly for.” As I have argued, however, her alignment is with “equal justice under the law”—an abstract value—and I contend that the abstractedness of “equal justice” acts as an out for Tammy.

In (4) Tammy also deploys an additional hedging strategy which can be identified as tentativizing as she frames her subsequent stance with “I can’t understand.” Following Wilamová, tentativizers are rhetorical devices that convey hesitation, uncertainty, or vagueness in an attempt to minimize or soften the explicitness of a statement. On its face, “I can’t understand” could be taken to mean that Tammy does not, at an informational level, have access

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200 Ibid., 90.
to the media’s rationale for its focus. From preceding and subsequent utterances though, it seems that this is not the case since she appears to have little difficulty in taking explicit and identifiable stances regarding the subject. “I can’t understand,” then, acts as a diminutive, or “softened” form of “I don’t agree with.” Since such an explicit statement would come close to breaking the rules of color-blind language by taking a clear stance in a debate where racialized disagreement is playing a prominent role, “I can’t understand” not only frames the statement as a sort of personal weakness or lack of comprehension that may elicit a sort of sympathy from C-SPAN viewers, but it also softens Tammy’s perceived degree of commitment to the stance she is about to take. Bonilla-Silva would contend that such language acts as disclaimer or “rhetorical shield” in the event that Tammy is challenged or confronted for either her racial views or the ways in which she has expressed them. That is, while Tammy’s degree of alignment may in fact be quite strong, hedging it with “I can’t understand” disguises the extent to which she is committed to her position, providing a safety net as she broaches the socially-precarious subject.

In (4-8), with her statement “but I can’t understand / why there’s so little / uh / spotlight on the / victim of this case,” Tammy is completing the hedging action, as “spotlight on the victim” is set up (perhaps artificially) as the counterpart to “equal justice under the law,” where “but” acts as the pivot on which her focus turns. Interestingly, no specification is given on what she believes a sufficient “spotlight” should entail. This lack of a specific call to action furthers the possibility that her intention is less about doing something to change or acknowledge the violence committed against Justin Barker’s, and more about getting attention off of the Jena Six.

(9) supports such a proposition, as Tammy goes so far as to utilize “you know” as she uses the fourth rule— invoking of a shared common sense or understanding—in a way that

201 Bonilla-Silva, Racism Without Racists, 55.
follows Vincent, Darbaky, and Mettouchi’s argument for the role than you know plays in discourse. In Tammy’s case in (9-10), the subject of what is “known” is that the media’s focus is “all about…the perpetrators,” and as I proposed in the previous paragraph, it seems that in Tammy’s opinion the media’s attention is misplaced and/or unwarranted (an argument which her subsequent statements will be shown to support). Vincent, Darbaky, and Mettouchi describe “you know” as a discourse marker that, while able to be used in a variety of ways, is often utilized to refer to a (presumably) shared knowledge or “common ground”; more specifically, it is used by the speaker to frame their expression as a “given” for the addressee. Closer to the purposes of this analysis, Fasching-Varner, in a study on the racial attitudes of pre-professional white teachers, concludes that “you know” is frequently used by the white subjects to establish a “shared knowledge about race and Whiteness,” observing that his subjects use the phrase even when the specifics of “you” in “you know” (i.e.- Fasching-Varner) are almost entirely unknown to them. When a subject invokes a shared—or “common”—knowledge or sensibility that is not actually held by Fasching-Varner, Fasching-Varner declares that the appearance of a bond between researcher and subject is, in fact, a fiction. I contend that Tammy’s use of “you know” in (9) functions in a similar, although perhaps not as explicitly racial, way. Fasching-Varner observes that you know works to create a sort of “racial bond” (although, as just noted, that bond is not necessarily based in reality), and argues that the result of that bond, however


204 Ibid., 30.
temporary, is a sort of “extra room” that lets people state their beliefs without being expected to articulate the rationale or “the specifics and substance” of their beliefs. Furthermore, Fasching-Varner notes that white racial bonding, and subsequent references to that bond through signals such as you know, is built upon shared “stock stories” or “master narratives,” echoing Bonilla-Silva’s “racial story lines” from Chapter 3.

In this instance, Russell’s archetype of black male criminality— the criminalblackman—is the stock story that serves as the basis for the image of a generalized “perpetrator,” which in the next few lines Tammy will use to emphasize the illogicality of equating said perpetrators to “heroes.” It should be noted that by using the criminalblackman as the basis for the shared knowledge assumed in her use of “you know,” Tammy is not compelled to justify or further detail what she assumes is implicitly understood by her audience; if she were to make explicit her reasons for doing so, the rules of color-blindness would be violated, and indeed, it is possible that Tammy is not entirely conscious of the basis for her assumed shared knowledge. The racial bond and subsequent extra room that Tammy creates through her use of “you know,” then, coincides closely with earlier discussions of habitus and the color-blind system of racial organization, as both are systems that work to structure knowledge while remaining unconsciously known to their users and inherently avoid the need for explicit justification—and subsequently avoid potential critique.

After trying to build a temporary sense of shared or common knowledge by using “you know,” in (9-10) Tammy makes her first direct reference to the six Jena defendants. She identifies them as “the perpetrators,” whom she sees as unfairly being made out as

205 Ibid., 34.
206 Ibid., 37.
“almost…heroes,” based on the popular conception of archetypal “perpetrators” and “heroes” as being clear and longstanding adversaries. While her reference to them as “the perpetrators” is perhaps a slight use of Bonilla-Silva’s first rhetorical strategy—avoidance of direct racial language—because of the way that her statement frames them solely in light of the crime they committed rather than their shared race—again, echoing the archetypal criminalblackman—more compelling is her perception of them being portrayed “almost as if they’re heroes” in (12). This alignment of the identity of “perpetrators” with that of “heroes” seems intended to highlight the absurdity of such an equivalence—an absurdity that is reliant upon an additional shared understanding or “common sense” about the relationship between conventional heroes and villains.

No evidence is given of the “heroic” depiction that she says is being made of the six teens, yet Tammy’s use of “almost as if” in (12) acts as a tentativizer—similar to the one seen in “I can’t understand” in (4)—which allows her to make her beliefs, which are potentially contentious, appear hesitant and less-explicit. While she uses minimizing and tentativizing tactics to soften the explicitness with which she takes her stance, Tammy is nevertheless fulfilling the fifth rule as she positions herself as being in a stance against the Jena Six and in alignment against those who support them, as seen in her claim of the media’s depiction of “perpetrators” as “heroes.” Although she uses “almost as if” in (12) to blunt the force, the social and ideological weight behind both “heroes” and “perpetrators” suggests the power of her conviction in her perception of the media’s misguided attention.

Tammy’s “uh” in (6) and “and the it was / there was an innocent / victim” in (13-15) appears to be a brief instance of what Bonilla-Silva calls “rhetorical incoherence.” Rhetorical incoherence, as defined by Bonilla-Silva, is an increase in “grammatical mistakes, lengthy
pauses, or repetition” that occur when a person discusses potentially unacceptable topics, including but not limited to open discussion of racial issues. As Tammy gets closest to her critique of the treatment of the six defendants, claiming that they are being treated “as if they’re heroes” in (11-12), she also relies most heavily on coded language to make her argument.

Bonilla-Silva argues that rhetorical incoherence results when white speakers attempt to talk—often negatively or critically—about race while at the same time maintain the belief that within the color-blind social structure, race does not matter. The result, he says, is confusion and often incoherence on the part of the speaker as they set out to talk about race without explicitly mentioning race as being a factor in their evaluation or belief. In Tammy’s call, then, it follows that her moment of overt incoherence comes immediately after she makes her most color-blind reference to the defendants on trial: “It’s all about you know the / perpetrators / and now they’re made / almost as if they’re heroes.” As discussed above, Tammy’s clearest color-blind criticism of the Jena Six lies in her contrasting of their “perpetrator” status with their perceived “hero” depiction by the media, and it seems likely that such a point would be the one at which she, attempting (albeit unconsciously) to follow the rules of color-blind language, is the most likely to waver in terms of coherence.

Furthermore, through her statement of “there was an innocent victim” in (14-15), Tammy is perhaps again using abstract liberalism to justify her reasoning— the liberal value being that of “innocent victims” as people who deserve sympathy and recognition. In (14-15), and recalling (4-8), she is further aligning herself against the attention being given to the Jena Six as she deploys the presence of “an innocent victim” without further elaboration on who he is or what

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207 Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, 68.

208 Ibid., 71.
should be done for him, again suggesting that her stance on the issue is less about being for Barker than it is about being against the six teens. Echoing the contrast established by “perpetrator” and “hero” in (10) and (12), “innocent victim” in (14-15) acts as an additional point of contrast against which the Jena Six can be labeled “perpetrators,” thus strengthening her evaluation of the Six and their supporters.

Finally, (16-18) repeats Tammy’s use of tentativizing in “I just don’t understand” to further minimize the impact her position might make by framing her position as a matter of personal knowledge and comprehension rather than objective fact. As a result, she maintains an “out” from accusations of both a. not assessing the situation accurately, and b. overreaching in what she has the power to say or give her opinion on. Additionally, her use of just acts as a sort of narrowing-down of her focus, as if to say that the press’s focus is the primary point at which she disagrees in order avoid charges of being dissatisfied with too many different issues.

While Tammy illustrates how the five rules of color-blind language allow their users to talk negatively about race in ways that would not be socially acceptable otherwise—especially through the use of diminutive and minimizing language, and explicit commitment to abstract liberal values—the next caller shows a challenge to the boundary of those rules. More specifically, Caller 2, who I call Karen, maintains her alignment against the Jena Six, yet she speaks much more explicitly about her racial attitudes and uses few hedging strategies. Yet, in the end, she too is constrained by the limits of effectiveness set by color-blind language.

Caller 2

Karen, like Tammy, is aligned against support of the Jena Six—perhaps even more so than Tammy. They differ, though, both in the object of their stancetaking, and in their alignment and justification of their position. Karen, is distinct, too, in how she diverts from following the
rule of avoiding directly racial language, and while she generally maintains the frame of color-blindness, she does not use many of the minimizing and diffusing tactics observed in Tammy’s call. In the end, however, it seems that it is Karen’s implementation of the rule of stancetaking, rather than her violation of color-blind language, that limits her effectiveness in expressing her evaluation of the situation in Jena.

Slen: Maryland Republican

Karen:
1 /Yes I’m calling.
2 /yes this is horrible what happened down there,
3 but /they should have handled it theirselves
4 Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton have
5 REALLY `got `nerve
6 That /Duke lacrosse?
7 /They
8 BRIBED they `offered
9 that `woman a
10 FULL SCHOLARSHIP
11 so that she would testify against those `three
12 /WHITE.
13 `Duke.
14 `Lacrosse.
15 players.
16 Now that messed their-their lives up.
17 The girl was proven uh that it `never happened.
18 You
19 NEVER heard an
20 APOLOGY from
21 `Jesse `Jackson
22 Al Sharpton
23 They a-

From the outset, Karen invokes a subtle, but identifiable, expectation of common sense or shared knowledge with “yes this is horrible” in (2). Less explicit in its presumption of a shared understanding than that seen in “you know,” “yes this is horrible” nevertheless establishes what the nature of the situation is (that is, it is “horrible”), with no room in the statement for either further explanation or further questioning. Karen does establish herself as being in alignment
with people who consider “what happened” to be something that is “horrible,” and while her opening use of “yes” suggests that she thinks such an alignment should come without question, she does not clarify what “this” or “what happened” refers to. One could infer that “down there” is Jena, yet from the start Karen deploys the rule of shared knowledge in her presumption that the audience recognizes and shares meanings that Karen has not made clear.

In a distinct contrast to (2), then, (3) begins to create a stance that is eventually established as being clearly positioned against the protesters who marched in Jena the day before, as Karen argues that “they should have handled it theirselves.” Like Tammy, Karen uses “but” as a clausal mitigator at the start of (3) to establish a pre-emptive rhetorical defense, using the beliefs expressed in (2) to justify those that will be expressed in the rest of the call. Who “they” refers to is not yet made clear, although in her speaking of “what happened down there” in (2)—considering her own geographical location in Maryland—and her subsequent references to both Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, it appears that she is evaluating the actions of the black citizens in Jena. On the one hand, “they” is not directly identified by Karen; on the other hand, since support for and against the Jena Six in the town fell generally along racial lines, meaning that the majority of white residents were not in support of the Six, and since Jackson and Sharpton are explicitly named by the caller, “they” is best understood as referring to Jena’s black residents. While later statements will further support my reading of who “they” are in Karen’s call, Karen does not return to what “it” is, nor does she elaborate on how “it” should be “handled,” leaving the viewers to question whether she is referring to the nooses left on the tree, the attack on Justin Barker by the six students, or the public march protesting the charges. Karen only states that “they” should have worked through the (unspecified) problems “theirselves.” While it is possible to discern that Karen is talking about the racial conflict in Jena, it should be
noted that the non-specified “down there” in (2) works in conjunction with the equally unclear “they” and “theirselves” in (3) to depict the situation in Jena as distant and non-immediate. In combination with the mitigating language that she uses, the unclear language in (2-3) further supports a reading of Karen’s attitude in which the entire conflict and subsequent trial was not a significant enough problem to warrant the involvement of Jackson, Sharpton, or the media attention that the case brought to the small town.

**Sharpton, Jackson, and Duke Lacrosse**

Karen leaves her current topic of discussion and makes a sharp turn in her attention in (4), moving to talk about prior actions by Jackson and Sharpton. Compared to the generalized “they” in (3), both Jackson and Sharpton were already well-known as black political activists and commentators by white Americans at the time, and Karen’s statement that the two men “really got nerve” in (5) shows a clear alignment against them.

While I briefly discussed Sharpton’s ongoing activism efforts in the first chapter, it is worth noting the central role that both Sharpton and Jackson played in political and social activism efforts throughout the 1980s and into the early 2000s. Although Jackson was known in 2006 for his 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns, he began his public career working with Martin Luther King after meeting King at the March on Washington in 1965. In 1966 King made Jackson director of Operation Breadbasket, the economic strategy branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) that King founded and presided over. Operation

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Breadbasket aimed for black socioeconomic equality through the promotion of black-owned business, and it was there that Jackson hired Sharpton to work in the New York branch of the organization.\textsuperscript{211} Jackson would remain more directly involved in politics through his own political campaigns and his establishing of two advocacy groups—PUSH in 1971 and the Rainbow Coalition in 1984—and the merging of the two in 1996.

As early as 1984, however, Al Sharpton was organizing the protest marches that he would eventually become known for\textsuperscript{212} as he continued to advocate for racial fairness in legal cases during the next several decades. Throughout their public careers, however, both men were subject to considerable controversy and criticism, both from within and outside the black community. Jackson was widely criticized in 1984 for his public use of an ethnic slur against the Jewish population of New York City, as well as his continued refusal to disavow the controversial Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. His financial management of PUSH and the Rainbow Coalition was widely questioned too, along with the lack of detailed, viable plans to implement the policies he campaigned on during his political career.\textsuperscript{213} Sharpton, alternatively, gained notoriety for his activism in the 1987 Tawana Brawley case, in which a young black teenage girl’s rape claim was ruled to be a hoax. Sharpton publicly accused a white assistant district attorney of being one of Brawley’s attackers in that case despite a lack of evidence, and the accused man, Stephen Pagones, won a $65,000 defamation suit against Sharpton. Sharpton’s


\textsuperscript{213}Purnick and Oreskes, “Jesse Jackson Aims for the Mainstream.”
financial abilities as well as his numerous failed political campaigns were also questioned, and he was often criticized for public statements that were at times racially inflammatory and read as encouraging violence against non-black people.\textsuperscript{214}

By the time of the Duke Lacrosse rape and Jena Six cases in late 2006, then, both Sharpton and Jackson were widely-known for their highly-public political and organizational activism efforts, but both had also been significantly featured in the media for the criticisms noted above. As a result, they were both recognized for their work in bringing opportunities to black urban communities, but were both equally noted for their controversial public statements and beliefs about how racial equality should be brought about. Nevertheless, they held significant media attention and were able to organize sizeable marches and protests, as demonstrated in their collaboration in organizing the march in Jena.

By not acknowledging the role that Sharpton Jackson played in organizing the march in Jena— which likely contributed to the size and media coverage of the event— and instead only claiming that the two men have “really got nerve,” Karen works to simplify their involvement in a racially-charged and legally-complex situation down to a matter of personal brashness. Such a characterization of Jackson and Sharpton’s involvement in Jena is supported later in the call by her elaboration on their role in the Duke Lacrosse scandal which I discuss below. Her statement, then, becomes somewhat surprising in its explicit racialization as she noticeably does not use indirect or coded language to make her argument, and instead explicitly names Jackson and Sharpton who, in many instances, had been seen as speaking on behalf of the larger black community. It is telling that throughout her statement, aside from the brief appearance of what

could be an assertion that relies common sense in (2-3) regarding the “horrible” nature of the situation, and the belief that the black residents of Jena should not have brought in outside media or protesters, Karen makes no observable hedging maneuvers, nor does she utilize any of the color-blind language rules short of being overtly racist in a way that would be socially unacceptable. Instead, she talks explicitly about race through her naming of Jackson and Sharpton.

From the first mention of Jackson and Sharpton in (4) through the end of the call in (23), Karen turns to critique Jackson and Sharpton’s involvement in the Duke lacrosse team scandal that occurred in March 2006, before she is apparently cut off from the broadcast by Slen in (23). The Duke lacrosse scandal, which happened in March 2006, began when Crystal Gail Mangum, a 27 year-old black woman hired to work as a stripper at a party hosted by Duke University’s lacrosse team, accused three of the players of rape.\(^{215}\) The subsequent court case was highly publicized, Mangum was found to have falsified her claims, and all charges against the three players were dropped in April 2007.\(^{216}\) While a full elaboration of the racial elements at play in that court case and the subsequent dismissal of charges against the team are outside the scope of this project, the proceedings were nevertheless highly publicized, and highly racialized, due in part to perception of Jackson’s and Sharpton’s involvement. Karen’s criticism lies primarily in what she sees as Jackson and Sharpton’s role in “messing up” the lives of the members of the Duke lacrosse team, as she argues that they bribed the black woman who claimed she was the victim in the case, Mangum, to provide false testimony against the members of the all-white


lacrosse team. It should be noted that on the one hand Sharpton did appear on Fox News’s “The O’Reilly Factor” to discuss the case a month after the initial events, where he viewed the prosecutor’s decision to proceed with the case as a sign that, despite questions about the veracity of Mangum’s claims, there was enough evidence in her favor for a trial to proceed.\textsuperscript{217} On the other hand, Karen’s claim in (7-15) that both Jackson and Sharpton “bribed” Mangum with a “full scholarship” to “testify against those three white Duke lacrosse players” appears to be in reference to an announcement made by Jackson in early April 2006 that his Rainbow/PUSH Coalition would pay Mangum’s college tuition. Jackson noted that he would pay even if Mangum was found to be lying, saying that she would never again “have to stoop that low to survive.”\textsuperscript{218} (4-5) clearly demonstrates that Karen is critical of Jackson and Sharpton’s actions in that situation, and presumably at the time of her call to C-SPAN she was critical of their presence in Jena. While the Duke case was ultimately dismissed after the discovery of Mangum’s making false claims against the team, the Jena Six situation was similarly racially charged although under different circumstances, and because the two cases were in the public’s attention around the same time it became unlikely that people following both cases—like Karen—would fail to draw parallels between the two. For perspective, while Mangum’s initial rape claims were filed in March 2006 and the Jena Six’s attack on Barker took place in December 2006, the charges against the Duke lacrosse team were dropped in April 2007, and the march and trial in Jena began just five months later in September 2007. One can see a variation on the first rule of color-


blind language (avoidance of direct racial language) at work in Karen’s logic here: Because of
the close window of time between the court trials of both cases, and because of the presence of
Jackson and Sharpton in both cases, one could reach the conclusion that, because Mangum lied
while being associated with Jackson and Sharpton, the claims of injustice made by the Jena Six
were equally invalid and nothing more than “race baiting”219—a term widely applied by white
critics of Jackson and Sharpton’s actions in the Duke case. By drawing an equivalency between
the Duke Lacrosse case and the Jena Six rather than directly stating her opposition to the Jena
Six based solely on its own elements, Karen projects the most contentious aspects of the Duke
Lacrosse case on to what is at stake in Jena, and in that way is able to avoid saying where her
objection truly lies.

Where Tammy made careful and frequent use of multiple color-blind linguistic strategies
to communicate a position that was generally negatively-aligned while still being “polite” or
socially acceptable, Karen makes far fewer moves to hedge her positions, and she is explicit in
her naming of who is at fault. This call stands out as distinct, then, in its explicit and strong
alignment against supporters of the Jena Six, its lack of minimizing or “softening” language, and
its shift in focus that, while ultimately cut short by Slen, can be seen as maintaining a logic about
the way that race, and racial identity, is deployed by individuals. Furthermore, in her emphasis
on “white / Duke / lacrosse / players” in (12-15), Karen is explicitly highlighting the racial
identity of the lacrosse players whom she considers to be the “real” victims in the case. By
emphasizing the racial identities of the defendants in the Duke lacrosse case, Karen implicitly
argues that a. the racial identities of Sharpton and Jackson were significant to their involvement

219 C. Edmund Wright, “Eight Years Later, Accusers of Duke Lacrosse Players Still in
Denial,” Breitbart, May 19, 2014, http://www.breitbart.com/sports/2014/05/19/duke-lacrosse-
liberals-ratchet-up-their-denial-even-as-reality-plays-out/.
with Mangum, and b. those racial identities are also at play in their involvement in Jena. One could suspect that Karen’s move towards increasingly explicit racial language is what leads to Slen’s decision to remove her from the on-air broadcast at the end of (23). It is important to note, however, that Karen falls short of explicitly identifying “what happened” in (2) and “it” in (3), although one can surmise that through her mentioning of Jackson and Sharpton she is referring to the legal trial and seeming inequality present in the charges against the Jena Six. Karen attempts to draw a connection between the Duke case and Jena through her mention of Jackson and Sharpton, presumably suggesting that like the racially-charged claims that ultimately turned out to be false in the Duke case, Jackson and Sharpton are trying to win a false victory at the expense of a white “victim” in Jena. In that sense, Karen is recalling the image of the *criminalblackman* by framing the actions of Jackson and Sharpton as seemingly devious, and by extension is including the Jena Six as *criminalblackmen* who are trying to “get away with” committing the assault on Barker. Yet, Karen does not make her statement explicit enough to be understood and agreed or disagreed upon by the audience. For all of the ways that her call is notably explicit in its centering on a racially-charged situation— that is, the Duke lacrosse case— Karen’s lack of naming the elements or actors unique to the Jena case suggests that even *without* abiding by the color-blind rules that are meant to blunt the force of expressing racial beliefs, speakers perhaps unintentionally follow the first rule of color-blind language: Avoidance of talking directly about race. That is, Karen uses vague language to stake her position in an otherwise racially-direct statement, resulting in the inability of listeners to identify— and consequently align with or against— the stance she is taking over how much, or what kind of, attention should be paid to the events in Jena.
Conclusions

Although similar in their shared general alignment against the claims made by the protesters and supporters of the Jena Six, Tammy and Karen are distinct both in their aims and their strategies. While Tammy speaks out most directly against the media’s depiction of the six teens in Jena, Karen seeks to communicate her critique of Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton’s presence in Jena, especially in light of their involvement in the Duke lacrosse case several months prior. Tammy’s position is much more coded and couched in minimizing and tentativizing language so as to not come too close to openly talking about the racial elements at play in Jena, although she ultimately holds a position that is clearly not aligned with the Jena defendants. Alternatively, Karen is much more assertive in her stance against the Jena defendants and protesters, and while her statement is not overtly racist she does not employ race-avoiding language, and in that sense her statement is remarkably racial. In the end, however, Karen takes a strong stance against the presence of Jackson and Sharpton in Jena yet fails to give reasons for her objection to them outside of their involvement in the Duke lacrosse case. Regardless of her intentions, Karen discusses Jackson and Sharpton only in the context of a case where the race of Jackson and Sharpton was seen as a sort of impairment to their judgement which therefore resulted in false charges being brought against the Duke lacrosse team. By making Jackson and Sharpton’s race the hinge upon which the connection between Duke and Jena turns, Karen violates the rules of color-blindness and Slen responds correspondingly by cutting off her call in the television broadcast.

Positively-Aligned Speakers

In the final two calls, both participants are generally aligned alongside or with the issues raised by those protesting on behalf of the Jena Six. While their stance acts are largely positive,
in the sense that they are generally in support of the discourse Slen is discussing in the segment, these callers, too, are constrained by the limits of color-blind language. While the specificity and forcefulness with which they can communicate their position is hindered by the overarching, yet unspoken, rules of talking about race, they attempt to challenge the ways that race is—or is not—a part of the public discourse in Jena.

Caller 3

Unlike the first two calls, this caller from Queen’s Creek, Arizona, from a woman who I will call Linda, generally aligns herself with the protesters and seems to be sympathetic to the Jena Six defendants. Nevertheless, like the previous callers she utilizes minimizing and hedging devices to frame the evaluations and stancetaking that she performs, yet the presence of color-blind strategies differs in crucial ways. Notably, she utilizes hedging devices to conclude with a stance that is clearly against the critics of the Jena Six, and more specifically, against the townspeople of Jena. I divide the call into three primary segments: Linda’s evaluation of the townspeople of Jena, her evaluation of the noose-hanging performed by the Jena high school students, and her linking of the students’ actions and the response from Jena.

Slen: uh Queen’s Creek Arizona you’re on the air

Linda:
1 /Yes um my…
2 um `question is is that
3 I /hear a lot of,
4 `townspeople say
5 you know um
6 “we don’t ag/reer with this”
7 But they don’t say exa:ctly
8 `how they feel
9 other than…
10 “no, we don’t agree with this.”
11 You know
12 but but the `actions
13 of the students,
there /is
you know a
`sign to it
there.
We `feel,
as,
African Am/ericans
that,
you know there’s a /symbol to it
it’s not just,
a `pra:nk
and that, I think that’s what we feel from,
the people
IN Jena
is that it’s
just a `prank

From the outset with (1-2), Linda makes a minor speech repair through her brief rhetoric incoherence and recovery seen in “yes um my / um question,” before establishing her forthcoming statement as if it will be a question when she states “my question is is that”;
although, by (3) and through the rest of her call, she does not posit any sort of question to Slen or the viewers. While the use of proposed questions is not in the literature as a hedging device, it seems likely that her use of a question-centered framing for her statement is operating similarly to the tentativizers seen with Tammy. That is, “my question is” establishes a sense of hesitation, and perhaps personal uncertainty or vulnerability as a way to elicit sympathy and build connection with the audience, in a way that is similar to statements such as “I’m not sure why” or “I can’t understand why.”

In (3-4)— “I hear a lot of / townspeople say”— Linda refers to what she assumes is the reasoning that is common among the people of Jena, although it is only suggested that she is referring to Jena’s residents based on later statements since no explicit clarification is given. By relaying the words used by the townspeople, “we don’t agree with this,” Linda explicitly positions the statement that will appear in (6) as language that she does not necessarily ascribe to
herself—language which she further details in (7-10). Moving from (1-4) to (5-6), Linda uses “you know um” to follow the fourth rule of color-blind language before relaying the sentiment of “we don’t agree with this” that she believes is common among the people of Jena. In (5), Linda’s use of the discourse marker “you know” operates in a way similar to Tammy’s use of it, in that “you know” functions to create a temporary bond of shared or common knowledge between herself and her audience. The difference for Linda, however, is that rather than the assumed mutual understanding being about the nature of the protesters in Jena, the assumed mutual understanding is about the generally negative reactions by the residents of Jena towards those protesting in support of the six teens. What the audience should presumably already “know” in order to recognize and understand Linda’s use of “you know” in (5), then, is perhaps not as obvious as it is with other callers or in other instances, since the stock stories upon which invocations of “you know” usually rely is not immediately clear in Linda’s use of the phrase.

Recalling Bonilla-Silva’s examination of racial story-lines, Fasching-Varner, as mentioned in the discussion of Tammy’s call, argues that successful use of you know relies upon a generalized narrative that is shared between speaker and audience. For Bonilla-Silva, the story-lines surrounding discussions of race, by their definition, function to provide explanations for why things are the way they are in order to maintain the current racial hierarchy. Such story-lines must therefore be widespread, well-known, and unchallenged. To return briefly to Tammy’s call, she utilizes an assumed shared knowledge in order to build an unspoken connection between herself and her audience. Within her call, one can see how her use of “you know” when describing what she sees as undeserved acclamation for the Jena Six both employs and perpetuates negative perceptions of young black men. To use you know in reference to what the

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220 Bonilla-Silva, Racism Without Racists, 76-77.
white residents of Jena think and feel, however, does not come with a readily available stock of culturally-perpetuated narratives or attitudes. Thus, in the instance of (5) in Linda’s call, the audience must work harder to determine that Linda’s use of “you know” is based in the assumption that anyone, regardless of race, would want equality and an end to racial hostility and inequality.

While the “this” in “we don’t agree with this” in (6) is not specified here or even later in the call— although (17-22) will suggest that Linda is referring to the nooses hung on the tree at Jena high school— here she uses constructed dialogue to transmit the line of argument that she says is common among the people of Jena. She uses “I hear a lot of / townspeople say / you know um / ‘we don’t agree with this’” in (3-6) in conjunction with the “but” at the beginning of (7) to act as a clausal mitigator for what she says in (7-8): “they don’t say exactly / how they feel.” By acknowledging what she believes is a commonly-held attitude, (3-6) acts as a sort of minimizing preparatory statement, and as a result Linda creates more rhetorical space for herself to be explicitly critical of the townspeople in (7-8). One could hypothesize that, had she used even more additional minimization and hedging, she would have been able to perform an even harsher critique of the townspeople in (7-10), as she would have created a wider margin for herself to be critical while remaining within the bounds of socially-accepted discourse.

In the remainder of (7-10), Linda is again expressing what she believes to be the feelings or attitudes of the townspeople, as exemplified in the statement “no we don’t agree with this” where “we” is the residents of Jena. Linda, however, is framing the attitudes of the townspeople in such a way as to make it appear that their attitudes are insufficient or ineffective for the situation in Jena, as seen in her use of “other than” in (9), as if to say that the townspeople’s attitudes extend no further than “no we don’t agree with this.” Additionally, “you know” at the
end of (10) further acts to present the townspeople’s attitudes towards the Jena Six as a “given,” or at least as something that should not be questioned too much. Altogether, in (3-10) Linda is establishing her stance on the subject, but in contrast to earlier callers, the object of her stance is not the six defendants or their charges, nor does it have to do with the protest march. Rather, in this instance the object of Linda’s stance is the townspeople’s response. Through her use of “but they don’t say exactly / how they feel” in (7-8), it seems that rather than sharing a stance object with the residents of Jena, Linda’s stance object is the townspeople of Jena and their response—or lack thereof—towards the Jena Six and their treatment within the legal system.

In (12-24), Linda changes focus to discuss the actions that took place at Jena High School two months prior to the incident with Barker. With “the actions / of the students” in (12-13) and “there is / you know a / sign to it” in (14-16), as well as the reference made to her own African American identity in (18-20), it becomes apparent that the “this” in (6) and (10) is the event in which the white students hung nooses from the tree on school property in September 2006, which also clarifies the “it” in (16). This clarification comes about both through Linda’s invocation of the “actions of the students” in (12-13) and, as I discuss, her describing their actions as “not just a prank” in (23-24)—both of which were descriptors used in the media to describe the event of the nooses—as well as through her expression of how “we feel as African Americans,” recalling that the black residents of Jena were the group largely and publicly responsible for pushback against the leniency given to the students responsible for hanging the nooses. Interestingly, while Linda appears to self-identify as African American in (18-20)—with “we feel / as / African Americans”—her use of “you know” in (15) and (22) draws attention to the “common sense” of why the black community would take special offense at the actions of the white students. Such a “common sense” would be reliant upon a shared knowledge and
understanding of American racial history, and in particular the role that lynching played in the oppression of black Americans. In (18-24), then, it seems as if she is trying to make a sympathetic connection with the wider audience, regardless of their race, as if to say that for people like the herself, the actions of the students were much more meaning-laden than they were for white Americans.

Such a reading of “you know” in (15) and (22) is further supported by Linda’s statement in (23-24) that “it’s [the nooses] not just / a prank,” which again suggests that for people like her, the act of the nooses being hung at the school could not be seen merely as the immature or ill-advised choices of a few young students. In this statement, she is taking a stance that is openly critical of the townspeople’s enactment of one of the rules of color-blind language: use of diminutives. That is, Linda recognizes the ways in which defining the events with the nooses as “a prank” downplays their significance, and she is drawing attention to the minimization that has been performed by others rather than participating in a sort of minimization herself. In (23-24), then, the object of her disapproval is not necessarily the noose-hanging, but rather the townspeople's minimization of the seriousness of the act. Two elements come together to make up the object of Linda’s criticism: first, the townspeople’s consideration of the students’ actions as “a prank,” and second, the townspeople’s avoidance of what could be considered direct racial language through their saying of “we don’t agree with this” in (6) and (10), especially since “this” is never made clear, and “don’t agree” is hardly an explicit disapproval of an act that many blacks took as a sign of overt racial threat with historical precedent. In combination, these two elements illustrated the ways that the response from the white community in Jena was, for Linda, insufficient and short-sighted.

In the final segment of her statement, Linda moves to summarize the connection between
the actions of the students in Jena and the townspeoples’ response. With “I think that’s what we feel” in (25), Linda, like Tammy and Karen before her, uses minimizing language to tentativize her statement and hedge the perceived severity of the judgment she is making. By hedging her statement with “I think,” she is in a way exempting herself from accusations of speaking too broadly or trying to have the “final say” on what the townspeople of Jena think. Additionally, her use of “that’s what we feel” in (25) operates in a similar way, attaching the perceptions of the African American population—presumably, based on her use of “we” in (18)—to a “feeling,” creating room for the possibility that the African American community’s perception of the event was somehow mistaken or flawed. Yet, looking at the call in its entirety, it is clear to the audience that rather than operating from a presumption of self-error, Linda is in fact taking a clear stance against the townspeople and their initial response to the actions of the students. Although still constrained by color-blind language in how explicit she can be, I believe Linda makes effective use of the rule of appealing to shared knowledge and common sense as an empathy-building strategy as seen in her multiple uses of “you know.” These appeals, in combination with an appeal to the historical symbolism of the noose-hanging that took place in Jenahyu, work to illuminate Linda’s position as an individual and as a speaker; and, for her audience, they illustrate the stakes of a discourse that results from, and results in, lived and substantive experience.

Caller 4

The final call is from Tyler, a man in Alexandria, Virginia. This call stands in marked contrast to Linda’s in that while also appearing to be generally aligned with, or supportive of, the cause of the Jena protesters, Tyler is most notable for the hedging and color-blind maneuvers that he does not use.
Tyler: 
1 /Um I actually feel that this /case is, 
2 this is a, 
3 is a `branch off of historic events that occurred in the past that’s 
4 `undiscussed. 
5 It ’hasn’t been discussed in years, 
6 and `this is what 
7 `happens 
8 when `generations… 
9 when the `generations… 
10 have `not discussed this issue. 
11 And it’s `people, that are, 
12 my age, 
13 which is like, in the `twenties 
14 that `have to discuss it `now 
15 which /is, 
16 which is a good and `positive thing 
17 but, 
18 now it’s the-it’s the fact that 
19 people `fighting over 
20 /who is the `victim 
21 (in the situation) 
22 it it it’s the battle of 
23 who is the `victim 
24 you have `whites saying /they’re the victims 
25 you have `blacks saying /they’re the victims 
26 both sides have 
27 /reasons to be victims, 
28 however no on sits down to actually 
29 `debate this 
30 because it’s 
31 `not 
32 `important to many people. 
33 Although people are discussing it /now, 
34 /will it be important in a couple of weeks, 
35 `that’s the question. 

Tyler begins (1) with an instance of repair through the use of “um,” and like the three 
callers before him he tentativizes with “I actually feel.” By prefacing his call with the statement 
that what follows is a matter of “feelings,” Tyler distances himself from accusations of being
wrong or too direct, regardless of what he actually says, thus employing the third rule of color-blind language: minimization.

While “this case” in (1) is presumably in reference to the trial and sentencing of the Jena Six, Tyler utilizes the fourth rule to reference a shared knowledge in (2-3) with “this is a a branch off of historic events that occurred in the past,” as he refers to what is presumably the history of racial inequality in the United States; yet, in his statement he does not explicitly say what the historic events are, and instead assumes that his audience will understand his reference. Later statements from Tyler will stand in contrast to the other callers in the way that he is more explicit about the role that race has played in the Jena situation. Yet, from the outset, Tyler invokes common sense in that he does not clarify or expound upon the “historic events” that he uses to introduce the rest of his statement. Although Tyler’s position is clear in that the audience knows what he sees as the relationship between “this case” in (1) and “historic events” in (3)—that is, the Jena case as “a branch off of” the historic events—his direction of alignment is seen through the attention he believes should be paid to the issue, rather than through a direct praise or critique. In (3-5), Tyler’s use of “undiscussed” and “hasn’t been discussed in years” to describe the historic events that have led to the case suggests that he believes there is a gap or lack in how history has been remembered and transmitted, leading the audience to assume that to some degree he does not approve of how the current situation is being understood, explained, or handled. Tyler seems to be aware of potential challenges to his position, though, as it has been discussed how his use of “I actually feel” in (1) tentativizes the forthcoming statement; such hedging acts as a self-acknowledgment of the fact that his stance may not be widely or automatically accepted, regardless of how it is actually received by the audience.

It is again unclear what “this” is in both “this is what happens” and “this issue” when
Tyler states that “this is what happens when generations have not discussed this issue” in (6-10)—is he referring to the nooses hung on the tree at the high school? The attack on Justin Barker? The prosecution of the Six? The protest march that took place the day before? As he has not yet taken a stance either for or against the Jena Six and those who are protesting on their behalf, it seems that he is generally supportive of them, yet the lack of direct and explicit language in (1-10) makes his intended meaning difficult to determine. On the one hand, it is possible that his avoidance of direct racial language is being used, like Tammy and Karen before him, in a way that follows the first rule of color-blind language in order to express a racial attitude or belief that would be socially unacceptable or discouraged if the language were more explicit. On the other hand, it is possible that while he may be attempting to make a statement that is in support of the Jena protesters, Tyler is trapped, as it were, within the bounds of color-blind racial language. That is, while Tyler is attempting to say something in support of those in Jena, the boundaries set by color-blind language restrict him from explicitly acknowledging the racial nature of the protest in order to prevent violation of the overarching rule: avoidance of direct racial language. The invocation of a wrongly-understood or unacknowledged historical past in (3-10) suggests that Tyler is attempting to bring a forgotten racial narrative to light, or trying to challenge or re-frame commonly accepted understandings of racial history. In this instance, the language that would normally be used by people to express their racial—and potentially racist—beliefs in an indirect and socially-acceptable way is in fact constraining language that is attempting to draw attention to the historical realities and functions of race. In that sense, Tyler’s inability to specify the exact nature of the historical problem demonstrates the limiting function of color-blind language, as he cannot challenge what he cannot name and address. As it will be demonstrated, though, as Tyler shifts his focus from the
conflict’s historical origins to its current stakes he is ultimately able to explicitly foreground the role of race in the ongoing hostility in Jena, and in that way disrupt the boundaries established by color-blind language and logic within this particular discourse.

In (11-13) Tyler moves to self-identify to some degree by disclosing his age, as he argues that “it’s people that are / [his] age / which is like in the twenties / that have to discuss it now.” While the “it” in (14) is presumably the same “it” as in (5) and is still not specified, Tyler asserts that that people of his age have a responsibility or duty to directly address the issue, as seen in his use of “have to” in (14). (15-16) establishes the positive stance that Tyler takes towards the potential for open discussion, as he describes the needed discussion in (16) as a “good and positive thing.”

In (17) through the end of his call, Tyler demonstrates several rhetorical moves, yet he does so in a way that is essentially different not just from Tammy and Karen, but also from Linda, with whom he perhaps shares the most alignment. While (18) and (22) begin with some repair that could signal brief swerves into rhetorical incoherence, Tyler establishes and maintains the position that occupies the rest of his call. His use of “now” in (18) suggests that, unlike the “historic events” in (3), the fundamental problem at the heart of the Jena conflict has changed. (17-22) reveal that in Tyler’s perception, the conflict is a “battle” over what racial group can rightfully claim the title of “who the victim in “the situation.”

While “the situation” that Tyler is discussing could reasonably be the victimization of Barker as a survivor of violent assault versus the victimization of the Jena Six as participants in an unfair legal system and the questions of who deserves the media’s — and the public’s — sympathy, he does not clearly delineate what “the situation” is in (21). By extension, the nature of the victimization that is being fought over is also unknown. By presenting the conflict
between the black and white groups as “fact,” as seen in (18), Tyler presents his interpretation of the conflict as one that, while not widely-shared, is better-representative of what is politically, socially, and historically at stake. Furthermore, recalling (3) in which he says that the case and its surrounding events are “a branch off of historic events that occurred in the past,” Tyler is not just commenting on the current contentions in Jena, but also recalling “historic events” to do so. In that sense, while Tyler’s deployed language is much more vague, he joins Linda as the only other caller who attempts to contextualize the response from either racial community in Jena in light of history.

In a moment that is remarkable in its distinction from the previous three callers, in (24-25) Tyler directly states what he believes to be the racial nature of the conflict in Jena: “you have whites saying they’re the victims / You have blacks saying they’re the victims.” While he does not define the nature of their victimization—even though within Jena white residents said Barker deserved the most attention while the black residents said the focus should be on ensuring a fair trial for the Jena Six—in (24-25) Tyler is on the one hand not hedging his assertion about the nature of the conflict in any way, and on the other he is violating the color-blind rule of non-direct race talk. Indeed, through his naming of black and white racial identity, in this instance Tyler is violating the boundaries of being color-blind. It is noteworthy, though, that while he is clear is his assertions of the nature of the conflict, Tyler does not definitively position himself in alignment with either side. While a lack of obvious personal alignment could be read as an attempt to create a sort of color-blind appeasement for an audience that may be inclined to disagree with him, his color-blind rule-breaking in (24-25) still stands as he acknowledges the history of challenges and inequalities that both racial groups can lay claim to, as he observes in (26-27) that “both sides have / reasons to be victims.” At the same time, however, color-blind
logic may still be at play in Tyler’s call, as he mentions the possible victimization of both black and white groups. On the one hand, Tyler may, as I said above, believe that there is a history of both groups being oppressed or mistreated in some way. On the other hand, if Tyler does in fact believe that one group has historically been more victimized than the other, the constraints against direct racial language prevent Tyler from saying so, and he must equalize his alignment, as it were, by including both black and white histories in his assertion.

In (28-32), Tyler fulfills the fifth rule of color-blind language as presents his evaluative stance, most clearly demonstrated in his statement that “however no one sits down to actually / debate this / because it’s / not / important to many people.” While he does not explicitly align himself with or against any of the involved parties in Jena, in a move similar to Linda his criticism is directed most clearly towards people who are uninformed or perhaps critical of the events in Jena, rather than the protesters themselves. In Tyler’s case, he sees the primary issue lying in the fact that “it’s not important to many people,” demonstrating that his criticism is towards people who simply do not care, or in his estimation do not care enough. It should be noted, though, that by observing the low priority that “this” and “it” hold when he says that “no one sits down to actually debate this because it’s not important to many people,” Tyler is in a way acknowledging that the position he holds is admittedly uncommon. That is to say, in order to evaluate the presence or lack of concern on the issue, Tyler has to know that the issue exists and must hold a certain level of concern against which he can compare others. In this instance, then, while not apologizing or backing down from his violation of the rules of color-blindness, Tyler is showing an awareness of the ways in which his talk on race is exceptional and potentially socially discouraged.

Finally, Tyler concludes with (33-35), offering a final evaluation. Building from his
stancetaking discussed above, in this instance Tyler observes “although people are discussing it now / will it be important in a couple of weeks / that’s the question.” In this closing statement, Tyler questions if the “it” in (33) and (34) will be in the public consciousness after a few weeks. He is suggesting that the primary obstacle to continued involvement and progress in racial conflict is that of continued interest, and that without ongoing and invested communication between racial groups—as seen in (28-29) with “no one sits down to actually / debate this”—the historical cycle of racially-based conflict will continue.

Conclusions

While similar in both their generally positive alignment in support of the protesters and the defendants on trial in Jena, and in their grounding of the racial nature of the debate in historic and lived reality, Linda and Tyler differ in both the degree to which they align themselves and in the objects of their stancetaking. Linda critiques the actions of the Jena High School students and the Jena residents’ minimization of the act, saying that for African Americans both in and outside of Jena, the historical symbolism carried by the nooses that were hung as a “prank” is too significant to be dismissed. Although she gives multiple instances of minimization and hedging to soften the sharpness of her critique, Linda ultimately positions herself as clearly disapproving of the way the townspeople in Jena have responded to the events leading up to the trial. While Tyler does not align himself with the protesters as clearly as Linda does, he questions what is at the heart of the ongoing conflict in Jena. In doing so, he transgresses the boundaries of color-blind language by first grounding the debate in historical reality, and then by directly naming race as the primary point of contention, thus violating the foremost rule of color-blind language.

In the next and final chapter, I will examine and discuss the ways in which all four calls employed—or noticeably did not employ—the five rules of color-blind language, discussing
ways in which conformity to the rules emerges, or can be challenged, in an attempt to identify and question the boundaries and functions of color-blind language.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

— 1 Corinthians 13:12

In this final chapter I conclude the analyses performed in the previous chapter, and then I move to discuss the implications, limitations, and applicability of the principles, methods, and research I have utilized here. Returning to the points of contrast laid out in Chapter 1 between the people and methods employed in the Jena protest in comparison to more contemporary activism efforts, I suggest that while racial discourse in the United States is changing in medium and aims, the objects of protest—namely, racial inequality and disparity—remains the same. First, though, I revisit the five rules of color-blind language, looking at the ways in which the callers abide by, fail to use, or challenge the boundaries drawn by the use of color-blind language.

Analysis of Sources

The following section will follow the divisions used in Chapter 4, where I will first discuss the two callers who take a negative or critical stance towards the Jena Six, before moving to the two callers who took a generally positive stance.

The first caller, Tammy, made considerable use of the rules of avoiding direct racial language, abstract liberalism, and diminutive language in order to take a stance that was critical of the Jena Six and the support being given to them, and while she held her stance with a strong degree of commitment, it was made without explicitly racial rationale. Tammy typifies speakers who, while not appearing explicitly “racist,” nevertheless utilize hedging and downgrading rhetorical maneuvers to soften the explicitness of their position even as they are saying
something that, without the hedging, would be otherwise highly racial. That is, behind Tammy’s use of abstract liberalism and minimization is a stance where racial logic is playing a role that would be unacceptable to state directly. Tammy’s use of “you know” furthers this reasoning, as she clearly invokes a knowledge or understanding that she assumes is shared between herself and the audience. Yet, Tammy’s underlying reasoning follows Bourdieu’s description of the habitus, as the understanding that she assumes is shared is never made clear or explicit and the racial logic that organizes her statement and position can never be stated directly. Indeed, without applying the schema of color-blind language to her statement it would be difficult to discern that rather than merely following a common sense that is not—and cannot—be questioned, she is instead playing within a specific, constructed, ideologically-driven field of logic.

In contrast to Tammy, Karen is much less coded in the racial aspect of her critique of Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton and their involvement in Jena. That is, through close reading one can perceive that it is, in fact, the racial identities of Jackson and Sharpton that make them central to Karen’s argument. I suspect that such explicitness is why Slen appears to cut off her call, as the direction of her statement seems to be heading towards even more direct criticism. As I noted earlier, however, Karen fails to specify the aim of her evaluation, as seen in the use of “they” in statements such as “they should have handled it theirselves.” While her stance is strongly negative towards Jackson and Sharpton, and while she may be maintaining such ambiguity in order to unknowingly abide by the rules of acceptable color-blind discourse, Karen does not explicitly state her intentions for calling, nor does she reach a conclusive evaluation of the Jena situation. Thus, although Karen appears to be violating the rules of color-blind language and therefore threatening the boundaries of social acceptability, her lack of clarity in identifying her stance object minimizes the impact her explicit racial language would otherwise have.
Bell notes that in the context of mass communication—which these calls could be considered a demonstration of—speakers must create a new relationship, rather than draw on an existing one, when communicating with their audience, and in doing so the speaker essentially says to the audience that they are bonded, or *ingroup*, together.\footnote{Bell, “Language Style,” 192.} Comparing Karen’s lack of hedging to the numerous ways in which Tammy hedges her stance, it seems that the two callers diverge in their assessment of the audience that they must estimate and create in the moment of communication. That is, because both callers are in the situation of making a phone call to the C-SPAN show without knowing who, specifically, is listening to them, they must quickly strategize what reasoning will be most effective for the assumed and unseen listening audience. On the one hand, Tammy makes effective use of hedging and minimizing and relies on assumptions of shared knowledge in order to take her stance that is in fact quite secure, and in that sense appears to believe that the audience may not immediately agree with her. In contrast, Karen takes a strong stance but does so without the hedging, minimizing, or connection-building maneuvers that Tammy uses, suggesting that Karen views the C-SPAN audience as already generally aligned or in agreement with her and that there is less persuasive “ground” that needs to be covered when she makes her statement. Ultimately, while Karen takes a very strong stance and maintains it throughout her call, Tammy makes more effective use of the strategies that allow for continued discourse and agreement-making among herself and her listening audience. In that way, even though both hold similar attitudes about the Jena Six, Tammy does not draw as much attention to the basis for her beliefs and thus maintains the color-blind habitus, and in contrast Karen—although she does not intend to change her mind—is drawing attention to the framework that undergirds her reasoning, and in that way opens the door for identification,
challenge, and critique of the racial logic that informs her beliefs. Such a critique does happen, then, as the racial basis for her statement moves too close to being made explicit and Slen cuts her off from the program, effectively reinforcing the boundaries of what is acceptable in public discourses as he places Karen’s statement outside the limits of what is allowed to be said.

At the same time, both Tammy and Karen, despite their different ends, make use of the criminalblackman story line in their calls. Both draw upon images of black male criminality to build a critique of those supportive of the Jena Six, but by utilizing the criminalblackman, they are seemingly made exempt from needing to provide further information than the initial invocation of the criminalblackman image, as I have noted by identifying where they have notably not included certain specific details. Such usage of this particular racial stereotype is consistent with both Tammy and Karen’s wider statements, and with Russell’s initial observations of how the stock story functions in discourse.

The last two calls I examined, from Linda and Tyler, are generally more supportive of the Jena Six and the protest marchers. While Linda’s and Tyler’s positions differ from each other, overall they attempt to align themselves with those who say that there is reason for concern over the fair treatment of the Jena Six within the legal system. However, they maneuver through what can be said within color-blind discourse in different ways, and with varying success.

Linda employs multiple hedging maneuvers and appeals to shared knowledge in attempts to move her audience to consider the personal impact that historic racial symbols can still hold for people. Ultimately, however, Linda is able to alter the use of color-blind language, as she flips the expected effects of the language: Where avoidance of direct racial language, diminutives, and hedging are usually used to obscure the presence of a person’s beliefs about race and instead draw attention to seemingly non-racial rationale, Linda utilizes these strategies
to subtly introduce her directly-racial reasons for evaluating the students and townspeople in Jena in the way that she does. That is, rather than the strategies being used to draw attention away from a person’s negative racial attitudes, Linda uses the logic of non-direct racial language to bring her reasoning—of which race is a central part—into the discourse without appearing to explicitly appeal to race.

At the same time, in light of Linda’s rhetorical strategies, a noteworthy caveat is found in Alexander’s discussion of the long-term legal significance of the Jena Six case in The New Jim Crow. Namely, Alexander contends that without the nooses hung from the tree at Jena high school several weeks earlier, the charges brought against the six defendants would likely not have been seen as an instance of racially unfair prosecution, and that only the overt Jim Crow-era symbol of the nooses allowed the entire episode of the Six to be seen and framed in the media as being in parallel to older, more recognizable forms of racial oppression. As a result, Alexander says, the media’s presentation of the Jena Six did not ultimately result in a significant shift in racial attitudes in the US, nor did it bring about what she deems “a new civil rights movement,” because any injustice that was present in the Jena Six case was predicated solely upon older, more familiar forms of racism. Without the historical precedent of the nooses being narratively linked to the assault on Barker, the color-blind discrimination that was embedded within the historical precedent applied to the prosecution of the Jena Six—as discussed in Chapter 1—would not necessarily be seen as an issue of racism. Thus, while Linda’s referencing of a widely-known historical symbol of racial violence may have been empathy-building for white listeners at the time of the C-SPAN broadcast, such reliance on historical—and in particular, pre-Civil

222 Alexander, The New Jim Crow, 222.

223 Ibid. 223.
Rights era—instances of racism are not necessarily sustainable or effective in establishing long-term awareness and understanding of how color-blind racism is functioning in the present.

Next in consideration of her call, through her appeals to shared knowledge as seen in her use of “you know,” Linda attempts to build a temporary connection with her audience based on unspoken understanding and knowledge that she believes they share. While Linda falters in that the knowledge she bases her use of “you know” on is not necessarily shared between herself and the audience she is trying to connect with, she utilizes the strategies offered by color-blind discourse to challenge what can be achieved within said discourse. This is not to say that Linda successfully challenges the limits of color-blind language in a sizable way, as she operates within the bounds set by color-blind language and logic. Nevertheless, the way that Linda uses color-blind language to subvert color-blind logic offers paths for further inquiry into the ways that the racial system—organized and perpetuated by racial logic—can be confronted and challenged.

Finally, Tyler pushes beyond Linda’s abidance by the rules of color-blind language as he builds his statement and stance explicitly upon the historical reality of race and the ways that racial identity has real and lived consequences for people. Although Tyler does not take a clear stance for or against the protesters and the Jena Six, he does draw attention to how both white and black racial identities have—albeit in different ways—experienced what has resulted in them being victims in the Jena situation. By directly stating, and thereby foregrounding, the presence of people’s embodied racial identities while also grounding those identities in historical realities, Tyler effectively circumvents the limits that color-blind language attempts to place on racial discourse—making explicit the very element that color-blind logic relies on remaining unspoken and unidentified.

Each caller, then, demonstrates variations on the ways that the rules of color-blind
language can be used, and to what ends. In all four calls, as I suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, the use of the five rules of color-blind language worked to belie the ways in which race was playing a central role in each caller’s statement. Following Bourdieu, each statement—with the possible exception of Tyler’s—stayed generally within the discourse of color-blind racial logic, and in that way the habitus of race was shared, maintained, and further established into the future as a governing system.

In the next section, I return to the contemporary moment introduced in Chapter 1 to suggest avenues for research into the ways that color-blind discourse will continue to function despite the changing nature of racial protest and activism, and discuss potential applications of the theoretical foundations introduced in this work. After a discussion of the limitations present in the scope and productivity of this project, I conclude by challenging the notion of a future that is inevitably governed by current color-blind language and logic.

**Implications and Applications for Further Research**

As suggested in the first chapter, while the public responses to the events in Jena provide valuable insight into racial discourse and stancetaking via color-blind language, the nature and medium of public activism, protest, and engagement has changed in substantial ways. Namely, technological developments and the rise of social media and networking have altered the ways in which people can meaningfully engage in protest and activism efforts. Consequently, organized protest no longer requires a central, recognizable leader, nor does effective activism need to take place in a set physical location; instead, more local, grassroots, and independent activism can take place without the need for a well-known organizer or leader; or, people’s political and social activism can take place entirely online. Indeed, such an occurrence was seen with the rapid rise in the use and popularity of #BlackLivesMatter, and research suggests that fights for ending
racial discrimination and inequality will continue to be mediated through digital, rather than physical, mediums; although, this too is disparate along racial lines.

As of 2016, black social media users were twice as likely as white users to identify at least some of what they post on social media sites as being “about race or race relations,” while 28 percent of black users said that “most or some” of what they posted was race-related compared to 8 percent of whites. Alternatively, 67 percent of white social media users said that none of the things they posted or shared on social media were race-related. With the continued use of color-blind language as the way for white speakers in the US to frame, understand, and express racial beliefs, and with the emergence of the internet and social media as a place for a wide range of participation among members of all racial identities, the gap shown in the content posted by black and white social media users opens a number of potential avenues for inquiry and further application of the research begun here.

First, I believe there is considerable research to be done on the language and rhetorical methods of online talk about race. Such research could examine both the language used by activists and proponents of racial equality, such as the 28 percent of black social media users mentioned above, and the ways in which the five rules of color-blind language that I have presented remain consistent and/or are disrupted in online language and expressions of racial attitudes. Socially, the United States has potentially already reached the point where protest gatherings such as the march in Jena led by Sharpton in 2007 are no longer the most noteworthy or effective in either gathering national attention or in leading to concrete moves towards ending racial inequalities and disparities, and online tools for activism and protest possibly already eclipsed older protest methods. Thus, the language, methods, and message of these new media

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224 Anderson and Hitlin, “Social Media,” 2-3.
forms provide a wide and vibrant body of potential examination.

Second, as stated above, there is a significant split between black and white racial groups regarding the use of social media as a platform for sharing race-related content. While not all racial content that is shared on social media is necessarily in the service of pursuing racial equality or civil rights, already it is apparent that black social media users draw more attention to race through the content they post and share than white users do. Additionally, 68 percent of black social media users said that at least some of the content they viewed was about race or “race relations”— and 24 percent said that most of what they saw was race-related— but only 29 percent of white users said that some of what they saw on their social media pages was about race, while 48 percent said that little of what they saw was race-related, and 16 percent said that none of what they saw pertained to race or race issues.225 I believe profitable research could be done into the ways that the rules of color-blind language— and the manifestations of those rules— remain the same or change in online environments and content as they do in “real world” speech communication.

Third, considering the direction for research just suggested, it seems that the gap between racial groups in what is seen on social media could be productively investigated in light of Bourdieu’s habitus. In the preceding research, the habitus, as I have described it, acts as an organizing structure that maintains the current racial hierarchy— in which white racial identity is given the most power— and I believe that the absence of race-related content on white social media users’ pages is an additional way for the racial hierarchy to remain unseen and implicit. By race issues being unavailable— or at least not immediately present— for viewing by white social media users, it is possible that race issues and inequalities can be denied or seen as

225 Ibid., 5.
nonexistent, thus reinforcing the deniability of racial inequality or the existence of a social hierarchy. Such research would coincide, I believe, with increasing use of mobile social media technology and emergent interest in the ways that algorithms increasingly determine what content is displayed for different social media users, wherein social media experiences are based upon prior online actions. That is, if a user consistently avoids or does not encounter race-related content that challenges their present beliefs and attitudes, they are unlikely to encounter such content in the future, thus reinforcing their present interpretive framework for racial experiences and encounters.

**Limitations**

Some limitations should be noted regarding the scope and effectiveness of this research. First, while I maintain that the Jena Six case is still a productive source for study and discussion, the text samples used in this project limit the scope of what can be examined in terms of true discourse. That is, because they are one-way statements given by callers in response to minimal prompting by a television show host, the calls consist of only one speaker and are not conversational. If multi-speaker conversations regarding the same Jena Six topic were available, I believe much more productive analysis could be done in terms of alignment between speakers. Because the calls used in this project have only one speaker, it is possible to discuss callers’ stance object and their evaluation of that object, but elaborations on how and who they are in alignment with are limited. In contrast, data types such as observed conversations between multiple people would be more fruitful in future examinations of color-blindness and its interactions with conversational stancetaking.

Second, based on Bonilla-Silva’s system of color-blind logic that I have described as corresponding to Bourdieu’s habitus, systems of racial organization and logic are unavailable for
identification and critique. Similarly, the color-blind language that structures and maintains the racial-system is, in order to ensure the protection of the system, never explicitly about race. Such constraints are inherent to the very language I am seeking to identify within my analyses, and thus within the calls I examined it is possible that the points of speech that the callers left vague and seemingly non-racial— which I interpreted as being a moment of color-blind language expression in what would be an otherwise racially-explicit statement— were just that: non-racial. In the moments of ambiguity in each of the calls I discussed in Chapter 4, it is possible that outside of a few notably explicit exceptions, none of the four callers were in fact talking about race, and that color-blind logic and the language that supports it does not exist. Here I defer to Bonilla-Silva, who suggests that because authors come with their own theoretical and ideological orientations, their explanations of phenomena must be evaluated as if they were maps. That is, to borrow Bonilla-Silva’s expression, my “cartographic efforts” must be judged on their usefulness in increasing understanding for their readers; their accuracy in depicting the situation at hand; and their success in bringing to light elements that have not be previously explored.\(^\text{226}\)

**Color-Blindness and Possible Futures**

Bell hypothesizes that “convergence win[s] friends and divergence win[s] arguments,”\(^\text{227}\) and a similar reasoning could be applied to the multiple depictions of color-blind language use and strategies seen in the four statements that I analyzed in Chapter 4. For speakers who remain within the rules of color-blind language, it seems that while they are held back from making statements that are too explicit or socially unacceptable, they are also able to maintain a position that is secure and not disruptive to their self-perception or status within the habitus of the racial

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\(^{227}\) Bell, “Language Style,” 186.
hierarchy. Furthermore, the habitus of color-blindness provides a familiar, all-encompassing logic for interpretation and existence within the world of racial identities. In contrast, for those who attempt to move beyond the familiar restraints of racial discourse, the rules of color-blind language hinder the ground that can be claimed against the habitus of racial organization, yet I believe it is possible to move beyond the present racial system by conscientiously calling out, and then selectively disregarding, the rules of color-blind language.

If color-blind language provides the framework for the color-blind racial system, then the habitus of color-blindness is made up of, and exists within, a complex and interconnected field of lived realities, institutions, and ideologies that will be difficult to disentangle. Yet, I believe the base of ongoing conflict and contemporary concerns of race in the United States is found in the continued reliance upon language that will never be able to fundamentally change present situations or concerns, and the use and function of that language must be called out. The potential for change, or “[t]he possibility of awakening political consciousness,” as Shotwell says, “depends on the possibility of articulating new available discourses.”228 Rather than continuing to play, as it were, within the circle drawn by color-blind language and thought, a new racial discourse—one that acknowledges and speaks of both the constructed and artificial nature, yet real consequences, of racial identity—must continuously be sought and enacted. Recalling Bourdieu, the habitus of color-blindness not only interprets and maintains itself in the present, but its inability to be identified and questioned means that it also constructs itself into the future, thereby limiting perceived openings for change. Indeed, as he says, “[t]he relation to what is possible is a relation to power; and the sense of the probable future is constituted in the prolonged relationship with a world structured according to the categories of the possible (for us)

228 Shotwell, Knowing Otherwise, 15.
and the impossible (for us).”

The present habitus of color-blindness circumscribes and constrains what is considered “possible,” thereby binding ways of challenging present and future inequalities within a hierarchy that actively functions to maintain itself. The racial logic that governed the past, and continues to govern the present, is that which has resulted in and sustains current conditions. Outside of what is currently understood as possible, then, is where a new and not-yet-imagined futures lies—a future in which emancipatory discourses may yet be found.

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229 Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, 64.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX
TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
(modified from Schiffrin, 1987 (Discourse Markers); Tannen 1989 (Talking Voices))

. indicates sentence-final falling intonation
, indicates clause-final intonation (“more to come”)
! indicates exclamatory intonation
/ raised pitch on a single segment
? indicates final rise, as in a yes-no question
… three dots in transcripts indicate pause of ½ second or more
‘ accent indicates primary stress
CAPS indicate emphatic stress
[ brackets show overlapping speech.
Z no perceptible inter-turn pause, placed between the two lines
: colon following vowel indicates elongated vowel sound
:: extra colon indicates further elongation
- hyphen indicates glottal stop: sound abruptly cut off
“ ” quotation marks highlight dialogue
( ) parentheses indicate “parenthetical” intonation: lower amplitude and pitch
hhh indicates laughter (number of h’s indicate duration by second)
= equal sign at right of line indicates segment to be continued after another’s turn; equal sign at left of line indicates continuation of prior segment after another’s turn
/!/ indicates inaudible utterance
{ } brackets indicate comment on what is said
VITA

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