

# **Racial Identity and Emotional Responses to Confederate Symbols**

*B. D'Andra Orey*

*Jackson State University*

## **Abstract**

### **Objective**

This research tests whether psychological predispositions influence African Americans' emotional responses to Confederate battle symbols. The former Mississippi state flag is employed here because it contained the Confederate battle symbol in the left canton.

### **Methods**

The data were collected using a snowball sample of 68 African Americans from Jackson, the state capital of Mississippi. Emotional responses to the Mississippi state flag were measured using skin conductance levels (SCLs). Using ordinary least squares regression, the SCLs were regressed on variables measuring multiple dimensions of racial identity and ideology: Linked Fate, Private Regard, and Legal Disillusionment. Because of the significant presence of police officers in the sample, a dummy variable was included to account for this group. The study also controlled for the self-reported Age of the participants.

### **Results**

The findings of this study reveal that African-Americans suffer psychological trauma when observing racist symbols. African-Americans who shared a common fate with other African-Americans and those who possessed a high regard for other African-American people were more emotionally responsive when they viewed the former Mississippi state flag. Police, however, were less responsive, when compared to civilians. This result may be attributable to officers working near the state capitol building and becoming desensitized to seeing the flag.

### **Conclusion**

In recent years there has been an increased interest among political scientists in the study of biopolitics. One of the shortcomings, however, is that the research has relied almost exclusively on white subjects. Our research helps to fill this gap by focusing exclusively on African-Americans. We recognize that African Americans do not uniformly respond to the flag but are unique individuals whose personal views and experiences shape how they respond to the world. Even when presented with symbols representing a horrid past of lynchings and terror, African-Americans do not constitute a monolithic group. The removal of the Mississippi state flag establishes one of many historical markers in the state's efforts to balance the scale of racial justice. Its removal also represents one less source of trauma for African-Americans and a step toward racial healing for Mississippi and the nation.

Political symbols convey meanings and act as signals of belonging. Symbols representing or promoted by the state carry additional weight in the public square, signaling shared values, access to resources, and governmental priorities. Posner (1998) points out that flags, when flown under the banner of state law, put forth a demand for respect demonstrated by simple recognition, perhaps even salutes by some. A narrative accompanies the symbolism embedded in a state flag. At the national level, Americans know from rote memory the underlying narrative of the 50 stars arrayed across the U.S. flag. The same is true for many state flags. Reverence for the flag is communicated in its placement in locations of privilege and expectations, reinforced by the state, to honor and protect it. What happens then, when a state flag features a symbol that is highly contested, and that for some, represents not only a history of harm, but also clear and present danger? Do such symbols elicit emotions of anger or hurt? For residents of Mississippi and others who conduct business in the state, the Confederate battle symbol featured in the left canton offers an opportunity to address these questions.

This article tests whether exposure to the former Mississippi state flag leads to emotional trauma for African Americans. That engaging a symbol whose history reminds us of the nation's singular Civil War, the relegation of African-American people to second-class citizens, and protests against integration by throngs of angry white protestors in the 1960s might be traumatic for African-American people is not surprising. In fact, to imagine that African-American people encountering the Confederate flag could be undisturbed is dubious. While Whites and African-Americans may experience Confederate flag symbolism quite differently (Hutchings, Walton, and Benjamin, 2010; Reingold and Wike, 1998), African-American people are still likely to demonstrate variation in the degree to which the former Mississippi flag is a trauma-causing symbol (Clark, 1997; Strother, Piston, and Ogorzalek, 2017). A 2007 artistic display by Arthur Simms labels the Confederate flag as "visual terrorism" (Holyfield, Moltz, and Bradley, 2009:517), and in a paper published a decade earlier, John Clark concludes that the Confederate flag is "no longer simply a flag, [instead] it becomes the manifestation of anger and frustration by both supporters and opponents..." (1997:492).

Here, attention to trauma builds on the extant literature in psychology. According to The Center for Treatment of Anxiety and Mood Disorders (2020), trauma can be defined as "a psychological, emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing." Those suffering from trauma can be impacted cognitively, emotionally, and physiologically. A recent account of the response of an African-American veteran to the inclusion of a Confederate flag in a Veteran's Day parade is a case in point. The veteran reported that as a result of working with a race-focused support group, he was able to organize to oppose the flying of the Confederate flag "without exploding with anger or bursting into tears" (Carlson et al., 2018).

To be clear, this article, unlike many that test White and African-American differences in attitudes toward the Confederate flag, instead examines the emotional responses of African-American people to engaging with the flag. For most African-Americans, the flag, far from being neutral or a relic of southern heritage, actually embodies a South that sees its citizenry as singularly white (Webster and Leib, 2016).

Moving forward, we begin with a discussion of the racist use of Confederate symbols. Next, we highlight the history of the Mississippi state flag and the politics of its subsequent removal. Following this, we explain our expectation that African-Americans' racial identities may mitigate their emotional responses toward the flag. We then discuss how new scholarship on biopolitics can help us understand the threat posed to African-Americans' emotional well-being by exposure to the former Mississippi state flag. After presenting our findings, we provide a discussion of the implications of this study for understanding the traumatic effects of state-sanctioned racist symbols, followed by a brief conclusion.

## THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG

On June 17, 2015, 21-year-old Dylan Roof murdered nine African-American parishioners attending Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Following the massacre, numerous photographs surfaced revealing the self-avowed white supremacist posing with the Confederate battle flag. Two years later, during a Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, members of the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, neo-Confederates, and other racists groups marched through the streets waving Confederate battle flags and other flags associated with white supremacy. During the rally, James Alex Fields Jr., a self-identified white supremacist, drove his car into a crowd of antiracist protesters, killing Heather Heyer and injuring 19 others. The U.S. president, Donald Trump, was heavily criticized following the protests when he refused to condemn the protestors, stating instead that, "... you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides" (Kessler, 2020).

Since at least the 1950s, as southern states began to include Confederate iconography in official state symbols, the Confederate battle flag has figured prominently in the protest activities of white supremacists. On January 6, 2021, a mob of rioters descended on the nation's capital to participate in what was called a "Save America" rally spearheaded by the Women for America First organization. During this riot, organizers assembled tens of thousands of Trump supporters to protest the 2020 election, falsely claiming that the election had been "stolen" from him (Seitz and Keppler, 2020 ). More than 300,000 Trump followers had organized on Facebook to create a group dedicated to "Stop the Steal." During a speech to the angry mob, Trump exhorted his supporters to "fight like hell" to "take back our country" before encouraging them to march to the Capitol building where members of Congress were in the process of certifying the presidential election results (Naylor, 2021). Some of the marchers carried nooses and paraded other symbols of white supremacy. Stuningly, there was even a gallows platform with a hanging noose set up on the Capitol grounds. During the insurrection, some members of the agitated crowd stormed past Capitol police officers, leading to the death of one officer and injuring countless others. Once inside the Capitol, angry, violent rioters searched to find lawmakers, threatening Vice President Mike Pence and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with bodily harm.

Leading the charge into the Capitol was Kevin Seefried, who waved the Confederate battle flag as rioters staged the invasion.<sup>1</sup> The invasion was the first insurrection of its kind against the Capitol in American history and marked the first time that a Confederate battle flag was flown inside the Capitol building.

Given the history of Confederate symbols and their association with violence against African Americans by white supremacist groups, many African Americans remain traumatized by these symbols. According to Williams (2015a), “[s]uch symbols serve as environmental microaggressions, subtle forms of racism, that contribute to the ongoing distress and traumatization of African Americans. African Americans may endure microaggressions in many forms over a day or a lifetime, and the cumulative toll contributes to stress and unwellness that can increase susceptibility to more serious conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder.”

## STATE-SPONSORED TRAUMA: THE CASE OF THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG

By description, the former Mississippi state flag includes a blue saltire, edged in White, commonly known as the “Southern Cross” (reminiscent of the St. Andrew's Cross). It consists of 13 stars over a red backdrop. The Southern Cross was first imbedded on the Confederate battle flag in 1861, before being incorporated into the Stainless Banner, a battle flag formally adopted by the Confederacy on May 1, 1863. One of the main points of contention has been whether the Civil War was fought over slavery. While the answer to this question is hotly debated, Mississippi was very clear about why it seceded from the union. Mississippi's Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union delineates that Mississippi was seceding to maintain the institutions of slavery. The document reads, “our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery...” (Mississippi Declaration of Secession, 1861). Moreover, one can point to Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens’ (1861), “Cornerstone speech.” He states, “[o]ur new government is founded upon ... the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition” (Stephens, 1861).

In a court case challenging the former Mississippi state flag, *Daniels v. Harrison County Board of Supervisors* (1998), Judge Fred Banks provided countless incidents associating the Confederate battle flag with violence against African Americans. He opined that the flag “takes no back seat to the Nazi Swastika” (NAACP, 2015). Attorney Carlos Moore addresses the notion that the flag may injure those who are forcefully exposed to the Confederate battle symbol. In his lawsuit against then-governor Phil Bryant, Moore alleged that seeing the former Mississippi state flag was “painful, threatening, and offensive,” making him “feel like a second-class citizen,” and “causes him both physical and emotional injuries” (*Moore v. Bryant*, 2016:3). Moore's contention was based on his occupation as an attorney in Mississippi, where he is often forced to enter courtrooms that include the former Mississippi state flag. Although the case was dismissed based on the plaintiff's failure to adequately prove injury, Judge Carlton Reeves was very critical of the former state flag in his decision. He stated, “[t]o millions of people, particularly African-Americans, the Confederate battle emblem is a symbol of the Old Mississippi—the Mississippi of slavery, lynchings, pain, and white supremacy” (*Moore v. Bryant*, 2016:31).

Ironically, less than a week after the riots took place to protest the 2020 presidential election on January 6, 2021, the state of Mississippi officially adopted a new state flag. The newly adopted flag replaced the old flag, which included the Confederate battle flag emblem in the left canton. That flag flew over the state for 126 years before the state legislature voted to remove it.

Before the insurrection, the Mississippi state flag was the last flag with the Confederate battle symbol to fly on the grounds or atop a state Capitol.

African Americans were deeply affected by the imagery of the Confederate flag in such a sacred space as the state Capitol building. For some African Americans, the racist imagery at the Capitol brought back traumatic memories of American's history of lynchings. During the riot at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, historian Mary Frances Berry said she felt “disgust,” recalling “wanting to scream.” According to Berry (when seeing the flag), she immediately thought about James Byrd, an African American who was kidnapped and killed by white supremacist who beat him, spray painted his face, chained him to a truck and dragged him down a back road. Senator Cory Booker, equated the mob to the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He stated, “[o]ur democracy is wounded, and I saw it when I saw pictures of yet another insurgency of a flag of another group that tried to challenge our nation,” Booker said. “I saw the flag of the Confederacy there. What will we do? How will we confront this shame? How will we confront this dark second time in American history?” (Booker, [2021](#)).

With the increased use of social media, more and more people are being exposed to Confederate symbols and the associated racist history. Given such exposure, we maintain that, more than nuisances, Confederate symbols may pose a threat to the physical and emotional health of African Americans and other groups that are offended by its presence. The Confederate flag may trigger an individual's sympathetic nervous system and thus send them into *fight or flight* mode. Constant exposure to such stimuli could dangerously lead to, for example, chronic stress, which may lead to adverse health outcomes.

## EMOTIONAL TRAUMA AND CONFEDERATE SYMBOLS

One does not have to be physically present to be impacted by a traumatic event. For example, studies reveal that indirect exposure via media impacts people who witnessed September 11th or the Boston Marathon Bombings (Holman, Garfin, and Silver, [2014](#)).

Given the flag's history, it is plausible that some African Americans may experience mental distress when forced to observe the flag. In Mississippi, state employees face unavoidable encounters with the flag flying near buildings where they worked daily. Arguably, long-term exposure to the Confederate flag could result in various kinds of trauma. Transgenerational trauma or complex posttraumatic stress disorder has been defined as “a psychological disorder that can develop in response to the prolonged, repeated experience of interpersonal trauma in a context in which the individual has little or no chance of escape” (Cortman and Walden, [2018](#)). Historical trauma also refers to the cumulative emotional harm endured by an individual or entire generation based on a traumatic experience or event (Brave Heart, [2003](#)). According to Williams, “[m]aybe that specific thing has never happened to us. But maybe we've had uncles or aunts who have experienced things like this, or we know people in our community [who have], and their stories have been passed down. So, we have this whole cultural knowledge of these sorts of events happening, which then sort of primes us for this type of traumatization” (Corley, 2015). DeGruy ([2005](#)) very succinctly describes the aforementioned traumas in her book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*.

## **Biology and politics**

In recent years, there has been an increase in the interest among political scientists in the study of biopolitics. Simply put, biopolitics is the intersection of political science and biology. Researchers in this area have employed methods related to human genetics and neurophysiology. For example, Oxley et al. (2008) found a correlation between physiological responses and political ideology (see, however, Bakker, Schumacher, and Gothreau, 2020; Osmundsen et al., forthcoming).

Despite these new developments, the discipline has failed to conduct research that includes African-American samples. The failure to study African Americans leaves a gap in our full understanding of political attitudes and behavior. One reason for the discipline's failure to use African-American subjects may be due to data limitations. The current research helps to fill this void by focusing exclusively on African Americans' psychophysiological responses to the former Mississippi state flag.

## **Racial Identity and Mental Distress**

Traditionally, the political science literature has measured African-American group identification using items asking about feelings of closeness toward African-Americans (see e.g., Dawson, 1994; Tate, 1993). Here, we seek to buttress the research in political science by turning to the field of psychology. For example, Sellers et al. (1997), proposes the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI). This model posits four dimensions of racial identity that capture "the significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to their membership in the African-American racial group within their self-concepts" (Sellers et al., 1998:23). The MMRI model theorizes that individuals have multiple identities that are hierarchically ordered. In examining this hierarchy, the MMRI focuses on the relative importance of race compared to other identities. The four dimensions defined in the MMRI model include racial saliency and centrality, which measure the significance of race; and racial regard and ideology, which assess the meaning of race. Examining both affords the opportunity to investigate the complexity inherent in the role that race plays in the lives of African-Americans.

Some studies support the view that heightened levels of racial identity enhance African-Americans' psychological well-being (Cross, Parham, and Helms, 1998; Azibo and Ya, 1983). For example, researchers have found that the positive feelings African Americans hold about their racial group membership (i.e., Private Regard) were related to less depression (Bynum et al., 2008; Sellers et al., 2006) and less stress (Sellers et al., 2006). However, research in this area has been mixed. Racial identity has been shown to either insulate or exacerbate the psychological well-being of African-Americans. For example, Hardeman et al. (2017) concluded that African-American medical students who possessed high levels of racial identity experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression than those with lower levels of racial identity. But Settles et al. (2010) suggest that even when controlling for gender, African-American women who possessed high levels of Racial Centrality and both Private and Public Regard were less likely to experience depression. Private Regard has consistently supported the insulation hypothesis. In

some instances, Racial Centrality interacted with Private Regard to achieve insulation (Rowley et al., 1998; Caldwell et al., 2004). Here, we only employ Private Regard.

A vast body of literature has found a relationship between laboratory analogs of perceived discrimination and physiological activity (Soto, Dawson-Andoh, and BeLue, 2011; Lincoln et al., 2007). Neblett and Roberts (2013) expand this literature by examining the role of racial identity as a possible mitigating factor when explaining the impact on African-Americans' emotions. These authors use audio vignettes of racist comments by African-American and white spokespersons as stimuli to examine the impact of perceived discrimination on the autonomic nervous system. Racial identity is employed to examine whether it helps African-Americans to better cope with perceived discriminatory events. Their findings yield that African-Americans who scored high on the racial identity scale and were exposed to racist comments were more likely to experience higher emotional responses when compared to those African-Americans with low levels of racial identity.

### **Expectations and Hypotheses**

This article tests whether racial attitudes and ideologies impact African-Americans' emotional responses to the former Mississippi state flag. It is argued that these responses will be tempered by their racial identity and ideology. Those who score high on racial identity scales are expected to respond less to the flag because their identity serves as a buffer to assist with coping with the flag's presence. The racial identity variables include Linked Fate and Private Regard.

Legal Disillusionment, the belief that the legal system is unfair to African-Americans, is included as a dimension of African-American ideology (e.g., Dawson, 2001; Block, 2011). Respondents who score high on the Legal disillusionment scale are expected to be less emotional because they have little to no expectations that the legal system protects African-Americans.

Age is also included in the model as a control. It is hypothesized that African-Americans who were socialized during the Civil Rights era will be more emotionally aroused when compared to younger participants. Arguably, younger participants lack exposure to the negative attitudes and behavior associated with the flag. This position may be debatable given the most recent incidents of white supremacist revering the flag (e.g., Charlottesville, Virginia).

Finally, a variable identifying police officers is included<sup>2</sup> because this was a snowball sample, and because some of the police were in our data base, given their participation in one or more of our prior research projects.

### **DATA AND METHODS**

The data in this analysis were culled from a convenience sample of 68 African-Americans recruited from the state of Mississippi. This article does not claim that the sample is representative of the country, state, city, or campus from which it was drawn.

This research was conducted in the Jackson Political Science Research Laboratory. Subjects were recruited using a snowball approach. Once identified, they were given directions, time and date to come to the lab, and asked to complete an online survey. Each of the subjects was informed that they would receive \$20. The participants were first administered a survey consisting of demographic items and items related to race and American politics. During the second part of the study, subjects were taken to the lab. Once the subjects arrived at the lab, a proctor explained the process related to the physiological equipment and the purpose of the experiment. The proctor explained to the subjects that two small electrodes attached to adhesive strips would be attached to the tips of the digital phalanx of the index and middle fingers. Following the instructions, the proctor applied isotonic gel to help generate sweat secretion and then attached two Ag/AgCl electrodes to the subject's fingers. These electrodes were connected to leads linked to a BioPac M150 for data acquisition and the GSR/EDA100C device, which measures skin conductance via changes in perspiration on the skin's surface due to stress, arousal, or emotional excitement. The BioPac M150 equipment, when attached to the EDA 100c device, allows for the analysis of electrodermal activity focusing specifically on skin conductance levels (SCLs), which captures the increased conductivity resulting from moisture secreted by eccrine glands in the lower layers of the skin.

Upon the start of the study, the subjects were instructed to focus on a blank screen for 60 seconds. Next, the subjects were exposed to a random set of still images. A variety of images were used in the experiment.<sup>3</sup> The primary image for the purposes here is the former Mississippi state flag flying atop the state's Capitol. Before selecting this image as the primary stimulus, it was rated by 46 independent judges. Raters were asked to report the emotion they felt when viewing the image, followed by the intensity of their emotions. The options included happy, sad, angry, or none of the above.

The stimuli were randomized for the first subject and remained the same for each additional subject. In between, and before each image, the subjects were shown a blank gray screen for 10 seconds. This screen is known as an interstimulus interval (ISI). The ISI serves as a baseline for comparison to the random stimuli. Each image was presented randomly for 10 seconds. Using raw scores produced by the ISI and stimulus proves problematic when using skin conductance analyses due to the wide variance between subjects. For example, some subjects may be prone to sweat more than others or less.

Electrodermal activity (EDA) analyses, also known as galvanic skin responses, were used to study physiological responses to the former Mississippi state flag. EDA serves as an umbrella for defining autonomic changes associated with the electrical properties of the skin. EDA measures microscopic changes in sweat that are collected from electrodes attached to the fingertips (Figner and Murphy, 2011). These measures include tonic (SCL) and phasic components (skin conductance responses) that result from sympathetic neuronal activity.

EDA is the most widely used measure used to study changes in sympathetic arousals associated with emotional and cognitive states because it is the only autonomic psychophysiological measurement that is not interfered with by parasympathetic responses. Unlike explicit measures of attitudes used in surveys, EDA can be used to examine implicit responses that can occur unconsciously. The use of physiological responses to examine political phenomena is much



needed, given the poor performance of many attitudinal models that have been used. This can be attested by the lack of variance that these models explain. The use of EDA is vital because the sympathetic nervous system is responsible for alerting the body for action, particularly when individuals are faced with threatening dilemmas or are exposed to traumatic images.

There are numerous ways to measure electrodermal activity. One method is to take the first difference between the SCL associated with the stimulus and the ISI or the baseline (gray screen presented before the stimulus). This difference will yield a measurement of the change in skin conductance between the stimulus and the ISI. One can also compute a measure based on the proportion or percentage (Dawson, Shell, and Filion, 2007). This proportional method creates a standardized measure where 1 reflects no change in SCL between viewing a fixation point and the former Mississippi state flag, and numbers greater than 1 indicate an SCL increase. The SCL for each image was measured as a proportion of the SCL recorded while the participant was viewing the fixation point for the ISI (10 seconds prior to the stimulus). The proportion method is used in this analysis to measure the *dependent variable*. It is calculated based on the SCL of the mean stimulus score divided by the mean baseline. Both the SCL for the stimulus and the baseline were calculated based on 10-second intervals.

## Measurements

The *dependent variable* Proportion was measured using the proportional method to measure electrodermal activity. The *independent variables* consisted of items used to operationalize various dimensions of racial identity, racial ideology, age, and police participation. The racial identity variables included Linked Fate and Private Regard. *Linked Fate* consisted of the traditional question: “Do you think what happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?” The responses were coded from low to high based on the following responses: “Not at all; Not very much; Yes, some; and Yes, a lot.” To measure the variable derived from Psychology, we use the Multidimensional Inventory of Black- Identity – T-Form (Scottham, Sellers, and Nguyen, 2008.). An additive scale was created for Private Regard. Items adopted to measure *Private Regard* were as follows: “I am happy that I am Black”; “I am proud to be Black”; and “I feel good about Black people.” These were measured using 5-point Likert items ranging from Really disagree to Really agree. These items loaded onto a single dimension and achieve an  $\alpha$  score of

0.59. *Legal Disillusionment* was measured based on the following 5-point Likert item: “The American legal system is unfair to Blacks.” The responses ranged from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. *Age* is self-reported by the respondent. *Police* was measured using a dichotomy with one indicating that the subject was a police officer, and zero otherwise. Imotion software was used to collect and analyze the physiological measures. Ordinary least squares regression was employed to analyze the data. For ease of interpretation, each of the variables, save for age, was recoded from zero to one.

## RESULTS

Given that physiological measurements do not connote valence, additional analyses were conducted to gauge the emotions that are assumed to be associated with the flag. The image used

in this research is the former Mississippi state flag flying atop the state's Capitol. Before selecting this image as the primary stimulus, it was rated by 46 independent judges. Raters were asked to report the emotion they felt when viewing the image, followed by the intensity of their emotions. The options included happy, sad, angry, or none of the above. The results are as follows: 23 rated the stimulus as making them feel either angry or sad, and 3 indicated that it made them feel happy. The remaining respondents selected “none of the above.” Thus, of the 26 who associated the flag with an emotion, 89 percent classified the image as making them feel either sad or angry. The raters were also asked to rate the emotion on a scale of 1–10 on the intensity of their emotions with 1 = Not very strong and 10 = Very strong. The average score for those who chose the anger or sad emotion was 8.09.

In addition to the explicit measures, an implicit bias test measuring nonconscious attitudes was conducted to detect whether African Americans possessed a positive, negative, or neutral association with the former Mississippi state flag. Using an implicit association test (IAT), participants sat at a computer with their fingers positioned on the E and I key. They were instructed to press one of the keys, depending on whether the word or letter shown on the screen was associated with a particular category. Based on the results, the average implicit bias score for African Americans was  $-0.18$ .<sup>4</sup> This score suggested that African Americans possessed a slightly negative bias toward the former Mississippi state flag. These results are substantively significant because, again, the EDA measures do not specify valence. In other words, one can be aroused when they see the flag because they support the flag. The results suggest that this is highly unlikely, given the negative explicit and implicit biases associated with the flag.

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics. The average age of the participants in the sample was approximately 37, and roughly 46 percent were police officers. Turning to the racial identity variables, participants scored a mean of 0.66 on the Linked fate scale and were a near consensus on the Private regard scale, which yielded a score of 0.91. The Legal Disillusionment score was also high at .80. The total  $N = 68$ , however, that number is reduced to 63 in the regression analysis due to missing data or faulty waveforms for the SCL scores.

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age	68	18	61	36.46	14.099
Proportion	67	0.680	1.810	1.060	0.179
Police	68	0.00	1.00	0.4559	0.50175
Legal Disillusionment	67	0.00	1.00	0.8022	0.23652

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Private Regard	65	0.00	1.00	0.9054	0.16673
Linked Fate	68	0.00	1.00	0.6624	0.27039
Valid N (listwise)	64				

The results of the EDA regression model are included in Table 2. Based on the  $F$ -statistic, the overall fit of the model is good. The  $F$ -statistic is statistically significant, indicating that the model performs better than a model without any independent variables. The Adjusted- $R^2$  was assessed to determine the fit of the model. According to this statistic, the independent variables account for roughly 15 percent of the variance in the model. It is preferred to the  $R^2$  because it considers the sample size and number of variables in the model.

TABLE 2 Emotional Responses to the Former Mississippi State Flag

	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>95% Confidence interval</b>	
Police	-0.094	0.0393	-0.172	-0.015
Linked Fate	0.164	0.078	0.008	0.32
Private Regard	0.29	0.114	0.062	0.52
Age	0.002	0.001	-0.001	0.005
Legal Disillusionment	-0.122	0.092	-0.307	0.063
_cons	0.751	0.145	0.462	1.041
$N$	64			
$F(5, 58)$	3.28			

	Coefficient	SE	95% Confidence interval	
Prob > F	0.0113			
R <sup>2</sup>	0.2202			
Adjusted-R <sup>2</sup>	0.153			

Based on the regression results, three of the coefficients associated with the variables in the model proved to be statistically significant. While the Legal Disillusionment coefficient was in the posited direction it was not statistically significant. The coefficients for Linked Fate and Private Regard were statistically significant, but in the negative direction. According to Table 2, a full one-unit change in Linked fate, ceteris paribus, increases the proportion of electrodermal activity by roughly 16 points. Private Regard performs somewhat better, as a full one-unit change resulted in a 29-point increase. The Police coefficient suggested that police scores were 9 points less when compared to civilians<sup>6</sup>

## DISCUSSION

This study is important because it is the first of its kind to measure the impact that a Confederate symbol has had on the emotional well-being of African Americans. The state of Mississippi was chosen because it was the last state to officially fly a flag that included the Confederate battle symbol.

Using methods derived from psychophysiology, the current research examined whether African Americans in Mississippi experienced emotional distress when exposed to the former Mississippi state flag.

Our expectation was that racial identity would work as a buffer to insulate African-Americans from the trauma when forced to observe racist symbols. This was not the case. Rather, African-Americans who scored high on the Linked Fate and Private Regard scales were emotionally impacted by the presence of the former Mississippi state flag when compared to those who scored lower on these scales. These findings are plausible. In a state like Mississippi where racial polarization has long dominated the political climate, it is likely that African Americans are frustrated with many of their losing efforts. For example, an African-American has not won a statewide political position since reconstruction. And given that the experiment was conducted prior to the flag's removal, the flag was one of the most divisive political issues in the state and those divisions split along racial lines, with African Americans having been on the losing end.

## CONCLUSION

In recent years, there has been an increase in the interest among political scientists in the study of biopolitics. Despite these new developments, the discipline has failed to explore the potential differences in responses that may exist *between* groups and *within* groups. The failure to make these distinctions has left a gap in fully understanding political attitudes and behavior. One reason for the discipline's failure may be data limitations. Samples consisting of African-Americans are almost nonexistent. The research here helps to fill this void by focusing exclusively on African-Americans.

In conclusion, we recognize that African Americans do not uniformly respond to the flag but are unique individuals whose personal views and experiences shape how they respond to the world. Even when presented with symbols representing a horrid past of lynchings and terror, African-Americans do not constitute a monolithic group. Although the removal of the Mississippi state flag is a significant victory, the African-American struggle in the universal quest for freedom continues in the face of symbolic and systemic repression.

## FOOTNOTES

1

For example, rioters chanted, “Hang Mike Pence,” apparently because of his unwillingness to reject the electoral vote count on behalf of Trump and trashed several congresspersons’ offices. States such as Georgia and Mississippi adopted the Confederate battle symbol as a part of their state flag. Alabama and South Carolina also flew it over their state Capitols. Other states, however, flew the flag to recognize history. The removal of Confederate symbols, in the view of many, was tantamount to erasing history (Coski, 2005). In Texas, it flew as one of the flags at Six Flags over Texas theme park. Florida displayed the flag on Capitol grounds until it was removed in 2000 by then-governor Jeb Bush. In 1966, Oklahoma displayed the flag outside the state Capitol building but was removed during renovations and was never resurrected (Coski, 2005).

22 Police

3 In addition to the former Mississippi state flag, images were borrowed from the International Affective Picture Systems (IAPS) collection. This collection included additional images of flags and neutral images. IAPS photos cannot be publicly distributed but are made available to researchers from the Center for the Study of Emotion and Attention at the University of Florida.

44 Scores >0.65 = “a strong positive” preference; scores ranging between 0.35 and 0.64= “moderate negative preference”; scores between 0.15 and 0.34 = “a slight preference.” In this analysis, we employ a single category IAT using the former Mississippi state flag. Negative scores connote a negative bias against the flag and positive scores denote a positive bias toward the flag.

65 A diagnostic test was conducted to detect multicollinearity. Based on the variance inflation factor of 1.15, there were no signs of multicollinearity.

## REFERENCES

### Works Cited

American Psychiatric Association. "What is Traumatic Stress Disorder?"

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>.

Beggin, Riley. (2020, June 27). *Vox*. Trump signs an executive order on prosecuting those who

destroy monuments. <https://www.vox.com/policy->

[andpolitics/2020/6/27/21305396/trump-confederate-monuments-executive-order](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/6/27/21305396/trump-confederate-monuments-executive-order).

Block, Ray

Brave Heart, MYH. 2003. "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its

Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration." *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35 (1), 7-13.

Brown, R. & Shaw, T. 2002. "Separate Nations: Two Attitudinal Dimensions of Black

Nationalism." *Journal of Politics*, 64: 22-44.

Boucsein, W., Fowles, D.C., Grimnes, S., Ben-Shakhar, G., Roth, W. T., Dawson, M. E. &

Filion, D. L. 2012. "Publication recommendations for electrodermal measurements."

*Psychophysiology* 49: 1017–1034.

Burch, T. 2013. *Trading Democracy for Justice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Carter, R. T. (2007). Racism and psychological and emotional injury: Recognizing and assessing race-based traumatic stress. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(1), 13-105.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. Race Based Traumatic Stress. *Psychiatric Times*.

<http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/cultural-psychiatry/race-based-traumatic-stress>

The Center for Treatment of Anxiety and Mood Disorders. "What is Trauma?"

<https://centerforanxietydisorders.com/what-is-trauma/> Accessed January 29, 2020.

Chiacu, D. (2020, July 19). *Reuters*. Trump says Confederate flag proud symbol of U.S. South. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-confederate/trump-says-confederate-flagproud-symbol-of-u-s-south-idUSKCN24K0I0>.

Cortman, C. & Walden, J. 2018. *Keep Pain in the Past: Getting Over Trauma, Grief and the Worst that's Ever Happened to You*. Coral Gables, FL.

Cox, K.L. 2003. *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*. Florida, University of Florida Press.

*Daniels III. V. Harrison County Board of Supervisors*, 96-CA-01129-SCT, 1998.

<https://caselaw.findlaw.com/ms-supreme-court/1166689.html>.

Davis, D. & Brown, V. 2002. "The Antipathy of Black Nationalism: Behavioral and Attitudinal Implications of an African American Ideology." *American Journal of Political Science* 46: 239-252.

Dawson, M. 2001. Black Vision: The Roots of Contemporary African American Political Ideologies. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1994. *Behind the Mule: Race, Class, and African American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dawson, M. E., Shell, A. M. & Fillion, D. L. 2007 The electrodermal system. In *Handbook of psychophysiology* (eds J. T. Cacioppo, L. G. Tassinary & G. G. Berntson), pp. 159–181, 3rd edn. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Dodd, M., Balzer, A., Jacobs, C., Gruszczynski, M., Smith, K. & Hibbing, J. 2012. "The Left Rolls with the Good, The Right Confronts the Bad: Physiology and Cognition in Politics". *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 367: 640-649.

Dwyer, Colin. (2020, June 20) *NPR*. Protesters fell Confederate monument In DC, provoking Trump's fury. <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racialjustice/2020/06/20/881199628/protesters-fell-confederate-monument-in-d-c-provokingtrumps-fury>.

Galovski, TE, Peterson, ZD, Beagley, MC, Strasshofer, DR, Held, P & Fletcher, TD. 2016.

“Exposure to Violence During Ferguson Protests: Mental Health Effects for Law Enforcement and Community Members.” *Journal of Trauma Stress*, 29(4): 283-292.

Glaser, J. C. 2015. Suspect Race: Causes and Consequences of Racial Profiling. New York: Oxford University Press.

Grabe, M. E. & Kamhawi, R. 2006. Hard wired for negative news? Gender differences in processing broadcast news. *Communication Research*, 33 (5) 346-369.

Grabe, M. E., Lang, A., Zhou, S., & Bolls, P. 2000. Cognitive access to negatively arousing news: An experimental investigation of knowledge gap. *Communication Research*, 27, 3-26.

Grisales, C. (2020, July 1). *NPR*. Trump Vows To Veto Defense Bill If It Removes Confederate Names From Military Bases.

Guerra, N. G., Huesmann, L. R., & Spindler, A. 2003. Community violence exposure, social cognition, and aggression among urban elementary school children. *Child Development*, 74, 1507–1522.

Gurin, P. & Epps, E. 1975. Black Consciousness, Identity and Achievement. New York: Wiley.

Gurin, P., Hatchett, S. & Jackson, J. 1989. Hope and Independence: Blacks' Response to Electoral and Party Politics. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Gurin, P., Miller, A. H. & Gurin, G. 1980. “Stratum Identification and Consciousness.” *Social*



*Psychology Quarterly* 43: 30-47.

Holman, E. A., Garfin, D.R. & Cohen Silver, R. 2014. "Media's role in broadcasting acute stress following the Boston Marathon bombings." 2014 *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. Vol. 111

<http://www.pnas.org/content/111/1/93>.

Law and Justice. (2020, June 26). *White House*. Executive Order on Protecting American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Violence.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-americanmonuments-memorials-statues-combating-recent-criminal-violence/>.

Lerman, A. E., & Weaver, V. M. 2014. Arresting Citizenship. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lincoln, K. D., Chatters, L. M., Taylor, R. J., & Jackson, J. S. 2007. Profiles of depressive symptoms among African Americans and Caribbean Blacks. *Social Science & Medicine*, 65, 200–213.

Liptak, Kevin. (2020, June 25) CNN politics. *CNN*. Trump administration prepares major effort to protect monuments that includes US Marshals and executive order.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/24/politics/trump-prepares-effort-to-protectmonuments/index.html>.

Love, D. 2015. "PTSD and Mental Health Disorders in Black Linked to Trauma from Racism and Trauma." <https://atlantaBlackstar.com/2015/07/03/ptsd-and-mental-health-disordersin-Black-people-linked-to-trauma-from-racism-and-violence/> Accessed January 20,2020.

Miller, A., Gurin, P., Gurin, G. & Malanchuk, O. 1981. "Group Consciousness and Political

Participation.” *American Journal of Political Science* 25: 494-511.

Mississippi Declaration of Secession, “A Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union” (1861), <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/missconv/missconv.html> (emphasis added). Accessed January 1, 2020.

*Moore v. Bryant* (Case No. 3:16-CV-151-CWR-FKB SD Miss. September 8, 2016

NAACP, History of Lynchings. <https://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/>.

NAACP. 2015. <http://naacpms.org/judge-fred-banks-opinion-on-the-state-flag/> 7/9/2015

Accessed January 1, 2020.

Neblett, E. & Roberts, S. O. 2013. Racial identity and autonomic responses to racial discrimination.” *Psychophysiology*, 50(10), 943-953.

Osmundsen, M., Hendry, D., Laustsen, L., Smith, K. & Petersen, M.B. (Forthcoming). The Psychophysiology of Political Ideology: Replications, Reanalysis and Recommendations. *Journal of Politics*

Oxley, D., R., Smith, K. B., Alford, J., Hibbing, M. V., Miller, J. L., Scalora, M., Hatemi, P. K. & Hibbing, J. R. 2008. “Political Attitudes Vary with Physiological Traits”, *Science*, 321: 1667-1670.

Scottham, K.M., Sellers, RM & Nguyen, H. X. “A Measure of Racial Identity in African American Adolescents: The Development of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity--Teen.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*”, 14(4), 297-306. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.14.4.297>.

Seery, M., Holman, A. & Cohen Silver, R. 2010. “Whatever Does Not Kill Us: Cumulative Lifetime Adversity, Vulnerability, and Resilience.” *Journal of Personality and Social*

- Psychology* American Psychological Association 2010, Vol. 99, No. 6, 1025–104.
- Shingles, R. 1981. “Black Consciousness & Political Participation: The Missing Link.”  
*American Political Science Review* 75: 76-91.
- Sinclair-Chapman, Valeria. 2018. (De)Constructing symbols: Charlottesville, the confederate flag, and a case for disrupting symbolic meaning. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 6(2), 316-323, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2018.1455597.
- Smith, W. A., Hung, M., & Franklin, J. D. 2011. Racial Battle Fatigue and the Miseducation of Black Men: Microaggressions, Societal Problems, & Environmental Stress. *Journal of Negro Education*.
- Smith, K. B., Oxley, D., Hibbing, M.V. Alford, J.R. & Hibbing, J. R. 2011. “Disgust sensitivity and the neurophysiology of left-right political orientations.” *PloS one* 6: e25552.
- Soto, J.A., Dawson-Andoh, N.A. & BeLue, R. 2011. “The relationship between perceived discrimination and Generalized Anxiety Disorder among African Americans, Afro Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic White.” *Journal Anxiety Disorders*. 2011 Mar: 25(2):258-65.
- Srikanth, Anagha. (2020, June 29). *The Hill*. Trump doubles down on ‘heritage’ defense of Confederate statues. <https://thehill.com/changing-america/respect/equality/505060-trumpdoubles-down-on-heritage-defense-of-confederate>
- Stephens, Alexander. 1861. “Cornerstone Speech.”  
<https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-source-sets/civilwar/cornerstone-speech-alexander> Accessed January 20, 2020.
- Tate, K. 1993. *From Protest to Politics: The New Black Voters in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tyler, T. R., Fagan, J. & Geller, A. 2014. Street Stops and Police Legitimacy: Teachable Moments in Young Urban Men's Legal Socialization. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 11, 4: 751–785.

Voigt, R., Camp, N. P., Prabhakaran, V., Hamilton, W. L., Hetey, R. C., Griffiths, C. M., Jurgens, D., Jurafsky, D. & Eberhardt, J. L.. 2017. Language from police body camera footage shows racial disparities in officer respect. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS)* [www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1702413114](http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1702413114).

Wang, Amy B. 2017. "Lawmaker apologizes after saying leaders 'should be LYNCHED' for removing Confederate statutes." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/05/22/lawmaker-sayslouisiana-leaders-should-be-lynched-for-taking-down-confederate-statues/> May 22, 2017. Accessed: March 15, 2020.

Welch, S., Sigelman, L., Bledsoe, T. & Combs, M.. 2001. Race and Place. Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Monica. The Link Between Racism and PTSD. 2015  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/culturally-speaking/201509/the-link-between-racism-and-ptsd>.