

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Making of a Mantra: Americans' Racial Ideologies in the Era of Black, Blue, and All Lives Matter

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Abstract

In any racialized social system, a dominant racial ideology will emerge to uphold it, but it is always contested by and in dialog with others. This article leverages conversations around Black Lives Matter, All Lives Matter, and Blue Lives Matter as a site of racetalk. By moving beyond narrow conceptualizations and measures of racial attitudes, this paper pinpoints a myriad of racially based frameworks, or ways of talking and thinking about structural racism, white grievance, state-sanctioned social control, and the matter of Black lives. It analyzes 1,000 Americans' open-ended responses to a question around these contested mantras with the Fightin' Words algorithm alongside an inductive analysis to illuminate the use of circulating racial ideologies. In addition to outlining the components of four racial ideologies—colorblind racism, diversity ideology, white protectionism, and anti-racism—the article assesses how they are deployed among Americans to uphold or challenge the racial status quo.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter; All Lives Matter; Blue Lives Matter; racial ideology; colorblind racism; racial attitudes

In any racialized social system, a dominant racial ideology will emerge, but it is always contested and in dialog with others. The United States can be characterized as a society where social, political, economic, and even psychological benefits and disadvantages are partially doled out on racial lines; further, it is one that is marked by a system of whiteness or white supremacy.¹ The structural inequalities produced in this society are propped by ever-evolving racial ideologies, all of which seek to rationalize and explain (away) ongoing racial disparities and inequities (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Arguably, colorblind racial ideology is the dominant mode of thinking about matters rooted in racism in the United States, but it is not the only one that operates among the American public or in American political institutions, though hegemonic, dominant racial ideologies are often challenged. (Bonilla-Silva 1997;

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Mayorga-Gallo 2019). Indeed, the initial rise and subsequent waves of the Black Lives Matter (henceforth BLM) movement have thrown light on several racial ideologies that are in circulation in the United States. The shape, logic, and ramifications of the dialectical relationship among them are of concern here.

Black American social movements and freedom fights have always served to force “America to face all its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism,” and they “[expose] the evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. [They reveal] systemic rather than superficial flaws and [suggest] that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced” (King Jr 1969). The 21st-century iteration of the Black freedom struggle, sometimes referred to as the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) and more colloquially as the BLM movement, falls into this tradition.² Arguably, BLM is a still-evolving, anti-racist movement rooted in Black feminism, illuminates a broad set of interconnecting racial inequities, and offers a set of demands and (policy) solutions to eradicate racial disparities across a wide array of domains of American life, with an eye toward local-level politics (Lopez Bunyasi and Smith 2019; Taylor 2016).

Like any social movement, this contemporary movement for Black lives expands the scope of conflict and re-introduces the notion that Black folks are perceived to be “dispensable populations as vital but otherwise unqualified human life” to a larger audience and set of stakeholders (Biesecker 2017, 420). This message is undergirded by an anti-racist ideology. However, in doing so, the movement must contend with an audience which may include supporters alongside naysayers, opponents, and apathetic observers. E. E. Schattschneider notes, “the spectators are an integral part of the situation, for, as likely as not, the *audience* determines the outcome of the fight” (1960, 2, emphasis in original). In this case, the audience members include not only BLM activists and advocates but also those who view the world with different ideological lenses, including those who retort and purport that “All Lives Matter” or “Blue Lives Matter” (henceforth, ALM and BlueLM, respectively).

This article turns to the debates around BLM, ALM, and BlueLM as a site of racetalk. Specifically, it aims to provide a nuanced assessment—through an inductive approach—of the racial ideologies in motion in the United States as well as the extent to which the public relies on them by addressing the following questions: Which, if any, component parts of various racial ideologies underlie ostensibly competing claims of BLM, ALM, and BlueLM? What do the explanations of support for these three mantras tell us about the shape and prevalence of the various racial logics that Americans grasp onto?

This article makes several contributions. First, though it is often the case that political scientists in particular have tended to rely on rather narrow measures of racial attitudes to assess levels of “racism” in America, it is well known that Americans’ orientation toward racism is multidimensional (DeSante and Smith 2020a, 2020b; Chudy 2021). Additionally, although there does tend to be one dominant racial ideology, it behooves scholars to tap into competing ideologies, given that the structure of a democratic society is partially the outcome of dialectical processes (Omi and Winant 1994; Mayorga-Gallo 2019). Here, this article encourages a broader discussion about how to capture and potentially measure Americans’ racial attitudes beyond racial resentment or anti-Black stereotypes by illuminating the patterns of how people discuss and explain existing racial disparities.

In order to do this, I rely on cultural theorist Stuart Hall's (1996) insight, where he defines ideology as "systems of meaning, concepts, and categories and representations which make sense of the world." Barbara Field's ideas are centered; she notes, "race is not an idea but an ideology. It came into existence at a discernable historical moment for rationally understandable historical reasons and is subject to change for similar reasons" (Fields 1990, 110). More to the point, racial ideology, in particular, can be understood as "the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify . . . or challenge . . . the racial status quo" (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 65). This article not only pinpoints the racial ideology that is most prevalent among Americans but also aims to illuminate other frameworks that Americans rely on when discussing the matter of Black lives.

The movement for Black lives, similar to other contemporary social movements like the Arab Spring, was able to proliferate its message through social media. As such, a great deal of key research on BLM relies on data culled from social media sites such as Twitter (Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Bonilla and Tillery 2020; Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016; Gallagher et al. 2018; Olteanu, Weber, and Gatica-Perez 2015; Stewart et al. 2017; Tillery 2019). However, the actors and spectators that have been swept into the scope of conflict include those who may rely on other kinds of social media outlets or none at all.³ Meanwhile, scholars of racial ideology have mostly relied on smaller samples of Americans to assess prevailing racial ideologies given the onerous task of high-quality, theoretically rooted qualitative research (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006; Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick 2004; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). An additional contribution of this article, then, is methodological. I employ a dataset that allows me to speak to several critical points of inquiry, including the demographic and partisan make-up of supporters of BLM, ALM, and BlueLM. Here, respondents provide short, open-ended responses to explain why they support one mantra over the other. Qualitative data allow scholars to capture "contemporary racetalk (specific linguistic ways of articulating racial views), specific rationalizations for racial inequality, deep cognitive connections between frames and racial issues, and racial stories" (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 64). This article's large-n, qualitative data is analyzed through two methodological strategies—Monroe et al.'s (2008) Fightin' Words algorithm and via an inductive analytical process that ascertains whether elements of racial ideologies previously articulated by race scholars are present. The findings illuminate the necessity of widening the scope of our measurement strategies around Americans' racial orientations. These methods move us beyond static measures of racial animus captured by Likert scales and feeling thermometers to capture the more mercurial and nuanced articulations of Americans' mental maps of race and racism.

Together, the following analyses illuminate that elements of four racial ideologies—colorblind racism, diversity ideology, white protectionism, and anti-racism—are in circulation among Americans' way of thinking. The results also reveal a historical pattern: anti-racist ideology in the United States has not just one dominant racist ideology with which to contend, but instead, it must overcome many others—some overt and aggravating, others moderate and complicit, all insidious and embedded.

A Brief History of Three Mantras

The contemporary movement for Black lives is part of a long legacy of Black freedom struggles. A concise version of this iteration of the movement is that #BlackLivesMatter was introduced by Marcus Hunter, then again by three Black Millennial women community organizers—Patrice Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi—on social media in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of the man who killed him (Bonilla and Tillery 2020). However, the hashtag became a core animating principle and mantra in the wake of the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri during the summer of 2014. Since then, the hashtag ranks as one of the most highly used in Twitter’s history, and the movement has developed to encompass not only dozens of BLM chapters globally but also includes a wider array of organizations that coalesce under the banner Movement for Black Life (M4BL) (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016).

In the time that the hashtag, mantra, and social movement “Black Lives Matter” has come into the consciousness of Americans, it has largely been narrowly understood as focused primarily on eliminating anti-Black police brutality. It is worth noting, however, “without a doubt, it is in part because mainstream as well as other media outlets reductively reframed BLM as an unruly, even confrontational and violent, single-issue movement protesting the lack of accountability for police who use excessive force against black men” (Biesecker 2017, 411; Corley 2021). To be sure, miscarriage of justice and state-sanctioned violence at the hands of local police are one of the points of focus for this contemporary movement. However, this policy matter largely serves as an illustration or representation of structural racism (Rickford 2016). Anti-Black police violence as a spark for Black uprisings is not unlike previous iterations of the Black freedom movement. Indeed, even the 1968 Kerner Commission noted that most of the Black, urban uprisings in the mid- to late-1960s were sparked by “incidents” of police brutality, but these incidents, from the perspective of Black folks, were simply indicative of a larger pattern of the “white power structure” (National Advisory Commission On Civil Disorders 1968).

The contemporary movement for Black lives, then, is not simply aimed at either “reforming” the police or changing the “hearts and minds” of (racist) American. Instead it is focused on radically transforming policies and institutional structures that produce racial inequities in every domain of American life, including in education, health, wealth, and the criminal legal/punishment system. The movement also challenges widely relied upon narratives and ideologies that rationalize and legitimize mechanisms of anti-Black racism. (Lopez Bunyasi and Smith 2019; Taylor 2017).

Rejoinders such as “All lives matter” and “Blue Lives Matter” quickly arose in response. A charitable reading of the former is that it serves as an “ethical response” that is launched from a defensive, colorblind crouch, whereby people perceive claims of BLM as implying that “only” BLM; another reading is that ALM is a “vitriolic dismissal of BLM” (Biesecker 2017). Meanwhile, journalist Jeff Sharlet (2018) explains that calls for BlueLM “began after the December 20, 2014, slaying of two New York City police officers . . . The murders were the catalyst for what quickly became a rebuttal to BLM, its insistence that we pay more attention to killer cops than to cops killed in the line of duty.” What BlueLM signifies has shifted and

evolved over the course of its own seven-year lifespan. By 2016, a call to focus on police well-being became more intertwined with Trumpism. Sheriff David A. Clarke Jr. opened his remarks to the 2016 RNC this way, “Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to make something *very* clear: *Blue Lives Matter!*” He went on to connect the phrase with matters of “law and order” and “Make America Great Again,” both of which are racist dog whistles (López 2015). Additionally, BlueLM supporters adopted the “thin blue line” flag, which over time would be flown alongside “other standards of lovers of the strong hand: the yellow snake of “Don’t Tread on Me,” the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy, and even—most notably at the August 2017 Unite the Right protest in Charlottesville, Virginia—the swastika’s crooked cross” (Sharlet 2018).

Scholars of new social movements suggest that contemporary social movements tend to “replace resource mobilization in the service of instrumental demands with a ‘politics of signification’ that seeks to create a space for and represent their distinctive identities within postindustrial cultures”; moreover, this body of scholarship illuminates the role of “frames,” or the “dominant narrative of what the movement is about” (Bonilla and Tillery 2020). The contemporary movement for Black lives relies on a paradigm of intersectionality (Bonilla and Tillery 2020; Crowder and Smith 2020; Taylor 2016). In striking contrast, BlueLM has become entangled and increasingly entrenched in messages of “law and order,” arguably a white supremacist dog whistle (López 2015). This article seeks to ascertain what we can learn about the shape and prevalence of various racial ideologies in circulation by analyzing how Americans articulate support for these three mantras.

Ideologies in Circulation

A focus on racial attitudes, particularly by measuring racial prejudice or resentment through traditional survey methodologies, constraints our epistemic capacity to untangle Americans’ complex way of thinking about race matters. Indeed, analysis of an individual’s responses to most Likert-style questions and feeling thermometers about “race” leads us to miss out on the role of power dynamics, how individual attitudes feed into a larger system of racial hierarchy, and the collective nature of individuals’ orientations toward questions of inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2003). When we shift our attention toward racial ideologies, however, we get a nuanced understanding of the myriad of mental maps that people rely on to rationalize and uphold (or challenge) structural racism. By mining the literature on contemporary racial ideologies, four arise. The first is one that many scholars of racial stratification have suggested is the dominant racial ideology of the 21st century: colorblind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Carr 1997; Embrick and Moore 2020; Mueller 2017); another that recognizes a shift in Americans’ professed value of “diversity”—diversity ideology (Mayorga 2014, 2019); and updated versions of naked white supremacy that are cloaked under the notions of “white protectionism” (Smith and King 2021a, 2021b). The fourth—anti-racism—seeks to challenge the status quo outcomes in the U.S.’s racialized social system that the previous three justify.

Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains, “Much as Jim Crow racism served as the ideological glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-civil rights era, colorblind racism serves as today as the ideological armor for

a covert and institutionalized system in the post-civil rights era” (2018, 3). Put simply, colorblind racial ideology suggests that since race should not matter, it does not matter, and it is upheld through four frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism allows people to use widely acceptable, reasonable, and ostensibly moral ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., equal opportunity, individualism, and choice) to undermine efforts to specifically address questions of racial inequality. Naturalization involves people suggesting that racial phenomena can be explained as natural (inherent and biological) phenomenon; this is well illustrated by the common (but erroneous) rationalization that neighborhoods (or schools, or departments at institutions of higher education) are racially segregated because, like birds and wolves, people flock together with their own kind. Cultural racism turns to culturally based narratives of inequality, whereby people of color are viewed as having inept mindsets and patterns of behaviors that prevent their social, economic, and political mobility. Finally, the minimalization of racism allows people to acknowledge the presence of contemporary discriminatory practices without centering them as a key explanation in shaping the life chances of people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2018, 54–58).

To be sure, colorblind racism emerged in the post-civil rights era, but at least since the start of the 21st century, Americans have become more “color conscious.” Indeed, critical diversity scholars point to white Americans “great awakening,” whereby people are more likely to call into question matters of structural racism and appear to be increasingly appreciative of the presence of people of color in their organizations, marketing materials, and neighborhoods. Sociologist Sarah Mayorga (2014, 2019) analyzes this apparent paradox: white Americans simultaneously love (the idea of) racial diversity, but they do so without also relinquishing power to people of color in an increasingly diverse society. Mayorga articulates “diversity ideology,” which is “in part, a co-optation of calls for race consciousness that challenged color blindness: it highlights race and other axes of difference to achieve a colorblind ideal of fairness where race will no longer matter. In this way, diversity ideology creates space for minor acknowledgment of structural inequality in the abstract” (2019, 1790). Specifically, through its own frames and tenets—diversity as acceptance, intent, liability, and commodity—diversity ideology accommodates “systemic whiteness by focusing more on identity construction (e.g., not racist, progressive, and inclusive) than structural changes and the production of equitable results” (1796).

What, then, is the contemporary, acceptable version of a more explicit white supremacist ideology? Here, Smith and King’s (2021a, 2021b) contributions point us to the shift toward “white protectionism.” Smith and King argue that since Trump, the United States is seeing a shift in “the core of racial conservatism away from colorblindness toward policies designed directly to protect whites, including unconstrained policing, weakened civil rights enforcement, and franchise and immigration restrictions” (2020, 1). These ideas bump up against ideologies such as white nationalism and “Western chauvinism.” This ideological apparatus describes those who see traditional American values as under threat and argue that maintaining the (racial) status quo requires a broad range of social control measures and state-sanctioned methods and practices of exclusion. Though Trump’s rhetoric

is often colorblind and inclusive, white protectionism has gained the attention of many white Americans, especially conservative white Christians.

In many ways, this logic dovetails an articulation of “white spaces” as a core component of a racialized social system (Embrick and Moore 2020; Lipsitz 2011; Mirzoeff 2020). Embrick and Moore explain, “In a racialized social system steeped in White supremacy, space becomes a contested ground for who belongs and who does not, who has access to the resources of the space and who does not”; as such, “White space works to facilitate patterned behaviors that normalize White resource hoarding, racially oppressive hierarchies, and the routine subjugation of people of color” (2020, 1936). White protectionism serves as an ideological map that requires white space. It thus allows for the necessity of “law and order” to prevent the outbreak of social chaos, which relates both to “crime” as well as the ordering of the existing racial hierarchy.

As previously mentioned, racial ideologies are toolkits that are used to prop up (or challenge) the existing racial organization of society. Mary Jackman reminds us that “the strength of an ideology lies in its loose jointed, flexible application. An ideology is a political instrument, not an exercise in personal logic: consistency is rigidity, the only pragmatic effect of which is to box oneself in” (Jackman 1994, 69). With this in mind, we can see how elements of various ideologies which maintain the racial hierarchy may be used in various combinations and permutations. Here, we have outlined key components of racial ideologies that scholars have articulated in order to lay the groundwork for the following analyses. Using conversations of BLM, ALM, and BlueLM as a site of racetalk, do elements of these fully theorized racial ideologies arise? Are these elements systematically employed across supporters of each of the mantras?

Data

Nearly seven years after BLM was introduced as a budding social movement, a police officer in Minneapolis killed a man named George Floyd in May 2020 in broad daylight. Though this police killing would not be the first to be filmed on a citizen’s mobile device and repeatedly broadcast on social media, a certain confluence of events turned this not-so-rare occurrence into the spark of the second wave of the BLM movement and the U.S.’s largest protest: the video evidence depicted a cruel punishment, and it was viewed by millions of people who could not turn their attention to much of anything else given ongoing lockdown in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. A short module about the ongoing protests was added after the core questions in the September 2020 wave of a periodic public affairs poll conducted by YouGov for the Mood of the Nation (MOTN) Poll launched by Penn State’s McCourtney Institute for Democracy.⁴ This sample of 1,000 Americans was drawn from YouGov’s non-probability panel, which is based on matching Current Population Survey benchmarks and population estimates from other surveys. YouGov samples are demographically representative of the American voting eligible population.

The survey is designed to capture individuals’ rationale for their responses to open-ended questions about how they feel about current events and policy issues. In the September 2020 wave, the respondents were asked, “Suppose you had to choose

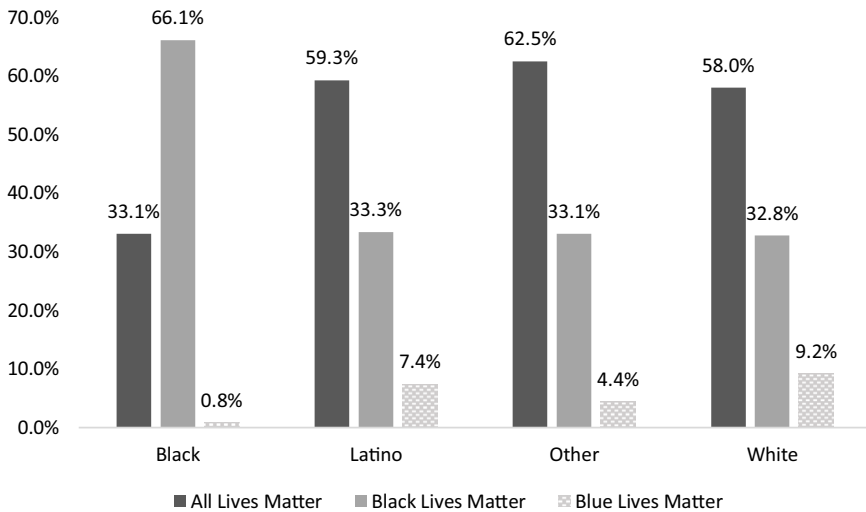


Figure 1. Racial groups' levels of support.

one of the following slogans to display as a yard sign, bumper sticker, t-shirt slogan, or on a button. Which would you be most likely to choose?" The choices presented were (a) ALM, (b) BlueLM, and (c) BLM. Then, respondents were prompted to provide a rationale for their choice. For instance, if a person elected "All Lives Matter," they received a follow-up prompt: "In a few sentences, please tell us why you selected 'All Lives Matter' rather than 'Black Lives Matter' or 'Blue Lives Matter.'" Respondents were provided with a space of up to 240 characters. All 1,000 qualitative responses are at the center of the following analyses.

In addition to capturing the public's mood and attitudes around a particular set of issues, the survey also captured information about the participants' demographics. The poll collected information as to whether respondents categorized: their gender as male or female; their race (white, Black, Hispanic, and Other); their partisanship (Democrat, Republican, Independent, and Other), and their state of residence. (Demographic data are described in the appendix.)

Descriptive Statistics

Among the MOTN respondents, all but one provided a response to each of the questions of concern. Across the remaining respondents, ALM was elected most often, capturing the attention of 556 or 55.7% of the respondents. BLM was preferred by 37% of respondents, and finally, BlueLM was chosen by only 73 (7.3%) of respondents.

Just as we tend to see across a wide array of political and social matters in the United States, there was a clear racial and partisan division across the three groups, as depicted in Figs. 1–3. Figure 1 reveals how members across each of the four "racial" groups responded to the question. The majority of Black respondents (66.1%) selected "Black Lives Matter" as the slogan or sign they would pick over one

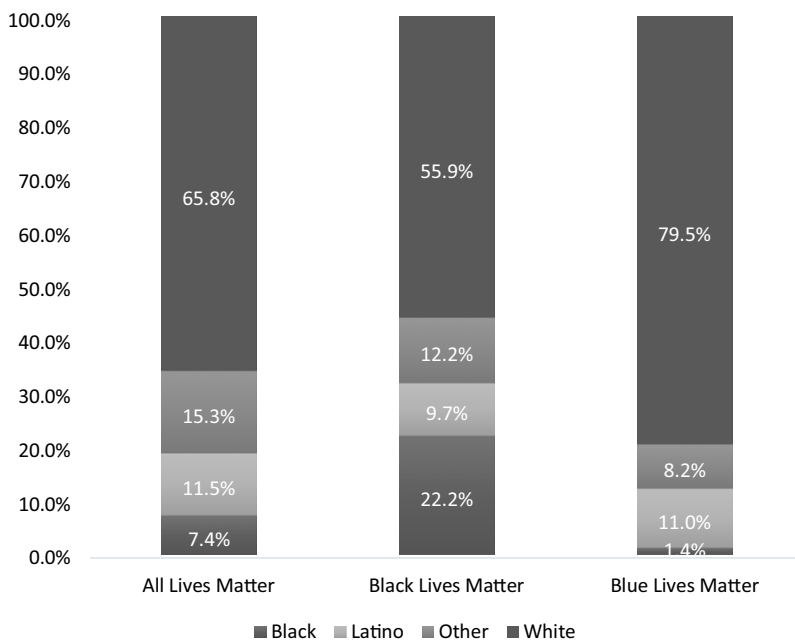


Figure 2. Mantras’ support by racial group.

of the other two.⁵ Meanwhile, the majority of Latinos, whites, and those who selected “other” races threw their support behind ALM. Exactly one Black respondent chose BlueLM, composing 0.8% of that group’s allocation across the three mantras. In contrast, 58 white respondents, or 9.2% of that group, elected BlueLM.

If we consider the racial and partisan “coalitions” of these groups, we gain another perspective. Figure 2 reveals that both ALM and BLM have racially diverse support. Meanwhile, BlueLM is primarily composed of white Americans. Figure 3 provides information about the political leanings of these groups. Just less than half of the ALM respondents are composed of Republicans (47.1%), and the remaining half relies on support from Democrats (30.4%) and those who identify as Independents or with some other political party (22.5%). In stark contrast, BLM is comprised overwhelmingly of Democrats (80.5%), and BlueLM sees similar levels of polarization, whereby this mantra is mostly likely to be espoused by Republicans (75.3%).

Fightin’ Words

The previous descriptive analysis provides information about the prevalence of support for each of the three mantras and the kinds of people most likely to show public support for each. However, it is worth knowing why people have elected to support one claim over the other, as racial ideologies are revealed in the patterns of rationales that people employ around matters of racial inequality, hierarchy, and

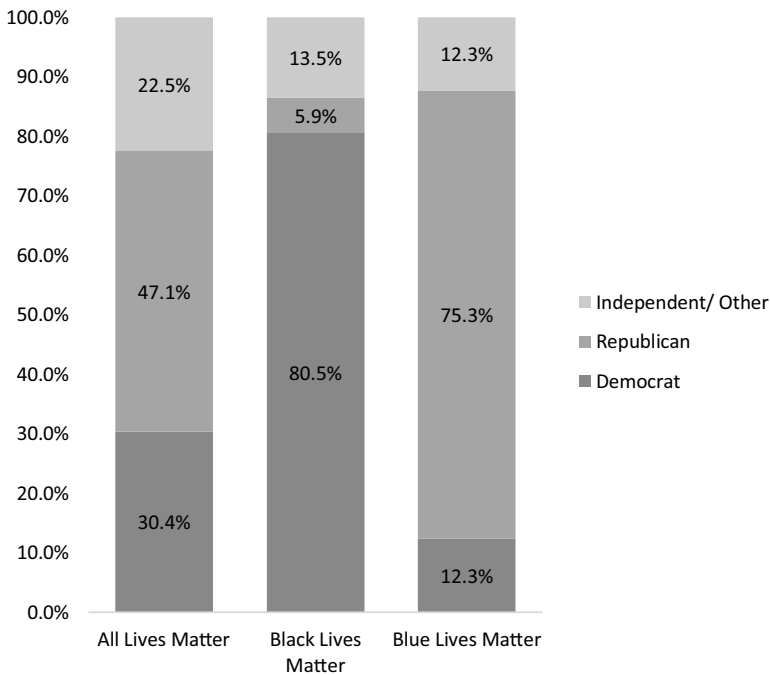


Figure 3. Mantras' support by partisanship.

equity. As a first step in my analysis, I rely on a text-as-data analytical tool developed by Monroe, Colaresi, and Quinn (2008): the Fightin' Words algorithm. In an effort to improve previous methodological strategies, theirs does not require one to produce a set of keywords or a dictionary or remove words from lists prior to presenting them to a reader. This feature selection algorithm “relies on a model-based approach to avoid inefficiency and shrinkage and regularization to avoid both infinite estimates and overfitting the sample data” (Monroe, Colaresi, and Quinn 2008, 373). The model uses log-odds ratios to compare words used by groups while also specifying priors to regularize the estimators. The method was designed to allow scholars to employ text as data that uncovers patterns of representation, issue framing, polarization, and dimensionality. The method is helpful here because it allows us to summarize and organize text in a way that avoids traps of other strategies, such as those that may lead scholars to select and weigh words or lists that have low semantic validity or may vary quite a bit depending on arbitrary decisions. The Fightin' Words method allows “consistent distinctions across groups to become apparent” (Monroe, Colaresi, and Quinn 2008, 399).

Figure 4 illuminates a weighted distribution of words employed among the open-ended responses, controlling for respondents' support for BLM, ALM, or BlueLM. The figure should be interpreted with two dimensions in mind. As we move from left to right, the words are used with increasing frequency among all of the respondents. Moving from bottom to top, we are able to see which groups are more likely to employ a particular set of words. The size of the words reflects the primary

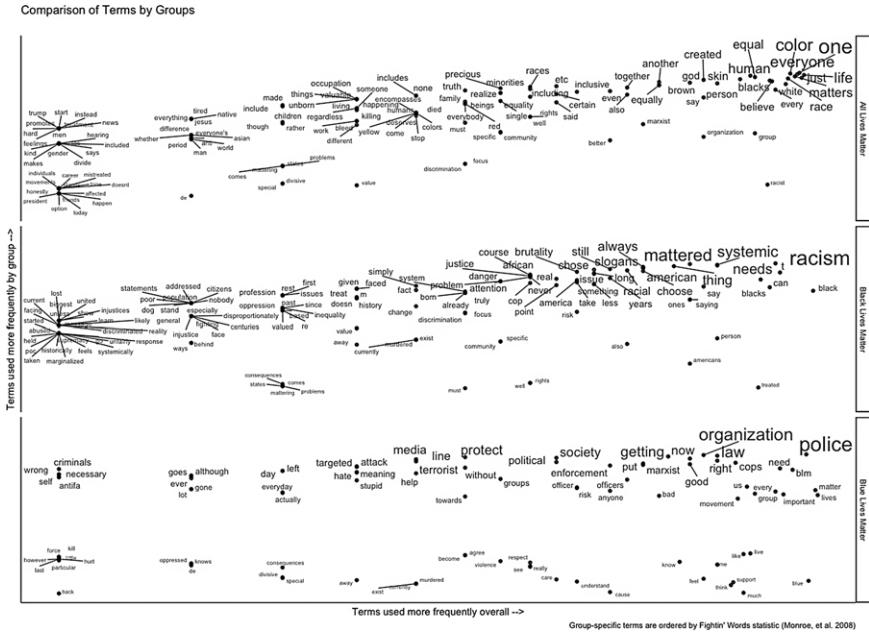


Figure 4. Fightin’ Words of BLM, ALM, and BlueLM supporters.

perspective, or point of view that respondents from each of the three groups frame the debate at hand.

In this case, Fig. 4 illustrates that words like “color,” “systemic,” and “police” are used widely among the 1,000 respondents, but they are most likely to be used by those who support ALM, BLM, and BlueLM, respectively. Here, we get a glimpse of the main concerns that arise in each of the groups. ALM appears to be concerned with everyone, all humans, and equality. Indeed, it seems that for ALM supporters every group matters, including “black,” “white,” and “brown.” Words like “god” and “created” are also highly used words among ALM supporters, suggesting that those who claim that ALM may be more religious or rely on religious principles in their assessment of the three slogans. At first glance, then, Fig. 4 lends evidence that ALM relies on elements of colorblind racial ideology and/or diversity ideology. There is an acknowledgment of racial differences, but the respondents in this category do not turn to—or consciously turn away from—matters of racism or inequality; there is an apparent grasp of “color” and sidestep of race or racism.

The second largest group of respondents are those who selected “Black Lives Matter.” The second panel of Fig. 4 reveals that the central concept that animates this group’s sentiments is systemic racism. Terms like “always,” “never,” and “long” are words that speak to questions of history and time; each of these appears on the right-hand side of the BLM panel. Here, signs of anti-racist ideology are telegraphed through the most prominent words relied upon by BLM supporters.

The bottom panel of Fig. 4 illuminates the words and terms that dominate the open-ended responses of those who elected BlueLM. Here, words like “police,”

“organization,” and “law” appear quite prominently—on the right-hand side of the panel. It is also worth noting that “BLM” and “Marxism” also appear on the right side, suggesting that respondents are not only concerned with matters of “law and order” and police themselves but also seek to provide a critique of BLM, potentially understood to be a Marxist organization, a misconception spread by state and non-state actors alike (Corley 2021). A first glance of the open-ended responses suggests that a deeper analysis would reveal a reliance on elements of white protectionism.

Connecting Political Mantras with Racial Ideology

Rather than determining whether respondents are racist or prejudiced, this analysis seeks to ascertain whether elements of various racial ideologies arise in their reasons for supporting one of the mantras over the other two. I follow the guidance of qualitative sociologists who conceive “racial ideology as an interpretative repertoire consisting of the following three elements: frames, style or racetalk, and racial stories,” and who argue that “individual actors employ these elements as ‘building blocks . . . for manufacturing versions on actions, self, and social structures’ in communicative situations” (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 67).

In order to assess whether and the extent to which various components of racial ideologies were evident in the response, I followed several steps. First, the lead member of a small research team examined the 1,000 responses to ascertain whether there were clear patterns that arose in the open-ended responses. This led to the development of 19 themes; a brief description of each code was also created. In a second stage, both members of the team coded the 1,000 respondents separately. Then, the two sets of codes were evaluated for intercoder reliability. The overall Krippendorff’s Alpha was .796. (Additional analyses of intercoder reliability are provided in the supplemental appendix.) Finally, the author of the paper adjudicated the few discrepancies between the two sets of codes (most of which arose because of coding errors).

It may be important to reiterate that respondents were queried why they elected one mantra *rather* than another, a comparative task. Respondents provided a broad range of responses, and often, the responses captured more than theme. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the frames as well as the frequency each arose across the three supporter groups. I mentioned previously that all but one survey participant selected either BLM, ALM, or BlueLM. Among the remaining 999 respondents, only 21 (2.1%) of respondents elected one of these either because they did not have an “opt-out response” or because they viewed their choice as the least of three suboptimal choices. In all, the remaining 98% of the sample provided some substantive justification for their support for one of the three mantras.

A quick glance at Table 1 reveals that some of the themes are relied on almost exclusively by one group rather than the other two, and several of the themes mimic the above-mentioned tenets of anti-racism, colorblind, diversity, and white protectionism ideologies. In the subsequent three sections, I further delineate these themes, provide examples of well-worn sentiments, and illuminate any connections between the themes and the racial ideologies that I outlined in the previous sections.

Table 1. Frequency of theme appearance across *LM Mantras

Theme	Overall frequency	ALL Lives Matter	Black Lives Matter	Blue Lives Matter
Structural and Historical Racism	253	5	248	0
Acknowledgment of race but not racism	211	210	0	1
Equality w/o acknowledgment of racism	187	183	0	4
Critiques of Blue Lives Matter	110	6	104	0
All Inclusive Slogans are Preferred	104	100	3	1
Critiques of All Lives Matter	85	0	81	4
Critiques of Black Lives Matter	84	62	1	21
Black folks are targeted by police/ violence	64	1	63	0
Police Matter	43	7	0	36
Religious	40	39	1	0
BLM as a self-evident claim	22	0	22	0
Police are necessary	22	1	0	21
Close to Home: My family or I are affected	17	2	13	2
Racial justice for all	14	3	11	0
Anti-Police	5	0	5	0

Note: There are three additional codes: Unreadable/Uncodable (27 respondents); Miscellaneous (33 respondents); and Opt-out/least bad (21 respondents).

ALM: Active Misrecognition

ALM arose almost immediately after “Black Lives Matter” came to prominence. The phrase BLM may have initially induced feelings of cognitive dissonance among a large proportion of the American population, given that the phrase rang out during a time when Black folks’ political status seemed to have reached a pinnacle, during the first Black president’s second term (Lopez Bunyasi and Smith 2019). Still more, it was clear that some people interpreted the message to mean that “only” BLM when in fact, BLM was always intended to simultaneously call attention to the precariousness of human life and make a universal claim that all lives will matter in the United States when Black lives also mattered (Biesecker 2017). However, the data analyzed here were collected over years eight years after the slogan was introduced to the American public. Despite nearly a decade of public education and debate, the majority of the respondents preferred “All Lives Matter” over either of the other two phrases. Among the themes identified across the entirety of the sample, four frames weathered the most use among ALM supporters. In all, they provide evidence for what Charles Mills (2007) refers to as the epistemology of ignorance, or an aggressive willingness not to understand structural racism. I take each in turn.

Black, White, Brown, Yellow, or Rainbow

The first two themes are closely related but are worth examining separately. The first category is “acknowledgement of race but not racism.” Here, respondents articulated an awareness of race and racial categories but elided or convoluted matters of racial hierarchy, power, or inequality. Here, respondents often expressed exasperation, suggesting that there is too much attention to Black people rather than the hardships of people from other (racial) groups. The following responses are representative verbatim responses:

“Because there should not be a racist distinction about lives. All men are created equal.” (White, Female, 62 years of age, Republican)

“Every person lives matters. Not just cops and black people. People make it seem that only a few lives matter compare to others. We all Americans with different ethnicity.” (Latina, Female, 30, Democrat)

“When you label Black, White, Brown, Yellow or Rainbow you’re already separating, when you want equality you need to ignore race.” (White, Male, 57, Independent)

“I sympathize with what black people have gone through and still going through, but having grown up white and poor I have some bad things happen to me and my family. We matter too.” (White, Female, 67, Democrat)

Across this group, people are aware and willing to mention racial groups, categorizations, and racial labels, but they do not show awareness that members of various racial groups have systematically different life chances and ranges of opportunity. Additionally, people who preferred ALM elide the difference between racial group categories (e.g., Black and white) and other categories that are not structurally contingent (e.g., “cops”) and often include groups that are not real at all (e.g., yellow and rainbow).

Respondents who believe that ALM is the most appropriate mantra insist that “bad things happen” to all sorts of people; this kind of sentiment does three things. First, it flattens differences across all of the kinds of “bad things” that can happen to people—which could range from eviction due to poverty or police violence that is rooted in racism. These problems are both embedded in various hierarchies, but their solutions likely differ. Furthermore, the outcomes of either of these events are likely to play out quite differently for Americans in different racial groups; race-neutral housing policies, for instance, have historically had racially disparate outcomes (Rothstein 2017). Second, by obscuring the difference in the challenges that people face, white Americans can suggest that their grievances are worthy of greater attention. Finally, these sentiments imply that we are in a zero-sum game, whereby attention to the barriers that Black people are more likely to face due to racism automatically reduces attention as a resource to the unspecified challenges (in this context) that white Americans face.

This theme highlights the ways in which a large portion of Americans believe that talking about race is racist. This rationale is a core element of colorblind racial

ideology, which aims to explain racial phenomenon by relying on non-racial explanations. Moreover, there is an element of white grievance here. Respondents who prefer ALM as a mantra tell stories about how white and other non-Black people of color are *also* aggrieved and challenged in this society. It is difficult to know whether they believe it is unfair to prioritize one group's challenges over another, or if they simply believe none of these challenges should be systematically addressed.

We Should Not Single Out Any One Group

The second related category is “equality without acknowledgement of racism.” Respondents in this group were clearly in support of the notion of equality, but they do not mention the fact that structural racism is a barrier to their goal. Indeed, they do not mention “race,” or “racism” at all. On its face, it may seem that I am making a difference without distinction. But, it is important to remember that respondents were asked why they prefer to support ALM *rather than* BLM (or BlueLM), which ought to prime the matters of racial inequality and Black people, generally speaking. Responses like the following are included in this category:

“All lives are supposed to be the same.” (Black, Female, Democrat, 54)

“All lives do matter as long as each person puts forth an honest effort and realize that everyone has to work through difficult situations. Blaming an outside entity only defeats the efforts gained through perseverance.” (White, Male, 68, Democrat)

“Singling anyone group out is not good. if we want everyone to be equal we should not single out any one group as mattering over the others.” (White, Female, 60, Republican)

“All humans are created equally until they individually prove they're not worthy.” (White, Male, 55, Republican)

Across these rationales for supporting ALM is an active misrecognition of structural racism and inequality. Certainly, all lives are “supposed” to be the same, but they are not, partially due to racism. Like those in the previous group, respondents suggest that “everyone has to work through difficult situations”; as such, individuals (rather than an “outside entity”) are solely responsible for their well-being, opportunity structure, and ability to prove their worthiness as a human being. Respondents in this group mimicked the abstract liberal logic of Justice Roberts, “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” Here, respondents suggest that the problems faced by different groups cannot be solved by focusing on the problems of different groups.

All Inclusive and Anti-BLM

The last two major themes that arose among ALM supporters speak to the slogans themselves. On the one hand, 100 (of 556) respondents mentioned that they

preferred ALM as a mantra over BLM and BlueLM because they felt that the slogan itself had an inclusive connotation. On the other hand, many selected ALM because they outright derided BLM.

Nearly one of five ALM supporters explained their preference by pointing to the slogan itself. For instance:

“Because logically all lives encompasses blue lives and black lives.” (“Other” race, Female, 30, Democrat)

“When you say all lives matter you unite and not divide segments of the population. Singling out one race or one profession divides. All lives matter means black, blue, green, brown, orange, white. All people.” (White, Male, 33, Republican)

“All Lives Matter is an inclusive phrase that does not deride nor exclude anyone.” (“Other” race, Female, 32, Independent)

These sentiments overlap with those who acknowledge race without acknowledging racism, but these individuals are also seeking to split the difference. In many ways, they seek to reveal that they are accepting of all types of people. These respondents tend to lean on two tenets of Mayorga’s diversity ideology—acceptance and intent. The diversity as acceptance tenet celebrates racial differences while refusing to differentiate structurally contingent identities (e.g., race) with idiosyncratic identities and preferences (e.g., occupation). This is shown in these respondents’ willingness to suggest that it is “logical” to focus on “blue lives and black lives,” even though only one of these identities is located toward the bottom of America’s racial hierarchy.

The second tenet—diversity as intent—is a means by which proponents can feel good about themselves by sending out messages that they are a moral person, which is reflected in their intentions rather than their actions. This rhetoric maneuver serves to “accommodate systemic whiteness by focusing more on identity construction (e.g., not racist, progressive, and inclusive) than structural changes and the production of equitable results” (Mayorga-Gallo 2019, 1796). The focus on selecting a mantra because it is “an inclusive phrase” rather than throwing one’s weight behind a social movement that seeks to produce inclusion is an illustration of how the value of inclusivity can be subverted to accommodate a racialized social system.

In contrast, others explained their preference of ALM as a clear rejection of BLM, particularly as they perceive the social movement and its organizers. Respondents who supported ALM as a critique of BLM relied on rationales such as the following:

I think BLM is a racist organization. I always support police so I chose All lives matter. I don’t think we should put people in groups because I think that separates people even farther. We need to come together as one people and support people (White, Female, 43, Republican)

BLM movement has allowed themselves to be corrupted by Marxists, and violent opportunists. Even worse, BLM movement leadership has not only FAILED to

condemn the violence, but have in many instances ENDORSED the violence and looting. (Latino, Male, 44, Republican)

BLM is just another group that doesn't represent the truth. All lives should matter. If black lives matter then they should worry about black on black crime (White, Male, 49, Democrat)

Put simply, these respondents rely on a wide range of inaccuracies. These revelations, though, do expose how a significant portion of Americans view and understand BLM as a social movement—as a racist, Marxist organization that endorses violence. To be sure, the U.S. media has played a part in shaping the way the public views, understands, and even experiences (from a distance) the contemporary movement for Black lives.

Taken together, the dominant themes that arise among ALM proponents are those that are undergirded by components of colorblind racial ideology and diversity ideology. This group is largely supportive of the abstract idea that all lives “should” matter in the United States, but they do not engage with the structural (or interpersonal) challenges that prevent their vision from coming to fruition. These sentiments telegraph an active misrecognition of BLM, as they forcefully turn away from discussing race in the context of racialized social system’s legal system, social structure, and political and economic institutions, all of which combine to produce racial inequality. While these individuals can see themselves as moral, upstanding people who care about “all” people, including the unborn,⁶ their articulation of the way out of America’s “race problem” is to ignore it.

BLM and Anti-Racism

Among the respondents, just over a third (337 respondents) reported that they would prefer to share a message of “Black Lives Matter” over ALM or BlueLM. The most dominant theme to arise was historical and structural racism against Black people, at 248 mentions; these responses spoke specifically to matters of violence directed at Black folks—by the police or otherwise. These respondents expressed their sentiments this way:

“They are the main ones being harmed, killed, and impoverished by the oppression, more than the rest of us.” (White, Male, 80, Democrat)

“Black people are in the greatest need. We know all lives matter and blue lives too but we are in greater danger and have been for 401 years.” (Black, Female, 72, Democrat)

“Systemic racism is still a problem in the USA. And of course all lives matter, but the ones who need our help and support right now are our black neighbors, friends, and family.” (White, Female 29, Democrat)

“Because black lives have been marginalized for centuries by those in power; politicians, law officers, business owners, etc. Blacks have always been considered

less than equal and have always struggled to be seen and heard.” (Black, Male, 61, Democrat)

The vast majority of BLM proponents pointed to matters of “oppression,” “power,” and history (“401 years”) in their rationale, thus focusing their attention on a larger set of structures rather than individual responsibility to prove oneself or work against an unspecified set of challenges. Additionally, they note that Black folks are disproportionately allocated disadvantages in society, and consequently, they believed these challenges should be directly addressed.

In addition, a large proportion of respondents in this group also took the time to critique both the ALM and the BlueLM mantras and rationale. Indeed, a large proportion of the BLM respondents explained their support for BLM this way:

“If ‘All Lives Mattered’ there wouldn’t be a need to say ‘BLACK LIVES MATTER.’ THERE ARE NO ‘BLUE LIVES!!!’” (Black, Male, 64, Democrat)

“Black lives matter is an actual movement. The others are poor, fear based reactions.” (White, Male, 41, Democrat)

“All lives matter is dismissive. Blue lives don’t exist. A job you choose and can leave anytime with a uniform you can take off every night is not the same as living with institutionalized ducking⁷ racism” (White, Female, 30, Democrat)

“The latter two slogans are cynical distractions from the reality of the systemic racial prejudice which pervades the institutions of this country.” (Black, Female, 64, Democrat)

“Because systemic racism is entrenched in America. And America has become even more racist after President Obama was elected. The other two slogans are RACIST.” (Other race, Female, 42, Democrat)

If “antiracism can be understood in its broadest sense as any theory and/or practice (whether political or personal) that seeks to challenge, reduce, or eliminate manifestations of racism in society” (O’Brien 2009, 501), then these sentiments capture the key elements of the ideology in three moves. First, they point to systemic racism. Second, they differentiate between structurally contingent identities and occupations to home in on the specific problems that arise from systemic racism. Third, they note that BlueLM and ALM do not seek to challenge the status quo, but rather, these respondents characterize the other two slogans as “racist,” “fear-based reactions,” and “cynical distractions” that are “dismissive” of the underlying claims and efforts of a contemporary movement for Black lives.

The words that people use are just as important as the ones they choose not to use. In this case, it may be worth noting that even though we fielded these responses during a time when millions of Americans turned their attention to George Floyd and matters of racism, there was no mention of Mr. Floyd’s name nor any other specific person who had been killed by the police. There were very few (five respondents) who expressed outright aspersions toward the police. This suggests that proponents of BLM are aware of the structural or institutional character of

racism in the United States (above and beyond policing and the criminal legal system). That is to say, rather than focusing on one or two “incidents” of overt racism (by police), they largely oriented their attention toward larger systems of inequality as well as the historical circumstances that have accumulated over time to produce contemporary patterns of inequity.

BlueLM and White Protectionism

A small group of individuals in this sample—7.3% preferred BlueLM. When asked why they selected BlueLM over BLM or ALM, they largely relied on three explanations: BLM is not an organization they could support; police and their well-being should be central to the American consciousness; and police were necessary to protect citizens’ day-to-day lives as well as a safeguard a broad set of values core to American life.

In comparison to the 11% (62/556) ALM supporters who turned to critique of BLM as a key component of their rationale, 28.5% of BlueLM supporters did the same. Their responses are well represented by the following comments:

“Black lives matter is a terrorist organization” (White, Male, 25, Republican)

“I feel that people are currently being narrowminded. Yes BLM movement was initially legit but after the chaos, looting, hindering traffic, threats and disrespect to authority and business owners, damage to property . . .” (White, Female, 28, Republican)

“Black lives matter is a stupid left wing propaganda slogan that doesn’t mean anything. All lives matter is just a stupid boomer comeback. Blue lives matter because they do an important job and they are under attack every day” (White, Male, 24, Republican)

This group turned to support the BlueLM mantra as if it were in direct confrontation with BLM, suggesting that BLM is an organization that must be controlled and combatted against, as one would a terrorist organization. Here, “disrespect to authority” and “damage to property” reign as priorities over Black lives. For others, there is a simple out-of-hand rejection of the BLM claim altogether, as one respondent states emphatically that “Black lives matter . . . doesn’t mean anything.”

While no BlueLM supporter mentioned structural racism (see Table 1), many expressed concern over the ostensible systemic precarity of police officers’ lives and well-being. This emphasis on police officers’ persistent disadvantages is highlighted in these examples:

“All lives do matter, but that’s not what is important right now. There’s a huge battle between black and blue, and both sides are wrong and right in their own way. But ultimately I feel that police officers are getting more hate than they shoul[d]” (White, Female, 28, Democrat)

“Because the police are the most oppressed group right now more than black people” (White, Male, 26, Republican)

“Because the police are getting a bum rap because a couple of them were bad cops and now the media is making it out like all the cops are bad and that’s pure crap.” (White, Female, 57, Republican)

“Our police represent the most persecuted and undervalued part of our society, while at the same time being most critical to the function and preservation of our society.” (White, Male, 62, Republican)

These respondents rely on a similar logic that BLM does in reference to addressing Black folks, but they transfer the rationale to a very particular group of Americans: police. Several individuals directly compare the well-being of Black people with police officers. Implied here is that these groups are mutually exclusive—all police are white from this perspective. Moreover, this “Black vs. Blue” comparison reflects the minimization of racism, which is a core component of colorblind racial ideology. That is to say, here the rationale is that Black people may face racism, but “police are the most oppressed group,” and that they are “the most persecuted and undervalued part of our society.”

Moreover, there is a push toward ensuring that we separate “a couple of them” who “were bad cops” from the larger group of police, which is inherently virtuous. There is a recognition that the media has a role in constructing stereotypes, but here, they focus only on how this process may have a downside for police officers and departments. Those who rely on an anti-racist reading of policing would similarly point out that the focus on one “bad apple” does not provide a sufficient analysis of policing in America, but anti-racists would point out that police officers work within a larger set of rules and policies further embed racial inequity and legitimize racially disproportionate state-sanctioned deaths (Butler 2015). Those relying on an anti-racist ideology might also note the media has produced “film and TV shows that glorify police officers and whitewash police brutality” for decades (Vakil 2020). Here, BlueLM turn matters of fairness, equity, and stereotypes on their head to undermine claims of structural racism.

The last theme that arose among supporters of BlueLM dovetails closely with the previous one. Here, respondents make clear that they support BlueLM because police officers are absolutely necessary to prevent America from being a violent, chaotic society, shifting away from the U.S.’s orientation toward democracy, capitalism, and social control. These sentiments are represented by the following responses:

“Law enforcement is necessary to protect everyone.” (Other race, Male, 58, Democrat)

“BLM is a Marxist organization dedicated to destroying capitalism. Supporting police department’s right to exist is important in maintaining the free society I live in.” (White, Male, 32, Republican)

“The police are the last line of defense to ensure our Democracy!!! They are under attack.” (White, Female, 55, Republican)

“A successful Society only works with LAW AND ORDER. It’s shameful to see these so-called “Cause” groups like BLM and Antifa literally tearing our Country apart.” (White, Male, 56, Republican)

“Without supporting the thin-blue-line, efforts to de-fund and demonize law enforcement by the marxist/anarchist will result in more division and chaos.” (White, Male, 58, Republican)

These responses illuminate an important set of assumptions, narratives, and ideological mappings. First, there is a view that policing in the United States is a public good that equally enhances the lives of all Americans. From this perspective, police are “necessary to protect everyone,” or they protect a shared set of values and way of life by safeguarding a “free society” and “our democracy.” BlueLM supporters note, specifically, that police guard against the destruction of “capitalism” and prevent the encroachment of Marxism, anarchy, division, and chaos.

BlueLM supporters also speak directly to the symbol of the “thin blue line.” The symbolism of the “thin blue line” developed in the 1950s in response to a move toward racial integration. It has been a historical racial dog whistle, connecting the necessity of the police with the prevention of the disorder, chaos, and anarchy that would ensue if Black Americans were able to experience social and economic mobility (Mirzoeff 2020). “Thin blue line” thinking dovetails with calls for “law and order,” another coded racial appeal employed to capture the attention and votes of conservative white Americans (López 2015). Consequently, “unspoken but understood is that the areas which the blue line protects are white spaces: the largely segregated regions where white people mostly live” through the implementation of “law and order” measures disproportionately targeted toward Black and other non-white people (Mirzoeff 2020). The symbolism of the thin blue line has recently become more prominent in the form of a white and black American flag with a thin blue line, which was developed in 2014, and since then has been flown by white nationalists, neo-Nazis, and neo-Confederates (Sharlet 2018).

The ideological underpinning of this way of thinking speaks to white protectionism. This interpretive frame suggests that white people are now the primary victims of racial discrimination; it views “efforts to assist long-discriminated-against minorities not as means of promoting equality but as dangers to those who America has traditionally protected”; and thus, it requires “heightened protection for whites” (Smith and King 2021a, 2021b). While colorblind racial ideology seeks to avoid questions of race and racism, and diversity ideology accommodates racial inclusion but avoids a reallocation of power, white protectionism centers whiteness as property and space that needs to be protected. Nick Mirzoeff (2020) argues,

Whiteness has changed. It is becoming blue. The white-to-blue shift moves the axis of personal and political identity from ancestry to affiliation with law enforcement. To be “white” is now to accept and endorse the absolute necropolitical (the power to administer death) authority of police. To be “blue” is to bring together all the tangled desires and frustrations connoted by

whiteness into a spatialized subjugation to police authority. The resulting form of identification is a new form of nationalism. It has flags; it demands violence; and it exults in its own presumed superiority.

Embrick and Moore add, noting that the preservation of “white space” is integral both to maintaining a racialized social system in the United States as well as global anti-Black racism; it “ensures Whites’ fantasy(ies) of complete dominion over place and space, as well as control over Brown and Black bodies” (2020, 1937). The police are critical to this fortification from this ideological perspective, as is shown by the respondents’ rationale for supporting BlueLM over BLM, or even ALM.

Discussion and Conclusion

By leveraging rhetoric and dialogue around BLM, ALM, and BlueLM, we can assess contemporary racetalk—rationalizations of racial inequality and what should be done to address structural inequality, if anything—and discern the connections between racial frames and the stories we tell ourselves about race matters. The analysis provides evidence that colorblind racial ideology is prevalent, but it also shows that elements of diversity ideology are grasped onto, allowing people to appear morally upstanding by celebrating diversity and seeking to rise above division, even while staving off a critique of structural racism. Elements of both racial ideologies are largely relied on by those who believe that it is of utmost importance to claim that “All Lives Matter” in a time when indisputable evidence that Black lives are in a state of precarity has been made widely available. Though racial ideologies that seek to prop up a system of whiteness are largely relied on by the group that it benefits the most, the data here reveal that elements of colorblind racial ideology are relied upon by a diverse array of Americans—spanning racial groups and generational cohorts; it also appears to be bipartisan.

Still more, the data show that an ideology of white protectionism is also in circulation, but this sentiment has not been fully captured by the traditional measures of racial attitudes. White protectionism, which includes elements of white grievance, is turned to by some respondents, largely politically conservative and white. Individuals who rely on elements of this ideology (correctly) centered police as being necessary safeguards to the status quo, though they did not identify the status quo as racist and inequitable. Less than one-in-ten respondents relied on elements of white protectionism, but future research should ascertain the prevalence of this ideology among political elites. To be sure, Smith and King (Smith and King 2021a, 2021b) have already shown that white protectionism structures not only Donald Trump’s rhetoric but also a wide range of policies that were developed and implemented during his tenure; a change in administration does not necessarily lead to a swift reversion of policy and law, nor even the rules of the game or how people explain what they see around them.

Though BLM was not the mantra that garnered the most support from the respondents in this dataset, it did capture the attention of about a third of the sample. This group is composed of Americans from across racial groups and generational cohorts, but the group is largely composed of Democrats. Despite the demographic diversity of the group, there was ideological cohesion among this

group, as nearly every BLM supporter alluded to matters of historical and structural racism as well as to (state-sanctioned) violence and oppression in their responses. Moreover, these kinds of responses were virtually mutually exclusive from the responses of ALM and BlueLM supporters, suggesting that components of anti-racist ideology are not relied on by the latter two groups.

Rather than seeking to determine the levels of racism or prejudice evinced by Americans, this article ascertains the prevalence of various components of circulating racial ideologies. Indeed, the analysis reveals elements of racial ideologies that are rarely, if ever, captured in survey research (e.g., racial resentment and feeling thermometers) despite their apparent prevalence. Moreover, we get a sense of how racial ideologies are shaped, disseminated, and contested. Additionally, the results outlined here demonstrate the tacit alignment between supporters of ALM and BlueLM against anti-racism; white supremacy has always depended on formal and informal coalitions, and this study contributes a better understanding of the combined forces opposing anti-racism.

It is my hope that the analysis of responses adds nuance to the study of Americans' racial orientations above and beyond mere attitudes. By taking steps toward a more capacious understanding of the components and semantics of contemporary racial ideologies, scholars may be able to make better predictions about the public's preferences for and elites' effort to shape certain kinds of racialized policy. When we are made privy to Americans' varied set of logic about whether racism is a feature of American politics, then we can more accurately pinpoint change—be it progressive or regressive. In this case, the results illuminate the resilience of colorblind ideology and highlight other racial ideologies in circulation, which also serve to undergird the racial status quo. These findings, perhaps, may help social movement scholars understand, and activists strategize how to curtail the rhetorical and psychological spaces in which an epistemology of ignorance is paraded as a morally consistent position.⁸

Racism has been referred to as a “scavenger ideology” because it evolves by incorporating key contemporary values of the dominant racial group (e.g., liberalism, meritocracy, and diversity) as it simultaneously discards elements that make the underlying goals of maintaining a racialized social system transparent, abhorrent, or unacceptable (Mosse 1978). As such, scholars will have to keep their finger on the pulse of this ongoing ideological contestation and conversation, as we are likely living in a time when the dominant racial ideology will itself have to shift if it wishes to keep its job: maintaining a racialized social system marked by whiteness.

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Notes

1 Whiteness and white supremacy, here, are used interchangeably to refer to a system that is organized to produce systemic benefits and privileges to white people and systemic disadvantages to people of color. Given that the currency of value in social sciences is trends rather than particularities, it may be important to

note that we are referencing racial groups, on average, rather than any one specific person in any racial group.

2 “Black Lives Matter” has taken on many lives despite its creators intentions. It is a rally cry, a mantra, a slogan, and the name of a global network of local chapters that share values and goals. The “Movement for Black Lives” is a coalition of about 50 organizations, which includes the Black Lives Matter Network. Both “Black Lives Matter” and “Movement for Black Lives” are also used to refer to peaks of protests that respond to some police killings of Black citizens. Here, I use the “contemporary movement for Black lives” and “BLM” interchangeable as an all-encompassing term for the protests and ongoing social movement concerned with reducing or dismantling anti-Black racism that have occurred since 2013.

3 Twitter and Facebook are, in some ways, racialized spaces. A larger portion of Black Americans (22%) traditionally used Twitter than white Americans (16%). What’s more, the significance of “Black Twitter” cannot be overlooked when considering racetalk on the platform (Bonilla and Rosa 2015).

4 The data used in this article are secondary data held and offered by request to scholars by the directors of the Mood of the Nation Poll and the McCourtney Institute for Democracy, Eric Plutzer and Michael Berkman.

5 One might note that in other nationally represented data, such as Civiqs’, Black Americans’ support of Black Lives Matter between April 2017 and April 2022 never dips below 77%. However, the question presented in that survey and ones like it are typically binary: “Do you support or oppose the Black Lives Matter movement?” The question presented in the survey employed here presents a choice to the respondents, asking them their preference for one mantra over another. Needless to say, those in the “All Lives Matter” group may not necessarily condemn BLM but simply show preference for one over the other.

6 Several people made mention that all lives include the “unborn”; these responses are largely coded under the “religious” theme, as there was often a mention of God and His creation.

7 Many respondents were likely to have completed the survey on their smartphones. American curse words are often autocorrected.

8 I share a sincere note of appreciation for two of the anonymous reviewers who helped me to articulate these final points.

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