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FRAMING RACE: THE ELECTION OF THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN MAYOR OF JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

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Lord have mercy! We're going to have a black mayor in Jackson in Jackson, Mississippi.

An anonymous black woman quoted in Chappell (1997)

The above epigraph expresses the shock within the black community of Jackson, Mississippi when Harvey Johnson was elected as the city's first African-American mayor in June, 1997. Surprisingly, four years earlier Johnson failed to win the Democratic nomination for the mayor's office. How did Johnson rebound from his earlier defeat in the 1993 Democratic mayoral primary election? In other words, how does one explain Johnson's historic victory—the first African-American mayor of Jackson, Mississippi—in light of his prior defeat in 1993?

This study argues that the role of the media proved crucial to Johnson's 1997 electoral fortunes by de-emphasizing race in its coverage of the election. Conversely, it is suggested that during the 1993 Democratic mayoral primary election, the print media racialized the campaign to the detriment of the electoral fortunes of Harvey Johnson. The study first provides a review of the literature and then offers a brief overview of the 1993 and 1997 mayoral elections. The following section subsequently identifies the data and methods utilized to answer three central research questions underpinning the study. Finally, the analysis concludes by addressing the implications of the major findings.

Framing Race

Framing is “the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy” (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1997, p. 567). Parenti (1986) further notes that framing news content is “the manner in which the news is packaged, the amount of exposure, the placement (front page or back, lead story or last), the tone of presentation (sympathetic or slighting), the accompanying headlines and visual effects, the labeling and vocabulary” (p. 222). While journalistic norms serve to minimize bias in the news (Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar, 1993; Beck, Dalton, and Huckfeldt, 1995; Bennett, 1996), the media nevertheless influence the public in a myriad of subtle ways (Parenti, 1986; Bartels, 1993). For instance, the media often frame issues with the selection labels and code words designed to “convey politically loaded images” (Parenti, 1986, p. 220).

In the past, black candidates have complained about the bias and limited coverage of the media (Pettigrew and Alston, 1988). Charles

Evers, the first African-American elected to the office of mayor in Mississippi since Reconstruction, lamented, "The Press has been and is one of the worst enemies, along with the police, that the Negro has in Mississippi" (Lyle, 1968, p. 68). This media bias has been particularly prevalent in political contests in which African-American candidates sought high profile elective offices (Henry, 1987).

Using Parenti's definition of framing, Reeves investigated the *New York Times* coverage of the 1989 mayoral election featuring David Dinkins, the first black mayor of New York and Rudolph Giuliani. Reeves (1997) found that 18 percent of all the stories on Dinkin's campaign were negative in tone. According to Judson Jeffries (2000), Douglas Wilder, in his historic election as the nation's first African-American governor, received more negative treatment from the media than did his opponent in the Virginia gubernatorial contest. In a content analysis of *the Washington Post*, Jeffries found that 26 percent of the stories written about Wilder were negative, compared to 12 percent negative rating for his white opponent, Marshall Coleman (Jeffries, 2000).

Political contests involving African-American candidates seeking high profile political offices, generally, increase media coverage of the election (Kleppner, 1994). This heightened exposure increases media racial referents, which may undermine critical white voter support by disseminating racial cues that trigger anti-black sentiments (Pettigrew and Alston, 1988). Reeves (1997) found that 69 percent of the news articles that covered the 1989 New York mayoral campaign made references to the racial and ethnic groups of the city's electorate. He also gleaned similar empirical evidence from the 1989 Seattle mayoral election featuring an African-American, Norman Rice, who defeated Doug Jewett, a white candidate. For example, Reeves (1997) found that the *Seattle Times* mentioned the race of the candidates in 63 percent of the news articles pertaining to the election.

1993 and 1997 Mayoral Elections

During the 1993 primary contest, five candidates sought to represent the Democratic Party in the Jackson, Mississippi mayoral election. Among the five were two white and three African-American office-seekers. Incumbent mayor, Kane Ditto, and a former, three-term mayor, Dale Danks, who held that office from 1977 to 1989, were the two white Democratic candidates. African-American Democratic candidates included Henry Kirksey, a former state Senator and noted civil rights activist, Harvey Johnson, an urban planner and Executive Director of the Mississippi Institute for Small Towns, and Courtney Paige, a Jackson State University undergraduate student.

Kirksey, a long-time local civil rights leader and icon of the Jackson black community ran a race-specific campaign, which racialized the

1993 Democratic primary election. Harvey Johnson employed a deracialized campaign strategy defined as, “[c]onducting a campaign in a stylistic fashion that defuses the polarizing effects of race by avoiding explicit reference to race-specific issues, while at the same time emphasizing those issues that are perceived as racially transcendent, thus mobilizing a broad segment of the electorate for purposes of capturing or maintaining public office” (McCormick and Jones, 1993, p. 76). Kirksey’s campaign, on the other hand, made direct appeals to the city’s black electorate; moreover, he never compromised his campaign messages for the purpose of appealing to white voters. When *The Clarion Ledger* offered the Democratic candidates an opportunity to “speak out” on an issue of their choice, Kirksey responded, “I’m talking black-white now because that is the issue here. The city has never given a priority to concerns of the black population” (*The Clarion Ledger* 1993, p. 2B).

Harvey Johnson’s decision not to participate in the Grassroots Political Convention strained relations with the *Jackson Advocate*, the city’s leading African-American newspaper. In 1992, the Citywide Coalition for a Progressive Jackson (CCPJ), an organization created for the purpose of identifying a single black mayoral candidate, sponsored the Grassroots Political Convention. Ali Shamsid-Deen, a *Jackson Advocate* reporter, organized the convention which held a black-only election to determine the sole African-American Democratic mayoral candidate in 1993. Johnson and Paige opted not to participate in the convention in which Kirksey emerged as the victor in the CCPJ sponsored election. Historically, black newspapers routinely endorse viable black contenders for high profile political offices. However, the state’s major black-owned newspaper failed to endorse Johnson.

During the crowded 1993 Democratic mayoral primary election, Ditto received 34 percent of the vote, while Danks won 32 percent and Johnson secured 24 percent of the ballots. Kirksey received only nine percent of the vote, and Paige roughly one percent. In the runoff election Ditto defeated Danks with 62 percent of the vote. In the general election Ditto won by a landslide, receiving 85 percent of the vote.

In an election marked by an anti-incumbent mood amongst the city’s electorate (Orey, 1999), the 1997 mayoral campaign also drew a host of potential office-seekers. Twelve contenders, six Democrats, four Republicans and two independents, comprised the 1997 mayoral pool of candidates. The field was evenly split along racial lines, six white and six African-American office-seekers. Three white and three African-American candidates sought the Democratic nomination. The white Democrats included the incumbent mayor, Ditto, Pat Frascogna, an attorney, and Lewis Wilson, a retired lawyer. African-American Democratic candidates included Harvey Johnson, Mary Coleman, a state legislator and the long-shot candidacy of Charles Taylor, a local truck driver. Among the four Republicans, only one was African-American, James Meredith, a

civil rights activist and most notably, the first African-American student admitted to the University of Mississippi. White Republican candidates included Aaron Dupuy III, an insurance salesman; Charlotte Reeves, the co-owner of A-1 Pallet; and Al Roland, a local gas station attendant. Both independent candidates were African-American: Kevin Antoine, a teacher who sought the 1996 Democratic congressional nomination, and Ivory Phillips, a Jackson State University professor.

The antagonism between the *Jackson Advocate* and Johnson resurfaced during the 1997 Democratic mayoral primary election. During the early months of the 1997 contest, the *Jackson Advocate* continued to publish unfavorable articles regarding Johnson's candidacy. In fact, the newspaper placed Johnson on its infamous Brown Society's list:

The Brown Society was begun by the Advocate as a satirical allusion to the Brown Society of Charleston South Carolina. The Brown Fellowship Society, started in 1790 by mixed blood offspring of Napoleon's armies which were then fleeing the uprising of Haitian slaves under the leadership of epic Haitian heroes Dessalines Henri Christopher and Toussaint Louverture. The Brown Society members believed in white superiority and were responsible for exposing Denmark Vessey's slave uprising.

The Brown in Brown society comes from the fact that at one time society members had to be "as brown as a paper bag" to be admitted to the group (Tisdale 1997, p. 4C).

Johnson vehemently requested that the *Jackson Advocate* remove his name from the list. During the week of February 13-19, the newspaper complied with Johnson's request. Charles Tisdale, the editor of the *Jackson Advocate*, noted, "in most cases where a person asks that his/her name be removed from the Brown Society list for the purpose of unifying the community, it has been done" (1997, p. 4C). The removal of Johnson's name from the Brown Society list signaled a change in the tone of the *Jackson Advocate's* coverage of Johnson. The newspaper ceased publishing unfavorable news items about the Johnson campaign, which established a forged truce between Johnson and Tisdale (Tisdale, 1999). Unlike the earlier mayoral race, Johnson ran full-page advertisements in the *Jackson Advocate* in 1997. More importantly, during the week of the Democratic primary, the *Jackson Advocate* endorsed the Johnson mayoral candidacy.

Harvey Johnson won a majority of the primary vote (58 percent), which eliminated the necessity of a runoff election. The incumbent mayor, Kane Ditto, received 26 percent of the vote while Frascogna received 11 percent of the ballots, Coleman's voter support did not exceed five percent, and Taylor only garnered one percent of the ballots. On the Republican side, Charlotte Reeves emerged victorious. Initially, four candidates were slated to compete in the 1997 general election. However, Antoine and Phillips, the two independent candidates, eventu-

ally bowed out of the race. With their departure, the stage was set for a landmark general election between Harvey Johnson and Charlotte Reeves. The voters of Jackson, Mississippi would either elect its first African-American or female mayor. Johnson eventually won a landslide victory capturing 70 percent of the vote in the historic election.

Four years after failing to win the 1993 Democratic primary mayoral election, Johnson became the first African-American elected to the mayor's office in Jackson, Mississippi. How does one account for Johnson's landmark election in 1997 after his unsuccessful bid in 1993? This study asserts that the print media assumed a pivotal role in Johnson's 1997 landmark victory. Indeed, the role of the media is critical to the success of African-American office-seekers in biracial political contests (Bullock, 1984). The assumption of a neutral stance by the media minimizes the successful manipulation of racially divisive campaign tactics (Jones, 1991, p. 109; Jones and Clemons, 1993, pp. 131-132). The study further contends that the print media racialized the 1993 mayoral election, which created an electoral terrain that adversely impacted the campaign fortunes of Harvey Johnson. In a racialized election between black and white opponents, anti-black sentiments are more likely to surface, therefore, making it less likely for a black candidate to garner voter support from the white electorate.

Research Design

This study addresses three research questions to ascertain the extent to which the media racialized the 1993 and 1997 mayoral elections:

- (1) Did the print media in Jackson, Mississippi make more reference to race in the 1993 Democratic mayoral primary election than in the 1997 election?;
- (2) Did the Johnson campaign receive more favorable news coverage from the print media in the 1997 mayoral election than in 1993?; and
- (3) Did the print media provide more negative coverage of Johnson's mayoral campaign in 1993 than in 1997?

The Clarion Ledger, the state's largest and most popular daily newspaper based in Jackson, constitutes the print media in this study. Dating back to the Reconstruction era, *The Clarion Ledger* has been generally conservative and anti-black. In an investigation of the print media in Mississippi, Pat Watters concluded, *The Clarion Ledger* was a leading proponent of segregation with abysmal news coverage of black people (Watters, 1969, p. 271). In 1982, however, the Gannett chain, based in Rochester, New York, purchased *The Clarion Ledger* and diversified its workforce by employing a number of African-American reporters, which ultimately improved its news coverage of the African-American community.

Content analysis was employed to examine articles, editorials, opinion columns, and letters to the editor published in *The Clarion Ledger*. The index of *The Clarion Ledger* identified the news items pertaining to the two elections. The timeframe of the analysis extends from January 1 of the election year until Election Day in 1993 and 1997. According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1996, pp. 324–326), data obtained from documents and archival records can be systematically analyzed through content analysis. Broadly defined, content analysis is “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1970, p. 601). Explicit standards were adopted to ensure the reliability of the coding procedure. In a systematic content analysis, the “inclusion or exclusion of content is done according to consistently applied criteria of selection; this requirement eliminates analyses in which only materials supporting the investigator’s hypotheses are examined” (Holsti, 1970, p. 598).

Similar to Reeves (1997) and Jeffries (2000), this study examines whether the newspaper items included a reference to race. Each news item was coded on the basis of the key campaign issues, the race of a candidate, date of the story, the placement of the story (page number), and the tone of the overall news item. First, the number of items that included a reference to the race of a candidate was recorded. Secondly, the number of items that included a reference to any aspect of race in discussing the electorate or campaign issues was recorded. These two variables were examined separately. In investigating the placement of the story, the page number of the placement of the story was noted. Finally, the tone of a news item was classified as favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, unfavorable, balanced, or neutral (Jeffries, 2000).

A favorable news item included any story that identified only positive aspects of the candidate or his campaign, conversely, an unfavorable item focused only on negative aspects of the candidate or his campaign. A balanced item is one that made equal references to both favorable and unfavorable aspects about the candidate or his campaign. A somewhat favorable item is one that made reference to both favorable and unfavorable aspects of the candidate or his campaign but the number of favorable references outnumbered the number of unfavorable references. Similarly, a somewhat unfavorable item is one that made references to both favorable and unfavorable aspects of the candidate or his campaign, but the number of unfavorable references outnumbered the number of favorable references. A neutral item did not make any unfavorable or favorable references to the candidate or his campaign. The tone of Johnson’s campaign news coverage in the two (1993 and 1997) elections was compared to ascertain media bias.

The author conducted the initial coding of the data. News items were divided randomly into three mutually exclusively samples, and a graduate student then coded each sample based on the previously noted crite-

ria. To ensure reliability, the two sets of coding decisions were compared. The reliability score was 85 percent. The unit of analysis is each newspaper item. In 1993, 40 news items were coded for *The Clarion Ledger*. In 1997, 34 were coded for the Democratic primary and 15 for the general election. If the percentage of the racial references was greater in 1993 than in 1997, we can infer that *The Clarion Ledger* racialized in its news coverage of the 1993 mayoral election. In addition, the tone of the news items was ascertained. If the percentage of unfavorable news items of the Johnson campaign was greater in 1993 than in 1997, we can infer that *The Clarion Ledger's* news coverage of the Johnson candidacy was more negative in the 1993 mayoral election than in 1997.

News Coverage of the 1993 Democratic Mayoral Primary Election

Among the 40 news items in *The Clarion Ledger* pertaining to the 1993 Democratic mayoral primary election, 19 percent explicitly reference the race of a candidate. In three items *The Clarion Ledger* mentioned the black candidate's prospect of becoming the city's first black mayor. Twenty-three percent of the news items that mentioned race were printed within the first 10 pages of *The Clarion Ledger*. Indeed, five of the news stories appeared on the front page. During the 1993 Democratic primary election, the print media published articles on a broad array of campaign issues. Contrary to the study's expectations, crime rather than race represented the most frequently mentioned issue (71%) in *The Clarion Ledger* (see Table 1). One possible reason for the extensive coverage of crime was its saliency among the Jackson electorate. In 1992, a year prior to the election *The Clarion Ledger* conducted a survey of Jackson citizens, which found that crime and drugs were the most pressing issues affecting the quality of life in Jackson (Simmons 1993, p.1A). The issue of race was identified in approximately 23 percent of the news items. Given that 1993 Democratic mayoral election included viable African-American contenders and was further racialized by the Kirksey candidacy, it is not surprising that race constituted the second most frequently mentioned issue by *The Clarion Ledger*. The other major issues during the 1993 campaign included education (19 percent) and poverty (13 percent) (see Table 1).

During the 1993 Democratic primary, Johnson was mentioned in 80 percent of the news items published by *The Clarion Ledger*. Johnson followed Ditto who was identified in 90 percent of the news items. Additionally, Danks was mentioned in 80 percent of the items, Kirksey in 63 percent, and Paige in 50 percent. It appears that *The Clarion Ledger's* coverage of the candidates coincided with their electoral viability, in that the findings of the content analysis corresponded with the final results of the primary election. Johnson's frequency among the news items of *The Clarion Ledger* may also be attributed to his media strategy. Johnson identified key issues and then would call a press con-

ference to generate news coverage. He employed this strategy to offset his limited financial resources (Johnson, 1998).

TABLE 1
Campaign Issues Identified in *The Clarion Ledger* Coverage of the 1993 Democratic Mayoral Primary Election in Jackson, Ms.

ISSUE	N	PERCENT
Crime	22	71%
Race	7	23%
Education	6	19%
Poverty	4	13%
Neighborhoods	3	10%
Police/Fire Departments	3	10%
Economic Development	2	6%
Jobs	2	6%
Environment	2	6%
Business	1	3%
Taxes	1	3%
Bond-Rating	1	3%
Teenage Pregnancy	1	3%

Table 2 reveals that Johnson received favorable coverage among 22 percent of the newspaper items that mentioned his name. Johnson followed Ditto, who led all candidates with an overall favorable coverage rating of 33 percent (see Table 2). Kirksey and Danks both received 16 percent favorable coverage rating in the 1993 Democratic Primary contest while Paige did not receive any favorable coverage. The vast majority of all of the candidates' news items fell within the neutral category (see Table 2). Unlike prior research (Reeves, 1997; Jeffries, 2000), the findings of this measure do not show media racial bias by *The Clarion Ledger* in its coverage of the 1993 Democratic Primary election.

Surprisingly, among the four major Democratic mayoral contenders (Ditto, Danks, Johnson and Kirksey) an African-American office-seeker received the least amount of unfavorable coverage. Table 2 shows that 12 percent of the news items published on Kirksey were coded as unfavorable while Johnson's unfavorable rating was 16 percent (see Table 2). Thus, contrary to previous findings (Reeves, 1997; Jeffries, 2000), the African-American candidates in the biracial political contest in Jackson, Mississippi received less unfavorable news coverage than their white opponents.

One potential explanation for the fair treatment of black candidates by the mainstream newspaper, or as Thompson (1993) puts it, the "white press," is that the majority of the items covering the 1993 campaign were written by black reporters. As noted in Figure 1, black reporters authored

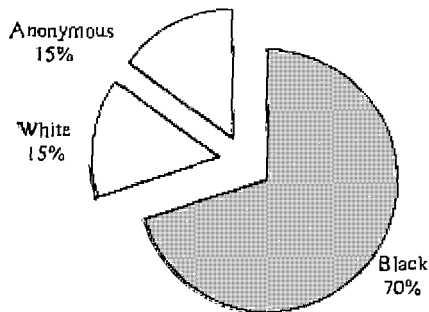
70 percent of the news items pertaining to the 1993 election while white reporters wrote 15 percent of the campaign stories.

TABLE 2
Tone in *The Clarion Ledger's* Campaign Coverage of the 1993 Democratic Mayoral Primary Election in Jackson, MS.

TONE	JOHNSON	DITTO	DANKS	KIRKSEY	PAIGE
Favorable	22%	19%	3%	16%	0%
	(7)	(7)	(1)	(4)	(0)
Somewhat Favorable	0%	14%	13%	0%	0%
	(0)	(5)	(4)	(0)	(0)
Balanced	0%	6%	3%	0%	0%
	(0)	(2)	(1)	(0)	(0)
Neutral	53%	39%	59%	72%	90%
	(19)	(14)	(19)	(18)	(18)
Somewhat Unfavorable	3%	3%	6%	0%	0%
	(1)	(1)	(2)	(0)	(0)
Unfavorable	16%	19%	16%	12%	10%
	(5)	(7)	(5)	(3)	(2)

() = Total number of news items.

FIGURE 1
News Items by Race of the Reporter
1993 Democratic Primary for Mayor in *The Clarion Ledger*



News Coverage of the 1997 Mayoral Elections

Among the 34 news items on the 1997 Democratic primary mayoral election published in *The Clarion Ledger*, only three percent made an

explicit reference to the race of the candidates. In 1997, there was a 16 percent decrease in the number of news items, which mentioned the race of candidates compared to 1993. Moreover, *The Clarion Ledger* made explicit references to whites and African-Americans as a racial group in 17 percent of its campaign stories compared to slightly over a majority (55%) of the news items that mentioned a racial group in the 1993 election. This significant decrease (38%) in the number of published articles which referenced race undoubtedly created a less racialized political environment. Consequently, the electoral terrain was more conducive to the election of a black candidate. Eight of the news items of the 1997 primary election that mentioned race were included within the first ten pages of *The Clarion Ledger*. Among these eight items (26%), only three appeared on the front page of the newspaper, paralleling the placement of campaign stories during the news coverage of the 1993 election. Similarly, the vast majority of the news stories published on the 1997 mayoral election did not focus on race. Crime (72%) remained the most often cited issue among the campaign news items appearing in *The Clarion Ledger*. Economic development (28%) and educational (24%) were the two other frequent issues noted in newspapers (see Table 3). Economic development supplanted race as the second most mentioned issue in the coverage of the 1997 mayoral election.

TABLE 3
Campaign Issues identified in *The Clarion Ledger's* Coverage of the
1997 Mayoral Election in Jackson, MS.

ISSUE	N	PERCENT
Crime	18	72%
	7	28%
	6	24%
	2	8%
	2	8%
	2	8%
	2	8%
	2	8%
	2	8%
	1	4%
	1	4%
Gambling	1	4%
Consolidation	1	4%
	1	4%
	1	4%

Similar to 1993, *The Clarion Ledger's* coverage of the African-

American candidates was free of racial bias. During the news coverage of the 1997 Democratic primary election, Johnson appeared in 82 percent of all the news items printed in *The Clarion Ledger*, only three percent less than Ditto who was mentioned in 85 percent of the items. Johnson did receive the most favorable coverage among all of the mayoral candidates in the 1997 Democratic primary. Table 4 shows that 21 percent of Johnson's news items were coded favorable, a rating slightly higher than Frascogna's favorable coverage.

TABLE 4
Tone of *The Clarion Ledger's* Campaign Coverage of the
1997 Democratic Mayoral Primary Election in Jackson, MS.

Tone	Johnson	Ditto	Frascogna	Coleman	Taylor	Wilson
	21%	10%	18%	0%	0%	0%
	(6)	(3)	(4)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Somewhat Favorable	4%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	(1)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Balanced	0%	7%	0%	7%	0%	0%
	(0)	(2)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(0)
Neutral	61%	62%	73%	93%	88%	100%
	(17)	(18)	(16)	(13)	(7)	(15)
Somewhat Unfavorable	0%	0%	9%	0%	13%	0%
	(0)	(0)	(2)	(0)	(1)	(0)
Unfavorable	14%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	(4)	(4)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)

= Total numbers of news items.

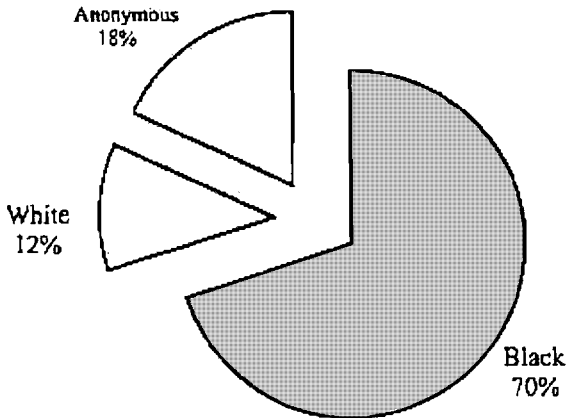
At first glance it may not appear that Johnson's unfavorable rating of 14 percent seen in Table 3 lends support for racially neutral news coverage in the 1997 election. However, upon further inspection, data in Table 3 show that three of the Democratic mayoral candidates did not receive any unfavorable coverage while Johnson and the incumbent mayor, Ditto, both received exclusively unfavorable coverage in 14 percent of the news items. This finding suggests that the newspaper's coverage of the two viable Democratic contenders, (Johnson and Ditto) were treated in an equally critical manner. Both Johnson and Ditto received the same unfavorable news coverage rating (14%) from *The Clarion Ledger*.

The final indicator of the print media's racially unbiased coverage during the 1997 mayoral election is evident in the majority of the candidates' news items classified in the neutral category (see Table 4). Although the findings reveal that Johnson received the most favorable coverage in *The Clarion Ledger* in the 1997 mayoral election, the newspaper endorsed Ditto on Election Day. In an anonymously written edito-

rial in the "our views" section, the newspaper stated, "both Johnson and Ditto are men of good character, intelligence and ability. However, Ditto has the edge" (*The Clarion Ledger*, 1997, p. 6A).

Nevertheless, *The Clarion Ledger's* coverage of the 1997 mayoral election, as was the case in 1993, did not conform with the previous findings of media bias in biracial political contests (Reeves, 1997; Jeffries, 2000). The major explanation for *The Clarion Ledger's* departure from the prevailing role of the media in such elections is the diversity in the newspaper staff. African-American journalists authored 70 percent of the news items published in newspapers compared to 12 percent of the stories written by white reporters (see Figure 2). Among the favorable news items concerning Johnson, four of the seven items (or 57 %) were written by black reporters, two (28%) by white reporters and one (14%) was written by an anonymous reporter.

Figure 2
News Items by Race of the Reporter
1997 Democratic Primary for Mayor in *The Clarion Ledger*



Conclusion

In 1997, Harvey Johnson was the first African-American elected to the mayor's office in Jackson, Mississippi. The findings of this study reveal that in contrast to the 1993 mayoral election, the media decreased its mention of race in 1997. This change is argued to have significantly con-

tributed to Johnson's landmark victory. The decrease in the mention of race is understandable given that the 1993 contest represented the first viable opportunity for an African-American candidate to win the mayor's office in Jackson, Mississippi, and included the race-specific candidacy of Henry Kirksey. In addition, while race also was the second most frequently mentioned issue during the 1993 primary by *The Clarion Ledger*, it received very little attention in 1997. Crime was the most frequently mentioned issue during both the 1993 and 1997 Democratic primaries. Prior research (Peffley, Hurwitz and Sniderman, 1997) has found that the issue of crime often serves as a racial cue to undermine white support in biracial elections. Despite such findings, the racial divisiveness generally associated with crime in elections in which a black candidate opposes a white political opponent was absent in both elections. Contrary to a central premise of this study, *The Clarion Ledger* did not engage in racially polarizing news coverage during the 1993 Democratic primary election. Unlike the media coverage of the 1989 watershed elections of Dinkins in New York, Rice in Seattle and Wilder's gubernatorial victory in Virginia, Harvey Johnson received favorable coverage from *The Clarion Ledger* in Jackson, Mississippi.

The findings did not offer evidence of *The Clarion Ledger* framing race as a divisive issue in either election. Moreover, in 1997, Johnson's favorable rating (21%) was the highest among the Democratic candidates covered by *The Clarion Ledger*. Unexpectedly, Johnson also received the highest favorable ratings (22%) among the Democratic mayoral candidates in 1993. Conversely, his unfavorable ratings for both elections did not reflect the news bias of previous biracial elections. The findings of this analysis underscore the importance of racial diversity in the workplace. The presence of African-American news reporters at *The Clarion Ledger* appears to offset the negative bias historically associated with the newspaper's coverage of Mississippi politics. In short, *The Clarion Ledger* of old with its exclusive white staff is a relic of the past and has profound implications for a racial tolerance in the state of Mississippi.

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