**Chapter 2.**

**The Persistence of Race and the Inclusion of Ethnicity: Mapping Race and Ethnicity in**

**Presidential Campaign Rhetoric from 1964 to 2004**

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While scholars have given considerable attention to the use of race in political

campaigns, few attempts have been made to track the long-term development of presidential

racial language and show how presidents have changed the way that they speak about race and

ethnicity over time. This chapter maps presidential rhetoric on race and ethnicity from 1964 to

2004 to track shifts in word-usage patterns and assess their relation to voters' perceptions of the

president. Instances of fourteen words[1] were counted in re-election year volumes of the *Public*

*Papers* from Lyndon Johnson to George W. Bush Jr. Each word's context was checked to ensure

that it was used by the president and that the president intended it in its racial or ethnic

formulation.[2] To allow for a more accurate comparison between presidents, the table of contents

and index was removed from the dataset, as were any speeches that did not take place during the

president's election year. The total words in each volume was calculated so that results could be

presented as relative frequency per 1,000,000 words.

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[1] The fourteen words were: race/racial, black, Negro, White, African-American, non-white, ethnic, Latino, Hispanic, Chicano, Mexican/Mexican-American, Muslim, Jewish, and Minority

[2] Checking to ensure that a word was used in a racial context became most important with the words white and race. White had to be checked to make sure that it was not used to refer to the White House while race had to be checked to ensure that it was not used to refer to the arms race.

Analysis in this chapter shows how presidents introduced ethnic language alongside racial rhetoric during the 1970s. Analysis is performed in four steps. First, analysis of the total use of racial and ethnic language is assessed to track patterns of fluctuation over time and determine if party has a significant impact on how often a president speaks about race and/or ethnicity. Second, the relationship between racial and ethnic language was assessed through analysis of word usage patterns that show when presidents introduced ethnic language into their speeches. Third, analysis was performed to determine if the rate of racial and/or ethnic language correlates with approval rate among whites and non-whites. Finally, analysis of the relative usage frequency of specific words – Black, White, African-American, Hispanic, Latino, Jewish, and Muslim - was performed to understand the usage patterns of individual racial and ethnic categories relative to developing immigration trends. The chapter shows that, over time, presidents increased use of ethnic rhetoric, introduced it alongside racial rhetoric, and introduced new ethnic categories. Assessment of word usage patterns indicates that Republican presidents introduced new ways of speaking about race and ethnicity during the 1970s, and that these patterns correlated with variance in white and non-white approval ratings. It concludes that these new word usage patterns demonstrate changes in the way that presidents speak about race and ethnicity that have a significant impact on voter approval.

**Long Term Trends in Racial and Ethnic Rhetoric**

How has the frequency in which presidents use racial and ethnic language changed over time? Racial and ethnic language exists in each president's re-election year volume of the *Public Papers*. The words race, black, ethnic, Jewish, Mexican, and minority appear at some point in the each of the eight election year volumes of *the Public Papers* from 1964 until 2004. The words Latinos, Negro, African-American, Hispanic, Muslim, and Chicano do not.

**Figure 1: Total Use of All Racial and Ethnic Language, Including Minority, in the Public Papers of the Presidents, during Election Years**
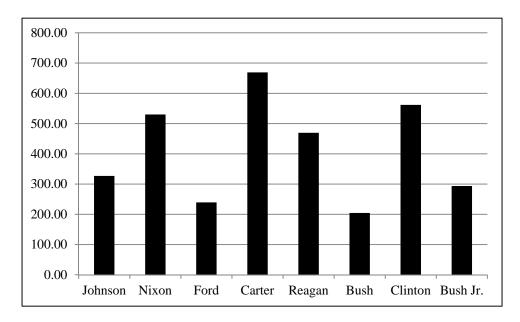


Figure 1 shows total racial and ethnic language discovered in re-election years of presidents from 1964 to 2004. The graph demonstrates that the frequency of racial and ethnic language does not rise or fall over time in an even pattern. One period of sustained decrease exists from Carter until Bush, but there exists no other period of increase or decrease lasting three elections or more in the years analyzed. Therefore, time does not directly correlate with a rise or fall in presidents' use of racial or ethnic language

Party also has no statistically significant impact on a president's use of racial and ethnic language. Overall, language pertaining to racial and ethnic difference occurs in Democrats' volumes of the *Public Papers* at a rate 1.495 than in Republican volumes. The highest frequency of racial and ethnic language exists in Democrats' volumes of the *Public Papers* - specifically Jimmy Carter (657.89/per 1m) and Bill Clinton's (560.65/per 1m) - and the lowest frequency occurs in Republican volumes - George H.W. Bush (204.34/per 1m) and Gerald Ford's (225.80/per 1m) volumes.

Statistical tests show that these differences are not significant. An independent samples t-test was performed to determine if party is a statistically significant predictor of rate of use of ethnic and racial language. The *t* value of 1.547 does not fall within the critical value of ± 2.447 and that p-value of .173 is greater than the alpha value of .05. These results show that, while Democrats (m = 514.81/per 1m, sd = 170.68) do speak about race more on average than Republicans (m = 341.55/per 1m, sd =143.98), there is not a significant statistical difference in the averages.

This correlation was foiled by Republicans Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon's frequent use of racial and ethnic rhetoric compared to their Democratic peers. Johnson's volume (325.90/per 1m) has a lower frequency than in both Ronald Reagan (463.54/per 1m) and Richard Nixon's (523.73/per 1m) volumes. Reagan and Nixon's high rate of racial and ethnic rhetoric is significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates how both used messages backed by racial language, and shows that the content of these messages need deeper investigations. This research is performed in chapters six and seven, and it shows that both used racial language to frame coded message to target racial resentments. Second, the low rate of racial and ethnic rhetoric used by Johnson and the high rate used by Nixon suggests that a more significant relationship might be found between party of a president and the rate in which a president uses racial and ethnic language. Chapter four shows how Nixon began to use ethnic rhetoric in his 1972 election. If the same independent samples t-test is performed the same test on presidents after 1972, a different outcome is obtained. In this case the *t* value of 3.367 does fall within the critical region defined by the value of ± 2.776 and the p-value of .028 is lower than the alpha of .05. In other words, there does exist a statistically significant difference between rate of racial and ethnic language among Democrats (mean = 609.27, sd = 68.76) and Republicans (mean = 296,

sd = 117.52) if analysis is limited to these cases after 1972. Democrats do speak about race and ethnicity more that Republicans after 1972.

Analysis of only racial language in the *Public Papers* reveals a similar dynamic. Figure 2 shows instances of racial language per 1,000,000 words in the *Public Papers* over time. As was the case with race and ethnicity, there exists no clear trend of decrease or increase regarding racial language over time. An independent samples t-test performed on every year also generates a similar result. The *t* value of 2.164 does not fall within the critical region defined by the value of ± 2.447 and the p-value of .074 is higher than the alpha of .05. There exists no statistically significant difference between rate of racial language among Democrats (mean = 300.27, sd = 33.13) and Republicans (mean = 159.36, sd = 106.67). Again, if we analyze the relationship between Democrats and Republican use of racial language after 1972, statistical significance is found again. The *t* value of 3.871 does fall within the critical region defined by the value of ± 2.776 and the p-value of .018 is lower than the alpha of .05. Again, there exists a statistically significant difference between rate of racial language among Democrats (mean = 318.25, sd = 16.02) and Republicans (mean = 119, sd = 67.81).
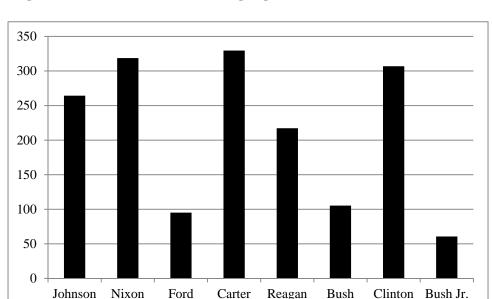
**Figure 2: Total use of Racial Language in Election Years, 1964 – 2004**



Analysis of racial language alone demonstrates the extent to which willingness to speak about race is disconnected from party, depending on the cases analyzed. The highest frequency of racial language in election-year volumes of the *Public Papers* occurred in Carter (329.58/per 1m), followed Nixon's (318.65/per 1m), and then Clinton's (306.92per 1m). Clinton's rank at third place comes somewhat as a surprise as he made race a focal point of his campaign. The reason for his third place rank is due to the high word count in his 1996 volume of the *Public Papers*. In fact, Clinton used the word race much more frequently overall than Nixon, 335 times for Clinton as compared to Nixon's 103 times. However, there are 1.7 million words in Clinton's 1996 volume of the *Public Papers* and 633,918 in Nixon's volume. The frequency in which Clinton used race is actually lower than in Nixon's despite Clinton's overall higher number of uses of racial language.

These results suggest that changes in the way that presidents spoke about race and ethnicity during the 1972 and 1976 campaigns were significant. Since Democrats were more

likely to speak about race and ethnicity than Republicans after 1976, but not before, this suggests that something changed in the way that presidents addressed race between 1964 to 1976. During this period, presidents used ethnic language at an increasingly frequency. To show the significance of this shift, analysis of ethnic language in presidential speeches was conducted. The purpose of these tests was to determine changes in the groups that presidents name by identifying patterns relative to changing demographics. Figure 3 shows the total rate of ethnic rhetoric – defined as instances of the words ethnic, Italian, Jewish, Hispanic, Latino, Muslim, and Chicano – in presidential speeches during election years.
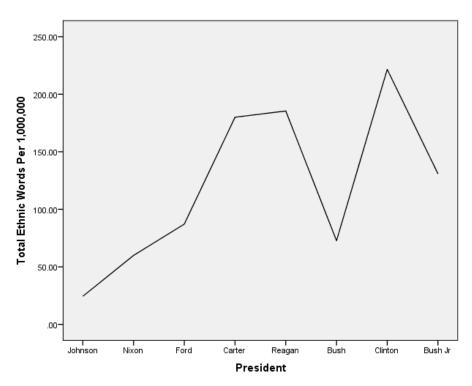
**Figure 3: Instances of Ethnic Words in Presidential Speeches**



Similar to the case with racial language, ethnic language existed in more frequently in Democratic volumes of the *Public Papers* than in Republican volumes - at a ratio of 1:1.32 – but the difference is not statistically significant. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the rate of ethnic language between all Republican and Democratic volumes of the

P*ublic Papers.* In this case, the *t* value of 0.651 does not fall within the critical region defined by the value of ± 2.447 and the p-value of .539 is higher than the alpha of .05. Therefore, there exists no statistically significant difference between rate of ethnic language among Democrats (mean = 142, sd = 103.92) and Republicans (mean = 107.21, sd = 51.23).

Unlike tests on racial language alone, and racial and ethnic rhetoric, analysis of just ethnic rhetoric after 1972 does not show a statistically significant difference between parties. A t-test was also performed to assess party as a way to predict use of ethnic language on only the volumes after 1972. In this case, the *t* value of 2.039 does not fall within the critical region defined by the value of ± 2.776 and the p-value of .111 is higher than the alpha of .05. Unlike the case with racial language, there exists no statistically significant difference between rate of ethnic language between Democrats (mean = 200.79, sd = 29.39) and Republicans (mean = 119.04, sd = 50.69), even if analysis is restricted to only presidents after 1972.

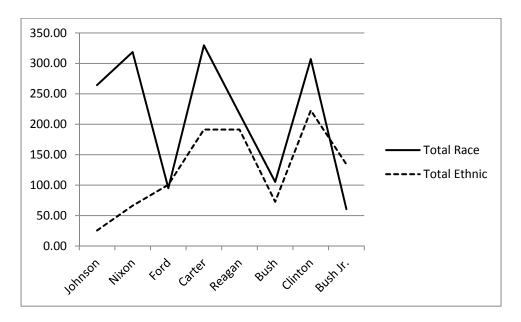**Table 1: Statistical Significance of Racial and Ethnic Language Compares**

|  | All | After 1972 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Race and Ethnicity | No Significant Difference | Significant Difference |
| Race | No Significant Difference | Significant Difference |
| Ethnicity | No Significant Difference | No Significant Difference |

Table 1 shows the different results of these tests and it suggests that presidents changed the way that they spoke about racial and ethnicity in the year 1972. Evidence suggests that ethnic rhetoric has joined *alongside* racial rhetoric since 1964, and a critical period of shift seems exist between 1972 and 1976. If the relationship between the rate of racial rhetoric and the rate of

ethnic rhetoric is analyzed over time, it shows that presidents began to use ethnic language in a similar manner to how they used race after 1976. Figure 4 compares total instances of racial language and total instances of ethnic language in the *Public Papers*. It shows that after Ford, similar patterns of fluctuation occur in both lines. This graph demonstrates differing rates of ethnic versus racial language under Johnson, Nixon, and Ford. During that period, the race line increased then decreased from Nixon to Ford. Meanwhile, the ethnicity line shows a steady increase in the rate of ethnic rhetoric during the same period. The two lines converge during Ford and then follow a similar pattern from that point forward, though with variation. There exists a statistically significant correlation between use of ethnic and use of racial language in presidential speeches *after* Nixon. To determine significance, a Pearson correlation was run on total ethnic and total racial language from 1976 to 2004, which generated a significance of r =.832, p = 0.04, N = 6. This analysis suggests that changes during the 1972 and 1976 elections can be used to understand presidents' introduction of ethnicity alongside racial rhetoric.

**Figure 4: Racial Rhetoric Compared to Ethnic Rhetoric in Presidential Speeches during Election Years, 1964 – 2004**



A statistically significant relationship between a president's use of racial rhetoric and their party existed after 1972, but not for a president's use of ethnic rhetoric. During this same period, a statistically significant correlation existed between rate of racial ethnic and race of ethnic rhetoric. To provide further evidence that presidents significantly changes the way that they spoke about race after Nixon introduced ethnic rhetoric in to presidential speech, a t test was performed to assess the relationship between use of racial and ethnic rhetoric by party. To do this, total rate of ethnic language was subtracted from total rate of racial language to show how much more racial language than ethnic language a president used. A t-test was then performed to see if a statistically significant relationship existed between the results with party as the independent variable. In this case, the *t* of 2.829 was higher than the critical value of 2.776 and the p (0.047) was lower than the alpha value of 0.05. These results show a statistically significant relationship between the frequency that Democrats use racial compared to ethnic language (m =

117.47, sd = 45.42) and the frequency that Republicans use of ethnic language compared to

racial language (m = .5050, sd =48.49).

In addition, time does seem to be a more significant factor in understanding presidents'

use of ethnic rhetoric than it does in understand presidents' use of racial rhetoric. Figure 5 graphs

the total use of all ethnic language surveyed over time.

**Figure 5: Totals of Surveyed Ethnic Words in Presidential Rhetoric during Election Years**
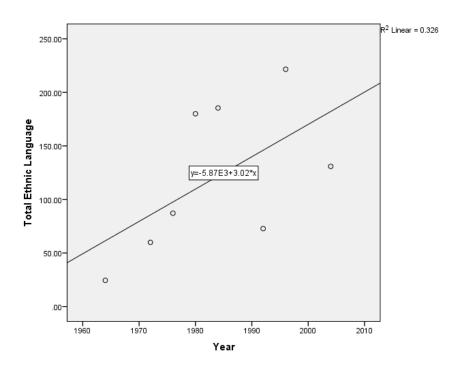


Figure 6 offers one more way to visualize the influx of ethnic language. It shows how

much more likely a president is to use the word "race" in the *Public Papers* than the word to the

word "ethnic." In Johnson's edition of the *Public Papers,* there are 72.5 times more instances of

the word race than ethnicity while, in Nixon's, there are 10.3 times as many instance of race than

ethnicity. From Ford to Bush Jr., the rate of instances of race relative to ethnicity stays between

1.16 and 1.79, except for in the case of Carter. In Carter's volume, where there were 3.5 times as many instances of the word race than ethnicity.
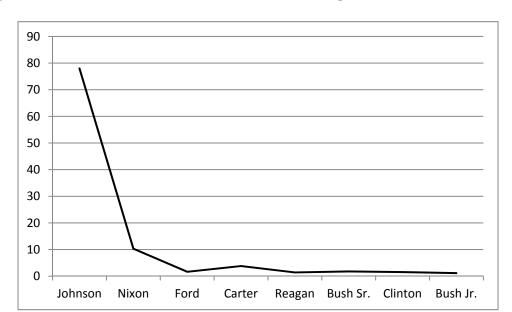
**Figure 6: Number of Uses of the Word Race Per Single use of the Word Ethnicity**



To provide statistical proof of presidents' integration of ethnicity alongside race, the relationship between race and ethnicity in presidential speeches was assessed using a Pearson correlation coefficient. The frequency of race and ethnicity over the entire period yields no significant correlation. However, if the same Pearson correlation is run from 1976 – 2004, there is a significant relationship, r=0.958, p=0.003, N = 6. This shows that, after 1976, presidents used ethnicity at a similar rate to race, but prior to 1976, they did not. While this data is not conclusive proof of a stable ration between race and ethnicity, it does show, first, that ethnicity is becoming increasingly evident in the *Public Papers*. It also shows that the word ethnicity's frequency in presidential rhetoric has become closer in frequency to race over time. While there is some evidence that a decline in racial rhetoric is occurring alongside an increase in ethnic rhetoric, political party appears to be somewhat significant in this relationship, and the more

significant relationship seems to be one where ethnicity is joining alongside race. There exists less variation between parties in the frequency of ethnic language than for racial language in the *Public Papers*. While there is an increase of ethnic language in both Republican and Democratic volumes of the Public Papers, there is evidence of a decrease of racial language in only Republican volumes.
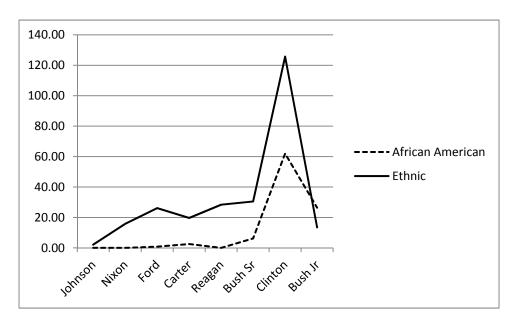
These results demonstrate how Republicans began to use ethnic rhetoric more frequently than Democrats did during the 1970s and 1980s. Republicans used ethnic rhetoric and racial rhetoric at more similar rates than did Democrats because Nixon and Reagan used ethnic rhetoric to frame racially coded messages, which I show in chapters five and six. They also used racial rhetoric in this framework. Throughout this period, presidents from both parties began to use ethnic rhetoric more frequently.

**Black, White, African American, and Ethnic**

Relationships between the words that presidents use to speak about race have a significant relationship with politics as well. One curious shift that took place during this period, 1976 to 2004, was that two Democrats, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, used more racial rhetoric than they did ethnic rhetoric when compared to Republicans. These results suggest that it is important to the development of racial and ethnic rhetoric is the way that racial categories – black and white – relate to ethnic rhetoric and the changing power dynamics of race and ethnicity. First, to better understand the relationship between race and ethnicity, a Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between the frequency of the word African American in the *Public Papers* and the frequency of the word ethnic. There was a positive correlation between the two variables, $r = 0.874$, $n = 8$, $p = 0.005$. In addition, the
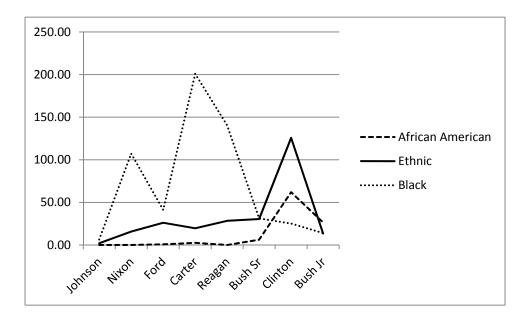
worth ethnic does not correlate with any other word use. Figure 7 shows this correlation across time.

**Figure 7: Instances of African American and Ethnic in the Presidential Speeches during Election Years, 1964 - 2004**



What does this correlation offers in terms of how we might view the relationship between ethnicity and race? First, it does suggest some that the shift from use of the word "black" to the word "African American" in the *Public Papers* occurred as ethnicity was integrated into presidential rhetoric.

**Figure 8: Instances of Black, African American and Ethnic in the Public Papers During Election Years, 1964 - 2004**



In figure 8, a line showing the frequency of the word "black" in the *Public Papers* is added. It shows that the word "black" appears less frequently in the *Public Papers* as the words ethnicity and African American appeared more frequently. Thus, there appears to be a dynamic relationship between these terms.

Why is this significant? Ben Martin's analysis of the effort by "African American opinion makers" to "call for African Americans to be considered an ethnic group" shows how the political motivations lead a "call for African American ethnic consciousness." He states that "naming – proposing, imposing, and accepting names – can be a political exercise." Martin connects adoption of the term "African American" with the "the black claim to primacy among groups deserving redress from American society because of the special experience of slavery." Martin's analysis effectively states that the increase in use of the term African American, and the call for African Americans to "be considered an ethnic group," was a way to keep the black power movement alive during an influx of ethnic rhetoric, a "political setting more crowded with

claimants for status and benefits."[3] In other words, ethnicity and race began to interact, causing some political leaders to attempt to transport discourses of race into the language of ethnicity in an attempt to give new meaning to claims about equality.
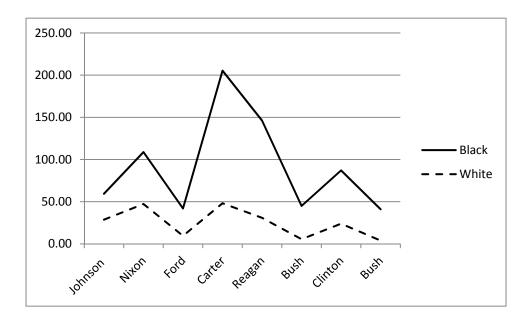
A correlation between instances of the word African-American and instances of the word ethnic in the *Public Papers* shows how presidents adopted race to fit an ethnic framework. In fact, Bill Clinton was the first president to use the term African American more than ten times per million words, using it 61.97 times per million. Analysis in this dissertation suggests that Nixon and Reagan adopted a strategy to use ethnic rhetoric more frequently. The increase use of the ethnic sounding word African American fits into this trend, because, as I show in Chapter 7, Clinton began to use ethnic language frequently and he even adopted the rhetorical framework created by Nixon and Reagan.

While these results show a relationship between racial and ethnic language, a relationship between the categories of white and black also demonstrate a significant political relationship. A second Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between the frequencies of the race-related words – black and white - in the *Public Papers.* Analyzing and the frequency of the word white and the word black in the *Public Papers* showed a positive correlation between the two variables, $r = 0.747$, $n = 8$, $p = 0.033$. Figure 9 shows a graphical representation of this relationship over time.

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[3] Ben L. Martin, "From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 1 (Spring91 1991): 83.

**Figure 9: Total Instances of White and Black in the Public Papers during Election Years, 1964 - 2004**



While the frequencies correlate, figure 9 shows is that the word "black" always occurs more frequently that the word "white" in the *Public Papers*.

**Table 2: Black compared to White in Election Year Rhetoric 1964-2004**

|       | Johnson | Nixon  | Ford   | Carter | Reagan | Bush   | Clinton | Bush    | Totals   |
|-------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|----------|
| Black | 59.45   | 108.85 | 41.99  | 205.35 | 146.16 | 45.02  | 87.11   | 40.99   | 734.9224 |
| White | 28.66   | 47.32  | 9.51   | 48.17  | 30.90  | 5.54   | 23.97   | 3.93    | 198.01   |
| Both  | 88.11   | 156.17 | 51.50  | 253.52 | 177.06 | 50.57  | 111.08  | 44.92   | 932.93   |
|       |         |        |        |        |        |        |         |         |          |
| Ratio | 2.07:1  | 2.3:1  | 4.42:1 | 4.26:1 | 4.73:1 | 8.13:1 | 3.63:1  | 10.43:1 | 3.71:1   |

Table 2 shows the ratio of instances of black to white in the *Public Papers*. On average, there are 3.71 times more references to "black" in the *Public Papers* than references to the word "white." The correlation between instances of black and white and the ratio between the two words is interesting because of the relationship between population and word use frequency. While roughly 79 per cent of America is white, we might expect that presidents would speak about whites more often. What is the case is that presidents *name* whites much less frequently

than Black Americans, despite the population difference. However, scholars suggest that naming a groups may not be synonymous with speak about a group, a point worth exploring.

As Thomas Nakyama and Robert Krizek state, "white public figures tend to avoid the topic of whiteness."[4] They argue that whiteness is a "cultural construction" with specific "strategies that embed its centrality." Whiteness, they state, does not have an "essential nature," instead its "rhetorical construction makes itself visible and invisible, eluding analysis yet exerting influence over everyday life." Whiteness "reinforces white dominance in U.S. society" as it, for example, is implied in speech that "confuses whiteness with nationality." They argue that "invisibility of whiteness has been manifested through its universality," but "the everydayness of whiteness makes it difficult to map."[5] Thus, whiteness is often invoked in the assumed silences surrounding language about national identity. Carrie Crenshaw calls on scholars to "locate interactions that implicate unspoken issues of race, discursive spaces where the power of whiteness is invoked but its explicit terminology is not."[6]

Is presidential rhetoric a place where whiteness is implied? The differences rates in which presidents name whiteness gives some indication that it might offer a location to understand the implied and "unspoken issues of race." When presidents *name* racial categories, they are more often speaking about black Americans than they are white Americans. This division makes it difficult to understand the differences between presidential speech and the relationship between black versus white. Perhaps presidents name black Americans more than white Americans, but

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[4] Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 3 (1995): 297, doi:10.1080/00335639509384117.
[5] Nakayama and Krizek, "Whiteness."
[6] Carrie Crenshaw, "Resisting Whiteness' Rhetorical Silence," *Western Journal of Communication* 61, no. 3 (1997): 253–278.

whiteness is implied in their speeches. Research in this dissertation will attempt to map these spaces to better understand how these silences might invoke race.

Whiteness' silence is not the only issue complicating an understanding of race in presidential rhetoric. As Ross Chambers points out, "the racial binary" in the United States is "contaminated by the concept of ethnicity." He clarifies that the "paradigm of nonwhite" is "pluralized" while whiteness is singular. "To pluralize the other," he states "is to produce one's own singularity."[7] Therefore, to understand whiteness in presidential speech, we should also consider ethnicity's role in racial rhetoric, and must look to see how ethnicity fits within this binary.

**Racial and Ethnic Language and Electoral Outcome**

These results do not however suggest that tracking racial and ethnic rhetoric over time at a more abstract level cannot tell us anything about politics. Regression analysis was performed to determine if there exists a correlation between non-white voting and instances in which a president uses racial language, ethnic language, or both.[8] Gallup survey statistics were used to track presidential approval among non-whites, which were defined as the dependent variable. The words white, Negro, African American, black, and race were defined as independent variables. These variables have a strong, positive association. The coefficient of determination, $r^2$, is $(0.812)^2$, or 66%, meaning that 66 per cent of variance in non-white approval can be predicted by the rate at which presidents use racial language. Testing was also done to analysis the relationship between racial and ethnic language and white approval. No correlation exists

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[7] Ross Chambers, "The Unexamined," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

[8] See Appendix A for statistics on approval rating for each president by group

between the total use of racial and ethnic language by a president and their approval rating among whites when all presidents are analyzed.

A cursory glance at these results might lead us to the incorrect conclusion that presidents who speak about race are more likely to gain favor with non-whites. In fact, the relationship between racial language and approval rating is much more complex, which is revealed when the analysis is performed with respect to party. Regression analysis was performed to determine the impact of total racial and ethnic language on white approval ratings for Republican candidates. Results showed a strong positive correlation, $r^2$ is $(0.868)^2$, or 75% meaning that 75 per cent of variance in white approval can be predicted by the rate at which Republican presidents use racial language. Interestingly, results demonstrate that Republicans are more likely to gain approval of whites if they used ethnic language. Regression analysis that only tracks the rate of ethnic language - with white approval as the dependent variable and total use of just ethnic language as the independent variable - shows an even stronger positive correlation, $r^2$ is $(0.91)^2$, or 82.8 per cent. Results show that 82.8 per cent in variable in white approval for Republican candidates can be predicted by the rate at which presidents use racial and ethnic language. During this period, whites were more likely to approve of Republicans who spoke about race, and even more likely to approve of Republicans who spoke about ethnicity.

Subsequent liner regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of total racial and ethnic language on white approval ratings for Democratic candidates. Results showed a strong *negative* correlation, $r^2$ is $(0.975)^2$, or 95% meaning that 95 per cent of variance in white approval, which ranged from 36 to 59 per cent, can be predicted by the rate at which presidents use racial language. Less references to race resulted in higher approval rating among whites. Figures 10 and 11 show the graphs of the correlations for both Republicans and Democrats,

which also shows how they predict in opposite directions. Democrats who are more likely to

speak about race and ethnic are less likely to grain approval among whites, while Republicans

who are more likely to speak about race and ethnicity, are more likely to gain approval of whites.

**Figure 10: Relationship between Democratic Approval Among Whites and Rate of Ethnic and Racial Language in Presidential Speeches**
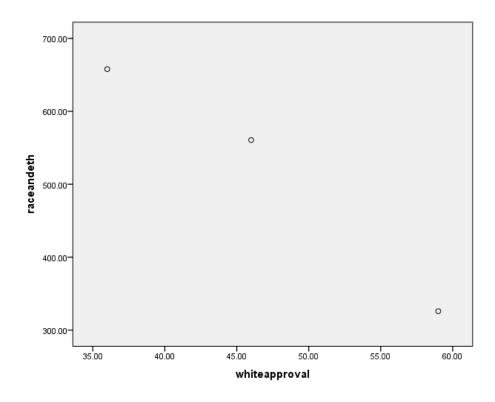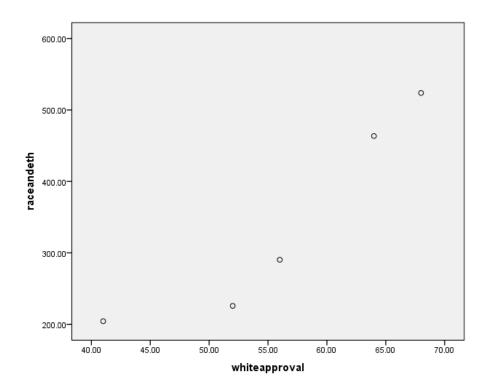
**Figure 11: Relationship between Republican Presidential Candidates' Approval Among Whites and Rate of Ethnic and Racial Language in Presidential Speeches**



When non-white approval rating was assessed relative to rate of racial and ethnic rhetoric, another interesting pattern was discovered. Regression analysis was performed to analyze the relationship between the rate of racial and ethnic rhetoric in presidential speeches and non-white approval. In this case, a very weak, almost non-existent, correlation was found between the rate of racial and ethnic language and non-white approval of Republican presidents, $r^2$ is $(0.015)^2$, or less than one per cent in variance can be predicted by Republican use of racial or ethnic language. Similar analysis performed on Democratic candidates reveals a strong *negative* correlation between rate of racial and ethnic language and non-white approval, $r^2$ is $(0.743)^2$, or 55 per cent of variance can be explained by the independent variable. Results indicated that non-whites were less likely to support a Democrat who speaks about race and

ethnicity, while a Republican's use of racial and ethnic language had no impact on approval rate among non-whites. The results of all tests are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Percent of Variance in Approval Rating by Group that can be Predicted Using Ethnic and Racial Language**

|  | Non-White | White |
|---|---|---|
| Republicans | > 1% (racial and ethnic) | 82.8%, positive (racial and ethnic) |
|  | > 1% (racial) | 75%, positive (racial) |
| Democrats | 55%, negative (racial and ethnic) | 95%, negative (racial and ethnic) |
|  | 47.5%, negative (racial) | 98%, negative (racial) |

These results suggest that Republicans are more likely to gain support among whites when they are more likely to speak about race, with little effect on their approval among non-whites. Democrats are less likely to gain support from whites and non-whites alike when they speak about race. How can we interpret this data? Perhaps these relationships are better explained by *what* the candidates say and do, rather than how often they speak about race. For example, Johnson's approval among non-white voters in 1964 might be due to his success in passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and his poignant rhetoric about that accomplishment, rather than his infrequent speeches about race and ethnicity. Similarly, perhaps Nixon and Reagan, who were more likely to speak about race than Bush Sr., gained higher approval ratings among whites because their speeches resonated with whites.

**Power and the Race-Ethnicity and Distinction: Latino, Jewish, and Muslim**

To attend to the race-ethnicity distinction in presidential rhetoric, it is important to understand how both demographic and rhetorical changes interact with changing categorization. Alongside the increases in presidents' use of ethnic rhetoric, new groups became part of the racial and ethnic topology through changing patterns of immigration. As Nancy Foner states

"today's arrivals" to the United States "are no longer mainly European, and they come from a much wider array of nations and cultures than their predecessors." Around 1900, "new immigrants were overwhelmingly Russian Jews and Italians" but now "most immigrants come not from Europe but from Asian, Latin America, and the Caribbean." Puerto Ricans arrived in large numbers to New York the 1950s, but now Dominicans are the "second largest Hispanic group, making up about a quarter of all Hispanic New Yorkers," while "a combination of Ecuadorians, Colombians, and Mexicans represent about another quarter."[9]

One of the key political impacts of these new immigration trends is the way that new groups establish relationships to the existing racial taxonomy because it is through these new identities that political candidates can harness racial resentment. In an article in *Essence Magazine* from April 1984, James Baldwin argued that Jewish immigrants came to United States to escape poor treatment, or, as he states "because they were not white." He continues, "American Jews have opted to become white," calling white "a moral choice" that operates "because of the necessity of denying the Black presence, and justifying the Black subjugation."[10] Twenty-two years later, in her book *Latino Spin*, Arlene Davila examines "contemporary representations of U.S. Latinos" to "examine their effect on furthering whiteness." She concludes that these discourses "over ethnicize or de-ethnicize Latinos," which she argues is "tied to a larger racial project entailing the very reconfiguration of how we talk or do not talk about race and racial hierarchy in an increasingly racially diversified society."[11]

Considering the diversifying immigrant population, and the connection between immigration, race rhetoric and power, one important question to ask is how the changing patterns

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[9] Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration* (Yale University Press, 2002), 9 – 13.
[10] James Baldwin, "On Being 'White'… and Other Lies," *Essence* 14, no. 12 (1984): 90–92.
[11] Arlene M. Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (NYU Press, 2008).

of immigration, specifically the large influx of Latinos, will influence American's understanding of the category of whiteness. If Baldwin is correct in his assessment, that new groups come to the United States and "choose to become white," then whiteness maintains a persistent ability to adopt to new groups, allowing many immigrant to groups to join the category of white, and maintaining white majority status and power despite the increasing diversity. However, Asian and Latino immigration led to persistent media reporting on a potential for whites to be outnumbered after the Census Bureau released a projection that whites will lose their majority in 2050. CNN even mistakenly attributed the increase in whiteness studies courses at universities as proof of "racial anxiety" and the feelings of oppression among whites.[12] Whiteness scholars – who are focused on understanding how the concept whiteness maintains oppression and racial hierarchy, not on studying how whites are oppressed - cannot easily explain what might happen to these groups in the future. While many immigrant groups considered racially non-white today, the pivotal question for whiteness scholars remains: is it reasonable to assume that Asians and Latinos will become white?[13]

What can presidential rhetoric show us about the future of Latinos in the rhetorical development of race and ethnicity? Understanding the relationship between ethnicity and racial language, the changing patterns of immigration, and the scholarly attention to the issue of whiteness, what has been the relationship between Jewish and Latino in the *Public Papers*? Also, how have presidents referred to Muslims? From 1964 until 2004, references to the Jewish Americans, Latinos (or Hispanics), and Muslims Americans has fluctuated over time in an often similar, but uneven pattern. A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to assess the

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[12] See: "Are Whites Racially Oppressed?," accessed February 11, 2013, http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/12/21/white.persecution/index.html.
[13] This question is also posed in: Victoria Hattam, "Ethnicity: An American Genealogy," in *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity*, ed. Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2004), 42–61.

relationship between the frequency of the word Hispanic in the *Public Papers* and the frequency

of the word Jewish in the *Public Papers*. There was a positive correlation between the two

variables, r = 0.979, n = 8, p = 0.000. A Pearson product-moment correlation was also conducted

to assess the relationship between Hispanic and Jewish and Jewish and Muslim, but no

correlation exists in either case.

**Figure 12: Use of Words Hispanic, Latino, Muslim, and Jewish in Election Year
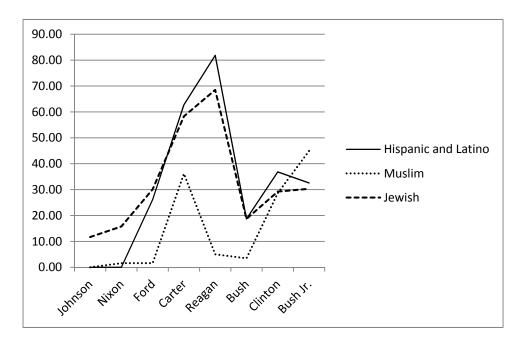Presidential Rhetoric, 1964-2004**



Figure 12 shows the rate of use of the words Hispanic and Latino, Muslim, and Jewish by

presidents during election years. Observable in this table is fluctuation over time of use of these

words. The graph shows a relatively close connection between the lines representing Hispanic

and Jewish, but a less clear relationship to the word Muslim.

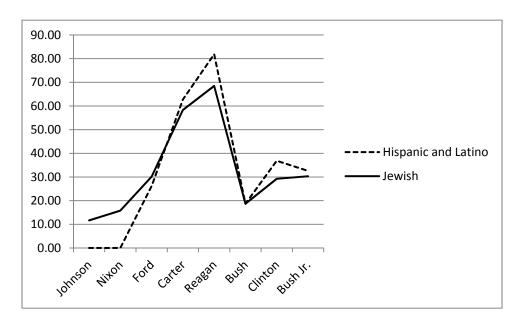**Figure 13: Use of Words Hispanic, Latino, and Jewish in Election Year Presidential Rhetoric, 1964-2004**
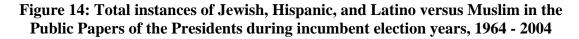


Figure 13, which shows just the lines for Hispanic/Latino and Jewish, shows how close these lines appear.

**Figure 14: Total instances of Jewish, Hispanic, and Latino versus Muslim in the Public Papers of the Presidents during incumbent election years, 1964 - 2004**
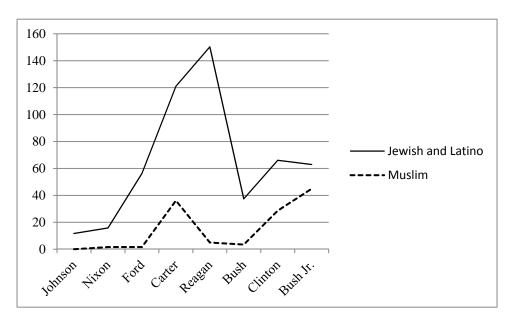


Figure 14, on the other hand, compares a combined curve of Jewish and Latino with the curve representing Muslim. While the curve overall appears somewhat similar, there is no statistically significant correlation between the two lines.

Why would there be a strong correlation between use of the words Hispanic and Jewish that does not extend to the word Muslim? The most pronounced incongruence occurs during the period of Carter, Reagan, and Bush. There are 56 instances of the word Muslim (or Moslem) in the *Public Papers* in 1980, but only 2 in 1976 and 5 in 1984. If we compare use of the word Muslim to use of the word Jewish, as in table 2, we can see that there are 13.67 instances of the word Jewish per every one instance of the word Muslim in Reagan's 1984 volume of the *Public Papers*. In Carter's volume in 1980, there exist 1.59 instances of Jewish per everyone one instance of the word Muslim.

**Table 4: Number of uses of the word Jewish per single use of the word Muslim**

| | |
|---|---|
| Johnson | N/A |
| Nixon | 10 |
| Ford | 19 |
| Carter | 1.59 |
| Reagan | 13.67 |
| Bush | 5.40 |
| Clinton | 1.02 |
| Bush Jr. | 0.68 |

Table 3 shows the number of instances that each of these words appeared in the *Public Papers*. Cater, Clinton, and Bush Jr. used the word Muslim more than Ford, Reagan, or Bush.

**Table 5: Use of Hispanic and Latino, Muslim, and Jewish during Election Years in the Public Papers**

| | Johnson | Nixon | Ford | Carter | Reagan | Bush | Clinton | Bush Jr. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hispanic/ Latino | 0.00 | 0.00 | 26.15 | 62.75 | 81.85 | 18.70 | 36.83 | 32.57 |
| Muslim | 0.00 | 1.58 | 1.58 | 36.13 | 5.01 | 3.46 | 28.65 | 44.92 |
| Jewish | 11.68 | 15.77 | 30.11 | 58.31 | 68.49 | 18.70 | 29.23 | 30.32 |

Presidents use the words Hispanic and Jewish at similar rates, but Muslim seems to fluctuate differently. As shown in chapter 3, presidents primarily used the word Muslim prior to 2004 to speak about relations with other countries and not about the American Muslim community. The correlation between Hispanic and Jewish suggests that there exists some relationship between a president's willingness to name ethnic categories, rather than their willingness to use less specific language, and the consistent attention given to both Hispanic Americans and Jewish Americans. Future research will likely be needed to assess how the word Muslim becomes part of presidential rhetoric after 2004.

The frequency that the word Hispanic occurs relative to the frequency of the word Jewish in the *Public Papers* is interesting given that it demonstrates a similarity between two words that scholars have noted are significant in the relationship between whiteness and ethnicity. While similarities in usage tell us little about the context of the words, it does show us that there exists relationship between who uses these words and when they use these words. Victoria Hattam states that "how Hispanic and/or Latinos come to identify is one of the critical factors to watch." She states that the fundamental question is "will the majority of Hispanics and/or Latinos accept the designation 'ethnic' or will they begin to racialize their identity by positioning themselves as 'people of color'."[14] As Raphael Sonenshein points out, "conservatives, white and Latino, believe that Latinos are on the road to assimilation along the classic lines of earlier immigrants, and to favor coalitions with "people of color" is to segregate Latinos from the mainstream."[15] Hattam also notes that how "those in power view Hispanics and/or Latinos in the decades to come" is important because, as she states "much will be determined by the attitudes and actions of the dominant white population."[16] Demonstrating the frequency of use of the word Hispanic relative to the word Jewish reveals a connection that can be explored further through the context in which presidents use the word Hispanic. It is there that we can further ascertain changes in elite rhetoric and the relation between Latinos and race.

**Conclusion**

No simple pattern can account for racial and ethnic rhetoric's use in presidential speeches over time. Neither party nor year is a significant predictor. What does seem to be the case is that the words that presidents use to speak about racial and ethnic difference are changing, and this

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Raphael Sonenshein, "When Ideologies Agree and Intersts Collide, What's a Leader to Do? The Prospects for Latino-Jewish Coalition in Los Angeles," in *Governing American Cities: Interethnic Coalitions, Competition, and Conflict*, ed. Michael Jones-Correa (Russell Sage Foundation, 2005).
[16] Hattam, "Ethnicity."

change occurred as presidents increased their references to ethnicity. A president who was likely to speak about race after 1976 was likely to speak about ethnicity, but that was not the case prior to 1976. Use of specific words by individual presidents confirms this account. Presidents who were more likely to speak about ethnicity were also more likely to use more ethnic-sounding word African-American. Moreover, presidents who were likely to use the word Jewish were also likely to use the word Hispanic, which suggests that presidents are attempting to appeal to these groups at similar rates.

The rate in which a president speaks about race and ethnicity seems to matter. Republican presidents who were more likely to speak about race were also more likely to have higher approval ratings among whites, with no impact of their approval rating among non-white voters. Interestingly, Democrats who were more likely to speak about race had lower approval ratings among all groups.

What these results suggest is that the long-term development of presidential rhetoric needs a closer analysis to understand language's dynamic. In many ways, this chapter opens up more questions than it answers. Specifically, how did Republicans presidents frame race that caused white voter approval to increase when they spoke about it more? How did presidents introduce the concept of ethnicity into presidential rhetoric, and how did they relate it to race? Through targeted textual analysis of the rhetoric during presidential elections, and analysis of the historical circumstances of these elections, we can better understanding how a dynamic developed between race and ethnicity.