



Crafting a Sense of Unity:

Interest Convergence in Oklahoma City Public Schools

Paul D.C. Bones Texas Woman's University

Interest convergence occurs when elites band with minority members to create broad coalitions brought together to achieve a common goal. However, in these instances, it is often the elites who ultimately profit while real stakeholders see little change. Critical Race Theory suggests that white elites use the mass media to shape discourse on important issues to achieve their goals. This descriptive discourse analysis examines how elites in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, one of the most segregated school systems in the United States employed agenda setting and framing to essentially convince whites to support a bond measure aimed at improving a segregated, inner city school. Drawing on articles from *The Daily Oklahoman*, the city's only major newspaper, I find that support for the plan was framed in a message of unity while challenges were primarily framed as tax avoidance. Race was largely kept out of the debate, but was occasionally systematically employed to silence opposition to the measure. The lack of racial discourse reflects colourblind discourse and represents a form of framing that aided elites in passing a measure that would raise Oklahoma City's national profile.

Keywords: critical race theory, segregation, colourblind racism

Introduction

What happens when white elites support a program that benefits minorities, but ultimately maintains the status quo? Critical race theory (CRT) asserts that civil rights struggles only end in victory if whites are the primary beneficiaries of such projects. This case study examines how the elites shape public opinion in order to achieve their own ends without upsetting racial hegemony. In order to explore how white interests are presented to the general public, I analyse agenda setting and framing techniques by elites in the case of MAPS for Kids (KIDS), a \$700 million capital improvement initiative in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA. *The Daily Oklahoman*, Oklahoma City's only major newspaper was selected for content analysis, paying attention to which issues were left out of the debate surrounding a historic reinvestment in a failing school system and how challenges to this plan were presented.

Oklahoma City serves as an important setting to study racial issues because it was recognised as the most segregated school district in the United States (Farley & Taeuber, 1974), and was also responsible for a key Supreme Court case that signaled the beginning of permissiveness towards resegregation (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Agenda setting powers refer to the ability of an institution to determine what voices are heard in public debates, whereas framing describes how elites present ideas to the general public (McMa-

hon & Chow-White, 2011). KIDS is an interesting case study because political, business, and media elites all favoured the projects, but were faced with the challenge of selling a policy that did not directly benefit middle- or lower-class whites. Elites had to carefully plan their strategy in order to ensure support for KIDS without challenging racial hegemony, often minimising the impact of race through colourblind rhetoric (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). What follows is a descriptive case study, utilising content analysis, of how essentially white elites sold affluent whites on a policy that on the face benefited minorities of colour, but ultimately served elite interests. I focus on three key themes expressed in *The Daily Oklahoman*: unity and colourblindness, use of taxation as a means of opposition, and expression of natural differences between groups as a justification for segregation.

Background

CRT is a perspective that challenges the view that race and racism as characteristics of the individual (Ladson-Billings, 1998). An offshoot of critical legal studies, CRT asserts that race is a central organising principal of American life, and that racism is inherently a product of American culture (Gillborn, 2006). CRT provides three mechanisms for challenging racial hegemony in the United States. First, CRT advocates the use of experiential knowledge to counteract the dominant discourse surrounding race. Eliasoph (1999) states that racism is practiced everyday through how we express shared social meaning about race, and that when we interact with others we are essentially reproducing dominant values associated with racial categories.

Second, CRT stresses the need to examine who benefits the most from race-centred legislation. Bell (1980) coined the term 'interest convergence' to explain why civil rights legislation is widely supported in a racist society. The author contends that whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation for decades. For example, the primary beneficiaries of affirmative action have been white women, not racial and ethnic minorities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Interest convergence

also takes place in the education system, as districts create and fund magnet schools in order to keep whites (and their parent's property taxes) in central city systems (Saporito, 2003). Often the passage of what appears to be legislation aimed at aiding disadvantaged groups is really a matter of white approval and desire. CRT stresses the need to examine how policies that are framed as serving racial minorities are symbolic in nature.

Third, CRT calls for an examination of how racial identity varies across groups, emphasising the lack of racial salience for whites. Whites often do not recognise their own racial identity and only assert an ethnic identity in an optional, symbolic manner (Doane, 1997). Consequently, white identity is synonymous with American identity, as U.S. culture is structured around whiteness. This disconnect from racialisation obscures the role of white privilege and is reflected in colourblind racist ideology (Parker, 1998; Ware, 1996). Bonilla-Silva (2010) outlined four frames of colourblind racial discourse: abstract liberalism – endorsing anti-racist beliefs but not practices that reduce racism, minimisation – suggesting racism is a thing of the past and there are fewer racists now than there were before, naturalisation – contending that segregation is a natural process that should be respected, and cultural racism – using codewords such as 'discipline' to espouse racist ideologies that focus not on skin colour, but on perceived cultural differences. Major policies such as education and taxation are often framed in colourblind terms, which minimise racial discourse but maintain racial systems like segregation.

The Role of Media in Agenda Setting and Framing

Overall, CRT is based on the premise that racial discourse in America reflects white hegemony, as serious challenges to structural racism are minimised while narratives encouraging race as an individual factor are presented by cultural elites. When it comes to topics such as educational segregation, political arguments are selected and framed according to what benefits elites. Through the mass media, elites exercise control

over the dominant discourse (Chouliaraki, 2000). News media owners are uniquely situated in networks of political and business power, often serving as gatekeepers to knowledge that defines how the public perceives social issues (Gray, 1987). Consequently, when we read a news story we must understand that what we would like to think of as objective reporting is shaped by 1) the views of the company owners, 2) the constrained voice of workers who want to remain employed by their company, and 3) the profit motive of capitalism. Journalism then can be seen as a powerful source of information, but something that also reflects the economic reality of the narrator. This shapes news in two ways. First, journalists rarely write anything that contradicts owners or would upset the general readership. Second, because we live in a culture based on shared ideology, news reports espouse the dominant modes of thinking on prominent issues, reinforcing and reifying the status quo (McMahon & Chow-White, 2011). News media then has the ability to reflect prominent cultural values in an easily observable way that can be deconstructed and examined.

Because the mass media is controlled by elites and regulates the presentation of social messages, the news can be seen as a tool of hegemony that perpetuates racism through agenda setting and framing of important topics (van Dijk, 2009). Agenda setting refers to the ability of an institution (or individual) to select what issues reach the public sphere (Lukes, 1974; Lee & Maslog, 2006). Simply selecting which voices are heard and which are silenced affects public opinion (Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver et al., 2009). What is not discussed in the news then becomes as important as what is allowed to become salient. McMahon and Chow-White (2011) contend that the presentation of race in the media has become a kind of 'cold war,' as the major points of contention in the struggle for racial equality are not made salient in news stories. Instead of focusing on structural issues, race and racism are presented as natural phenomena (van Dijk, 2009). Even when voices are not silenced, the media frames issues in such a way as to influence how the public perceives a topic (Kuypers, 2002). The way an issue is framed has a direct impact on how the public understands what is supposed to be an objec-

tive view of an issue (Jiwani, 2006; Entman & Pellicano, 2009). In order to gain a more comprehensive view of major policy initiatives, we need to consider how both agenda setting and framing are utilised to shape public opinion.

Oklahoma as a Setting

Oklahoma City serves as key site in the struggle to desegregate public schools, and to ultimately re-segregate them. Oklahoma City (along with Tulsa) had the most segregated public elementary schools out of 60 school districts surveyed in 1967-1968 (Farley & Taeuber, 1974). The educational segregation index score for the city was 97 (out of a possible 100, with a Southern region sample mean segregation score of 79) despite the fact that the residential segregation score was 'only' 87 (sample mean 91). Oklahoma City's extreme level of school segregation led to a federal district court injunction in 1972 ordering a busing plan to achieve integration. According to court records, after only five years, the federal court withdrew its enforcement after the Board claimed that unitary status had been achieved. The next two decades were characterised by attempts to either restore or fully remove the federally mandated 'Finger Plan.'

In 1971, the Oklahoma City Public School System served approximately 70,000 students, 50,000 of which were white (OKCPS, 2006). Lackmeyer, McManus, and Money (1999) describe how in the wake of the 1972 federal district court decision, Oklahoma City residents disinvested in their public education system. Immediately following the federal district court's decision, 8,000 students fled the district. White flight continued through the 1990s, resulting in a city where only half of all resident students attend schools in their city. At the same time, Oklahoma City residents pulled their financial support from city schools. In the 1960s, 17 new schools were built in Oklahoma City. No new schools were built in the district until after 2000. In the surrounding suburbs of Edmond, Midwest City, Del City, and Putnam City, 105 bond issues were passed from 1970-1999. Conversely, Oklahoma City did not even propose a bond

issue in the 1970s and only approved four of the ten bonds proposed since 1980. While school bonds were failing on the ballot, infrastructure improvements for suburban areas of Oklahoma City had little trouble passing, such as a 1989 provision to build new fire stations to decrease response times to the outer limits of the city. Lackmeyer and associates draw a clear connection between white flight and urban decay, stating that the growth in suburban communities came at the expense of Oklahoma City. They also contend that the disinvestment in city schools was the product of anger at being forced to integrate.

The Lackmeyer article was published at a time when Oklahoma City was prioritising urban renewal in order to increase economic growth. Following the oil bust of the 1980s, the city was left with a need for industrial diversification and the infrastructure to re-frame Oklahoma City as a place that was open for business. The Metro Area Projects (MAPS), proposed in the early 1990's and passed in 1993, renovated the dilapidated downtown area and included the construction of a San Antonio-style Riverwalk area, convention center renovations, a new baseball park, the subsidisation of a Bass Pro Shop, and other investments in the downtown area (Estus, 2003). While these projects certainly improved Oklahoma City's business and cultural center, the lack of a quality public education system was seen as limiting investment in Oklahoma's future. Bond issues were proposed in 1999 and 2000, both of which had a majority, but not the required 60% supermajority established in 1971. Frustrated with voter refusal to invest in the public school system, Mayor Kirk Humphreys pushed through new legislation that enabled the use sales tax to fund education bonds (Greiner, 2001), culminating in a vote for KIDS in 2001. This bond is best understood as an example of interest convergence because although racial and ethnic minorities would benefit from new schools, the larger goal of the project was to encourage economic growth for elites.

The KIDS plan called for a half cent sales tax for one year, followed by six years of a one cent tax increase, and a \$180 million bond to fund three new high schools (Watson, 2001a). The overall goal of the project was to place every single student in a new or

renovated school by 2009. Of the roughly \$700 million generated by KIDS, \$469 million was earmarked for new school construction and renovation, \$52 million for new technology such as computers and networking advancements, and \$9 million to replace the district's rundown busses. As a result, 24 schools were scheduled to be closed, 7 new schools were scheduled to be constructed, and many elementary and middle schools would be consolidated into large K-8 schools. Additionally, 23 surrounding suburban districts that overlap with Oklahoma City boundaries were eligible to receive up to 30% of the sales tax generated by the provision, depending on the number of Oklahoma City residents that attended their schools. Both measures passed, with Oklahoma City public school district residents supporting the bond issue with a 61% majority and Oklahoma City and surrounding suburban votes approving of the sale tax increase with a 60.5% majority (Watson & Perry, 2001). The north side of Oklahoma City (which has a higher concentration of African Americans) supported the bond issue, while the south side (with the exception of one newly developed area and a precinct that is predominantly Hispanic) overwhelmingly voted against the bond.

KIDS was a monumental undertaking, in terms of the scope of the project and the effort required to sell a major tax expenditure in the most red of states. As outlined above, the city had outright refused to fund schools ever since being forced to desegregate, resulting in a broken school system that served only half of the city residents. KIDS is noteworthy because elites had to craft a narrative that would reverse their stance on race, segregation, and public education while not losing legitimacy in the public eye. Using the only major newspaper, which traditionally leans right, to set the agenda in hopes of crafting a sense of unity was key to the project's success.

Method

Drawing on over 1,000 articles from *The Daily Oklahoman*, the city's primary newspaper, I reconstruct the events surrounding KIDS and how this attempt to rebuild Oklahoma City's public school system was

framed. Coding was completely inductive, but with a focus on how race was or was not part of the general discussion of KIDS. It should also be noted that *The Daily Oklahoman* unofficially supported the KIDS plan from the beginning, and endorsed the measure before Oklahomans voted it (Unknown, 2001a). This means that the content presented likely reflects the paper's approval in its journalistic reports, editorials, and selection of which letters from the public were published. Additionally, most of the articles that mention KIDS either restated the main goals of the project or provide an update on the project, which in-and-of-itself demonstrates the paper's commitment to the bond. Reporting on the leadup to the election was primarily handled by one author, Christy Watson. This creates consistency and unity in the messages presented about the project.

Results

Unity and Colorblind Rhetoric

The KIDS plan drew support primarily from business leaders and politicians. The Urban League, *The Daily Oklahoman*, Mayor Humphreys, Russell Perry (arguably Oklahoma City's most prominent Black entrepreneur), and the CEO of Sonic Restaurants all voiced their support for KIDS. Interestingly, the NAACP did not support the plan, but stated that, unlike with previous school bond issues, they would not oppose the measure (Watson, 2001b). Because business interests were the primary support for KIDS, the plan was first framed as part of an economic development agenda. Mayor Humphreys stated that new school buildings would provide 'curb appeal' that would bring business to the city and return suburban children to the district (Watson, 2001c). *The Daily Oklahoman* frequently included the mayor's vision of a modern school system and cast the plan in a pro-business light, even when the purpose of the article was just to remind voters of the upcoming election. This strategy benefited KIDS in three ways. First, proponents of the bill were able to sell what is typically a 'liberal' issue (education spending) to a 'conservative' (pro-business) constituency. This overlap of political goals enabled a broad coalition to form in support of

the measure. Second, this approach suggested that KIDS would benefit all Oklahoma City (and suburban) residents. A sense of unity was necessary to pass what could easily have been seen as a measure that would only affect inner city children, most of which are lower income and minority. Third, a pro-growth frame, and support by the city's only major newspaper, prevented defining the issue in purely racial terms. For a city still angry about integration, casting KIDS as a minority measure or segregation remedy would have quickly eroded voter support.

Race was seldom mentioned in official articles dealing with KIDS or in editorials supporting the measure. Although race was not often an overt, salient feature in the debate over KIDS, there are several ways that KIDS supporters used race to frame important issues directly or indirectly. Race was only explicitly utilised by supporters of KIDS when it quelled concern from the public. After African Americans in northeast Oklahoma City protested what they saw as unfair closings of many long-standing schools in their community, *The Daily Oklahoman* ran one of the only pro-KIDS editorials that specifically mentioned race. Betty G. Mason (2001), a resident of Oklahoma City, stated that 'African Americans bore the burden of educational changes during the desegregation years' and that community protestors were making sure the same thing did not happen again. Her message is not one of contention, but urges community members to band together and work towards education reform as a coalition. It should also be noted that Mason describes desegregation as a thing of the past, which reflects a kind of colourblindness that allows for future coalitions rather than addressing past wrongs.

Other examples of how race was utilised as a means of silencing or disregarding dissent came after the passage of KIDS when two separate protests aimed at stopping school closings ahead of schedule emerged. In the face of budget shortfalls and shifting demographics, the district accelerated the scheduled closings of six schools and added one more northern school to the list (Watson, 2003a). However, one southern representative protested this plan by introducing legislation requiring patron approval for school closings in poor neighborhoods. This news was

first reported in an article entitled 'Lawmaker Accused of Bid to Hurt MAPS' (Watson & Money, 2003), which attacked the proposed House bill before even detailing its contents. The article began by identifying Rep. Rebecca Hamilton as the bill's author and quotes her as saying that failure to support her bill would bring 'back busing for minorities.' The following day, Money (2003) provided a full account of the Oklahoma House bill, quoting Hamilton as saying '[a]ttendance at my schools are more than 82 percent minority. It's got a name, but I am not going to say it.' The next sentence stated that '[n]early three-quarters of the district's 38,000 students are minorities.' The report also included a quote from Rep. Leonard Sullivan, part of the opposition to this bill, stating '[y]ou didn't use the word, but your intent was to harass the Oklahoma City School Board into cutting you some slack and so you could impress your voters.' Two weeks later, *The Daily Oklahoman* published a letter by Hamilton explaining that many of her constituents were Spanish speaking, and closing a school in a district experiencing rapid population increases was counter intuitive.

Two patterns stand out from these few articles describing Rep. Hamilton's plan. First, the fact that the first article is titled as 'Lawmaker Accused of Bid to Hurt MAPS' accurately summarise how the staff at *The Daily Oklahoman* felt about the issue and how they intended for their readers to view this issue. Second, one cannot overlook that these articles chastise Rep. Hamilton for invoking the specter of segregation, without actually printing the word itself. While the first article contains a threat made by Hamilton that busing will occur if her bill is not passed, the second includes a quote where Hamilton herself stated that the schools in her district are overwhelmingly minority, but she opts not to use the word 'segregated' to describe this situation. The very next line stated that 75% of the district is minority, as though this was meant to disprove any claims that segregation is occurring. Additionally, it is interesting to note that a lawmaker who opposed her plan also refused to say 'segregation', and characterised her indirect usage of the idea as a way to seek personal glory and essentially pander to minorities. At the same time that Rep.

Hamilton was admonished for advocating in favour of local control of neighbourhood schools on the south side of the city, political and community leaders were also protesting early closings in the north.

Northern protests to school closings were also met with disapproval that invoked racial language. A coalition led by Rep. Opio Toure protested what they saw as policy targeting minorities (Watson, 2003b). Although Rep. Toure eventually signed on with KIDS during the campaign, he advised parents to pull their children from school to demonstrate their disapproval with the planned closures. *The Daily Oklahoman* first published an article (Unknown, 2003) describing the group's stance, before printing what appears to be an authorless editorial criticising the lawmaker. Whereas the original article stated Toure's stance on school closings and articulated his belief that minority children were vulnerable, the editorial was a racially motivated attack on his character. In the latter, Toure was accused of 'play[ing] the race card' and acting as a 'race-baiter' who was only 'interested in exercising control'. Additionally, he was called 'part of the problem' as well as 'a panderer'. This article is interesting for two reasons. First, the fact that there is no given author appears odd, except for the fact that several articles from this time lack such details (perhaps as a result of changes to website formatting at the time). Second, this was one of the rare editorials centered around race. This is actually the second time Rep. Toure has been discussed in racial terms, as Ms. Mason's editorial was in many ways a response to Toure and his constituency. However, whereas the first message was one of racial unity, this clearly is meant to define a challenge to KIDS in racial terms, again painting opposition to the bill as self-interested pandering.

Overall, racial discourse was almost completely absent from the KIDS campaign. Language was left colourblind, simply describing 'children', 'Oklahomans', and 'residents' even when there should have been a clear nod to segregation within the city. Overt racial terminology was reserved for instances when minorities (or minority allies) raised concerns and threatened to derail the campaign. Interestingly, race was also not widely utilised by opponents of the measure.

Race and Taxation

KIDS opposition was less organised and relatively underfunded. Brighter Futures for Families and Children, which promised that KIDS would ‘darken the children’s futures’, formed after five Oklahomans failed in challenging the legality of using sales tax to fund education (Watson, 2001d). Although Brighter Futures and their warning about ‘darkening’ futures could be seen as a dog whistle reference to desegregation, the group’s rationale for opposing KIDS was based solely on taxes. This theme would also appear in many editorials opposing KIDS. Raoul Carubelli (2001) equated taxes to weeds and questioned how senior citizens would cope with the increased financial strain of a 1% sales tax hike. David Whitney (2001) stated that KIDS constituted throwing money at a failed system, and would only cause taxpayers regret. Questions about new taxes arose in almost every editorial opposing KIDS, even those from suburban district members. While many school administrators viewed KIDS as a chance to gain extra revenue for capital improvements to their district, some parents thought the 70/30 split was unfair. Chris Fisher, a parent living in Oklahoma City but with a child in Edmond Public Schools best exemplifies suburban opposition when he stated that KIDS was ‘a redistribution of wealth’ and that he did not want a ‘single penny’ of his money going to Oklahoma City schools (Watson, 2001e). He went on to state that he paid enough in property taxes and thought that the 70/30 split is unfair to suburban families.

It could be argued that taxes may act as a proxy or dog whistle for race-based policies, since Oklahoma City residents starved the education system following desegregation. But, there were several local factors not explicitly centred on race that may have affected the mindset of Oklahoma City residents. The last school bond passed by Oklahoma City prior to the KIDS campaign was supposed to be a relatively simple \$89 million capital improvement plan that included providing air conditioning for all of the city’s schools. In the end, this bond cost the city over \$370 million and was not fully complete by the time KIDS was proposed in 2001 (Watson, 2001c). Additionally, Oklahoma is one of the most conservative states in

the country, and many residents tend to automatically vote against taxes regardless of their intended beneficiary (Newport, 2012). As the result of suburban migration, Oklahoma City had a very low percent of households with school age children. Less than 33% of Oklahoma City homes had children compared to 38% of Edmond homes and 47% of Mustang homes (Watson, 2001f), meaning that the majority of city residents had no direct stake in education funding. David Voelkers, a 77-year-old resident who sent all of his children to Oklahoma City public schools and believed that education is important simply stated his opposition to KIDS as ‘I just don’t like taxes’ (Watson, 2001f). Framing opposition to KIDS on the grounds that it is an unnecessary tax may have reflected a racialised past, but also could reflect a cultural opposition to taxation independent of race.

Only one editorial mentioned segregation. Greg Karnes (2001) connected the deteriorated state of Oklahoma City schools to segregation, but placed the blame for what he describes as a ‘failure to consider the law of unintended consequences’ on the federal judge who ordered integration. He lamented that federal judges did not have ‘some kind of malpractice insurance’ that the district could use to pay for KIDS. This demonstrates how desegregation was portrayed as a failed policy that impacted the district, but white flight was a natural choice resulting from outside intervention, reifying the idea of naturalisation (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Clearly Mr. Karnes did not feel that whites who left the school system shared any responsibility for the steady decline of the district. This was one of the few editorials that specifically connected segregation or race to the KIDS project.

The overall absence of race from discourse is surprising because Oklahoma is not exactly shy about discussing race or about race-baiting tactics in the election process. In 2012, Oklahomans approved a measure banning affirmative action (on race alone, not gender) in government employment, education, and contracting with a 59.2% majority (Allen, 2012). The measure was approved in all but one of Oklahoma’s 77 counties, despite the fact that quota systems have been illegal since the Nixon administration. Additionally, *The Daily Oklahoman* often publishes what

could be described as openly racist letters to the editor, such as an October 8, 2002 collection of letters that included a writer calling the Oklahoma State University president a 'politically correct bigot' for suspending three white students for engaging in a Halloween mock lynching of a student in blackface (Harcourt et al.). The author of the above letter also described diversity training as 'the liberal code word for anti-white racism'. The column also included a letter by William Pittman, Jr. condemning the disclosure of past slave owning practices and asking if 'African-American employees [will be required to] disclose that they might be the descendants of cannibals, headhunters, or witch doctors'. Finally, there was a contention by one resident that opposing KIDS does not make someone racist. Although this collection of letters to the editor was published after the KIDS election, this shows that while race (and racism) are commonly discussed in *The Daily Oklahoman*, they were absent during the debate itself, suggesting that race was intentionally kept out of the KIDS discussion by editors. However, once the bond passed and elites had achieved what they wanted, colourblind racism became more prominent in the narrative.

Colourblindness and Natural Differences

In addition to framing opposition as anti-tax, editorial comments also included vague cultural charges about the need for 'discipline' in schools or equated poor school performance to individual family factors. The most puzzling attempt to blame the victim came from Larry Steele, who directly equated poor student performance to overworked, underprivileged parents, but stated that increased funding for schools would hurt these families because they would have to work harder to make up for the 1% sale tax increase (Lackmeyer, 2001). This response is noteworthy because it simultaneously acknowledges structural inequality, but somehow opposes any (even symbolic) attempt to remedy race and class differences. These attempts to sway voters away from supporting KIDS utilise colourblind discourse to indirectly link segregation to preference and safety. Editorial comments that mentioned cultural or individual problems in schools were often included within official releases that reminded

potential voters that the KIDS plan represented a renewed focus on teaching and regaining control of classrooms (Unknown, 2001b). This appears to be an intentional attempt to rebut challenges to the plan at the same time as they became prominent and suggests that when elites favor an issue, they will allow diverse viewpoints to speak against their plans, but they will also use their framing abilities to quell any protests as they arise.

While the bulk of the bond called for repairs to existing structures, maintaining separate but equal schools, the plan called for one attempt at integration. The construction of three new high schools was touted as the 'crown jewel' of the KIDS plan that would draw residents back into Oklahoma City (Bratcher, 2005). Of the three new schools, one was scheduled to be built on top of the existing structure, and a second was designated for relocation, but was eventually built on site. Both of these were predominantly African American schools (Bratcher & Robinson, 2004; Dean, 2004). The third school (John Marshall High), another traditionally African American school, was scheduled to be relocated to a developing area of town closer to affluent white housing. This would become a point of contention as white residents resisted what they saw as an attempt at integration.

Some residents objected to the relocation because of the 'kinds' of students that would be coming closer to their homes. As one resident stated, 'I've driven through the John Marshall school district, and I don't want to live there' (Watson, 2002). Fear of crime, industrial development, and traffic were also voiced by parents who were apparently concerned that the old John Marshall neighbourhood would somehow follow students to their new school. When a school official stated at a town hall meeting that he knew of several studies that indicate that property values for residents would increase with a school nearby, he was booed. Ernest Abrogar (2002) questioned the logic of the new location, as this would leave a 'void in the old location' and force families to move or travel across town to the new site. Mr. Abrogar framed his opposition as concern for how minority families would be affected, and claimed he was not against building a school in the

area, he just objected to the kinds of students that would be attending this particular school. The idea that the high school should remain close to students was voiced several times, most often by residents in the proposed relocation area (Bratcher, 2002). As with other criticisms that evoked colorblind natural differences between racial groups of KIDS, challenges were presented side-by-side with rebuttals. Often articles gave more attention to quotes from the mayor stressing how a new school would benefit all Oklahomans, again crafting unity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Interest convergence affects how social issues are presented to the public because it is in white elites' interests to keep open racial discourse out of the media. In the case of KIDS, we see that the debate surrounding this plan centered on a unitary message that highlighted the way all Oklahomans could gain from its passage. Elites utilised agenda setting techniques by raising the visibility of this measure through repeated reminders of the positives outcomes for all associated with funding a school system that had been neglected for decades. Agenda setting also played a role in defining what issues related to KIDS would and would not see print. This measure was never intended to be an attempt to desegregate schools or achieve anything other than a continuance of separate but equal doctrine. As a result, the fact that half of all Oklahoma City children attend schools outside of the district was never mentioned as a cause of poor school performance in the city.

Likewise, redistricting to dismantle segregation was never suggested. If educational segregation is the product of neighbourhood segregation, and differential educational opportunities are determined by context, then KIDS lacked the ability to create real change from the time it was first drafted. Capital improvements were certainly long overdue, but simply updating buildings and expecting disadvantaged, disenfranchised students to somehow compete with well-funded, capital intensive suburban districts did not constitute a serious attempt to rebuild the core of a city. Instead, KIDS was intended to give the appear-

ance of change, which would appease potential investors and raise Oklahoma City's national profile. And it succeeded.

In addition to agenda setting, *The Daily Oklahoman* engaged in several forms of framing. Most objections to KIDS were presented, and refuted, by pro-business unifying messages that limited the impact of potential challenges to the plan by whites. Race was used as a means of marginalising non-white dissidents. Minority populations, if they voiced opposition to the plan on the grounds that it unfairly targeted non-whites, were cast as self-motivated attention seekers who were using race as a way to cause problems. The primary opposition to KIDS came in the familiar form of anti-tax conservatism, adhering to the colorblind tone established by the paper.

This descriptive examination of how one interest convergence project was framed in a source of mass media has several weaknesses. First, I only utilise one source to describe the dominant narrative. *The Daily Oklahoman* is the city's only major newspaper, but other sources (such as TV news presentations and small circulation newspapers) may not provide the same narrative. *The Black Chronicle*, Oklahoma City's main minority newspaper, does not have an online archive that extends back to this time. Inclusion of articles from this paper would likely reveal racial differences in how the issue was framed. However, given that the paper's owner was a vocal supporter of KIDS, it is likely that the overall tone of pieces dealing with the measure would have been supportive. Second, it should be noted that I approach the data with my own biases and am responsible for interpreting static text through my own experiences. Analysis of the dominant narrative surrounding KIDS should be viewed with this understanding that interpretations can vary, and my reading of the material may constitute one of several possible ways of deconstructing the story. Third, the agenda setting and frame analysis contained within this paper may also shed light on the kinds of discourse occurring across the United States, but contextual factors unique to Oklahoma City make this a case study. There is no way to generalise to other districts, even in Oklahoma. Fourth, this is an almost 20-year-old bond issue. However, as recent economic

developments have deprived schools of traditional educational funding and the merging of news media outlets has made framing and agenda setting even more important to study. In other words, the unique setting of Oklahoma City is becoming more common.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the study of educational segregation and interest convergence in several ways. First, Oklahoma City is an often-understudied location. Oklahoma City is not a highly populated area, but it has a historical significance in regard to segregation and desegregation. This means that it can serve as an exemplary case of interest convergence because of the city's longstanding commitment to segregation. Second, I applied a CRT framework utilising mass media as a form of dominant discourse. While CRT studies often employ discourse and media analysis, rarely are researchers presented with a situation where there is literally one 'official' source of knowledge. Third, the unique setting of Oklahoma City at this time allows for a greater understanding of interest convergence, agenda setting, framing, and colourblind discourse.

White elites have the power and resources to structure public debate on their own terms. While interest convergence can result in symbolic (albeit necessary) victories by non-whites, the ultimate winners in such instances are those who already profit from racial hegemony. The real issues that affect racial inequality are kept silent, but race still affects discourse. Race was used as a tool to silence descent, but elites countered assertions about natural segregation and cultural racist claims about discipline with a unitary message about how all of Oklahoma could profit from reinvestment in metropolitan schools. KIDS could have represented a major shift in the trajectory of Oklahoma City schools, but instead it affirmed separate but equal educational practice. Out of dozens of projects, only one high school was targeted as a possible platform for integration. However, even after relocating, John Marshall continues to be a majority Black school (OKCPS, 2012). Capital improvements do not counteract the persistent effects of residential and educational segregation. Which is often the result of interest convergence projects that prioritise the goals of elites over the needs of communities.

References

- Abrogar, E. (2002, August 10). Illogical to move school. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Allen, S. (2012, November 7). Oklahoma colleges, universities prepare for changes following affirmative action ban. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Bell, D. (1980). *Brown and the interest-convergence dilemma*. In D. Bell (Ed.) *Shades of Brown: New Perspectives on School Desegregation* (pp. 90-106). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell*. (1991). 498 U.S. 237. Retrieved from <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/89-1080.ZS.html>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2010). *Racism without Racists: Colour-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Bratcher, M. (2002, November 19). Existing campus added to sites for high school. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2005, August 29). MAPS for Kids set to open 'crown jewel.' *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Bratcher, M. & J.G. Robinson. (2004, May 11). Construction starts on Douglass. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Carubelli, R. (2001, September 12). Taxes, weeds Just alike. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2000). Political discourse in the news: Democratising responsibility or aestheticising politics? *Discourse & Society* 11(3): 293-314.
- Coleman R., M. McCombs, D. Shaw, & D. Weaver. (2009). Agenda-setting. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (pp. 147-160). New York: Routledge.
- Dean, B. (2004, June 3). Trust OKs Grant expansion purchases. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Delgado, R. & J. Stefancic. (2000). *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Doane Jr., A.W. (1997). Dominant group ethnic identity in the United States: The role of 'hidden' ethnicity in intergroup relations. *Sociological*

- Quarterly* 38(3): 375-397.
- Eliasoph, N. (1999). 'Everyday racism' in a culture of political avoidance: Civil society, speech, and taboo. *Social Problems* 46(4):479-498.
- Entman, R. & L. Pellicano. (2009). Nature, sources, and effects of news framing. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (pp. 175-190). New York: Routledge.
- Estus, J. (2003, April 25). History of the MAPS project: Timeline. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Farley, R. & Alma F. Taeuber. (1974). Racial segregation in the public schools. *American Journal of Sociology* 79(4): 888-905.
- Gillborn, D. (2006). Critical race theory and education: Racism and anti-racism in educational theory and praxis. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 27(1): 11-32.
- Gray, H. (1987). Race relations as news: Content analysis. *American Behavioural Scientist* 30(4): 381-96.
- Greiner, J. (2001, October 25). Lawyers attack, defend law on sales tax for schools' use. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Harcourt, N., W. Pittman Jr., R.E. Lynn, M. McCaughey, & R. Godwin. (2002, October 8). Policy placates black students. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Jiwani, Y. (2006). *Discourses of Denial: Mediations of Race, Gender, and Violence*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Karnes, G. (2001, August 17). School bussing boondoggle. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Kuypers, J. (2002). *Press Bias and Politics: How the Media Frame Controversial Issues*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Lackmeyer, S., M. McManus, & J. Money. (1999, December 12). City schools lose out as more families leave: Migration to north, south could run up road costs. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Lackmeyer, S. (2001, September 12). Sales tax for school rebuilding to go to voters: Metro districts would get millions from issue's passage. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *Qualitative Studies in Education* 11(1): 7-24.
- Lee, S. & C. Maslog. (2006). War or peace journalism? Asian newspaper coverage of conflicts. *Journal of Communication* 55(2): 311-329.
- Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A Radical View*. Macmillan: London.
- Mason, B.G. (2001, September 19). Bond issue needs passed. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- McMahon, R., & P. A. Chow-White. (2011). News media encoding of racial reconciliation: Developing a peace journalism model for the analysis of 'cold' conflict. *Media, Culture & Society* 33(7): 989-1007.
- Money, J. (2003, March 14). House OKs patron approval before MAPS school closings. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Newport, F. (2012). Mississippi most conservative state, D.C. most liberal. *Gallup Politics*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/152459/mississippi-conservative-state-liberal.aspx>.
- Oklahoma City Public Schools. (2006). District statistical profile 2005-2006. <http://www.okcps.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=WoSTex-M4N8%3d&tabid=7931&mid=18194>.
- . (2012). District statistical profile 2011-2012. Retrieved from <http://www.okcps.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=x5G0pDQ6MFQ%3d&tabid=7931&mid=18194>
- Orfield, G. & S. Eaton. (1996). *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*. New York: The New Press.
- Parker, L. (1998). 'Race is race ain't': An exploration of the utility of critical race theory in qualitative research in education." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11(1): 43-55.
- Saporito, S. (2003). Private choices, public consequences: Magnet school choice and segregation by race and poverty. *Social Problems* 50(2): 181-203.

- Unknown. (2001a, October 20). Alternative thoughts, better discipline = better schools? *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2001b, November 11). For better schools: Local taxes for local kids. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2003, April 2). Beyond bizarre: School boycott plan counter intuitive. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- van Dijk T. (2009). News, discourse, and ideology. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (pp. 191-204). New York: Routledge.
- Ware, L. (1996). Tales from the crypt: Does strict scrutiny sound the death knell for affirmative action in higher education? *Journal of College & University Law*, 23: 43-90.
- Watson, Christy. (2001a, September 8). School board backs \$530 million plan. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2001b, November 8). NAACP chapter won't oppose school bond issue: Group urges members to vote their conscience. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2001c, March 7). School improvements priced at \$558 million: Upgrades could cost more than MAPS." *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2001d, November 10). Group urges 'no' on MAPS for Kids: Mayor calls critics 'desperate people.' *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2001e, August 30). Sales tax promising for suburban schools. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2001f, October 21). Supporters find MAPS for Kids marathon battle. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2002, September 6). Proposed school upsets residents. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2003a, March 8). Closings will cause student shifts: District officials devise plan to move children to 12 schools. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- . (2003b, March 29). Group threatens boycott over closures. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Watson, C. & J. Perry. (2001, November 15). North side helped carry school vote. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Watson, C. & J. Money. (2003, March 13). Lawmaker accused of bid to hurt MAPS. *The Daily Oklahoman*.
- Whitney, D. (2001, November 9). Bad investment in crumbling system. *The Daily Oklahoman*.

Paul D.C. Bones, Ph.D. (the University of Oklahoma, 2015) is an Assistant Professor at Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX. His primary areas of interest are disabilities and crime, ecological predictors of crime, hate crimes, and rural drug abuse. His recent publications have appeared in *Deviant Behavior*, *The Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, and *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. He has also published a chapter on Race and Hate in *Hate Crimes* (Carolina Academic Press).

pbones@twu.edu
