

Show Me Your Papers! Obama's Birth and the Whiteness of Belonging

Matthew W. Hughey

Published online: 21 March 2012
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012

Abstract In the wake of Barack Obama's 2009 ascension to the White House, stories questioning his citizenship slowly trickled into the mainstream. By 2011, “Birtherism”—the belief that Obama is constitutionally disqualified from holding Presidential office—was a principle aspect of public discourse. Through an analysis of online comments in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, I analyze how dominant understandings of citizenship, race, class, and civil rights structure public navigation of “Birther” claims. I find the presence of several “narratives of belonging”—shared stories that people socially construct to account for who they are, how the world works, and where different people belong. These narratives reveal the sustained conflation of citizenship with an ideal or “hegemonic” form of white racial identity.

Keywords Obama · Birthers · Race · Citizenship · Whiteness · Online discourse

“You know, when I’m catching a cab in Manhattan—in the past, I think I’ve given my credentials.”

– Barack Obama, 23 July 2007, responding to whether he was “authentically black enough.”

“We’ve posted the certification that is given by the state of Hawaii ... People have provided affidavits ... and yet this thing just keeps on going.”

– Barack Obama, 27 April 2011, responding to whether he was born in the United States.

On 27 April 2011, Donald Trump—entrepreneur, reality-television show host, and then presidential candidate hopeful—claimed credit for President Barack Obama’s release of his “long form” birth certificate. After touting the publication as something “that nobody else

M. W. Hughey (✉)
Department of Sociology, Mississippi State University, 207 Bowen Hall, P.O. Box C, Starkville, MS
39762, USA
e-mail: MHughey@soc.msstate.edu

has been able to accomplish” he went on to cast doubt on the document’s authenticity, Obama’s educational background, and presidency that he previously questioned as possibly “one of the greatest scams in the history of politics” (Trump 7 April 2011). Trump stated:

Now, we have to look at it. We have to see. Is it real? Is it proper? What’s on it? I’m going to look at it and many other people are going to look at it. You’re going to have many people looking at it. And obviously, they’re going to have to make a decision. Because, it is rather amazing that all of a sudden it materializes. But, I hope it’s the right deal. I’m sure, I hope it’s the right deal. We have to look at it. A lot of people have to look at it. Experts will look at it ... The word is, according to what I’ve read, that he was a terrible student when he went to Occidental. He then gets to Columbia. He then gets to Harvard. ... How do you get into Harvard if you’re not a good student? Now, maybe that’s right, or maybe it’s wrong. But I don’t know why he doesn’t release his records. Why doesn’t he release his Occidental records? (27 April 2011)

In the wake of Obama’s 2009 ascension to the White House, political candidates, entertainment celebrities, and media commentators publically discussed “Birtherism”—the belief that by virtue of *jus soli* (birthright by soil) and/or *jus sanguinis* (birthright by parents’ nationality), Obama is disqualified from Presidential office. For many, such questioning represents a color-blind approach to legal consistency and gate keeping. For others, it reeks of racial profiling in which people of color face persistent questioning of their social belonging. While Birtherism is often framed as little more than a horse-race between Democratic and Republican Party interests, we have yet to interrogate how dominant understandings of race and civic belonging guide the public interpretation of this debate. Specifically, in an era constantly deemed “post-racial,” how do implicit and explicit racial meanings structure the public debate over Obama’s citizenship and legitimacy as President of the United States?

Below I outline the dominant streams of research on race and whiteness, providing a brief review of racialized demands for US citizenship documentation, and the data and methodology employed in this study. I then present examples of public narratives by which Obama is understood as an (un)belonging part of the US nation-state. I conclude with implications beyond this study.

Theorizing Race, Whiteness and Cyberspace

The unhappy marriage of race and citizenship continues to birth myriad disagreements as to the significance of race. A mountain of social scientific scholarship now details the interplay of US citizenship, constructions of whiteness, and the double standards for citizens that do not subscribe, in phenotype, performance, or politics, to the dominant expectations of Anglo conformity or its modern heir, “color-blindness.” Philosopher Charles Mills (1997, 13) thus contends that a color-blind Rousseauian *social contract* does not organize US relations, but a *racial contract* in which there exists a:

conceptual partitioning and corresponding transformation of human populations into “white” and “nonwhite” men...In the white settler state, its role is not primarily to demarcate the (temporarily) prepolitical state of “all” men (who are really white men), but rather the permanently prepolitical state or, or perhaps better, *nonpolitical* state ... of nonwhite men. ... White men who are (definitionally) already part of society encounter nonwhites who are not, who are “savage” residents of a state of nature characterized in terms of wilderness, jungle, wasteland.

A social order based upon asymmetrical relations between differently racialized groups, exist not as a blight on an otherwise perfect union. Rather, racial inequality and “otherness” remain endemic to the very concept and practice of citizenship and national order (Goldberg 1993; Mills 1997). US citizenship and notions of “whiteness” emerged from colonial domination. Nonwhites were framed as divinely, biologically, or culturally in need of either annihilation or subjugation (see Ignatiev 1995; Painter 2010). Haney-López (2006) and Harris (1993) found that early property law and legal interpretation created a unique and privileged citizenship status for those marked “white.” As heirs of this now normalized legacy, contemporary whites do not often realize or admit their racially privilege, but self-identify as “normal” or even “ideal” citizens (Frankenbuerg 1993; Perry 2002; Myers 2005). Whites often “frame” racial situations in ways that minimize or naturalize racial inequality while employing racial stereotypes, metaphors, and interpretations to buttress racial inequality and paint the nation as a land free of racial constraints, bigotry, or even stratification (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Feagin 2010).

Throughout this body of work, scholars highlight how racial discourse mystifies racial inequality and constructs white racial identity as a synonym for “citizen” or “American” *par excellence*. In specifying this correlation, recent scholarship demonstrates how racial discourse, that both normalizes and privileges whiteness, has changed either form (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Goodman and Burke 2010) or location (Picca and Feagin 2007; Myers 2005; Myers and Williamson 2001; Pollock 2004). Together, this scholarly corpus debunks the claim that racism is dead; racist discourse finds life through metamorphosis into polite and subtle forms of public talk and private sites of racial homogeneity and invective.

Online racial discourse represents a paradoxical synthesis of “color-blind racism” (Bonilla-Silva 2010) of the public sphere with the “two-faced racism” (Picca and Feagin 2007) of overt, antagonistic, and violent racist rhetoric endemic to the private sphere. Toward this end, the Internet is a space in which otherwise taboo racial rhetoric finds expression. Eliasoph (1999, 485) found that “different ways of ‘thinking through race’ ... are available in different settings, because speech itself means something different in different settings.” Moreover, Eliasoph argues that seemingly explicit racial discourse may be more about the interactional norms of talk itself—both racist and antiracist talk is employed to stabilize the civic rules about where one can talk about what (1999, 496). Perrin (2006) extends Eliasoph’s point by demonstrating that people respond to civic and political challenges based on their imaginings of what is right and feasible. The problem is, Perrin finds, when people argue against differing views, they often express a broad-brush skepticism of all evidence. It is possible then—in an era in which skeptical US residents have fewer networks and contexts in which to embed their social and political commitments (Putnam 1995)—that the Internet is a relatively new site for these struggles. If so, it may serve as an anomic space in which interactions and “group styles” (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) are far from settled; the vitriolic argumentation over race and politics may provide a script for virtual interaction (Eliasoph 1999).

While research on racial discourse is well established (see Meyers 2004; van Dijk 1993; 1992), less work examines the interactive and dialogic features of race and the Internet (Daniels 2009a, 2009b; 2008; Hughey 2008; Kolko et al. 2000). There is, however, a growing scholarly attention to race and online news formats (see Daniels Forthcoming 2012). Since 2004, papers like *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* invited online commentary. Just a few years later, the preponderance of racist comments led many newspapers to either disallow comments or heavily moderate content (Washington 2010). This new digital saga in online racial discourse prompted new lines of inquiry to stress the robust connection of racism, racial representation, and audience reception (see Hughey

2010b; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2010; Melican and Dixon 2008; Steinfeldt et al. 2010). And while the White Nationalist underpinnings of US citizenship are well rehearsed, we do not have direction on the enduring drama of online racial discourse within the episode of a nonwhite president of a nation still entrenched in whiteness *qua* citizenship.

From *Birth of a Nation* to a Nation of Birthers

Most scholars now agree that US citizenship was racialized from the onset (Du Bois 1935; Foner 1988; Glenn 2011). However, the capricious demand for, and subjective scrutiny of, citizenship documentation is a point less emphasized. Before the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1864, manumission papers proved essential (Patterson 1982). Without possession of such documents, white persons and officials were empowered by law (such as the “Fugitive Slave Law” of 1850) to capture any person *suspected* of being a runaway slave.¹ Even blacks born free were in danger of being labeled “runaways” and held captive by a white accuser if they did not obtain and carry appropriate papers (Patterson 1982). During reconstruction, a rise in racialized citizenship documentation—part and parcel of the cultural logic of the “Black Codes”—further quilted the legal marginalization of nonwhites into the social fabric of the nation even as it sewed together white solidarity and authority. Without written documentation, nonwhites were forced to pay poll taxes and/or pass literacy tests in order to vote (Feldman 2004). Even with documentation or successful passage of such tests, many blacks faced charges that documents were forgeries, were told to provide additional documentation, or were intimidated by groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the Red-shirts and lynch-mobs throughout the “Jim Crow” era (1876–1965) (Foner 1988).

After 1965, Latino immigration and demographics increased. With it, overt and explicit Nativist and xenophobic public language quickened pace both in the “Southern Strategy”² and in ugly encounters between people of color and policing agencies (Glover 2009; Parks and Hughey 2010). For example, on 29 March 1996, US Congressman Luis Gutiérrez took his young daughter and niece to a US Capitol tribute for Puerto-Rican veterans of the Korean War. Holding Puerto Rican flags, he then took them into the Capitol to show them his Congressional office.

A Capitol police security aide ... saw the flags unfurled and, according to the congressman, “yelled in [my] ear: ‘Those flags cannot be displayed!’” ... Gutiérrez was embarrassed, but told his daughter to get rid of the flags, saying “You know what the rules are.” Overhearing him, [the aide] asked: “Who are you that you know what the rules are?” When he told [the aide] that he was Luis Gutiérrez, a member of Congress, she replied, “I don’t think so.” So Gutiérrez showed her his congressional ID card. Her immediate response was to say, “It must be a fake.” And then she added, “Why don’t you and your people just go back to the country you came from?” (Oboler 2006, 167)

In 2008 Congressman Virgil Goode declared that the greatest threat to America’s national security were “anchor babies”—the pejorative term for children born in the US from immigrant parents usually of nonwhite status (Vietnamese “boat people,” Haitian refugees, or Mexican immigrants). Although it failed to pass, H.R. 1940 (the Birthright Citizenship

¹ Whites’ failure to attempt to apprehend any suspected runaway slave could result in a \$1,000 fine. This propelled a “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz 1998) whereby whites were subsidized for their participation in the socio-legal regimen of white supremacy.

² The Southern Strategy was the Republican Party strategy to win white votes in Southern states by playing to white racial fears, anxiety, and racist worldviews (see Goldfield 1997).

Act of 2007) sought to overturn the 14th Amendment to the Constitution in order to eliminate natural born citizenship via *jus soli*. In April of 2010, Arizona passed into law Senate Bill 1070 (dubbed the “show me your papers law”).³ Akin to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, this law gives local and state police broad power to detain anyone suspected of being an undocumented resident in the US. The recently introduced H.R. 140 (the Birthright Citizenship Act of 2011) proposes to summarily end *jus soli* unless one can supply papers to prove one’s parents were legally residing in the US at the time of their birth in order to retain or gain citizenship.

During the 2008 election season, US residents were more likely to associate American symbols with white politicians (e.g.: Hillary Clinton) or even white European politicians (e.g. Tony Blair) than with Obama (Devos et al. 2008). Another study demonstrated that when American citizens viewed an American flag they then showed implicit and explicit prejudice toward African Americans in general and reluctance to vote for Obama when compared to those not exposed to the flag (Porter et al. 2010). Simply put, “Barack Obama did not fit most American’s implicit idea of an authentic American” (Dasgupta and Yogeewaran 2011, 76). It is within this context that the public questioning of Obama’s citizenship emerged.

In June 2008, the conservative *National Review Online* called for Obama to release his birth certificate (Geraghty 2008)—an article many cite as the formative beginnings of Birtherism. Right-wing media pundits and authors soon questioned the legitimacy of Obama’s citizenship: from Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity to Lou Dobbs and Jerome R. Corsi’s book *Where’s the Birth Certificate? The Case that Barack Obama is not Eligible to be President* (published in May 2011 by Birther activist and Tea Party member Joseph Farah and “World Net Daily” press). By 2009, Senator Richard Shelby (Democrat-AL), Senator Roy Blunt (Republican-MO), and newly elected governor (and Democrat turned Republican) of Georgia, Nathan Deal, all publicly questioned the legitimacy of Obama’s presidency (Zapanta 2009), while thirteen members of Congress signed a bill requiring presidential candidates to provide their birth certificates (H.R. 1503).

Public belief that Obama does not qualify to serve as president due to his birth and citizenship remained relatively sustained from late 2008 to mid 2011. In October of 2008, approximately one-third of Republicans surveyed believed that Obama was born outside of the US (Thrush 2009). By July 2009 nearly a quarter of all Americans either thought Obama was born outside of the US or were unsure of his US birth (Weigel 2009). By August of 2009, nearly 75% of Southern whites asserted that Obama was not born in the US or had doubts that he was (Weigel 2009). This attitude grew by March 2010, when 25% of adults asserted that Barack Obama was “not born in the United States and so is not eligible to be president” (Harris 2010). By April 2011, a USA Today/Gallup Poll found that only 38% of respondents believed Obama was “definitely” born in the US (Page 2011).⁴

Data and Methodology

To operationalize an analysis of Birther discourse, I turned to the publicly accessible comments on *The New York Times* (NYT) and *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ). I chose the NYT

³ The bill was described in *The New York Times* as “the broadest and strictest immigration law in generations ... making the failure to carry immigration documents a crime and giving the police broad power to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally” (Archibald 2010, A1).

⁴ While one should hold sociological skepticism over polling, the patterned replication of these results certainly indicate a substantial portion of the population was unsure, at the least, of Obama’s birthplace.

and WSJ because of their status as archival sources for historians and social scientists and their formative role in American journalism as reflections of both mainstream left- and right-leaning newspapers. According to Kevin Stoker, “The success of the *Times*, combined with its position as a trendsetter for the U.S. press, helped validate objective reporting” (1995, 7). Similarly, Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007, 148) write that these two papers are “leading newspapers with regard to the coverage of international news and views, drawing readers from every state and around the world.”

For the NYT search engine, I selected US, NYT Archive “Since 1981,” advanced search, and a custom date range of 1 January 2009 to 31 May 2011. I then searched the term “Birther,” which resulted in seventy-one results. This amount was reduced when taking into account stories that enabled and archived comments ($N=25$). These twenty-five stories yielded a vast array of comments ($N=5,372$). The average amount of comments per story is 215 and ranges from 28 to 579. For the WSJ search engine, I selected advanced search and a “2 years” archive. I then searched “Birther,” which yielded sixty-one stories. This number was reduced when counting only those stories that enabled and archived comments ($N=53$). These fifty-three stories also yielded a large population of comments ($N=7,167$). The average amount of comments per story is 135 and ranges from 1 to 2,538. I collected the entire population ($N=12,539$) in text files, whereby each comment served as the unit of analysis. There were no substantive difference in the frequency of specific narratives related to Birtherism on one paper relative to the other (neither contained more pro- or anti-Birther comments than the other). However, the WSJ archived Birther stories and comments at a much higher rate than the NYT (WSJ=53 stories, 7167 comments; NYT=25 stories, 5372 comments).⁵

This methodology certainly poses questions about the representativeness of the comments. Given doubts that online discourse symbolizes generalizable attitudes or truly held white supremacist ideologies [see Daniels’ (2009a, 58–60) discussion of her participation as a “passive oppositional lurker” on a white Nationalist website], I avoid conceptualizing comments as a wholesale sociological proxy. Rather, I see racialized comments as crucial mechanisms in the (re) production of those identities. Hence, my goal is not generalizability, but to identify and explain the patterned narratives that hold “generalizing effects” (Smith 2005). The point is to map how a seemingly atomistic comment under one story aligns with comments produced elsewhere (see DeVault 2006). My approach highlights how the dominant white nationalist logic of US citizenship is constitutive of the collective racial-national identity it purports to represent.

Once collected, I deductively and inductively developed a preliminary coding schematic. In the former, I drew from the extant literature on racial discourse (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Goodman and Burke 2010; Hartigan 2010; Myers 2005; Myers and Williamson 2001; Pollock 2004; Riggs and Augoustinos 2004). In the latter, I developed coding categories based on my initial reading of the data whereby I sought an understanding of the debates. This form of analysis consists of reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection, data coding, data analysis, and interpretation. The aim is to be systematic and analytic, but not rigid. Next, I applied the schema to a random sample equal to 25% of the population ($n=3,134$). I used this step to inductively refine and organize the coding schema into distinct narratives.

People interpret their lives through recognizable storylines and sequences of events (Somers and Gibson 1994; Ewick and Silbey 2003). Such narratives provide common accounts that Somers and Gibson (1994) call “emplotment.” Through emplotment, people exchange and

⁵ Both the NYT and the WSJ are human moderated. The NYT moderation policy “Readers’ Reviews Posting Policy” is available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/content/help/site/usercontent/rpolicy/rpolicy.html>. The WSJ moderation policy “Journal Community” is available at: <http://online.wsj.com/community/faq#openId=3>.

build upon one another's stories, as they become "part of a stream of sociocultural knowledge about how structures work to distribute power and disadvantage" (Ewick and Silbey 2003: 1328). As Gerteis (2002: 593) notes, "Collective narratives can be said to emerge when regularly occurring plots connect to key characters in an empirically stable way." Through aggregation I delineated four primary narratives and twelve secondary narratives. The first level narratives focus on stable sets of contexts, characters, and dramatic plots that connect actors and events through causal explanations and assumptions. The second level centers on the recurring theses that ground, and provide examples for, the first level narratives (see Table 1).

Results: Narratives of Belonging

Obama's birth and citizenship were interpreted through several reoccurring storylines, or what I call "narratives of belonging." These narratives entailed specific assumptions about racial groups, their supposed character traits, relationships between them, and causality of outcomes. I present prescient examples of these narratives below.⁶

I. "Look, a Negro!"⁷

Obama was constantly reified as a consummate un-American "other." A variety of explicit and implicit racial codes labored to rationalize this narrative.

The Affirmative Action President

Many comments linked Birther claims to the racialized labels of "welfare queens," assumptions of blacks as inherently lazy, and whites losing jobs and opportunities to "unqualified" black candidates. For example, a comment from 2 March 2011 read:

If this POS [Piece Of Shit] current White House occupant isn't the product of the soft bigotry of low expectations/equal opportunity/race based initiatives then why can't he find his birth certificate, produce one written piece he contributed to the Harvard Law Review (where he served as editor) and stop fighting all attempts for information?

This narrative both relies upon and extends the robust correlation of blacks as undeserving social pariahs. Obama is portrayed as a liar and huckster that exploits racial sensitivity for personal gain. Moreover, comments of this ilk demonstrate how people circumvent NYT and WSJ moderator policies on hate speech and profanity through abbreviations and acronyms, allowing for the reproduction of overt invective (e.g.: "POS"). A comment from 28 April 2011 reads: "Black people are not taught that their bar is higher. They are given Government jobs when their test scores are alot [sic]⁸ lower then [sic] the white person applying. Every person running for President should have to show proof of citizenship,

⁶ The following comments are intentionally disconnected from both the stories under which they appeared and their authors due to ethical consideration. While this decision may result in some loss of the dialogical character of discourse, I retain dates and explicitly connect individual comments to the larger constellation of public white supremacist discourse.

⁷ Frantz Fanon's wrote, "'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'" as the opening line of "The Lived Experiences of a Black Man" in his now classic *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967, 89). Fanon points to the constant surveillance of black men as essentialized "others," what he called a "suffocating reification" (1967, 89).

⁸ Throughout the paper I specify various errors by "[sic]" (meaning "intentionally so written"). While the repetition may prove a distraction for some, the usage is conventional and necessary.

Table 1 Narratives of belonging ($n=3,134$)

First Level Narratives	Look, A Negro!	Birther Backlash	Bad Apple Birthers	[Not] Playing the Race Card	Column and Row Total Frequency/Percent
<i>Second Level Narratives</i>	<i>Affirmative Action President</i>	<i>Free Speech and Political Correctness</i>	<i>Insanity and Ignorance</i>	<i>A Post-Racial World</i>	
	$n=211$ (7%)	$n=149$ (6%)	$n=262$ (8%)	$n=408$ (13%)	
	<i>It's Obama's Fault</i>	<i>Ad Hominem Attacks</i>	<i>Just Ignore Them</i>	<i>Obama's Not Black; It's Not Racism</i>	
	$n=352$ (11%)	$n=146$ (5%)	$n=311$ (10%)	$n=96$ (3%)	
	<i>Overt Othering</i>		<i>Message vs. Method</i>	<i>Some of my best friends are black!</i>	
	$n=165$ (5%)		$n=115$ (4%)	$n=77$ (2%)	
			<i>Racism is Natural</i>		
			$n=377$ (12%)		
	$n=728$ (23%)	$n=295$ (9%)	$n=1065$ (34%)	$n=581$ (19%)	$n=2669$ (85%)

period. No race involved.” Through the synthesis of discourse that (1) Obama’s citizenship status was not properly vetted, (2) a large portion of the nonwhite electorate voted for Obama simply because he is black (thus engaging in “vulgar” identity politics), and (3) nonwhites use social welfare programs to exploit a benevolent white society (unfairly giving him “white positions” at Occidental, Harvard, the Senate and the White House), readers can activate a robust and seductive narrative in which Obama does not belong.

It's Obama's Fault

Comments often constructed the position that the Birther controversy was caused and perpetuated by Obama himself. His supposed dishonesty and own reluctance to “show his papers” were themselves cited as the cause of citizenship doubt. Such a problematic time-order relationship and tautological logic was rationalized through a narrative that “real” Americans would not put the nation through the turmoil of doubt. For example, a comment from 4 August 2009 reads:

Why has President Obama spent more than a million dollars on lawyers [sic] fees to kep [sic] from simply releasing his official birth certificate? From what I have read and heard, he has released only the “record of live birth”, not the official birth certificate. This leads some people to question his nationality and the details printed on the actual birth certificate. For the record, he has also refused to release his helath [sic] records, and his college transcripts. Why the secrecy? where [sic] is the transparency he promised? He could easily end all of this speculation by releasing all of these documents. Why won't he do so? That sort of evasin [sic] leads naturally to conspiracy theories. It's only human nature.

While Birtherism first concentrated on demands that Obama release his birth certificate, the claims slowly expanded to different types of birth documentation, affidavits, and private

information such as health records, educational transcripts, and international travel schedules from his childhood.

Obama is discussed not only as *politically* improper, but as a *racial* provocateur. Obama and the White House were consistently described as stoking the flames of racial animus. A 29 April 2011 comment reads:

The question of the president's citizenship would have never been called into question if the democratic party had done their part. Why did it take so long for this document to be released? It's part of a careful ploy by the gov't to cause racial unrest. They had it all along and could have disclosed it from the get go, but didn't. Now, 1 year from re-election it suddenly surfaces. Odd, don't you think? Why don't all the folks crying racism see that part instead of always playing victim? Get over yourselves.

These comments weave together a narrative that sanctions white entitlement and judgment of the appropriateness of black civic ontology. In so doing, a fictitious society in which whites must daily show their birth certificate on demand ("other Americans are forced to show their true birth certificates each and every day") is juxtaposed as equal to the real white demand that Obama somehow prove—via arbitrary enforcement of unwritten and reactionary demands—that he is a legitimate citizen and President.

Overt Othering

Many of the aforementioned narratives synthesized a subtle "othering" of Obama. Yet, another unadulterated "othering" narrative frequently emerged. These storylines were particularly brash and overt in their racial, religious, and regional aversion. For example, a 15 December 2010 comment reads: "If Obama didn't act like an alien, nobody would question his birth place. But he is so unAmerican in words and actions, people look for an explanation. The Birthers are just one group of questioners." Another comment from the same day well exemplifies the narrative that Obama's possessed an intangible yet potent ethos that betrays authentic citizenship: "It is clear that Obama does not meet the 'spirit' of the requirement that a president be a natural born citizen. Hawaii is pretty far from mainland US, Kenya is farther still and Indonesia still further."

As late as April 2011, the refusal to acknowledge Obama's legitimacy went so far as to insinuate Obama wishes to trash the Constitution, is a Marxist, is in league with "terrorists," and aligns with the Ba'ath regime of Iraq. Many of these stories are a continuation of a narrative vocalized by Republican candidates during the 2008 election campaign (Carrington 2009). These comments were generally prefaced with the obligatory statement that race has nothing to do with such interpretations.

I don't care what race or races Obama is. I don't like his white side either. Race has absolutely nothing to do with it. I have two problems with Obama. First, he is a Marxist. Second, he is ineligible to be President until he proves with a birth certificate that he was born here. Its [sic] in the Constitution. If you don't like that then change the Constitution. Obama would like to trash the Constitution anyway. (22 April 2011)

I believe these rumors about Barack Obama not being from America are true. I mean, who in this country would name their child Barack Hussane [sic] Obama. Remember Saddam Hussane. [sic] Coincidence? (25 April 2011)

Despite the common evocation of a race-neutral stance, overt racial invective often laced the commentaries. Given the moderation policies of both the NYT and WSJ to strike offensive language, the presence of the following denotes the acceptance of anti-black

rhetoric as little more than mundane discourse. For example, a 25 April 2011 comment advances the notion that Obama's supposed caginess and duplicity are a result of his blackness: "Because he has not shown his birth cetificit [sic] and he has only shown a certificit [sic] that he was born and i [sic] think half of it is becaus [sic] he is african american!" So also, a 21 April 2011 comment read:

"Not American Enough"? Has anyone noticed the obvious? I guess it will take 10 years going by. Then some really smart guy will figure out that Obama was raised Islamic in Indonesia. I'm not saying he's Islamic now. [...] Sure, Obama's got the mental maladies one catches in the left wing fever swamps. It's anyone's guess what really goes on in this clown's mind. He never had his academic background vetted—thanks to the likes of Taranto and other gutless "journalists". The cesspool we call the South Side of Chicago has included a politically influential gang that slaughtered everyone who wouldn't convert to Islam. Then there's the Siamese twins—Farrakhan and Rev. Wright—both of them Qaddaffi pals.

Such narratives labor to mystify the asymmetrical social relations of power that constitutes the very backbone of white supremacy. When these fairy-tales saturate the everyday discourse of mainstream papers like the NYT and WSJ, Birtherism appears as the natural and logical outgrowth of legitimate grips, rather than the contemporary discursive mechanism by which white prerogatives re-define authentic and ideal citizenship in line with a *Herrenvolk* democracy (see Mills 1993).

II. The Birther Backlash

In recent years the country has witnessed a "white backlash"—a phenomenon in which whites' sacrosanct dedication to abstract ideals of equality, color-blindness, and individual meritocracy are activated against laws, policies, and movements believed unfairly biased towards nonwhite interests.

Free Speech and Political Correctness

A comment from 4 August 2009 showcases the logic in which insinuations of Obama's illegitimacy are rationalized through appeals to free speech:

That there's a PR spin going on with respect to the birthers' claims—that much, at least—is quite obvious. In my mind, the jury is still out and MoveOn and other organizations that are attempting to shut down CNN/Lou Dobbs and others who would dare cover this matter need to realize that while the allegations may prove false, the First Amendment protections ought to stand strong. Attacking someone's First Amendment right to be a nut—or a truth teller, whatever the case may be—is the greater evil, in this reader's opinion.

Other comments explicitly racialized the attack on Birthers as anti-white. This narrative drew upon well-established myths of the rugged, self-made white person—unfairly victimized by racial identity politics—that serves as a central tenet of white neoconservatism (Barracough 2011):

His staff are doing a great job avoiding the real truth behind is illeged [sic] US Citizenship as well as other serious topics, bravo. Most of you want to play the race card for Mr. Obama in sympathy well that is a crock. Im [sic] a white male that was born and raised in this country ans [sic] my parents were and thier [sic] parents etc..

and [sic] I cannot find a job I'm qualified for, nor can I get a free education because someone else's [sic] accent or skin tone needs to be addressed before mine and other whites like myself. And the funny part is [sic] that I'm the minority now not Mr. Obama and other non caucasian [sic] racial people of this country. [...] Caucasians have passed laws, and rules that try to be fair to every other race in the country which is more than ok with me but we excluded ourselves, why is this? We will fail as a nation, regrettably [sic] because of soft sympathizers like you. (4 August 2009)

Such narratives demonstrate how the White House's early refusals to kowtow to demands to "show his papers" are told as an attack on white folks. So also, these comments illustrate a pervasive intra-white othering ("soft sympathizers like you"); whites' refusal to align with Birtherism results in castigation and a framing of them as inauthentic or deficient white citizens.

Ad Hominem Attacks

These comments derided the use, or even mention of, race as an unfair insinuation that Birthers are "racist." Birther supporters attempted to lay claim to the domain of race; dictating when and where it did and did not matter:

[...] Reading claims of racism into this is rather unfair. [...] The truth is, nobody needs race, skin color or creed to take "issue" with someone else. It's the nature of politics. I, for one, would appreciate it if people would stop playing the race card. To see racism in every conceivable issue is, in itself, racist. Isn't the Obama administration "post racialism"? If so, let's respect Obama's own convictions on this subject. I'm sure there are some birthers' who are racially motivated but clearly there's enough legal gray area with respect to the question of "naturalized citizen" to give rise to confusion, especially when you consider the dismal state of our educational system. Our educational system—the fact that schools no longer teach citizenship and civics—IS the real underlying issue. In contrast, the racial fixation and overall attempt to whitewash this question as racist is largely a smokescreen—a red herring, an ad hominem distraction. (1 August 2009)

Comments like the aforementioned blend an array of claims together to rationalize a victimized white subject position. First, speaking of Birther-based racism is both beyond the pale, except when speaking of supposed "bad apple" outliers (e.g.: "there are some birthers' who are racially motivated"). Second, "politics" and US citizenship are ahistorically reconstructed as a field and status devoid of race. Third, the Obama administration and Obama's intent are characterized as "post racialism" and detractors from Birtherism are (in a racial shell game) derided for not respecting Obama's convictions. Fourth and finally, the rather settled notion of Obama's citizenship are questioned as an objective "gray area" that a better-educated US citizenry would see if not "whitewashed" by the "smokescreen" of racism.

III. "Bad Apple" Birthers

Not all NYT or WSJ comments supported Birtherism. The digital domains of these newspapers frequently transformed into brash battlefields. However, amidst this opposition, very few comments carefully dissected Birther arguments or presented evidence of Obama's citizenship. Most centered on the supposed ignorance and/or insanity of Birtherism or dismissed Birtherism as a simple reflection of "natural" and "inherent" racism.

Insanity and Ignorance

A great deal of comments evaluated Birtherism akin to the following: “This is very simple. If you are a birther, you are stupid” (22 April 2011). Such critiques came from both the political left and right. A self-identified conservative commentator stated on 4 August 2009: “Ha! Those ‘Birthers’ are just crazy loons. Rather entertaining, though. I am a staunch conservative. I like to think myself firm but fair. My sincere opinion is Obama is an American citizen and those Birthers are complete nutjobs.”

Just like pro-Birther comments, anti-Birther discourse often linked ignorance or insanity to racist worldviews. Yet, these comments reduced “racism” to the level of individual prejudice and hatred from a time long gone by, thereby obfuscating the contemporary, normative, and widespread logic of white supremacy. A comment on 2 August 2009 reads:

The same people calling themselves the “birthers” have removed their white hoods and shown their faces for who they really are—small minded, selfish and ignorant people that have little knowledge of how to deal with a changing world. The fact of the matter is because they have removed the hoods we now know what we have to deal with for the years ahead. I for one am quite happy that they have revealed themselves so that we can move on and laugh out loud at how “stupid” they really are. The more reasoned majority must remain vigilant and always dispute the lies and distortions coming from the extremist right so that we can move forward and leave 1955 behind for good.

By framing such invective as the product of card-carrying white supremacists (“white hoods”) from the past (“leave 1955 behind”), a critical form of intra-white othering is accomplished. While Birtherism may not stand as a fringe *social movement*, the framing of Birther *rhetoric* as racially marginal thus extricates the white mainstream. That is, these comments serve as potent symbolic boundaries that labor to reify the nation into “good” and “bad” whites (Hughey 2010a) whereby the former stands as a racially neutral and moral national mainstream while the latter seems to represent a racist periphery.

Just Ignore Them

Many saw Birther arguments and media attention as together responsible for unearthing the body of racism buried long ago: “It is sad that some people in this country can not leave our country’s dark past behind us and move on into the 21st century where we should all get along with one another.” Another comment from 15 December 2010 reads: “[...] can we please stop giving these birthers coverage? They are ridiculous loons who only get some modicum of power and support because the media continues to cover them.” Such storylines posit that discussing racial issues in public forums like the NYT and WSJ represent the linchpin of racial animosity. These comments advance the notion that either ignoring the Birthers or refusing to discuss the racist arguments of Birtherism are more important than addressing the implications of this rhetoric as they relate to extant racism and racial inequality.

Message vs. Method

Despite an avid discourse that questioned the legitimacy of Birtherism, many of the supposed critiques actually supported the movement. A post from 2 August 2009 exemplifies this phenomenon:

Rich makes fun of the “birthers,” a right-wing fringe group that demands to see Obama's birth-certificate. While many conservatives including myself view this as a

pointless and silly crusade, it does represent a fact about Obama that many conservatives are uncomfortable about—the shocking lack of knowledge about most of Obama’s past. Several articles recently have pointed out that there are blaring lies in Obama’s autobiographies, such as the details of his first job after college, and a lack of information about his time both during and after college (no grades, papers, details of courses, etc.). When most presidents [sic] entire lives are combed, there is still very little known about Obama, despite two autobiographies and this is disconcerting to some. While there is no doubt in my mind that Obama was born in America, why has he refused to show his birth certificate (the certificate of birth given by the state of hawaii [sic] is not actually a birth certificate and leaves out many details). So there are legitimate reasons for many American citizens to demand more information.

These narratives shun the Birthers (which many across the political spectrum decry as “fringe,” “ignorant,” and “crazy”) while they defend their logic. Such rhetoric then shifts the discussion away from the stigma of Birtherism as a social movement while elevating its logic to a position of racially neutral rationality. Such narratives then open up a public space for those uncomfortable with the Obama presidency. With this discourse in the public eye, one can then more easily activate the debunked notion that Obama is not a citizen, that his background was not sufficiently vetted (Obama’s background, along with John McCain’s, was scrutinized by Congressional inquiry), and that he is a dangerous mystery in terms of his national allegiance, religious beliefs, and cultural values.

Racism is Natural

Birtherism was also marginalized through the discursive tactic of naturalizing racism as an inevitable and immutable characteristic of human behavior. Accordingly, comments both critical and supportive of Birtherism assumed that racial distrust of the first black president was a little more than a natural or biological reaction. A comment from 1 August 2009 reads:

[...] our country contains a staggering number of people who are narrow, superstitious, fearful, and just medieval in their mindset. That we are rich and have free access to the world’s best science and journalism seems to make no difference. The frontal cortex puts up a valiant fight, but it bows to the lizard brain, here just as much as anywhere.

Another comment from 15 December 2010 reads:

The fact is, the link between father and son in Obama's case is different from that of any other president. And odd. Given the symbolic role of president as Father of the country, race and religion are psychological realities inherent in the situation. If his birth credentials were not questionable, perhaps these differences could be absorbed by the spongy fabric of American good will.

By refraining from a whole-scale critique of Birtherism as a reflection of historically entrenched and now mundane racism, the fundamental goodness and racial-neutrality of the nation remains intact. This narrative reveals the continued conflation of appropriate and ideal performances of US citizenship with that of an ideal white American that rises above either “petty” or “fringe” matters of racial identity, racial inequality, and racism.

IV. [Not] Playing the Race Card

A dominant narrative in the NYT and WSJ comments highlights the notion that race has nothing to do with Birtherism. This type of comment narrates Birtherism as indicative of a

post-racial world and racially-neutral political strategy. At other times, the narrative shunned any connection to racism with the rationale that Birther supporters “have black friends” or presented the argument that Obama’s mixed racial heritage shields him from racism.

A Post-Racial World

Many of the comments attacked the notion that race holds meaningful significance in modern society. A 29 April 2011 comment reads, “This is beyond stupid, they think EVERYBODY BE RACIST [sic] OMG [Oh My God]. Grow a pair or get out. Seriously, blacks are more racist than whites are now. And dont [sic] even get me started on the hispanics [sic].” This comment asserts that claims of racism lack in quintessential masculinity (“grow a pair”) and instruct those people to either love the country or leave it (“get out”). In using such gendered and nationalist language, racism magically reappears as the providence of feminized and weakened nonwhites (“blacks” and “hispanics”) who wield racial animus in greater frequency than whites. One comment from 29 April 2011 reveals:

People in this ethnic group [African American] always cry Racism when people disagree with them or don’t immediately bow to their demands. People are tired of hearing their excuses and not taking responsibility for themselves so their complaints of Racism are no longer seen as valid and they are ignored. . Ibelieve [sic] that many of O’Bama’s [sic] appointments and decisions are based solely on Race. But, I don’t agree that he should have had to provide his “Birth Certificate” to show he is an American. I believe it was necessary for him personally since to this point his leadership is questionable at best. His Leadership has done great harm to the United States both at home and Internationally. He has basically destroyed the United States but it will rebound when a New President is elected.

Such statements often recast the significance of race as hurtful only white to people or as bias introduced to otherwise normal and objective reality.

Obama’s Not Black; It’s Not Racism

A repeated storyline concerned how Obama’s mixed racial heritage and identity disqualified him receiving racism. In this vein, only “authentic” blacks receive racism. As one 22 April 2011 comment read:

To all posters trying to make this about race: President Barack Hussein Obama, Jr, has a WHITE mother and an AFRICAN (black) father!! That makes him, mulatto, biracial, half black-half white, mixed race. Therefore he is NOT African American, because if he is, every poster with a WHITE mother is African American. I have two BLACK parents. What does that make me!!

This claim was repeated in a variety of ways. For one commenter, Obama’s mixed racial heritage meant that racism had nothing to do with the questioning of Obama’s citizenship while it also meant he is not a “true black man”:

This has nothing to do with racism. (Those who are losing the argument usually resort to namecalling [sic], i.e. racist) Why should I believe a pathological liar who can’t seem to tell the truth at any time when he says he was born in Hawaii? His policies and his dithering on foreign policy make him a sorry president. It has nothing to do with his skin color. I will be voting for Herman Cain in the primaries, a true black man, and

one who has experience in business and understands it, unlike the current resident of the White House. (22 April 2011)

For many, the metric for measuring racism and racial hostility remains tethered to the racial “authenticity” of the recipient.

“Some of My Best Friends are Black!”

In rather predictable fashion, many comments showcased blatant racism while denying any racism due to a friend that is black. For example, a 22 April 2011 comment reads:

I keep hearing all these charges of “racism” despite no evidence. The fact that his birth is being questioned at all is selected as prima facia [sic] proof. It is not, but there’s no convincing the already convinced. [...] it isn’t because I’m a racist. My best friend is black and even voted for the man, something we disagree about, but not something that causes him to accuse me of racism.

Another comment underlines the strategy by which the questioning of Obama’s citizenship was rationalized as racially-neutral, while insinuations that it might carry racist undertones were themselves deemed both racist and as the product of overly-sensitive blacks:

Sadly the most racist people I have ever seen have been black people. I am currently dating a mix exactly like Obama. Her Grandparents once they found out I was white stoped [sic] talking to her. She was now one of “Thoes “ [sic] women. IF you go looking for a racial componet [sic] anything you might want to ask yourself ... Why do I go straight to race? More then likey [sic] the answer is you are a closet racist. (29 April 2011)

Claims of inter-racial friendship and camaraderie supposedly insulate the wielder from the charge that they are “racist,” because a “racist” would never possess inter-racial affinities (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Hughey 2011).

Conclusion and Implications: Whiteness as Crisis

By flocking to the commentary fields of flagship newspapers, people collectively contest and arrest the contradictory meanings and ambiguities of race in stable and seductive narratives. Such public discourse refines how people decide who belongs (and who does not) within their imagined racial and civic community. Despite the Obama administration’s display of legal birth documentation and the defeat of lawsuits that questioned his presidential legitimacy, NYT and WSJ comments reveal that Obama’s belonging is far from settled. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2011, 3) clarifies:

Citizenship is not just a matter of formal legal status; it is a matter of belonging, which requires recognition by other members of the community. Community members participate in drawing the boundaries of citizenship and defining who is entitled to civil, political, and social rights by granting or withholding recognition.

But this is only half the story. These comments not only center on Obama’s birth and belonging, but contest and construct the historically robust connection between ideal whiteness and authentic citizenship. Given the challenges to white dominance since the Civil Rights Movement, many whites express fear of a world in which their dominion over

full citizenship rights is vociferously challenged. Hence, some argue that whiteness is in a present state of “crisis” (Gallagher 1995; Winant 2004). I contend that whiteness is not so much *in* a temporal crisis but is constructed *as* an ontological crisis. My semantic shift is subtle but no less important. Narratives of belonging cultivate a particular form of white identity that is an ideal citizen and essentially superior, while simultaneously under unfair attack and criticism. Expressions of white rebarbative venom over Obama are the latest manifestation of an identity constructed *as* crisis—whiteness is unable to live up to the extraordinary claims of superiority made on its behalf (Bonnett 2000, 39). The realization of whiteness-cum-crisis invites several considerations regarding race and citizenship.

First, these narratives provide a glimpse into how a specific ideal type of “hegemonic whiteness” (Hughey 2010a) aligns with authentic citizenship. This ideal may become reified through narrative practices that emphasize inter-racial boundaries of whites versus potent nonwhite symbols (e.g.: Obama) and intra-racial white distinctions of proper and deficient forms of whiteness. These boundaries help to create and/or maintain white racial cohesion in two main ways: “(1) through positioning those marked as ‘white’ as essentially different from and superior to those marked as ‘non-white’, and (2) through marginalizing practices of ‘being white’ that fail to exemplify dominant ideals” (Hughey 2010a, 1290). Such meaning-making processes are neither abstract ideals that float above actors’ heads nor functionalist mechanisms that operate within the black box of the mind to ensure white racial cohesion. Rather, these boundaries operate as socially shared rules that constitute a system of racial classification that help guide the pursuit of interests, the formation of identities, and the drama of interaction. The above Birther narratives indicate how moral concepts synthesize with inter- and intra-racial distinctions to mark hard work, honesty, and responsibility (and ultimately authentic citizenship) as the exclusive and essentialist domain of certain racialized factions. These boundaries are the product of different political, cultural, and social traditions that created whiteness as an ongoing crisis. Today, whiteness *qua* true US citizenship is reforming and realigning—both in terms of recent legal maneuvers and the informal sense of belonging (Glenn 2011)—with Nativist, xenophobic, Christian, embattled working-class, and hyper-masculine practices that stake claim to objectivity, morality, and truth.

Second, the politicized nature of Birther discourse, which now lurks in the background of Obama’s run for re-election, signals the rise of a Second Southern Strategy. During the 2008 primary and general election, there was already a strong rejection of Obama in counties (concentrated in the South) with high proportions of “unhyphenated Americans”—whites who claim no foreign ethnic ancestry and identify simply as “American” (Arbour and Teigen 2011). Given strong white racial aversion to Obama and African Americans in the South and battleground states in the Midwest, many districts are primed to respond to the race-baiting and “othering” characterized by Birtherism and its cousin, the Tea Party.⁹

Third, narratives of belonging reveal the paradoxical character of race. Anthropologist John Hartigan, Jr. (2010: 191) wrote that, “in the wake of Obama’s victory ... the significance of race is open-ended and changing.” While this is certainly true of racial discourse, we must not de-couple the links between talk and identity formation, interactional scripts, and institutional reproduction. While racial meanings can be made and deployed differently in varied contexts (Hartigan 2010; Eliasoph 1999), the ways in which supposedly different politicized narratives can paradoxically rationalize the same forms of discrimination and

⁹ Five of the six Tea Party factions (1776 Tea Party [more commonly known as “TeaParty.org”], Tea Party Nation, Tea Party Patriots, ResistNet, and Tea Party Express) have Birthers in their leadership. See Burghart and Zeskind (2010, 10).

material inequality (Hughey 2012; 2011) cautions us to temper the supposed open-ended significance of racial discourse.

Acknowledgements The author gratefully acknowledges the discerning feedback from the anonymous reviewers, the insightful guidance of guest editors Ben Carrington and Simone Browne, editor David Smilde, and comments on an earlier draft by Jessie Daniels. I dedicate this article to the life and legacy of Derrick Bell (1930–2011).

References

- Arbour, Brian K., and Jeremy M. Teigen. 2011. Barack Obama's 'American' problem; Unhyped Americans in the 2008 Elections. *Social Science Quarterly* 92(3): 563–587.
- Archibold, Randal C. 23 April 2010. "Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration." *The New York Times*. <http://www.nationalreview.com/campaign-spot/9490/obama-could-debunk-some-rumors-releasing-his-birth-certificate>. Accessed 27 September 2011
- Barraclough, Laura. 2011. *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural landscapes, urban development, and white privilege*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2010. *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*, 3rd ed. Landham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, and Tyrone A. Forman. 2000. I am not a racist, but...: Mapping white college students' racial ideology in the USA. *Discourse & Society* 11: 50–85.
- Bonnett, Alastair. 2000. Whiteness in crisis. *History Today* 50(12): 38–43.
- Burghart, Devin, and Leonard Zeskind. 2010. *Tea party nationalism: A critical examination of the tea party movement and the size, scope, and focus of its national factions*. Kansas City: Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights.
- Carrington, Ben. 2009. Fear of a black president. *Soundings* 43: 114–124.
- Daniels, Jessie. 2008. Race, civil rights and hate speech in the digital era. In *Learning race and ethnicity*, ed. A. Everett, 129–154. Cambridge: MIT.
- Daniels, Jessie. 2009a. *Cyber racism: White supremacy online and the new attack on civil rights*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Daniels, Jessie. 2009b. Cloaked websites: Propaganda, cyber-racism, and epistemology in the digital era. *New Media & Society* 11(5): 659–683.
- Daniels, Jessie (Forthcoming 2012). Race and racism in internet studies. *New Media and Society*.
- Dasgupta, Nilanjana, and Kumar Yogeswaran. 2011. Obama-nation? Implicit beliefs about american nationality and the possibility of redefining who counts as 'Truly' American. In *The Obamas and a (Post) racial America?* ed. G.S. Parks and M.W. Hughey, 72–90. New York: Oxford University Press.
- DeVault, Marjorie L. 2006. Introduction: What is institutional ethnography? *Social Problems* 53(3): 294–298.
- Devos, Thierry, Debbie S. Ma, and Travis Gaffud. 2008. *Is Barack Obama American enough to be the next President? The role of ethnicity and national identity in American politics*. Albuquerque: Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1976 [1935]. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*. Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson.
- Eliasoph, Nina. 1999. 'Everyday Racism' in a culture of political avoidance: Civil society, speech, and taboo. *Social Problems* 46(4): 479–502.
- Eliasoph, Nina, and Paul Lichterman. 2003. Culture in interaction. *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 735–794.
- Ewick, Patricia, and Susan Silbey. 2003. Narrating social structure: Stories of resistance to legal authority. *American Journal of Sociology* 108(6): 1328–72.
- Fanon, Frantz. 2008 [1967]. *Black skin, white masks*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Feagin, Joe R. 2010. *The white racial frame: Centuries of racial framing and counter-framing*. New York: Routledge.
- Feldman, Glenn. 2004. *The disfranchisement myth: Poor whites and suffrage restriction in Alabama*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Foner, Eric. 1988. *Reconstruction: America's unfinished revolution, 1863–1877*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Frankenburg, Ruth. 1993. *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Gallagher, Charles A. 1995. White reconstruction in the university. *Socialist Review* 24(1–2): 165–187.
- Geraghty, Jim. 9 June 2008. Obama could debunk some rumors by releasing his birth certificate. The Campaign Spot, *National Review Online*. <http://www.nationalreview.com/campaign-spot/9490/obama-could-debunk-some-rumors-releasing-his-birth-certificate>. Accessed 29 May 2011.
- Gerteis, Joseph. 2002. The possession of civic virtue: Movement narratives of race and class in the knights of labor. *American Journal of Sociology* 108(3): 580–615.
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2011. Constructing citizenship: Exclusion, subordination, and resistance. *American Sociological Review* 76(1): 1–24.
- Glover, Karen S. 2009. *Racial profiling: Research, racism, and resistance*. Landham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Goldberg, David Theo. 1993. *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Goldfield, Michael. 1997. *The color of politics: Race and the mainspring of American politics*. New York: New.
- Goodman, Simon, and Shani Burke. 2010. ‘Oh You Don’t Want Asylum Seekers, Oh You’re Just Racist’: A discursive analysis of discussions about whether it’s racist to oppose asylum seekers. *Discourse & Society* 21(3): 325–40.
- Harris, C. 1993. Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review* 106(8): 1707–91.
- Haney-López, Ian. 2006. *White by law: The legal construction of race*. New York: New York University Press.
- Harris Interactive. 23 March 2010. ‘Wingnuts’ and President Obama. *The Harris Poll #42*. <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/NewsRoom/HarrisPolls/tabid/447/ctl/ReadCustom%20Default/mid/1508/ArticleId/223/Default.aspx>. Accessed 31 May 2011.
- Hartigan Jr., John. 2010. *What can you say? America’s national conversation on race*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hughey, Matthew W. 2008. Virtual (Br)others and (Re)sisters: Authentic black fraternity and sorority identity on the internet. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 37(5): 528–560.
- Hughey, Matthew W. 2010a. The (Dis)similarities of white racial identities: The conceptual framework of ‘Hegemonic Whiteness’. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33(8): 1289–1309.
- Hughey, Matthew W. 2010b. The white savior film and reviewers’ reception. *Symbolic Interaction* 33(3): 475–496.
- Hughey, Matthew W. 2011. Backstage discourse and the reproduction of white masculinities. *The Sociological Quarterly* 52: 132–153.
- Hughey, Matthew W. 2012. *White bound: Nationalists, antiracists, and the shared meanings of race*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ignatiev, Noel. 1995. *How the Irish became white*. New York: Routledge.
- Izadi, Foad, and Hakimeh Saghaie-Biria. 2007. A discourse analysis of elite American newspaper editorials: The case of Iran’s nuclear program. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31(2): 140–165.
- Kolko, Beth, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman. 2000. *Race in cyberspace*. New York: Routledge.
- Lipsitz, George. 1998. *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Melican, D.B., and T.L. Dixon. 2008. News on the net: Credibility, selective exposure, and racial prejudice. *Communication Research* 35(2): 151–168.
- Meyers, M. 2004. Crack mothers in the news: A narrative of paternalistic racism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 28(3): 194–216.
- Mills, Charles W. 1993. White supremacy as sociopolitical system: A philosophical perspective. In *White out: The continuing significance of racism*, ed. A. Doane and E. Bonilla-Silva, 35–48. New York: Routledge.
- Mills, Charles W. 1997. *The racial contract*. IthacaNY: Cornell University Press.
- Mitchelstein, E., and P.J. Boczkowski. 2010. Online news consumption research: An assessment of past work and an agenda for the future. *New Media and Society* 12: 1085–1102.
- Myers, Kristen A. 2005. *Racetalk: Racism hiding in plain sight*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Myers, Kristen A., and Passion Williamson. 2001. Race talk: The perpetuation of racism through private discourse. *Race and Society* 4(1): 3–26.
- Oboler, Suzanne. 2006. ‘It Must Be a Fake!’ racial ideologies, identities, and the question of rights. In *Race and ethnicity in society: The changing landscape*, ed. E. Higginbotham and M.L. Andersen, 167–173. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Page, Susan. 26 April 2011. Poll: What kind of president would Donald Trump make? *USA Today*. <http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/2011-04-25-trump-president-poll.htm>. Accessed 31 May 2011.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. 2010. *The history of white people*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Parks, Gregory S., and Matthew W. Hughey. 2010. *12 angry men: True stories of being a black man in America today*. New York, NY: The New Press.

- Patterson, Orlando. 1982. *Slavery and social death; a comparative study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Perrin, Andrew. 2006. *Citizen speak: The democratic imagination in American life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Perry, Pamela. 2002. *Shades of white: White kids and racial identities in high school*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Picca, Lisa H., and Joe R. Feagin. 2007. *Two-faced racism: Whites in the backstage and the frontstage*. New York: Routledge.
- Pollock, Mica. 2004. *Colormute: Race talk dilemmas in an American school*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Porter, S., M. Ferguson, R. Hassin, and E. Balctetis. 2010 *Unintended American bias: American cues implicitly increase prejudice*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Putnam, Robert. 1995. Bowling alone. *Journal of Democracy* 6(1): 65–78.
- Riggs, Damien W., and Martha Augoustinos. 2004. Projecting threat: Managing subjective investments in whiteness. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 9: 219–36.
- Smith, Dorothy. 2005. *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people*. Toronto: AltaMira.
- Somers, Margaret R., and Gloria D. Gibson. 1994. Reclaiming the Epistemological ‘Other’: Narrative and the social constitution of identity. In *Social theory and the politics of identity*, ed. C. Calhoun, 37–99. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Steinfeldt, Jesse A., Brad D. Foltz, Jennifer K. Kaladow, Tracy N. Carlson, Louis A. Pagano Jr., Emily Benton, and Clint M. Steinfeldt. 2010. Racism in the electronic age: Role of online forums in expressing racial attitudes about American Indians. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 16(3): 362–371.
- Stoker, Kevin. 1995. Existential objectivity: Freeing journalists to be ethical. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 10: 5–22.
- Thrush, Glenn. 30 July 2009. 58 percent of GOP not sure/doubt Obama born in US. *Politico.com*. http://www.politico.com/blogs/glennthrush/0709/58_of_GOP_not_suredont_believe_Obama_born_in_US.html. Accessed 21 May 2011.
- Trump, Donald. 27 April 2011. Donald Trump to Release Financial, Tax information at the ‘Appropriate Time’. ABC News. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trump-gee-obama-birth-certificate-release/story?id=13465438>. Accessed 28 April 2011.
- Trump, Donald. 7 April 2011. Meredith Vieira Interviews Donald Trump on Today. *News On News*. <http://www.newsonnews.net/nbc/8082-meredith-vieira-interviews-donald-trump-on-today.html>. Accessed on 2 June 2011.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. 1992. Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse & Society* 3(1): 87–118.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. 1993. *Elite discourse and racism*. London: Sage.
- Washington, Jesse. 26 September 2010. Racist Comments Pose Quandry for Mainstream Sites. <http://www.thenewstribune.com/2010/09/26/1356803/racist-comments-pose-quandary.html>. Accessed 21 June 2011.
- Weigel, David. 31 September 2009. How Many Southern Whites Believe Obama Was Born in America? *The Washington Independent*. <http://washingtonindependent.com/53396/how-many-southern-whites-believe-obama-was-born-in-america>. Accessed 31 May 2011.
- Winant, Howard. 2004. Behind blue eyes: Whiteness and contemporary U.S. racial politics. In *Off white: Readings on power, privilege, and resistance*, 2nd ed, ed. M. Fine, L. Weis, L.P. Pruitt, and A. Burns, 3–16. New York: Routledge.
- Zapanta, Victor. 5 Septemeber 2009. Rep. Jean Schmidt Tells Birther: ‘I Agree With You.’ *Think Progress*. <http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2009/09/08/59651/jean-schmidt-birther/>. Accessed 31 May 2011.

Matthew W. Hughey is Assistant Professor of Sociology and affiliate member of African American Studies and Gender Studies at Mississippi State University. He specializes in the study of racialized identities, organizations, and media representations. He is the author of the forthcoming *White Bound: Nationalists, Antiracists, and the Shared Meanings of Race* (Stanford University Press), is co-editor of *The Obamas and a (Post) Racial America?* (Oxford University Press, 2011), *Black Greek-Letter Organizations, 2.0* (University Press of Mississippi, 2011) and *12 Angry Men: True Stories of Being a Black Man in America Today* (The New Press, 2010). His recent research has appeared in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Social Problems*, *Symbolic Interaction*, and the *Sociological Quarterly*.

Copyright of Qualitative Sociology is the property of Springer Science & Business Media B.V. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.