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**I, Mariam Elgafy, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication.**

It is entitled:

**Framing Racism: A textual analysis of government and news media artifacts regarding the "Racism as a Public Health Crisis" legislation.**

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**“Framing Racism”: A textual analysis of government and news media artifacts regarding the  
“Racism as a Public Health Crisis” legislation**

Master of Arts Thesis  
in the Department of Communication  
of the College of Arts & Sciences

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### Abstract

This research study aims to analyze legislation regarding marginalized communities, with news media communication and government official communication thereof. In order for a public health issue to be considered a crisis, it must 1) affect a large number of people, 2) threaten the health of a group over the long-term, and 3) require adoption of large-scale solutions to combat the issue (Galea, 2017). Racism is, and always has been, a public health crisis. Racism has had debilitating consequences on marginalized communities for centuries; socially, politically, economically, etc. After the “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” legislation was introduced by Representative Jahana Hayes in 2020, numerous cities, counties, and states in the United States began declaring racism a public health crisis. Consequently, these declarations require action-steps by elected officials and community members to dismantle structural racism interwoven within policies and practices. Using Iyengar’s (1993) Thematic Framing, this study proposes 3 prominent frames of the “racism as a Public Health Crisis” legislation: Public Health, Social Justice, and Political frames. Furthermore, Tajfel’s (1979) Social Identity Theory expands upon the use of the pronouns “we” and “them” to categorize members of in-groups and out-groups. With the analysis of twenty news media and government artifacts, this study highlights the most prominent frames by coding words, terms, race of those quoted, as well as the use of an individual or collective narrative identity.

**Keywords:** *public health, crisis, policy, communication, media literacy, legislation, racism, marginalized communities, framing, political communication*



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Racism is, and always has been, a public health crisis. Countless research studies have proven again and again that the structural inequalities faced by people of color throughout the world have had physically, emotionally, mentally, and psychosocially debilitating consequences (Lewsley, 2020). Racism is in and of itself a complex, multilayered crisis everywhere it appears. This crisis affects the social, political, and economic spheres of society. The present study is principally interested in legislation pertaining to “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” within the United States. What makes racism a *public health* crisis is the way in which racism as a deeply entrenched system of privilege negatively affects the daily lives of marginalized group populations, adversely impacting their opportunities for an equitable future, and consequently producing unwarranted stressors. When confronted with systemic discrimination due to skin color, people of color experience interception of opportunities in every domain of our society (Solomon et al, 2019). This results in obstacles to virtually every area of public life including safe housing, quality education, and access to a fair healthcare system. Despite promises of freedom, justice, and equality in all of its civil documents from the U.S. Constitution to the Declaration of Independence, the United States has consistently offered safe harbor for racism, injustice, and inequitable treatment against its marginalized group citizens who are people of color, and the consequence of racism and its concomitant inequities and stressors is its very real danger to public health.

After the Summer of 2020 when the world witnessed global civil unrest due to racism, more than 50 cities across the United States have decided to take a stand against racism in the



form of legislation naming this social microbe an emergency. On July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Representative Jahana Hayes introduced House Resolution #1069 to the House of Representatives “Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis.”

Proposed in July 2020, the legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” was initiated by Senators Kamala Harris (D-CA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), and Cory Booker (D-NJ). This legislation acknowledges persistent racist treatment against people of color and associates that treatment with ongoing racial disparities and health outcomes. This legislation further acknowledges implicit racial and ethnic bias in the healthcare field impacting the quality of care experienced by communities of color (House Resolution 1069, House of Representatives). The effects of racism extend to severe mental health challenges, leading communities to suffer both societal issues and inequitable healthcare systems that stigmatize mental health (Conner et al, 2009). The declaration of “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” is an important first step in the movement to advance racial equity and justice and activists have called for follow-through and accountability from elected officials. Specifically, they have consistently advocated for allocation of resources and strategic action, especially related the COVID-19 pandemic (Miliard, 2021).

The “Whereas” statements within the congressional resolution declare racism as a public health crisis mention COVID-19: “Whereas, during the COVID–19 pandemic, the effects of racism and discrimination are seen in COVID–19 infection, hospitalization, and mortality rates” (Senate Resolution Bill *Racism as a Public Health Crisis*) within marginalized communities more than others. Often referred to as the “twin-demic,” COVID-19 and racism are inextricably linked in media discourses grappling with racism and its connection to public health.

Of particular interest to the present study is the way in which the media have framed the discussion of this legislation. Framing of the “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” legislation is crucial to its effectiveness, both to the public and for institutions that will attempt to implement measures to dismantle systemic racism and combat this crisis.

Clearly, the persistence of racism can no longer be overlooked. In 2020 the Black Lives Matter movement was once again reignited to stand up for Black lives lost to police brutality and race-based violence. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Riah Milton are a few of the many lives no longer able to dream of a future because their humanity and dignity were stripped away. The effects of racism extend beyond protests and racial segregation to the healthcare opportunities and quality of treatment of individuals. In a recent Senate testimony, Senator Corry Booker (D) of New Jersey stated, “These health inequities are the direct result of centuries of racist policy that have disenfranchised, disinvested, and disrespected Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color” (Booker, 2020). Racist policies have perpetuated racism further into health inequities, whether in access, structural equity, quality of treatment, or increased risk of disease. In 2020, the Coronavirus outbreak, or COVID-19, in the United States led to the questioning of both the vulnerability and susceptibility of marginalized communities to disease, as well as a healthcare system that further perpetuates disadvantages to these communities. COVID-19 exposed these large cracks of the healthcare system that many easily crossed over due to their inherited privilege. Policies and legislation have been proposed during this time to address health, privilege, and racism. Media outlets and official government press release unjustly cover such policies as will be discovered in this study.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Racism continues to be a leading cause of civil unrest and it is critical not to undermine the roots of this issue. The legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” was introduced to officially declare racism an issue that affects the quality of life, healthcare, and opportunities of marginalized communities. By not discussing disparities faced by these communities, we are not acknowledging a truth within our society that disproportionately affects Black, Brown, Latinx, and other minority groups. During the months of May-August 2020, senators and legislators have taken to this matter by introducing resolutions and emergency declarations that address disproportionate effects of COVID-19 and systemic racism on marginalized communities. Senator and Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris (D-CA) added in her Senate hearing testimony, “COVID-19 has caused a public health crisis that is disproportionately impacting people of color. In fact, available data shows that African American and Latinx people are three times as likely to get sick with the virus; and nearly twice as likely to die”. Harris framed racism as an issue that affects the health of African American and Latinx individuals. On the other hand, Cornell Health’s Skorton Center for Health Initiatives broadens the effects of racism in this legislation stating, “racial discrimination affects access to safe and affordable housing, healthcare, education, and employment—essentially every dimension of living as a BIPOC—while also dis-empowering members of these communities from having a voice or sense of agency in their lives” (Cornell University, 2020).

Media outlets and government officials play a large role in defining and presenting stories that are relevant and important to an audience. Media outlets could undermine the power and reach of these policies by framing it from a certain perspective. Similarly, if elected officials

state that this legislation is a partisan issue we now frame a legislation aimed to uplift the quality of life of marginalized communities as merely a political issue, once again undermining and diluting the harmful and extended effects of racism. Low representation of effects of the racism and the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized communities negatively affects these communities' interactions with the healthcare system, schooling, and even the workplace. Once a legislation or story is framed negatively or undermined by the storyteller, this affects how the viewer receives, retains, and reacts to the information further perpetuating that partisan media polarizes viewers perception (Levendusky, 2013). Different framings of this legislation include social justice, public health, and political framings that could overlap depending on the producer. For example, a problem emerges with this legislation if the producer of the message framed this legislation to be reflected as solely a political or partisan issue, stating that party affiliation plays a role in whether one supports or opposes this legislation.

### **Preview of Conceptual Framework**

To fully enhance the understanding of how this legislation was discussed by government and news media outlets, I will be studying the thematic framing of this legislation. Framing involves selection and salience of information from artifacts. Framing directs people where to look, but more importantly it leads to ways of interpretation. A frame guides the thoughts and feelings of audiences, thus leading to predictable conclusions. Iyengar's (1993) Thematic Framing is my overarching conceptual framework used to analyze the framing of selected artifacts. Framing functions as follows:

...Episodic frames present an issue by offering a specific example, case study, or event oriented report. Thematic frames, on the other hand, place issues into a broader context. Episodic coverage leads to individualistic attributions while thematic coverage engenders societal attributions were borne out in various experiments (Iyengar, 1991).

Thematic frames provide a broader area for the placement of stories with their context referring to individual events. Themes can be detected through language and images. Fairhurst and Sarr's (1996) proposed Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Of the four core communication process elements of framing, listed below in the graphic, text and language play a major role in the conceptual framing of this theory. Words selected within the artifacts perpetuate a particular meaning or framing. Framing tools used include metaphors, stories, traditions, slogan, artifacts, contrast, and spin. I will be analyzing textual evidence from government and national news artifacts from June-October 2020. In this study, the three types of thematic frames used to analyze the artifacts are political, public health, and social justice perceived framing. Word selection within these articles will indicate which type of frame is used to frame the legislation "Racism as a Public Health Crisis". By analyzing articles using framing as a conceptual framework, I am able to identify the types of thematic frames within artifacts according to the usage of language and word selection.

**Table 1**  
**Elements of Communication Process Framing**

<b>Elements of communication process framing; Entman (1993)</b>	<b><u>Communicator</u></b> (Guided by frames, media outlet and government officials make conscious or	<b><u>Text</u></b> (Manifested by the presence or absence of artifacts and	<b><u>Receiver</u></b> (The judgement of the audience and public may or may not align with the	<b><u>Culture</u></b> (Commonly invoked in frames, this includes the people in
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	unconscious framing judgements)	language creating judgement)	communicators intended frame)	social grouping)
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Furthermore, this research study utilizes Tajfel's (1979) Social Identity Theory which discusses the significance of intergroup relations and group processes. Tajfel and colleagues experimented with group dynamics and concluded that interpersonal interactions involve people relating as individuals, rather than heightened awareness of social categories (Hornsey, 2008). Tajfel (1963) argued that social categorization changes the way individuals view communities, once the distinction between "we" and "them" occurs. The concept of in-group and out-group members influences how we perceive ourselves and others who do not share our racial, religious, ethnic, etc. identities. Tajfel's (1979) Social Identity Theory guides the study of pronoun usage within government and news media artifacts and assists in answering this research study's research question #2.

### **Preview of Methods and Methodology**

The overarching methods used in this study include the collection of ten government and ten news media artifacts, which will be coded to determine word selection that perpetuate any of the following frames: political, public health, and/or social justice frames. In order to analyze government and national news articles I will be conducting a textual analysis of twenty artifacts relating to the "Racism as a Public Health Crisis" legislation. An artifact is a piece of evidence. Government artifacts, articles in this study, were produced by government officials. These government officials are elected by the American people to represent their respective districts, cities, states, etc. These government artifacts are official statements from elected officials. Media artifacts, also articles in this study, were produced by a news media outlet. The national

news media artifacts chosen in this study take place between June 2020-October 2020, using the Stanford News Analyzer to select news segments with high frequency mentions of “racism as a public health crisis”, detailed below. Ten artifacts will be government related, while another ten will be national news articles. These artifacts will be covered during the time period of June 2020-October 2020. This period was carefully chosen as it reflects a period in 2020 when there was protests against police brutality, rising cases of COVID-19, and increasing death rates of Black and Brown individuals due to healthcare inequities. This textual analysis will be of word selection within these artifacts that perceive a thematic frame. These frames are words pertaining to framing of the “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” legislation as a political, public health, or social justice issue. These themes will be apparent through the words used in the article that pertain to a lenience of a frame, such words as “race-based violence”, “health disparities”, and “socioeconomic”. The emergent themes will be presented through the authors of quotes within the artifacts, as well as the content of these quotes. A chart of findings will include the article name, type (government or national news), word selection, as well perceived thematic frame (political, public health, social justice). These frames might overlap and this will be noted in the findings. Textual analysis of these artifacts allows me to delve deep into the message behind certain framing of artifacts, specifically to the effect of narratives regarding legislations aimed at marginalized communities. The research questions, explored deeper later in this project, include:

1. How have the perceived thematic frames in government and news media artifacts pertaining to “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” contextualized this legislation as a *political, public health, and social justice issue*?

2. How have government and news media artifacts thematically framed artifacts using the pronouns “we” and “them”?

### **Preview of Literature**

A public health crisis is defined by its health consequences as by its causes and precipitating events (AMJ Public Health, 2007). This public health crisis becomes emergent when “its health consequences have the potential to overwhelm routine community capabilities to address them”. Declaring a state of emergency for a public health crisis involved coordinates planning and implementation in order to achieve change. As racism is declared a public health crisis, this entails that the root cause of racism is affecting the mental and physical health of marginalized communities, as well as the healthcare treatment received. The power of communicating a message is extraordinary and substantial, with the producer given the ability to form the way we consume the message and react upon it. The concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text (Entman, 1993). To frame a topic is to select aspects of a perceived reality in a way to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation”. The legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” is a combination of identifying a problem, interpreting multiple causes to this dilemma, evaluating the morality of policies, and recommending treatment and a strategic course of action to dismantle a system that perpetuates racism and disadvantages marginalized communities. Using framing to conceptualize how government and state news media outlets discuss the legislation provides insight to a deliberative frame that affects the consumption of this information by audiences.



### ***Racism and Extended Effects***

Although racism is not just about Black and Brown communities, research shows these communities are most adversely affected. A disproportionate number of Black individuals lack adequate health insurance to seek treatment as well as more likely to have underlying conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (Snowden and Graaf, 2019). Additionally, there are socioeconomic factors that put Black communities in greater risk of obtaining viruses due to geographic location; in the COVID-19 pandemic this was the demographics of frontline workers who did not have the option of working from home (Goba, 2020). These frontline workers in discussion are not only hospital workers and first responders, but also grocery store workers, warehouse workers, bus drivers, subway conductors, postal workers, security workers, custodians, factory workers, home health aides, and the many others whose work must be done at their workplace and is vital for society to function (Krieger, 2020). Individuals are at greater risk of obtaining diseases and their health is put at risk due to systems that perpetuate inequality and racism. Vestal (2020) states, “Being Black is bad for your health. And pervasive racism is the cause”. A message from the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Black Psychology, Vandiver (2020), urges researchers to become involved in conducting psychological research and scholarship on people of African descent. Furthermore, Vandiver states that Black scholars and allies must be in charge of this scholarship and must ensure implications for public policy in the health, education, housing, employment and safety areas. This research will assist in shaping the policies that can upend the racial disparities for Black communities and have a subsequent impact on addressing racism for all marginalized communities (Vandiver, 2020).

Without the understanding of added effects of racism and discrimination, one lacks knowledge of structural systems and policies that inherently disadvantage marginalized communities as well as the extent of short-term and long-term effects of racism and discrimination. Racism has restricted socioeconomic attainment for members of minority groups (Williams, 1999) and educational and employment opportunities have further reinforced social, structural, and racial inequity. Williams continues to discuss this structural racism through residential segregation which “leads to the concentration of poverty in residential areas and thus the concentration of poverty in the classroom”. Richard Rothstein in *The Color of Law* discusses that although the U.S. history includes government-organized discrimination and even segregation of other groups it is of lesser degree than the de jure segregation experienced by Black Americans (Rothstein, 2017). De jure segregation are mandated laws that enforce segregation in communities, with effects we see reignited in 2020 when the deep effects of racism are once again questioned due to profound and extensive consequences on marginalized communities. Segregation has shown despicable effects on these communities, with racism perpetuating beyond injustice, but mortality (Collins and Williams, 1999). The role of the media in depicting these inequalities and communicating such inequities to the public is critical to informing a greater society (Carmichael et al, 2017). The framing of instances regarding racism and discrimination, whether conscious or unconscious by the message producer, can lead audiences to consume the knowledge in a variety of ways.

### ***Role of Media in Framing***

The role of media coverage has dramatically increased in recent years due to the dependency of consumers and the increased need of information-seeking. The framing of

stories within this media coverage plays a large role in shaping how these words and images flow into the consciousness and realities of audiences (Entman, 2007). Disasters, as racism, can have both short-term and long-term health consequences for the victims involved, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, or substance abuse (Vasterman et al, 2005). Profound racial disparities in 2020 have served as a mega-threat and mega-event for news media outlets, as well as for institutions. Often times, in order for these disparities to come to the awareness of those not affected a mega-threat or mega-event must happen. A mega-threat is defined as “a negative, large-scaled, diversity-related episode that receives significant media attention” (Leigh and Melwani, 2019). The death of Black lives due to race-based violence by police in 2020 ignited this mega-threat, with the legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” showing prominence during this time period.

Framing of news stories influence how the audience perceives this information and applies it into their realities. News media framing is done consciously and unconsciously, with emotions tied to the lens used to present information. Carmichael (2017) states that partisan media plays a role in framing news stories to reinforce opposition or support of certain topics of public interest, furthering opinions of news media outlets imposed on audiences. These frames can be episodic which present an issue by offering a specific example, or thematic frames which place issues into broader contexts (Iyengar, 1991). Both frames lead to different outcomes and audience perception, as emotions are at the core of these framing techniques.

The legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” presented an opportunity for media outlets to discuss the effects of racism in multiple sectors of society. Accurate framing of this legislation to discuss racism, public health, and social injustices was an opportunity for the

media to perpetuate a positive effect on health and societal consequences on marginalized communities. Framing of this legislation as a social justice and public health issue ignites critical conversations regarding the dire effects of racism, beyond protests and political party affiliation. Beyond the media, elected officials, too, have the opportunity to frame this legislation in ways to appeal to constituents. In a Senate hearing discussing “Racism as a Public Health Crisis”, Senator Brown (D-OH) framed this legislation as a social justice issue that could reverse racial disparities in the United States, “This resolution is an important step toward recognizing the racial disparities in healthcare that have existed for far too long while also outlining concrete action we can take now to help reverse them” (Brown, Senate Hearing, 2020).

On the other hand, academics had the opportunity to utilize this legislation as means to provoke intensified research in their respective fields of social justice, public health, mental health of marginalized communities, and to expose evidence in academia of the extensive effects of racism. Through all of these means, each aspect has the power to frame the legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” in ways to allow strategic action and change to be instilled within institutions, neighborhoods, and the healthcare system. As mentioned previously, Vandiver (2020), urges researchers in all fields, STEM and non-STEM, to become involved in conducting research and sponsoring scholarship that would invest in studies in critical areas such as race, racism, and extended effects of being part of a marginalized community in America.

## Research Questions

The following research questions will help guide this study pertaining to the thematic framing of artifacts regarding the “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” legislation:

1. How have the perceived thematic frames in government and news media artifacts pertaining to “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” contextualized this legislation as a *political, public health, and social justice issue*?
2. How have government and news media artifacts thematically framed artifacts using the pronouns “we” and “them”?

## Overview

In the forthcoming chapters, I will explore the framing of the legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” of government and news media artifacts. The type of thematic frame (political, public health, or social justice) will be noted by these artifacts in consideration with word usage and authors quoted within. Chapter 1 has served as an introduction and overview of the research. Chapter 2 provides an extended literature review of existent literature discussing framing of artifacts and how framing techniques have historically evolved. Chapter 3 will provide information on the methods and methodology of research which will assist the reader to dive deeper into the components of the thematic frames that pertain to artifacts. This chapter will also outline the methodology of the Stanford Cable News TV Analyzer, which will be the tool used to research news segments with the specific time frame of the research. Chapter 4 will be an analysis of the information gained from artifacts collected, commonalities and differences within thematic frames will be discussed, as well as the usage of pronouns such as “we” and “them” to include or alienate groups. Finally, Chapter 5 will conclude with research

findings as well as propose gaps in literature and theories pertaining to analysis of legislation and the effect framing of legislations have on marginalized communities.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Defining a Public Health Crisis

Unlike a pandemic, epidemic, or emergency a public health crisis does not have an epidemiological definition, though researchers have strived to provide qualifiers to label this crisis. Without an existing definition of public health crisis, this creates a vacuum for “crisis” to be misused in defining less critical events. A public health crisis must meet three qualifiers in order to be considered a crisis: the problem must affect large numbers of people, the problem must threaten health over the long-term, and the problem must require the adoption of large-scale solutions (Galea, 2017). For example, the Opioid crisis in Ohio qualifies under these determinants as it affects large numbers of people, threatens the health of Ohioans, and the state has adopted large-scale measures to overcome this health crisis. The Opioid crisis can be seen on victims, felt in communities who have lost loved ones due to overdosing, and heard through the cries of families torn due to this deadly crisis for decades past. Racism is often questioned whether it is a public health crisis, political partisan issue, or possibly a socioeconomic determinant. Based on a Boston University School of Public Health study, Dr. Amelie Ramirez and colleagues put racism to the ‘public health crisis’ test (Merck, 2020) and identified three prominent qualifiers, outlined in the following paragraphs.

The first qualifier of a public health crisis states that the problem must affect large numbers of people. Impacting over 100 million marginalized individuals in the United States, systemic racial injustices have denied many the equal opportunities to grow and be treated with human dignity. These opportunities include limited or denied access to healthcare, housing, land use

and ownership, transportation policies, red lining neighborhoods and schools, racial segregation, unjust labor laws, and many more complex issues.

The second qualifier of a public health crisis states that the problem must threaten health over the long-term. Racial injustices have been perpetuated in the United States for decades, far back and beyond the Jim Crow law era starting in 1865 (History, 2020). Reinforced policies and practice of racial segregation and injustices have systemically denied equal opportunity and access to Black communities in America. The health of Black Americans has been affected for decades due to this crisis. Dr. Susan Moore is one of the latest victims of systemic racism in healthcare who died due to COVID-19 complications after a White physician downplayed her complains of pain and discharged her, though it was to her detriment (Eligon, 2020).

The third and final qualifier of a public health crisis states that the problem must require the adoption of large-scale solutions. Large-scale solutions are indeed critical and needed in order to diminish a system rooted in policies and practices that disadvantage marginalized communities. This is the final reason why racism must be declared a public health crisis in order for policies to be put in place to overcome racial injustices. This qualifier propels states to take action regarding the legislation “racism as a public health crisis” to address structural racism and to investigate areas to implement anti-racist policies and practices.

These three qualifiers outline what is required to label a crisis a “public health crisis” and allows for alignment to the detriments of racism, labelling it a public health concern. Racism affects large numbers of people, threatens the health of communities over the long-term, and requires the adoption of large-scale solutions in order to change policies and practices. Racism is, in fact, a public health crisis.



Making this crisis a declaration for states is a step towards the adoption of state procedures and solutions aimed to dismantle systemic racism. The Opioid crisis was mentioned earlier to highlight the tangible and physical evidence of a public health crisis that can be seen by the naked eye; though racism must be uncovered through stories, experiences, and individuals willing to take a stand for marginalized communities in the workplace, healthcare, and beyond (Lentin, 2018). Racism affects certain populations more than others, Dr. Moore mentioned in a video recording prior to her death that her treatment by the doctor was not what she deserved “I put forth and I maintain if I was White, I wouldn’t have to go through that” (Moore, 2020). Biased medical treatment of Black patients continues to affect the health and livelihood of Black Americans and marginalized communities.

On August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020 an article posted by CNN Health states that treating racism as a public health issue is not a new idea, but what is novel in 2020 is that the “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” declaration came at a time when the country was at the midst of a national reckoning on race. “Both the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent killings of Black people at the hands of police have brought renewed attention to the ways that systems and institutions disadvantage people of color, especially Black Americans” (Kaur and Mitchell, 2020). CNN Health framed this legislation as a social justice and public health issue, stating that both have become intertwined as healthcare systems further perpetuate racism and racist policies.

“We Matter.” “We want to live.” “We are not a threat.” Yes. There was fire. Yes. there was chaos. Yes. there was rage, but beneath all of that, there was an attempt to make the pain visible.” (Acosta, 2020)

Overcrowded prisons are consequences of militarized policing (Acosta, 2020) and lead to larger spread of infectious diseases. Though Black Americans make up 12% of the adult general population, they make up 33% of the prison system. Similarly, Latinx make up 23% of the prison population, but only 16% of the adult general population (Gramlich, 2020). These numbers heighten the vulnerability of marginalized communities in prisons in obtaining diseases, while states fail to protect the health of inmates. Overcrowded and unsanitary conditions have increased the number of COVID-19 infections in prisons, leading to fatalities and higher risk of infections (Acosta, 2020). Racism in policing has forcibly pushed Black and Brown bodies into the prison system, where their health and wellness is not accounted for nor regarded.

...It is equally no wonder that we are willing to risk infection by taking to the streets in protest. Our lives are already at risk. Our lives are at risk regardless of if we are law abiding citizens. We carry the toxic stress we experience in our bodies where it festers weakening our immune systems and stealing our health. Why not then take to the streets and make that pain visible? What is there to lose, really?... (Acosta, 2020)

Acknowledging structural factors of racism is necessary in addressing how racism affects the lives of marginalized communities. This reluctance in addressing root structural factors was noted by scholars, “Doing something about poverty, racism involves notions of planned social and economic change, alternations are not likely to be achieved by lowering the public's cholesterol level” (Becker, 1986). The study of racism linked to health gained traction in the 1990s (Gee and Ford, 2011). For centuries health inequities were viewed as cultural issues, rather than systemic racism. High blood pressure and increased infant mortality rates for Black

Americans were seen as biological or cultural discrepancies, rather than the healthcare system disadvantaging entire communities. Ohio Senator Steve Huffman was fired from his job as a physician when he stated people of color might be disproportionately affected by the coronavirus due to poor hygiene. Huffman not only used an offensive and outdated word of “colored people” but his notion that certain communities are not practicing basic hygiene is a prime example of White superiority (Richardson, 2020).

### **Racism and Extended Effects**

Racism is defined as the concept that some people are better than others because of their race (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). A group is given advantages due to their race, while others are disadvantaged due to the latter. On the other hand, race is the biological and cultural practices of a group. Bonilla-Silva (2015) indicates that racism should be perceived as a materialist rather than idealist fashion. This entails that racism is about practices that produce racial structures that shape the lives of marginalized communities. Similarly, this structure is responsible for the “production and reproduction of systemic racial advantages and disadvantages of others”. These advantages are catered to the dominant racial group while disadvantaging subordinate races (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Marx and Engels (1975) argue that ideology is linked to domination, stating that racist ideologies are consequential to racist policies and practices.

America is not living in a post-racial society (Austin, 2009). The swearing in of Barack Obama, the first Black president, as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States does not put an end to racism in America. Anti-black racism, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim sentiments were powerful factors in the opposition against former President Obama (Austin, 2009). Racism didn’t end when Alvin Ailey brought the art of Black dance, music and choreography to the

world of theatre (Dunning, 1989). Despite the talent and unapologetic nature of Muhammad Ali in the boxing arena, racism and islamophobia only heightened due to the nation he resided in. The previously mentioned individuals rose to greatness over time, though racism persisted. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, America has proven the struggle to power and superiority does not lie within the hands of marginalized Black and Brown communities. The killing of innocent Black bodies such as Tamir Rice, Casey Goodson, Jamila Arshad, Trayvon Martin, Rayshard Brooks, and countless others have proven the persistence of racism in a country that portrays peace and freedom through the colors of its flag. Gee et al (2009) provide the iceberg metaphor to discuss individual and structural racism:

The tip of the iceberg represents acts of racism -- that are easily seen and individually mediated. The portion of the iceberg that lies below the water represents structural racism; it is more dangerous and harder to eliminate. Policies and interventions that change the iceberg's tip may do little to change its base, resulting in structural inequalities that remain intact, though less detectable (Gee et al, 2009).

The Jim Crow law, in U.S. history, is any law that enforced racial segregation in the south between the end of the Reconstruction in 1877 and beginning of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s (Urofsky, 2021). This era also marked a rise in violence towards Black Americans and marginalized communities. One of the most ruthless organizations during this era, the Ku Klux Klan, believed in White superiority and reaped to terrorize Black communities and immigrants. Jim Crow laws forbade Black Americans from entering public parks and segregated theaters and restaurants (History, 2020). This was extended to racial segregation of neighborhoods to allow Whites to live in affluent neighborhoods while property prices and values would decrease if a

Black American would move to the area (Rothstein, 2017). Real Estate agents were encouraged to steer away White individuals from Black neighborhoods, further dividing neighborhoods and instilling racist ideologies. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in public spaces, integrated public schools, and based workplace and employment discrimination on race illegal (Schwartz, 2020). A year later the Voting Rights Act of 1965, enforcing the fifteenth amendment of the constitution, outlawed discriminatory voting practices such as literacy tests and poll taxes. Despite these laws, voter suppression is prominent in many states (Georgia is the latest example of voter suppression turned to empowerment) and a civil war was on the brinks of occurring as we began a new year in 2021.

Perspectives from different areas of study regarding racism further enlarge the gap of systemic racism and the effects of it on the health and livelihood of Black and Brown communities. Bonilla-Silva (2015) labelled a new emergent system called “new racism” which outline systemic and societal effects racism and racist policies have on marginalized communities. Bonilla-Silva outlines five racial structure characteristics of the “new racism”: The first characteristic is the increasing covert nature of racial discourse and practices. Racial practices reside in hiring and promoting employees, redlining neighborhoods, denying medical services, etc. The second characteristic is the avoidance of direct racial terminology. This can be witnessed in the workplace when individuals hesitate to label racist behaviors or when a physician denies their patient access to critical testing. The third characteristic is the elaboration of a racial political agenda that eschews direct racial references. Political agendas contain broad statements such as “economic prosperity” and “police reform”, but what do these agendas entail? Without specific wording such as “increased anti-bias training” and

“allocate funds to underserved schooling districts” politicians are shying away from using racial references in their agendas. The fourth characteristic is the subtle character of most mechanisms to reproduce racial privilege. This applies, again, to privilege in housing, education, work, healthcare, etc. The final characteristic of this “new racism” is the rearticulation of some racial practices of the past. Voter suppression was a racial practice, though that was before the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These five characteristics by Bonilla-Silva (2015) of systemic and structural racism provide a bases to racial practices and policies that disadvantage non-dominant communities.

Racist narratives, prevalent even post-Civil War era, are what have shaped white supremacist ideologies. Soares (2018) comments, “even though the majority of Americans did not own slaves they harbored and accepted many of the racial prejudices and white supremacist ideology that slavery was based upon.” The narratives of keeping marginalized communities in inferior roles through education, healthcare, jobs, etc. has allowed for racist narrative agendas to prevail. Shows and motion pictures reinforced racist ideologies, by only allowing roles for Black Americans in caricature or to portray blackface in film. Black Americans stepped into these roles in attempt to “subvert American minds and cultural concepts of Blacks” (Soares, 2018). Media roles such as “Mammy” were played by Black women showcasing a compassionate role of a maid. The Aunt Jemima Syrup figure is one of the most prominent figures of Mammies. The racist White narrative continued in attempting to promote this idea that Black communities were satisfied and content with their roles in society. This was an attempt to keep marginalized communities in inferior positions, in fear of radicalized growth or

perceived power. Whether before or after the Civil Rights movement, the hierarchy of power keeps marginalized communities in inferior positions and contains their narratives.

Racial oppression and lynching were used to maintain White domination as it was perceived of “elitism” to show racial solidarity to the White race (Covington, 2010). The criminalization of Black and Brown bodies in the United States is still prevalent in modern-day society. After waiting for the judge’s decision for 21 years, Brandon Bernard was executed in December of 2020 for a crime he committed when he was an adolescent (Carrega, 2020). Bernard’s lawyers, and many other legislators and celebrities, pleaded that Bernard was not a leader in the crime, but it was too late as Donald Trump and Attorney General William Barr proceeded with the decision. This reflects reality as many Black and Brown bodies have been jailed and received death sentences due to wrongful accusations. Black Americans, as compared to other ethnic-racial groups, are more likely to go to prison and are at greater disadvantages after a criminal conviction (Pager, 2007). Structural racism is fatal in prison systems disproportionately affecting the health, convictions, and admittance rates of inmates.

Law-and-order politics resonated with White, middle class voters, who were increasingly anxious about their social position, and the public’s growing disillusionment with welfare state policies that seemingly did little to rehabilitate prisoners or decrease crime, generate economic and ethnic-racial equality, or enhance financial and social security (Page and Whetstone, 2014).

Structural racism threatens the perceived social positions of individuals, specifically those in positions of power who are capable of enacting change but become complicit. Post-racial discourse in the United States argues that the category of race has been worn out as a

result of the adoption of post-Civil Rights era legislation and social equality norms (Guinier and Torres, 2002). This discourse is dangerous and undermines the prevalence of racism in America and a study from the University of Washington asserts these sentiments. The study reveals that 56% of Americans agree with the statement that “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites” (Haltinner, 2014). This statement reaps of White ideology that success is a matter of trying harder, rather than acknowledging the structures put in place to disadvantage the path of marginalized communities. “Trying harder” does not equate to marginalized communities receiving proper healthcare nor protects them from harmful diseases to which they become more susceptible.

...Nationwide, Black people have died at 1.6 times the rate of White people. As of January 2021, 55,088 Black lives have been lost to COVID-19 (The COVID Tracking Project, 2020)

Racism is pervasive in prisons systems, schools, and also healthcare systems. Health inequities and accessibility to healthcare facilities was prevalent as the Coronavirus spread in the United States. COVID-19 has simply “pulled a thread” that revealed profound inequities in a deep and inequitable societal and systemic structure (Krieger, 2020). To focus the discussion on COVID-19 is to overlook the vital emergence of an issue which is that racism is far engrained in systems and structures and COVID-19 is only further demonstrating this disparity. The impact of racism far extends to the delivery of healthcare and mental health services, affecting the means of marginalized communities seeking treatment. For instance, the U.S. Supreme Court’s Plessy vs. Ferguson case established racial segregation in the U.S. by further perpetuating the “separate is equal” clause. The decision affected educational opportunities for marginalized



communities, as well as the types of healthcare they were permitted. The effects of the court's ruling are now evident with Black children twice as likely as White children to die in the first year, be born prematurely, suffer low birth weight, have mothers that received little to no prenatal care, live in substandard housing, and have less access to healthcare and mental health services (Hollar, 2001). Comprehensive mental health care must include culture competency to lower stigma surrounding marginalized communities seeking treatment. These are just a few long-term health consequences of the Supreme Court's ruling in Plessy vs. Ferguson from 1896 that continue to perpetuate racism on a societal and systemic level.

...COVID-19 has caused a public health crisis that is disproportionately impacting people of color. In fact, available data shows that African American and Latinx people are three times as likely to get sick with the virus; and nearly twice as likely to die

– Vice President-Elect Harris (D-CA), Senate Hearing Testimony, 2020

Racism is a potent psychosocial stressor that is characterized by both social ostracism and blocked economic opportunity (Brondolo et al, 2008). Enduring racism leads to cognitive, behavioral, and psychophysiological responses affecting the health of affected individuals. Such responses to racism increase the risk of stress-related disorders and mental health challenges over time. Culturally responsive healthcare is a means of intervening with racial disparities at a structural level (Brondolo et al, 2008). Racism is directly linked to increasing medical needs of marginalized communities:

Laboratory and ambulatory monitoring studies have documented the relationship between racism and psychophysiological reactivity, including cortisol, blood pressure, and heart rate responses. These patterns of reactivity have been linked to the

development of stress-related disorders, such as hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases (Brondolo et al, 2008; Matthews et al, 2004; Treiber et al, 2003).

Garcia and Sharif (2015) compare the responsibility of the healthcare field in playing a role in racial disparities to Krieger's (2007) work and emphasis on poverty in health research. Krieger states that epidemiologists "cannot afford to ignore poverty" as it jeopardizes the scientific rigor of their work (Krieger, 2007). Krieger states that it is the "intellectual responsibility" of researchers to study the role of poverty in health, just as Garcia and Sharif (2015) state that it is the responsibility of social scientists to study the disproportionate effects of racism on public health. A race-conscious approach is critical in order to examine how racism goes beyond the individual and interpersonal level, but affects structural, institutional, and societal levels.

"White Americans aren't afraid of the cops. White Americans are never afraid of the cops. Even when they are committing insurrection. Even when they are engaged in attempting to occupy our Capitol, to steal the votes of people who look like me. Because in their mind, they own this country, they own the Capitol, they own the cops, the cops work for them. And people who look like me have no right to try to elect a President. Because we don't get to pick the President. They get to pick the President. They own the President. They own the White House. They own this country. I guarantee you if that was a Black Lives Matter protest in D.C. there would already be people shackled, arrested, or dead" (Reid, 2021)

Jacob Blake was left paralyzed by police officers, later dying, after being shot seven times in the back in front of his three children (Morales, 2021). Breonna Taylor was murdered in

her own home during a botched raid of her apartment by police officers (Oppel Jr., 2021). Elijah McClain was sedated and put in a chokehold by police officers as he walked home from the convenience store (Lampen, 2020). Dr. Susan Moore, a Black physician, died after being denied proper medical treatment when the appointed physician ‘was not comfortable giving her narcotics’ and stated that she most probably did not qualify for further treatment (Eligon, 2020). Casey Goodson was killed by police officers after they mistook his Subway sandwich for a weapon (Maxouris, 2020). Fast forward a few months from these incidents, white supremacists breached the United States Capitol during a congressional session and attempted a coup on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Police and security guards did not harm these domestic terrorists, but rather complicitly did not prevent them from entering the Capitol. These white supremacists were called protestors and demonstrators, though looting classified government files and storming congressional offices (Bertrand, 2021). The attack on January 6<sup>th</sup> was the biggest determinant and solid evidence to modern day America that racism is prominent, dangerous, and affects the health, safety, and opportunities of marginalized communities.

### **Role of Media in Framing**

Partisan media plays a role in reinforcing and strengthening opposition or support of certain topics of public interest (Carmichael et al, 2017). Iyengar (1991) focuses on the use of episodic and thematic framing in persuasive messages that ignite emotional reactions, with a focus on emotions, framing, and policy views to shape public opinion. A frame is a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events weaving a connection among them (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). Frames guide the thoughts of audiences about an event or issue in a predictable way in order to reach a predictable

conclusion. Partisan frames, unlike bipartisan, are aimed to shape a specific opinion about a policy, issue, or event. Particular frames imposed on an issue or event can shape opinion on related policies (Druckman, 2001). Emotions are powerful means to move audiences to cognitively feel a certain way or to take action. Episodic frames present an issue by offering a specific example, case study, or event-oriented report, while thematic frames place issues into broader contexts (Gross, 2008). These frames are chosen by journalists for greatest impact on audiences, using the power of emotional appeals to engage their cognition and actions. In his book *Is Anyone Responsible?* Iyengar (1991) examines the effects of episodic and thematic frames in television news media on policies, events, and issues relating to the general public's interest, particularly political issues. Iyengar argued the following:

... The prevalence of episodic framing in political news coverage diverts attention from societal responsibility and leads people to hold individuals responsible for their own predicaments, thereby dampening support for government programs designed to address problems and shielding leaders from responsibility ... (Iyengar, 1991)

Citizens exposed to episodic frames fail to see the connections between problems such as poverty, racial discrimination, and crime when they are presented as discrete and unconnected (Gross, 2008). Iyengar's framing coverage concluded that individuals were more likely to offer individualistic attributions when faced with episodic frames, while offering societal attributions when faced with a thematic frame. Individuals who attribute poverty, racism, and other issues to societal rather than structural challenges are more likely to adhere to episodic frames. On the other hand, individuals who connect racism and other issues to systemic and structural challenges adhere to thematic frames. The details of a particular

television news media, including the language and words, determine how effective the episodic or thematic frame is. Gross (2008) believes that an episodic frame should be more emotionally engaging than a thematic frame, as there is an extra detail of “human interest” that would be included. Episodic and thematic framing both shape the perceptions of the audiences, but also the perception of the audience on who is to be held accountable and enforce systemic change.

... Societal attributions of responsibility led people to offer greater support for government programs to solve political problems and to hold political leaders responsible. Episodic framing of political problems diverts attention from societal responsibility and leads people to hold individuals responsible for their own situation, thereby diminishing support for government programs designed to address the problem (Iyengar, 1991).

Gross (2008) also found that research in political science has found that emotional reactions shape political judgements, and their effects vary in sensible ways (Abelson et al, 1982). Emotional reactions serve as a basis of judgement (Schwartz, 2000). As millions watched the gut-wrenching video of the murder of Eric Garner as he yelled “I can’t breathe”; a sensible human would not watch the video and look away cognitively and emotionally unaffected. This video of police brutality, and countless others, leave viewers emotionally triggered. Many take to protesting and questioning their elected officials on police reform, the criminal justice system, and the judicial system as a whole. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) believe the race of the individual portrayed in the news story affects the perception of the audience. The story of Dr. Susan Moore facing racial discrimination and later dying due to physician negligence and racism led many to question the racial equity in the healthcare system. Emotions and the framing of

stories in news media stories play a large role in how the audience interprets the content, but also how the audience perceives and reacts to the information. Our emotions take part in shaping our opinions; if one is outraged, they question, challenge, seek change, and take action. But if one watches a television news media and the content allows the viewer to blame a specific individual for a greater disparity facing society, this shows the ineffectiveness of news framing to enact structural and systemic change.

Communication, political science, and public relations researchers believe there still remains ambiguity and inconsistency around the concept of framing (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). “Currently, the field of communication produces dozens of framing studies each year, many of which have little to do with the original conception of framing” (Cacciatore et al, 2016). Salience-based definition of framing, such as that of Entman’s (1993) theory, positions framing as a product of accessibility rather than applicability (as Iyengar and others define framing). This definition observes that framing is communication aimed to merely making information salient, visible and accessible to the audience. A simplified salience-based approach to framing is not the intended definition of framing in this thesis project. The definition encompassed by framing in this research is that of applicability of content through the language usage. The effects of framing will differ from each individual based on their experiences and ways of perception; “an audience member’s preexisting cognitive schema or knowledge structures will determine the degree to which a frame will resonate” (Cacciatore et al, 2016).

The concept of responsibility is an essential building block of all social knowledge (Iyengar, 1996). Concepts of framing thus must encompass responsibility as a characteristic of evaluating information. Attribution of responsibility is highly critical in the extent power

influence information could have on an audience, shaping both societal and interpersonal attitudes. Television news media can hold an individual responsible due to their influence, as well as hierarchy and position in society. For instance, Mark Zuckerberg is the individual held accountable when his social media platform, Facebook, causes controversy due to privacy concerns or promotion of racism, islamophobia, etc. The information environment in which political issues and agendas are presented are predicaments to the influence of the information on audiences and who is held responsible for it (Iyengar, 1996). For instance, news stories that dwell on and revolve around particular individual cases, such as in an episodic frame, increased and encouraged viewers to blame the victim of the story (Iyengar, 1996). This decreased the focus on societal and structural responsibility to enact change.

An added layer of bias might be added in framing of news stories, allowing for the prejudice and distortion of content. Three types of major biases are defined by Entman (2007): distortion bias, content bias, and decision-making bias. Distortion bias is news that distorts and falsifies reality. Content bias favors one side instead of providing equivalent information from both perspectives, usually in a political conflict. Lastly, decision-making bias relates to the individual motivation and mindset of journalists who produce biased content. The distinction between these three concepts can be crucial (Scheufele, 2000). Political communication research entails that if framing is added under the umbrella of bias, this would advance the understanding of the media's role in distributing power and influencing policies through the perceptions of viewers. "As political communication research demonstrates, indisputable facts play only a partial role in shaping the framing words and images that flow into an audience's consciousness" (Entman, 2007). The criminalization of Blackness, associating terrorism with

Muslims and Arabs, and overlooking identity when the perpetrator is White demonstrates content bias in journalism.

“The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” -Malcom X

The role of media is critical when discussing policies, specifically the frames chosen to portray these policies. Media engage in intersectional stereotyping when relating the racial, religious, and ethnic identities of individuals (Wigger, 2019). Race and racism in popular media and television media has existed in the long history of North America (Behnken and Smithers, 2015). Racism is seen in cartoons, television shows, and news media. Kassia Kulaszewicz (2015) discusses racial and ethnic emphasis in television media, “News coverage with an ethnic emphasis often occurs in topics related to social dilemmas, politics, research findings, education, and other related subjects”. These topics add the extra layer of potential bias to the news stories, once again adding to the framing of systemic racism and related policies.

....When you frame something as a communicator or as a journalist or as an expert, what you do is you emphasize one dimension of a complex issue over another, calling attention to certain considerations and certain arguments more so than other arguments. In the process, what you do is you communicate why an issue may or may not be a problem, who or what is responsible for that problem and then what should be done. Every act of communication, whether intentional or not, involves some type of framing (Nisbet, 2012).



As we explore the diverse framings of the legislation that would declare racism a public health crisis, we need to define the three types of overarching thematic framing relating to this research study. The three proposed frames include public health, social justice, and political framing. A public health frame expresses societal issues that affect the health and environment, which connects the individual to a global issue or crisis (Nisbet, 2012). A social justice frame “appeals to the principle of inclusion based on structural relations expressed in the application of principles and notions of community based in understandings of belonging” (Bailey and Winchester, 2016). Finally, a political frame is one that leans to a political, usually party, affiliation based on values, individual beliefs, and arouses public agreement from those of similar opinions (Jacoby, 2000). These three types of proposed frames will be tested to align with the news media and government official releases artifacts that will be analyzed in this research study through words and phrases used, as well as individuals quoted.

### **Power & Politics of Pronouns**

As the media plays a large role in providing information for the public, the pronouns used by the media and government officials could potentially play a significant role in how the audience perceive this information. In *Pronouns in Literature*, Gibbons and Macrae examines personal pronouns in literature and the power of “I”, “we”, and “them” across diverse English scriptures and compositions. Personal pronouns are defined as reference subjects or objects, real or fictional, to whom we attribute physical and psychological identities, while shaping our perceptions of those subjects’ or objects’ identities and attributes as such references are being made (Gibbons and Macare, 2018). Personal pronouns have been used to describe personal identities and have evolved to include how we label an identity that is foreign to ourselves.

Bejan (2019) discusses how pronouns are the most political parts of speech, whether with gender-inclusive pronouns or pronouns to include or alienate groups. Bejan explores differences in pronoun usage within the 21<sup>st</sup> century to that of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Quakers and concluded that, though differences in language are drastic, what remains constant is the belief that what we say, as well as how we say it, can play a crucial part in creating a more just and equal society (Bejan, 2019). Pronoun usage can lead to alienate communities through assumed agreements that underlies this usage, though not directly stated.

The politics of pronoun usage make it difficult to be absolute and categorical, as many discussions have assumed a “we” and “them” pronoun verbalization. Contextually, one can assume who the “we” and the “them” is depending on their location, political affiliation, etc. Selwan (2018) explores the politics of pronoun usage in how it has been used by news media and government officials. “There are no subtle gradations or exceptions allowed for when categorizing people as ‘we’, ‘they’, ‘us’, or ‘them’” (Selwan, 2004). As George W. Bush mentioned in referencing the Iraq war, “You are either with us or against us”. Selwan analyzed this portion of speech as specifying who aligns with ‘us’, our morals, judgment, and stance on the war, with all who oppose such values become part of the ‘other’. Though it is not mentioned who is the in-group or out-group, Selwan reiterates this is an assumed agreement on who “we” are, in contrary to who “they” are.

Aligning stories, communicating messages, and interpreting assumed meanings of pronoun usage shifts the message intended by the speaker to how the audience perceives information. When analyzing and exploring the communication of a legislation such as the “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” declaration, becoming observant of the pronoun usage can

lead to different interpretation of the motivation of the speaker, whether conscious or unconscious motivation. Political communication research outlines the power of pronoun usage on audiences, as well as is chosen by speakers to form a specific message with a target audience in mind. Underlying assumptions carried by the politics of pronouns affect how we categorize in-group and out-group communities, requiring a strive to deeply understand and challenges such assumptions.

### **Summary**

In examining racism in the United States and surrounding discourse of the declaration “Racism as a Public Health Crisis”, this research will be guided by studying the perceived thematic frames within news media artifacts and government official releases. With a solid definition of a public health crisis, noted previously, the reader acknowledges the qualities of a public health crisis. Through examining how racism has affected marginalized communities socially, economically, and politically, we have a sustained understanding of why racism qualifies as a public health crisis. Beyond the definitions and examples, we now begin to examine how the declaration “racism as a public health crisis” has been manifested and framed by news media outlets. The role media plays in communicating and framing information to the public, as mentioned through the literature, has a large impact on how the public consumes this information and acts upon it. Furthermore, exploring the usage of pronouns such as “we” and “them” from news media and government officials will reiterate the alienation or inclusion of groups in communicating the “Racism as a Public Health” legislation.

A qualitative textual analysis allows for the researcher to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world, further impacting their conceptualization of

information and decision-making process. By researching the thematic frames of how government officials and news outlets used certain language to communicate information, we have a greater understanding of the power of the media and the power of framing a public health crisis.

This study adds to the growing research regarding media framing and political communication by providing a deeper dive into framing of legislations that impact the lives, livelihoods, and health of marginalized communities. This study further regards specific framings of racism and public health crisis as either beneficial or harmful to the public's understanding.

## Chapter 3

### Methods and Methodology

Qualitative researchers believe that the empirical and theoretical resources needed to comprehend a particular idea, or to predict its future trajectory, are themselves interwoven with, and throughout, the context (Tracy, 2019). Qualitative data are descriptive, conceptual, and could be characterized based on traits (Pickell, 2019). Qualitative methods cover interviews, participant observations, and textual analysis. This research is qualitative as it covers a textual analysis of artifacts and the ideas are interwoven within the context of the research. The role of the researcher is distinct in qualitative research as the researcher “is the instrument” (Tracy, 2019). Self-reflexivity is one of the first critical aspects of qualitative research:

Self-reflexivity refers to people’s careful consideration of the ways in which their past experiences, points of view, and roles impact their interactions with, and interpretations of, any particular interaction or context. Every research has a point of view, an opinion, or a way of seeing the world. Some people call this “baggage”; I prefer to call it wisdom. (Tracy, 2019).

Qualitative research allows for the researcher to embrace their individuality and background within the research. The qualitative researcher in mind and body literally serves as a research instrument- absorbing, sifting through, and interpreting the world through observation, participation, and interviewing (Tracy, 2019). Self-reflexivity and agency play a large role in qualitative research, as the researcher takes ownership of their beliefs and their

experiences are viewed through their interpretation of the research. “A reflexive researcher actively adopts a theory of knowledge. A less reflexive researcher implicitly adopts a theory of knowledge” (Carter and Little, 2007). Furthermore, Tracy (2019) characterizes qualitative research by context and thick description. Immersion in the context includes observing social constructions, historical, and current which allows the researcher to draw conclusions and make observations based on a wholesome systemic review. Thick description is the way researchers immerse themselves in a culture, investigate the particular circumstances present in that scene, and only then move towards grander statements and theories (Tracy, 2019). Contextual descriptions allow for larger conclusions to be made regarding smaller events; the following research will include a deeper dive into contextual descriptions beyond surface understandings.

### **Methods of Collecting Data**

The data collected will date between June 2020-October 2020. Before this legislation was introduced, the United States was facing civil unrest with unarmed Black civilians dying to police brutality. The killing of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery reignited the Black Lives Matter movement across the country. Coronavirus cases were rising in the United States during the summer of 2020 and numbers continued to surge into the fall season (The New York Times), with Black and Brown lives being impacted the most and fatalities affecting these marginalized communities (The COVID Racial Tracking Project, 2020). Black and Brown COVID-19 fatalities and a surge in police brutality were many factors that led to the declaration of the legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis”. The legislation titled “Declaring racism a public health crisis”

was introduced as House Resolution 1069 by Representative Jahana Hayes (D) on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

The data in this research will be collected through sorting of information and will be inputted into an excel sheet. Twenty total artifacts will be collected: ten news media artifacts and ten government artifacts. The data collection process below outlines the methodology of how I will be choosing each of the twenty artifacts. The news media artifacts will be collected through Stanford's Cable TV News Analyzer, data archived from the TV News Archive. The Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer was created by the Computer Graphics Lab at Stanford University in collaboration with the John S. Knight Fellowship Program. Financial support of this collaboration was provided by the National Science Foundation, Amazon Web Services, and other corporations. The Internet Archive, which provides the video dataset, provides data on a 24-hour delay. After the original program's airing, new results appear after 24-36 hours of the original airing time. The analyzer allows for facial detection, face descriptors, face identity tags, and caption time alignment. The facial detection and caption time alignment will assist in providing data regarding who is quoted in the news segment and how long the duration of racism discussed. The Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer allows for queries that compute the amount of time words are heard and the amount of time individuals appear in a segment. The Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer shows precisely three minutes of each news segment. CNN, FOX, and MSNBC will be the primary media sources of artifacts due to their high viewership national rankings in 2020 (Schneider, 2020) and longer news segments, as compared to local TV channels. Artifacts during the June 2020-October 2020 period will be chosen based on several criteria. First, as mentioned previously, this time period included much civil unrest with protests

around the nation against police brutality. Second, COVID-19 cases were surging during this period and the healthcare field received much attention for its ability and, at times, inability to provide equitable care to all patients. Finally, this time period was chosen due to highest frequency in news coverage of the “racism as a public health” legislation, as outlined by Stanford’s Cable TV News Analyzer. I will be printing out all twenty artifacts as they compose my units of analysis and color-coding words and phrases that emerge to compose different framings, outlined below, to my study. The following is a breakdown of coding used to sort data from news media outlet artifacts:

**Table 2**  
**Coding data breakdown of news media artifacts**

<b>Unit/date- CNN Artifact</b>	Public health framing Theme (word selection)	Social justice framing Theme (word selection)	Political framing Theme (word selection)	Who is quoted and role, if any	Race of who is quoted, if applicable	Individual narrative	Collective narrative
<b>Unit/date- FOX Artifact</b>	Public health framing Theme (word selection)	Social justice framing Theme (word selection)	Political framing Theme (word selection)	Who is quoted and role, if any	Race of who is quoted, if applicable	Individual narrative	Collective narrative
<b>Unit/date- MSNBC Artifact</b>	Public health framing Theme (word selection)	Social justice framing Theme (word selection)	Political framing Theme (word selection)	Who is quote d and role, if any	Race of who is quoted, if applicabl e	Individual narrative	Collective narrative

Additionally, ten government artifacts will be collected based on state or government official statements in the ten selected news media outlet artifacts. For instance, an MSNBC segment might reference and quote Governor Cuomo of New York regarding the “Racism as a



Public Health Crisis” legislation. I will then research official statements made by Governor Cuomo, or other NY government officials, to analyze for the government artifact. Official Department of Health statements will be considered under government artifacts. The following is a breakdown of columns used to sort data from government artifacts:

**Table 3**  
**Coding data breakdown of government artifacts**

Government artifact type/date/State	Government official, those quoted, and position	Public health framing Theme (word selection)	Social justice framing Theme (word selection)	Political framing Theme (word selection)	Individual narrative	Collective narrative
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### Research Questions

This study seeks to answer two main research questions based upon the conceptual framework. The questions are as follows:

1. How have the perceived thematic frames in government and news media artifacts pertaining to “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” contextualized this legislation as a *political, public health, and social justice issue*?
2. How have government and news media artifacts thematically framed artifacts using the pronouns “we” and “them”?

### Data Collection Process

In this research study, data is collected via online artifacts dated between June 2020 – October 2020. There are ten national news media artifacts and ten government artifacts. The news media artifacts are filtered and chosen upon the following criteria:

1. The artifact is dated between June 2020-October 2020.
2. The media outlet is one of the following: CNN, FOX, MSNBC.

3. The media segment must be referencing the legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis”.
4. The artifact must be found through the Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer.
  - a. Key terms used in Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer:
    - i. Racism as a public health crisis

Additionally, I will be collecting ten government artifacts. These artifacts are filtered and chosen upon the following criteria:

1. The artifact is dated between June 2020-October 2020.
2. The artifact is authored by/on behalf of a government official who resides in a state where the legislation “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” has been declared.
3. The artifact is authored by an official from the state’s Department of Health.
4. The state the government official is located had high frequency media coverage in June 2020-October 2020 of the “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” legislation.

### **Analytical Techniques**

A qualitative textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world (McKee, 2003). Textual research entails interpreting texts to see how people make sense of the world and events around them. The analyzed text could be a TV programming, book, film, magazine, etc. Researchers often will focus on analyzing the culture and comprehension within a textual analysis study, as well as note words, phrases, and individual contributions within the text. My textual analysis research focuses on the latter portion, which is the analysis of word selection within selected

government and news media artifacts. Textual analysis involves making educated guesses regarding the interpretation of certain texts (McKee, 2003).

### **Researcher Bias**

As a researcher, it is my duty to identify areas of perceived bias based on personal experiences that might affect the scope of this study. As an Egyptian-American Muslim, society plays a large role in how my identity is perceived and treated in the United States. My experience living in the United States and abroad shapes how I view education, health care, justice system, civil rights, and many other aspects that influence our lives. The communities I have resided in, the public university I attended, and the many social networks I am connected with have broadened my horizon to the true nature of racism and islamophobia in the United States. I have first-hand witnessed how hate, anger, and racism have taken the lives of individuals through systemic racism on the streets and in our healthcare system, as well as disadvantaged Brown and Black individuals in the workplace and through discriminatory laws. My personal experiences have shaped my identity and empowered my drive, but as a researcher my data, research, and observations are based on proven inequalities in our society.

## Chapter 4 Data & Analysis

This chapter presents an overview of the data collected, data analysis process, and an elaboration of thematic frames established by the data through the overarching conceptual frameworks. The goal of this chapter is to present the data collected from news media and government statements and analyze the word selection as compared to the perceived thematic frames and social identity affiliations. Ten news media artifacts are analyzed, through compilation from the Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer. Ten government statements are analyzed, selected by highest frequency of government officials speaking on the ‘Racism as a Public Health Crisis’ declaration in respective states, counties, cities, and municipalities.

### Research Questions

Using Iyengar’s (1991) thematic framing, we establish that themes are created through language and images. Entman (1993) further expands on the core elements of the communication process: communicator, text, receiver, and culture. This establishes that text and language play a major role in the communication and interpretation of messages. Furthermore, the proposed three frames in this study include: public health frame, political frame, and social justice frame. Using this knowledge of framing will guide the process of answering Research Question #1:

1. How have the perceived thematic frames in government and news media artifacts pertaining to “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” contextualized this legislation as a *political, public health, and social justice issue*?

Subsequently, Tajfel's (1979) Social Identity Theory proposed the idea that the world is divided into "we" and "them" through a process of social categorization. This categorization is built upon experiences, nature, and nurture which influences current ideologies and actions. Using the knowledge of Social Identity Theory, alienating vs. inclusive language, and politics of pronoun usage, this will guide the process of answering Research Question #2:

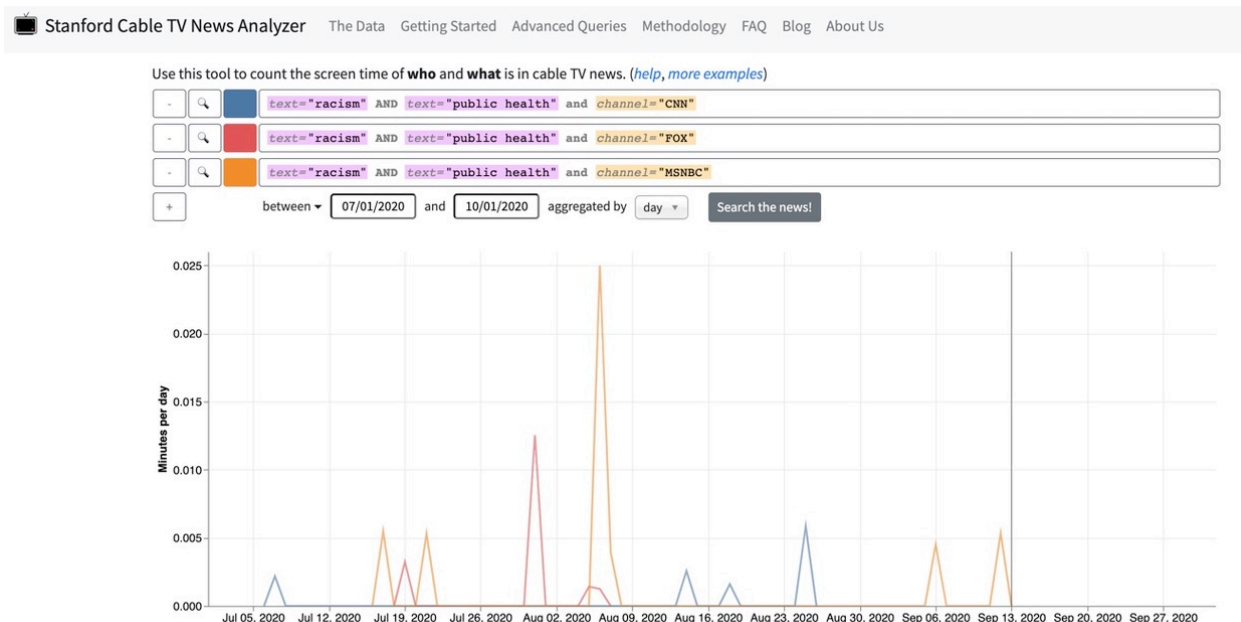
2. How have government and news media artifacts thematically framed artifacts using the pronouns "we" and "them"?

The research questions will be answered after the data collection and data analysis sections. The next section of this chapter will overview the data collection process, before diving into the analysis of the data collected.

### **Data Collection**

The Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer played a vital role in my collection of the ten news media artifacts. I was able to insert keywords, dates, and channels to search for news media clips that conformed to the requirements set forth by this study. The keywords inserted included "racism" and "public health". The specified channels in this study included MSNBC, FOX, and CNN. Finally, the dates inserted in this study were July 2020-October 2020, though it will be discussed further why artifacts from June 2020 were included in this study and expanded upon.

**Figure 1**  
**Screenshot from Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer Coding Requirements**



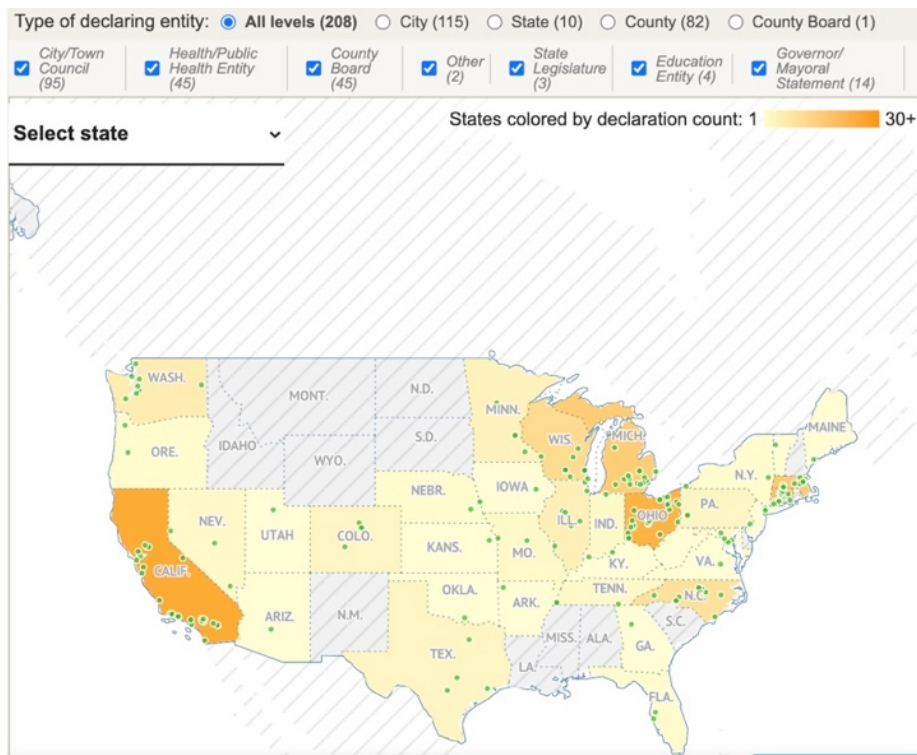
The Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer provided only 11-13 coded news clips that would include the words “racism” and “public health” as pertaining to the ‘Racism as a Public Health Crisis’ legislation. For this reason, I included June 2020 in the data collection process in order to diversify and expand the number of artifacts I can select. With this extension, I was able to choose from 15 coded news clips, narrowing to the ten most relevant to this study. The Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer also provides the direct link to the internet archives of the news clip for expansion and elaboration purposes.

**Figure 2**  
**Screenshot of MSNBC news clip from Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer**



Next, I selected ten official government releases that discussed the stance of the elected officials on the 'Racism as a Public Health Crisis' legislation. This process required that I choose official statements from states/cities/counties that have declared racism a public health crisis. For this reason, the following map demonstrates the states with the highest count of declarations and breaks down the type of declaration and the origin. Upon expanding the map, each declaration by state/city/county can be investigated.

**Figure 3**  
**American Public Health Association, “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” Map of Declarations**



After researching the states deeper, the following ten states (cities, counties, municipalities within) were chosen as the most prominent leaders in declaring racism a public health crisis: California (County leaders), Ohio (Columbus City Council), Minnesota (Minneapolis City Council), Michigan (governor declaration), Nevada (governor declaration), Wisconsin (governor declaration), Texas (San Antonio City Council), Vermont (Mayor), Washington (King County governing body), and Boston (Massachusetts Mayor).

Now that the states were determined with highest rates of declarations, I further researched into governor's websites, mayor's statements, and city council meetings and press releases in order to locate official statements on the declaration of racism as a public health crisis.



With ten official government statements and ten news media artifacts, I began to analyze all the data through two steps: First, print out and color-code thematic frames. Color coding on physical artifacts was as follows:

**Table 4**  
**Color coding of physical artifacts**

<b>Frame/Theme</b>	<b>Coding</b>
Public health framing/theme	Green
Political framing/theme	Yellow
Social justice framing/theme	Pink
Who is quoted/race	Blue Circle
Individual narrative identity	One underline
Collective narrative identity	Double underline

Second, once the physical coding of the twenty artifacts was complete, I compiled all the data into an excel sheet. Two pages on the excel sheet named as follows: “Government Statements” and “News Media”, each page with the respective ten artifacts.

Once the data was compiled into the excel sheet, I began to analyze what this data meant and find prevalent themes. The selected quotes inhibited prominent words and phrases that reinforced political, social justice, and/or public health frames. Each of these frames is backed by literature that supports the encompassed meaning of the frame, thus allowing for a specific selection of phrases to be considered similar to the proposed frame. Before discussing emergent themes, I will present data findings with the subsequent analysis.

#### **Data Analysis Summary: Government Statements**

In order to answer the first research question regarding thematic framing of government artifacts, I will be presenting data on the findings of the three thematic frames: public health, political, and social justice, as prevalent to the government artifacts.

### **Thematic frame #1: Public Health**

This data alludes to the thematic frames found within each government statement, as well as who is quoted in the statement, their race, and the type of narrative identity (individual or collective). The most dominant thematic frame throughout the government statements was the public health frame, which expresses societal issues that affect the health and environment, which connects the individual to a global issue or crisis (Nisbet, 2012). The following table includes quotes from government statements that thematically framed the artifact discussing ‘racism as a public health crisis’ as a public health issue:

**Table 5**  
**Government Artifacts with Public Health Framing Quotes & Data**

<b>State, Date</b>	<b>Government official</b>	<b>Quote</b>
Vermont, 7/16/20	Community	“There is sub-standard medical treatment caused by limited resources and doctors' bias”
Nevada, 8/5/20	Governor	“COVID-19 magnified challenges caused by racial disparities in the form of virus and environmental risks”
Michigan, 8/5/20	Governor	“COVID-19 pandemic has revealed, confirmed, and highlighted the deadly nature of pre-existing inequities caused by systemic racism”
Boston, 6/10/20	Mayor	“We must address the impact racism has on the health and well-being of residents; racism is a barrier to health equity for all Bostonians”
Washington, King County, 6/11/20	County	“We see how COVID is a new crisis on top of existing crisis of racism and underlying

		root cause of disproportionate impact on communities of color” (King County declaration)
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Prominent words and phrases used in the government artifacts alluding to public health frames included “sub-standard medical treatment”, “virus”, “health equity”, and much focus on the COVID-19 pandemic magnifying the health equity challenges faced by communities of color. These phrases acknowledged systemic racism in all areas of society, while focusing on health barriers faced by marginalized communities in the healthcare system. Though some of these statements discussed roots of systemic racism, they did not delve into pre-existing inequities that have led to the emergence of a public health crisis, such as political, economic, or social justice movements that shed light on societal challenges. The majority of declarations came from Governors of states, thus having a collective state declare racism as a public health crisis is powerful to the declaration of individual cities and counties. Mayors and county declarations were announced, though proving to be minor to the declarations of governors.

### **Thematic frame #2: Social Justice**

The second most prevalent thematic frame was the social justice framing, which appeals to the “principle of inclusion based on structural relations expressed in the application of principles and notions of community based in understandings of belonging” (Bailey and Winchester, 2016). Phrases used to identify a social justice frame included:

**Table 6**  
**Government Artifacts with Social Justice Framing Quotes & Data**

State, Date	Government official	Quote
Texas, 8/20/20	City Council	“This resolution works to eradicate implicit and explicit racial bias”
Wisconsin, 6/2/20	Governor	“We heard the echo of the words of Eric Garner from George Floyd, ‘I can’t breathe’”

Vermont, 7/16/20	Community	“Disparities based on race are stark and persistent, environmental racism that causes people of color to be unjustly exposed to pollutants”
Minneapolis, 7/17/20	City Council	“Racism is the underlying disease to all of the racially inequitable results we live with today”
Michigan, 8/5/20	Governor	“Governor Whitmer created the Black Leadership Advisory Council of Michigan and announced that all state employees will be required to take implicit bias training”

The majority of government artifacts that had a social justice framing were quoted by various government officials, from city council representatives to community leaders and governors. This includes a diversity of acquaintances to social justice movements that believe that as racism is eradicated, social justice activism must be centered and engrained in trying to overcome this public health crisis. Many of the government artifacts that included social justice framings also had a past, present, and future outlook in their statements. There was a discussion in some artifacts to specific city or state-related race-based violence incidents, social justice activists quoted, as well as specific action steps to be taken by government officials and supporting organizations.

### **Thematic frame #3: Political**

Finally, the political framing was prevalent, but not as dominating, as other frames throughout the government statements. This can be viewed from a different perspective, which will be discussed deeper in the final chapter, as there was a common theme to who was quoted in these articles and the political affiliation of the governors, mayors, and city councils that declared racism a public health crisis. A political frame is one that leans to a political, usually

party, affiliation based on values, individual beliefs, and arouses public agreement from those of similar opinions (Jacoby, 2000). The following table includes quotes from government artifacts that thematically framed the artifact discussing ‘racism as a public health crisis’ as a political issue:

**Table 7**

**Government Artifacts with Political Framing Quotes & Data**

State, Date	Government official	Quote
Texas, 8/20/20	City Council	“San Antonio has a history of segregation and redlining; we should promote policies and procedures that advance racial equity”
Nevada, 8/5/20	Governor	“The goal to instigate long-term change across all sectors of government, including education, housing, and criminal justice”
Minneapolis, 7/17/20	City Council	“Local elected officials must understand that antiracism must be centered in all the work we do to achieve racial equity”
Michigan, 8/5/20	Governor	“This is not about one party or person, council is charged with identifying state laws, gaps, with the goal of promoting economic growth”

A political frame of these government artifacts would readily acknowledge political suppression of marginalized communities, as well as inadequate representation of these communities in positions of leadership and power. Another section to this political framing would be discussing racism as a partisan issue, rather than a crisis that is affecting many individuals thus emphasizing the need of nonpartisan advocacy from all government officials and community leaders. Noting that political framing was the least conducted framing of government officials is perceived as overlooking the role of policymakers in perpetuating or dismantling racism in all areas of decision making: education, housing, criminal justice, etc. The statement by Michigan’s Governor, Gretchen Whitmer, reiterates the notion that this declaration should “not be about one part of person” but rather a collaborative engagement to

dismantle a system that disadvantaged marginalized communities, with success preceding to economic growth, social equity, etc.

### **Perceived Race & Political Affiliation**

The gathering of information on the perceived race of those quoted in the government statements, as well as their political affiliation, assists us to know which voices are centered and highlighted, and what ideologies support declaring racism a public health crisis. This section is a *minor aspect of my research that could potentially be expanded upon*, though a driving force for the results I am observing. The following is a condensed list of the race and political affiliation of those quoted in the government statements:

**Table 8**  
**Government Artifact Race & Political Affiliation Summary**

<b>Name/State</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
Governor Steve Sisolak, Nevada	White	Democrat
Governor Tony Evers, Wisconsin	White	Democrat
Councilwoman Andrews-Sullivan, Texas	Black	Nonpartisan
Mayor Marty Walsh, Massachusetts	White	Democrat
Senator Erika Geiss, Michigan	Black	Democrat
City Council Vice President Andrea Jenkins, Minnesota	Black	Democrat
Mayor Miro Weinberger, Vermont	White	Democrat

### **Individual or Collective Identity Narrative**

The final coded information in my research includes the word selection leading to an individual or collective identity narrative, i.e.: the use of “we” and “them”, alluding to the

politics of pronoun usage to either include or alienate individuals and communities. The following are excerpts of the pronoun usage in the government statements:

***Collective Narrative Data:***

**Table 9**

**Government Artifact Collective Narrative Identity Data**

State, Date	Narrative identity	Quote
Texas, 8/20/20	Collective	"We are stronger together; our communities, our residents we are here to do the work"
Wisconsin, 6/2/20	Collective	"We must condemn those who encourage violence against Black lives and we must offer support, compassion, and action"
Minnesota, 7/17/20	Collective	"For Minneapolis to be a place where everyone can live, we must recognize this crisis and we have to name that (racism) to heal it"
Michigan, 8/5/20	Collective	"Our state can tackle issues that impact our Black brothers and sisters, we must take the much-needed and long-overdue step of recognizing racism as a public health crisis"

***Individual (or alienating) Narratives:***

**Table 10**

**Government Artifact Individual Narrative Identity Data**

State, Date	Narrative identity	Quote
Nevada, 8/5/20	Individual	"I am grateful, and I look forward to working with Nevada leaders"
Ohio, 6/1/20	Individual	"Improving the quality of life and health of our minority residents"

These findings demonstrate that collective identity framings were used most prominently in government artifacts, than in individual narrative identities. These collective identities were either recognizing collective responsibility and/or collective effort to overcoming this public health crisis. A collective framing of this declaration would inspire unity

of challenging systems that perpetuate racism and focusing on “us” finding a solution through collaboration and conviction. On the other hand, individual framings either alienated a group by consistently using the term “minority” to compare to a majority population and/or the speaker did not include themselves as part of “us”, but only as a facilitator. Collective frames were used more frequently in social justice framed government artifacts, as a social justice lens is rooted in combatting systems of oppression through collective action and collaboration with other communities and systems.

### **Data Analysis Summary: News Media Artifacts**

In this section, I will be presenting the data collected of the news media artifacts and follow by an analysis of the provided data. In order to answer the first research question regarding thematic framing of news media artifacts, I will be presenting data on the findings of the three thematic frames: public health, political, and social justice, as prevalent to the news media artifacts. This will be followed by presenting the data of the collective and individual frames using “we” and “them”.

### **Thematic Frame #1: Political**

The most dominant thematic frame for the news media artifacts was the political framing. This suggests that political figures, governance, partisan parties, and other state entities were involved in this discussion and/or the idea of power and politics was prevalent in these news media clips. The following table includes quotes from news media artifacts that thematically framed the artifact discussing ‘racism as a public health crisis’ as a political issue:

**Table 11**  
**News Media Artifacts with Political Framing Quotes & Data**



News channel, date	Who is quoted, position	Quote
MSNBC, 8/6/20	Andrea Mitchell, news anchor.  Mike Memoli, journalist.	"Governor Whitmer's declaration could be a strategic announcement, as she is a potential finalist for Biden's VP pick"
MSNBC, 7/21/20	Ayanna Pressley, Congresswoman.	"Nobody can say the government does not have the money, "they" have the money and should invest in antiracist resources"
MSNBC, 7/17/20	Ali Velshi, news anchor.	"This is a conservative talking point that people in the Black community kill their own at a rate higher than what police do"
CNN, 8/18/20	Dr. Georges Benjamin, Executive Director of American Public Health Association.	"The true test of this resolution by officials will be to walk the talk, not just pass the resolution"
FOX, 8/5/20	Dinesh D'Souza, Conservative Commentator.  Laura Ingraham, news anchor.	"It's all about Whitmer and Democrats consolidating power, but what are they really doing here? What the left has done was built a gigantic narrative on top of George Floyd, one that is obsessed with race"

In contrary to the government artifacts presented previously, the news media artifacts had a prominently political framing throughout all ten analyzed artifacts. The majority of the news media artifacts found that Democratic-leaning politicians were more quoted and in support of the legislation declaring racism a public health crisis. These same politicians and activists were the same ones that stressed accountability in the process of healing and overcoming this crisis. A common expression "don't just talk the talk, but walk the walk" was used by the Executive Director of the American Public Health Association to describe the

responsibility of elected officials and those in political and social positions of power to enact this resolution once it is declared. The MSNBC artifact, dated 8/6/20, assumed that Governor Whitmer was making this declaration in order to appeal to social justice movements and marginalized communities, further making her a competitive contender for President Biden's Vice-Presidential nominee. This is a scrutinizing political point to presume a politician is making a social justice effort in order to appeal to larger numbers of voters, though with Governor Whitmer it was contested that she has applied these same morals throughout her political career in public service. Furthermore, those quoted throughout the politically framed news media artifacts were politicians and representatives of healthcare organizations, further exemplifying their credibility.

### **Thematic Frame #2: Social Justice**

The second most dominant frame for the news media artifacts was the social justice framing, stating that the conversation in the news media clips surrounded activism, justice, equity, and inclusion. The following table includes quotes from news media artifacts that thematically framed the artifact discussing 'racism as a public health crisis' as a social justice issue:

**Table 12**  
**News Media Artifacts with Social Justice Quotes & Data**

<b>News channel, date</b>	<b>Who is quoted, position</b>	<b>Quote</b>
MSNBC, 7/17/20	Ali Velshi, news anchor.  Reverend Al Sharpton, Host of Politics Nation, activist.	"George Floyd and Eric Garner's "I can't breathe" cries is like a boomerang"
MSNBC, 9/6/20	Barbara Lee, Representative of California's 13 <sup>th</sup> district.	"We have to close these disparities, but we have to do it in an intersectional manner"

CNN, 7/7/20	Lucian Truscott, Descendant of President Thomas Jefferson.	"We need to confront the racist past of this country; we need to confront slavery"
MSNBC, 7/21/20	Ayanna Pressley, Congresswoman.	"This declaration is not a symbolic statement; we will invest in resources to dismantle structural racism."

The social justice framing in the news media artifacts generally discussed past instances of structural racism through policies and practices, while the prominent mentions of this framing indicated eminence of the Black Lives Matter movement and specific names of those affected. The names mentioned included Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and centered around the phrase "I can't breathe". Those quoted throughout the news media artifacts varied from politicians, activists, and advocates of social equity and justice. Prevalent findings were in the demographics and previous activism of those quoted, such as those from marginalized communities who built a career on advocating for marginalized communities. The language that surrounded these framings was one of urgency and demand to evaluate past policies, in order to fully contemplate the need of this declaration that affects the lives of marginalized communities. Though this is not included in the original data finding, but it is to be noted that graphics that accompanied news media artifacts with a social justice framing included videos and photos of protestors, advocates, and Black Lives Matter activists.

### **Thematic Frame #3: Public Health**

Finally, the least discussed aspect in the news media clips was public health as it was not a leading factor in this conversation with guests on the news, nor were the voice of medical professionals or public health experts centered. The following table includes quotes from news media artifacts that thematically framed the artifact discussing 'racism as a public health crisis' as a public health issue:

**Table 13**  
**News Media Artifacts with Public Health Quotes & Data**

News channel, date	Who is quoted, position	Quote
MSNBC, 7/17/20	Ali Velshi, news anchor.  Reverend Al Sharpton, Host of Politics Nation, activist.	"Racism has created health and wealth disparities"
MSNBC, 9/6/20	Barbara Lee, Representative of California's 13 <sup>th</sup> district.	"Disproportionate rates of diabetes, asthma, hypertension, high blood pressure, you can directly relate this to racism"
CNN, 8/18/20	Dr. Georges Benjamin, Executive Director of American Public Health Association.	"Get more people of color into the medical specialties, we have to have this kind of representation and research studies"

The quotes provided and the discussion taking part in the news media artifacts surrounding public health and the 'racism as a public health crisis' declaration was compelling, but the public health aspect was not given priority as government artifacts alluded previously. Of all the news media artifacts assessed, Dr. Benjamin of the American Public Health Association, was the only medical professional or healthcare representative quoted. He personally mentioned that people of color should have greater access to medical specialties and fields in order to conduct research studies on topics affecting marginalized communities. Centering the discussion around political and social justice issues distracted from the discussion on the public health aspect of this resolution, racism in healthcare, and the effects of unequal medical treatment and access thereof of communities of color.

#### **Perceived Race & Political Affiliation**

As analyzed with the government statements, the perceived race and political affiliation of those quoted and hosted in the news media clips is also taken into consideration. The following is a breakdown of this information:

**Table 14**  
**News Media Artifact Race & Political Affiliation Summary**

<b>Name &amp; Position/News Station</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
Representative Ayanna Pressley, MSNBC	Black	Democrat
Governor Whitmer, MSNBC	White	Democrat
Reverend Al Sharpton, MSNBC	Black	Democrat
Representative Barbara Lee, MSNBC	Black	Democrat
Jeanette Kowalik, Commissioner of Health in Milwaukee Health Department	Black	Democrat
Dr. Georges Benjamin, Executive Director of American Public Health Association	Black	Nonpartisan
David Crowley, Milwaukee County Executive	White	Democrat
Dinesh D'Souza, Conservative Commentator, author of "Trump Card"	Indian-American	Republican

This data provides an overwhelming evidence of the bipartisan support of the 'racism as a public health crisis' resolution, as the majority of those quoted, and in support of the resolution, in the news media artifacts identified as Democrat or had no party affiliation. Those who verbalized opposition to the declaration identified as Conservative Republican. The declaration was also supported by majority Democrat-leaning elected officials, thus stating that the idea of racism being declared as a public health crisis was indeed a partisan issue.

Democratic mayors, governors, and community leaders were more readily willing to support this resolution while much skepticism from the conservative leaders surrounded this declaration. As for the perceived race of the individuals quoted, we certainly see diversity of race supporting the ‘racism as a public health crisis’ through the news media artifacts in all three framings: political, social justice, and public health.

### **Individual or Collective Identity Narrative**

The majority of the coded data includes collective narratives of “we” when discussing political, social justice, and public health initiatives by the state. “We” and “them” narratives create in-group and out-group social categorization, further either including groups in a larger collective conversation, or alienating groups further. The following are phrases used by guests on news media and that of journalists/reporters:

#### ***Collective Narrative:***

**Table 15**  
**News Media Artifact Collective Narrative Identity Data**

<b>News Channel, Date</b>	<b>Narrative identity</b>	<b>Quote</b>
MSNBC, 7/17/20	Collective	“We are our brother’s keeper; we can’t keep our brothers until we do something about the violence in our community and put value on our lives”
CNN, 7/7/20	Collective	“We are teaching people the full history of this country and these people”
CNN, 8/18/20	Collective	“We’re dealing with housing segregation, access to healthcare, etc.”
CNN, 8/25/20	Collective	“We work with our local officials, we work with our state officials and federal officials”

#### ***Individual Narrative (or alienating):***

**Table 16**  
**News Media Artifact Individual Narrative Identity Data**

News Channel, Date	Narrative identity	Quote
MSNBC, 7/21/20	Individual	"I wish Donald Trump and the administration would invest as much energy and time developing a national testing and contact tracing strategy"
FOX, 8/5/20	Individual	"It's so bad now, you see these Hollywood celebrities issuing tearful apologies for having weddings at plantations, apologizing for playing a role where their race doesn't match original character in biopic, this is wild"

The findings of individual and collective narratives assist in answering research question #2 on the thematic framing of news media artifacts through the pronoun usage of "we" and "them". The majority of news media artifacts included a collective narrative, stating that "we" collectively were the reason for the problem and must all work collaboratively in dismantling racist systems, policies, and practices. Collective narratives did not put the full responsibility or liability on an individual or community, but rather an entire system that needs to be held accountable in order to change from within. Powerful statements such as "we are our brother's keepers" reinstates that as a society we must protect our community members who are vulnerable to systemic racism and oppression.

After review of the data analysis of the government and news media artifacts above, I will be answering the research questions more in depth based on the data collected and the overarching conceptual frameworks used in this study.

### **Research Questions: Summary**

Research Question #1: How have the perceived thematic frames in government and news media artifacts pertaining to "Racism as a Public Health Crisis" contextualized this legislation as a *political, public health, and social justice issue*?

Contextualization of the ‘Racism as a Public Health Crisis’ legislation as a *political issue* has been demonstrated in both news media and government statements through the words used to describe racism as a bipartisan or partisan issue. We see this through who was quoted, the position of those centered in the conversation, and the political affiliation thereof. Furthermore, the responsibility in which the quoted individuals place on others demonstrates who their communities believe are responsible to enact change. These words placed responsibility on local, federal, and local officials that have mishandled political and societal issues that have further perpetuated racism, increasing the need to declare racism a public health crisis. Elected officials stated that this declaration should not be a partisan issue, but rather declaring racism as a public health crisis should be for the greater healing of our country to advance equity on all levels.

Contextualization of the ‘Racism as a Public Health Crisis’ legislation as a *public health issue* was one of the main framings established throughout the news media and government statements. Evidence shown of the public health framing included statistics of marginalized communities affected by COVID-19 as compared to other communities not facing as severe health disparities. Additionally, public health-framed statements and media clips included other information about how healthcare systems disproportionately disadvantage Black, Brown, Latinx, etc. communities in the United States. These health and economic disparities included, but not limited to, racially unconscious medical professionals, housing segregation, biased treatment within facilities, advanced mental health issues due to effects of racism, lack of access to healthcare, and others. Several of the government statements and news clips that



included a public health framing also included action steps that healthcare systems can begin to implement to combat racism as an existing public health crisis.

Contextualization of the ‘Racism as a Public Health Crisis’ legislation as a *social justice issue* was the second most dominant framing observed throughout the news media and government statements. Artifacts that had a perceived social justice frame included mention of social unrest, protests, the names of dominant men and women that were the forces behind many taking to the streets for the Black Lives Matter movement (George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, etc.), as well as contextualization of the history of segregation and racist policies and practices in the United States. Government statements and news media clips that included social justice framing included quotes from social justice activists, partnered with racial justice organizations, and provided action steps to combat social injustices that perpetuate racism at all levels in our society.

*Research Question #2:* How have government and news media artifacts thematically framed artifacts using the pronouns “we” and “them”?

The power of pronoun usage influences how audiences perceive information presented, as well as their perception of being included or alienated in a conversation. This study does not focus on audience perception and absorption of information, but rather the provider of the information and the specific text and word usage of this information. Based on Social Identity Theory, I use the terms “we” (individual) and “them” (collective) as social categories of in-groups and out-group members. Government statements had a mixture of collective and individual narrative identities that were perceived through careful consideration of the text.

Elected officials, leaders, and government employees stating, “we are the change”, “we are standing by our community”, and “this is our problem, and we must find a solution” are all collective means of identifying issues, determining that racism is a collective concern, and instilling in community members that we need “us” to combat this crisis. This creates a feeling of collective responsibility in order to move forward as a community and nation. Other government declarations framed their statements as an “us” concern. These statements included individual sentiments such as “I might have benefitted from the system” but that means “our responsibility is greater to dismantle the systems that unfairly advantaged us for centuries, in order to uplift communities disadvantaged by these same systems”. Such statements that included both an individual and collective frame were not common but served the statement reader well in terms of impact and resonance of message.

On the other hand, news media artifacts included a majority “we” framing of collective initiative and responsibility. This might be due in part to the speakers, their demographics, and experiences, as well as the timing of these live interviews when social unrest was heightened in 2020. Individual narrative identities were limited to news outlets that politically leaned to the opposite direction of declaring racism a public health crisis, rather putting blame of the increase in COVID-19 cases on those protesting the deaths of innocent Black men and women. These “them” framings alienated groups and further perpetuated inequity to individuals and allies of the Black Lives Matter movement, and frankly all social justice activists.

Through government statements and news media clips, I observed “we” and “them” pronoun usage through all three perceived frames: public health frames, political frames, and social justice frames. Collective narratives that included “we” perpetuated equity, the need for

justice, and the collective effort to bring about accountability and change to policies and practices. Individual narratives that included “them” alienated communities to an in-group and out-group, further expanding the divide between racial communities, activists, and those seeking to declare racism a public health crisis. In the following chapter, I will be concluding the analysis of this research study and presenting implications as related to the data collected and research questions, as well as recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Results & Conclusion**

The following chapter serves as a conclusion for this research study. A summary of the conceptual framework, major findings, and prominent thematic frames will be presented to fully answer each research question. Moreover, the research implications and limitations of this study will be acknowledged. Researcher bias will be elaborated in order to provide background on the communicator of this research study. Finally, future areas of study in regard to this topic will be presented to propel deeper implications of presented thematic frames in areas of political communication, party affiliation, and others.

#### **Review of Conceptual Framework**

This overarching conceptual framework used in this study to answer the research questions was Iyengar's (1991) thematic framing model. Iyengar establishes that themes are created through language and images, with this particular application to certain words used to signify a thematic frame. As mentioned previously, framing directs people where to look, but more importantly it leads to ways of interpretation. Thematic frames focus on issues and topics, rather than individuals. A frame guides the thoughts and feelings of audiences, thus leading audiences to make their own conclusions on topics presented. Furthermore, Entman's (1993) elements of communication process framing model acknowledged that artifacts do, in fact, play a large role in the communication process. The language and tone within the artifacts establish themes that influence the delivery of this message. Entman established that the communicator plays a vital role in the communication process, which was apparent in the government and news media artifacts analyzed and coded. The language used and the communicator of these

words contributed to the thematic framing of the artifacts and allowed us to make conclusions based on this information.

In addition to thematic framing, this research study utilized Tajfel's (1979) Social Identity Theory to particularly focus on analyzing pronoun usage in answering research question #2. Social Identity Theory exhibits that people's self-concept and identity is based on their membership to different social groups. People identify themselves with certain social categories, while categorizing other individuals perceived differently to them in other social memberships. Individuals include themselves within a social category when they perceive they have emotional strong ties to the group (Tajfel, 1979), creating a "we" ideology. These ties can be due to common language, race, religion, ideology, beliefs, ethnicity, etc. Thus, whoever does not conform to these similar ideals becomes categorized as "them". Social identities and categories can be initiated consciously or subconsciously. Using "we" and "them" narratives within news media or through government official communication to the general public can either alienate or include a group within a conversation. Similarly, news media artifacts and government artifacts analyzed in this research study included language that adhered to "we" as part of a conversation in comparison to the view of "them", while other artifacts perceived "we" and "them" as united in the face of adversity in combatting racism as a public health crisis.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

3. How have the perceived thematic frames in government and news media artifacts pertaining to “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” contextualized this legislation as a *political, public health, and social justice issue*?
4. How have government and news media artifacts thematically framed artifacts using the pronouns “we” and “them”?

### **Discussion of Research Question #1**

*How have the perceived thematic frames in government and news media artifacts pertaining to “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” contextualized this legislation as a political, public health, and social justice issue?*

In analyzing how the government and news media artifacts contextualized the “racism as a public health crisis” legislation to fit within certain thematic frames, the results were diverse depending on the type of artifact, those quoted within it, and their respective positions. Government artifacts predominantly thematically framed the “racism as a public health crisis” declaration as a public health issue. Table X included a quote from the King County declaration stating, “we see how COVID is a new crisis on top of the existing crisis of racism and underlying root cause of disproportionate impact on communities of color”. This quote verified the county’s understanding that racism was a preexisting condition to COVID, which further perpetuated health inequity for marginalized communities that now had to deal with more than one crisis. In the title of this declaration, “racism as a public health crisis”, we note that the public health is affected by this crisis and by not mentioning health disadvantages of marginalized communities this does not provide a full scope of racism in the United States and why this declaration must be enacted by more cities, counties, and states. In his statement

declaring racism a public health crisis, Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak, stated, “minority communities have inequitable access to mental health services and lack of educational and career opportunities” acknowledging specific health inequities and their influence on other aspects such as access to education and careers. In order to fully encompass this public health crisis, statements declared should have included background on inequitable health practices and policies that further instigated the divide of access and opportunity of marginalized communities to the healthcare field. On the other hand, news media artifacts were not dominant in the public health framing, interestingly this was the least discussed aspect to the conversation surrounding declaring racism a public health crisis. The majority of news media artifacts analyzed did not center the conversation around public health nor the perspectives of medical professionals. Rather, an overwhelming majority of news media artifacts provided a political thematic framing.

In analyzing how government and news media artifacts provided a political thematic frame to contextualize the ‘racism as a public health crisis’ declaration, the news media artifacts provided more prominent political framings than government artifacts. Certain news media artifacts alluded to a Governor, Gretchen Whitmer, declaring racism a public health crisis in her state of Michigan to become a stronger competitor for President Biden’s VP pick. This discussion revolved around political strategy and only showed a clip of Governor Whitmer declaring racism a public health crisis in order to reaffirm the pursuant narrative. Politically framing the news media artifact from MSNBC concluded in discussing Governor Whitmer’s political career, Joe Biden campaigning for her in 2018, and how she would be a “top tier for Vice Presidential pick”. Other news media framings quoted Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley’s

discussing the bill from a legislative perspective, as well as pursuant policies and practices. FOX news provided a unique lens to discussing the 'racism as a public health crisis' declaration by quoting Governor Whitmer and stating, "It's all about Whitmer and Democrats consolidating power, but what are they really doing here? What the left has done was built a gigantic narrative on top of George Floyd, one that is obsessed with race". This provided a political frame that stated that this declaration was a democratic-party issue, that quite frankly was deemed unnecessary. Such political framings push the conversation away from the actual declaration that is meant to combat a crisis and heal, to further divide communities and draw partisan lines during a public health crisis. On the other hand, government artifacts included the least contextualizing of the 'racism as a public health crisis' declaration with political thematic frames. Government declarations included political framing from government accountability standpoints and investing in structural changes. The San Antonio City Council declaration acknowledged the city's past by stating, "San Antonio has a history of segregation and redlining; we should promote policies and procedures that advance racial equity". Furthermore, the Minneapolis City Council placed responsibility on local officials stating, "Local elected officials must understand that antiracism must be centered in all the work we do to achieve racial equity". These responses include multi-frames, as the social justice theme emerges when discussing accountability.

In analyzing how government and news media artifacts provided a social justice thematic frame to contextualize the 'racism as a public health crisis' declaration, both government and news media artifacts included similar discussion around social justice thematic framing. Social justice was the second most prevalent frame for both artifacts, suggesting that



social equity, justice, and community activism is needed to declare racism a public health crisis. When discussing social justice framings, certain artifacts included specific Black Lives Matter themed and mentioned the names of the lives lost to police brutality. Other artifacts discussed specific policies and practices, working groups, and action plans in schools, healthcare environment, and in communities to combat this public health crisis. The social justice thematic frame included history on public health inequity towards marginalized communities, as well as present and future implications. In a conversation on MSNBC, Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley recognized that this declaration entails much work, “this declaration is not a symbolic statement; we will invest in resources to dismantle structural racism”. Supporters of Governor Whitmer’s office shared specific steps she had begun to take in declaring racism a public health crisis, “Governor Whitmer created the Black Leadership Advisory Council of Michigan and announced that all state employees will be required to take implicit bias training”.

As the analysis of the public health, social justice, and political thematic frames of the government and news media artifacts concludes, demographics and party affiliation of individuals involved in the conversation was also taken into consideration. A large majority of those quoted in government and news media artifacts across all three thematic frames had a democratic-party lenience, while a small quantity was nonpartisan. These individuals were in support of declaring racism a public health crisis. Right leaning individuals quoted in these artifacts were opposed to declaring racism a public health crisis, though there was insufficient data from conservative Republicans discussing this declaration in government and news media artifacts. The official bill declaration was proposed by leaders from the Democratic party, while the majority of co-sponsors were pursuantly Democratic as well. This will be discussed further

in the section on research study implications on party affiliations and the ‘racism as a public health crisis’ declaration. Finally, there was diversity present in race account in both government and news media artifacts. Those quoted and in support of the declaration included those who identify as White, Black, Latinx, and other communities. This showed that community members, elected officials, and city council representatives around the nation were uniting under the collective mission to declare racism a public health crisis as it affects many communities, with those most vulnerable experiencing the most repercussions. The race and political affiliation of individuals quoted within government and news media artifacts gave context to the thematic frames and was taken into consideration for future research which links perceived race, political affiliation, and agendas.

## **Discussion of Research Question #2**

*How have government and news media artifacts thematically framed artifacts using the pronouns “we” and “them”?*

Pronoun usage can be used to include or exclude a group of individuals from a conversation. Pronouns can cause division between communities or build bridges of healing and understanding. Government and news media artifacts analyzed in this research study had a large amount of collective narrative identity language that discussed how “we” need to collectively combat this public health crisis. Reverend Al Sharpton was quoted in an MSNBC interview stating, “we are our brother’s keeper; we can't keep our brothers until we do something about the violence in our community and put value on our lives”. In this particular clip, Reverend Sharpton was uniting voices and advocacy efforts on behalf of the Black community. In a Wisconsin government statement, advocates of declaring racism a public

health crisis shared collective sentiments such as, “we must condemn those who encourage violence against Black lives and we must offer support, compassion, and action”. Using “we” places greater responsibility on all members of a society and community to unite in a greater effort to dismantle racism in structures, systems, policies, and practices. With the dominance of “we” pronoun usage in government and news media artifacts, all those quoted are uniting their efforts on moving forward rather than affiliating the rise in racism in the United States on certain groups or individuals. In contrary, a small number of individuals were quoted in government and news media artifacts perpetuating alienating language and a larger agenda for the usage of the “them” individual narrative identity. Such language included the overuse of the term “minority”, which has been provided many alternative phrases in the past years to include a marginalized community without stating their presence is minor compared to other groups. Other individual narrative identities included placing responsibility on a particular individual, or the speaker excluding themselves from accountability in combatting this public health crisis.

Similarly to the expansion of research question #1, the race and political affiliation of individuals who utilized “we” pronouns were diversity of races but with a dominant Democratic-party affiliation. The usage of “we” and inclusive terms creates a sense of community and collective effort, while acknowledging that even though it is mostly certain marginalized communities that are affected but those who play roles in different structures must be part of the solution. In his statement declaring racism a public health crisis, Governor Tony Evers of Wisconsin was quoted saying, “We need systemic change to address the racism in our state and our country. We must be willing to face it, with clear eyes and open hearts,

recognizing that folks who look like me have been part of creating, exacerbating and benefitting from the systems that we must now turn to dismantle”. Governor Evers made a distinctive acknowledgement that his personal advantages due to his race and position allowed him to benefit from a system, which synchronously harmed marginalized communities. His unity and usage of “we” allows expansion of responsibility and demonstrates his attempt at combining different voices from the community to dismantle a system that disadvantages numerous individuals.

### **Implications of Study**

An implication of this research study is that government officials and individuals quoted in news media clips play a large role in the communication of legislations to the public and the tactic of communicating and framing must be analyzed for holistic impact. Words used to describe a legislation must be framed to relate to the needs of the general public in order to resonate with audiences. These themes must surround demands of a community, accountability of those responsible, and specific action steps to provide solutions to members of society. This research identifies different methods of framing, especially in the process of political communication of a social justice and public health crisis. Thematic frames must be analyzed closely for language that creates an overarching theme that overtakes the original message being communicated, propelling audiences to navigate through themes chosen by individuals and networks to interpret the goal of communicating certain messages.

Second, another implication of this research study pertains to racism being declared a public health crisis. Individuals quoted within government and news media artifacts shared experiences, opinions, and advocacy efforts to combat racism. The rise of Black Lives Matter

protests since the killing of George Floyd have propelled many to realize the racial inequity in our society that is affecting marginalized communities in the healthcare system, educational institutions, workplace, etc. Racial inequity dates numerous years back prior to the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, and many others. As individuals struggle to comprehend how racism is a public health issue and why racism must be declared a public health crisis, as a society we must understand systems, policies, and practices more in depth to analyze what a public health crisis entails and how racism is just as, if not more, deadly than the public health pandemics. This research study discussed racism, public health crises, how the declaration “racism as a public health crisis” would instigate systemic change, and specifically how this declaration was communicated to the public for greatest impact and resonance.

Third, an implication of this research study involves the power and politics of pronoun usage in communicating legislations to the general public. This study implies that collective narrative identities such as “us” include communities into a greater conversation, rather than alienate identities. The pronoun usage of “us” overwhelmingly creates a community of accountability, collective responsibility, and a united front that combats a crisis. In contrary, the usage of individual narrative identities such as “them” excludes communities from conversations, as well as relatively excluding the speaker from the event or issue they are discussing. When a speaker excludes themselves from a larger conversation, they are diverting responsibility to other individuals, systems, and practices that they do not assimilate to. Understanding the power and politics of pronoun usage in government statements and news media clips is vital to understanding who is included in a conversation, who is alienated, and furthermore who is deemed to be part of the problem or solution.

A final implication of this research study includes that the race and political affiliation of individuals quoted in government statements and news media clips aligns with positions taken in support or opposition of legislations. An overpowering number of individuals who supported the declaration “racism as a public health crisis” had a specific political lenience, while those who vastly opposed had different political views with a Democratic or Republican affiliation. This was a minor aspect of this research study and will be discussed further in the recommendations for future research section.

### **Limitations of Study**

Limitations of this study included limited data provided from the Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer on news media artifacts in the June 2020-October 2020 period. This limited the data the researcher is exposed to, effecting exposure to variety of opinions present on news media clips discussing the ‘racism as a public health crisis’ declaration.

Another limitation of this research study was the timeline of June 2020-October 2020 when conversations in congress and senate revolved around upcoming election rules and regulations, law enforcement management, as well as overwhelmingly the coronavirus pandemic and COVID relief bills and stimulus checks. This is mentioned to articulate the priorities and urgency of matters during this specific time period, which might have impacted how much news coverage the ‘racism as a public health crisis’ declaration was receiving, as well as the potential focus of government officials in their respective cities, counties, and states.

## Recommendations for Future Research

In this current research study and analysis, Iyengar's (1991) thematic frames proved that language and words play a large role in cultivating themes. Furthermore, Entman's (1993) communication process model emphasized the role of the communicator and text in exemplifying meanings and specific themes. The data analyzed in this study was specific to perceived thematic frames, with minor details of the communicator that could imply greater implications. The following are suggested recommendations for future research studies to expand on the present research study:

1. Expand upon the role and extent of political party affiliation in supporting bipartisan legislation that impacts communities and has major effects on their health and well-being.
2. Discuss the positional power of individuals quoted in government and news media artifacts in accordance with the stances taken and language used.
3. Further assess political advocacy of government officials who supported declaring racism as a public health crisis. Was their term coming to an end? Is this typical advocacy for this elected official?
4. Discuss conscious and subconscious pronoun usage in relation to TV network with other topics that center marginalized communities.
5. Investigate TV network social and political affiliations to greater understand lenience and agenda setting efforts.
6. Assess which thematic frame had the largest impact on select audiences.

The suggested future research recommendations expand upon the current research study to assess the role and background of the communicator, investigate agenda setting of TV networks, and assess persuasion extent of perceived thematic frames on audience members.

Moreover, in a future research study utilizing the internet video archives parallel to the Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer to have greater data to assess would be more efficient. Relying solely on one source of news media clips and the specific key words searched limited the number of clips available, while having more than one source would expand on this amount and allows the researcher greater freedom in selecting which news media artifacts to include in the research study. Expanding the search terms to search for news clips on the Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer will broaden the number of news clips available, to assist in assessing whether the “Racism as a public health crisis” legislation was discussed more or less frequently in the news media sources.

### **Summary**

This study fills a gap on thematic frames pursuant to political communication of legislation in government artifacts, as well as word and pronoun usage in government and news media artifacts. This study adds to the literature on thematic framing and the power and politics of pronoun usage. The three perceived thematic frames in this research study included political frames, public health frames, and social justice frames. Two general conclusions that emerged from these research questions are as follows:

Research Question #1: How have the perceived thematic frames in government and news media artifacts pertaining to “Racism as a Public Health Crisis” contextualized this legislation as a *political, public health, and social justice issue*?



The perceived thematic frames contextualized the “racism as a public health crisis” legislation as a political, public health, *and* social justice issue. Government artifacts prominently discussed the “racism as a public health crisis” legislation as a public health issue, discussed historic healthcare inequities, as well as action steps to combat this crisis. On the other hand, news media artifacts discussed this legislation as a political issue, placed responsibility on certain groups or political figures, and discussed historic political segregation of marginalized communities in housing, education, criminal justice systems, and other areas.

Research Question #2: How have government and news media artifacts thematically framed artifacts using the pronouns “we” and “them”?

Government and news media artifacts holistically thematically framed the “racism as a public health crisis” legislation through the pronoun usage of “we”, incorporating a collective narrative identity over an individual narrative identity. The pronoun usage of “we” places collective responsibility on individuals to combat this crisis and a community effort to dismantle systemic racism in various areas of society.

### **Final Thoughts**

This study analyzed the thematic frames in government and news media artifacts in contextualizing the “racism as a public health crisis” declaration proposed in 2020. This declaration came in time of social unrest due to the continuous killing of Black lives in the United States and calls for intervention in the criminal justice and justice systems. This declaration also came during a pandemic as the world navigated the Coronavirus outbreak, which impacted the public health, economic stability, and mental health of many. In communicating this declaration to the public, the following themes emerged in government

and news media artifacts framing of this declaration: (1) Public health framing, (2) Social Justice framing, and (3) Political framing. The public health framing was dominant in government artifacts, while the political framing was dominant in news media artifacts. Individuals quoted within government and news media artifacts had diverse races, though the majority had a political affiliation to the democratic party.

This study further analyzed the power of pronoun usage in both government and news media artifacts. Pronouns such as “we” proved to be inclusive of diverse communities and thoughts, while pronouns such as “them” were used to exclude groups from a conversation, criticize certain individuals, and further create divide in society. The vast majority of pronouns coded within government and news media artifacts used “we” sentiments to identify a problem and a collective effort to progress towards a solution.

The “racism as a public health crisis” legislation has been declared in numerous cities, counties, and states in the United States. Community activists, political figures, and many have taken strides to ensure that with racism declared as a public health crisis there are distinct action steps that are taken to establish accountability and enact change. This research study emphasized the importance of communicating political legislation that impacts the lives of millions in the United States to the general public, while centering the focus on the language and pronouns used to frame this legislation for an intended effect on the audience. This research study brought attention to one of the deadliest viruses in our society: racism. Academics from diverse fields of study must utilize their knowledge of framing, political communication, and others to provide greater lenses for the public to take into account when deciphering information from news media and government officials. One step towards change

is communicating, sharing experiences, becoming uncomfortable with reality, and applying a critical lens when consuming information. This declaration of racism as a public health crisis comes at a time when our country needs collective unity and advocacy in order to combat a crisis that continues to unjustly take the lives of innocent individuals.

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