Title: Moral Panic, Race, and SB6: Examining the Mediated Response to Kentucky’s Immigration Bill

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Background / Context:
This research is a part of a larger on-going project examining recent racialized immigration policies currently being drafted and passed throughout the United States. The initial data was collected based on Arizona’s policy (SB1070). I expanded this research to include Kentucky’s immigration policy (SB6). What made Kentucky’s policy so significant was that it was actually harsher than Arizona’s. Although SB6 was not passed, the public support for it was so overwhelming that the discourse surrounding it had to be examined.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:
The purpose of this research is to examine the extent of modern racism in mediated discussions surrounding recent anti-immigration legislation, specifically, Kentucky Senate Bill 6 (SB6). Expressions of overt racism have almost all but disappeared in media and from public discourse generally (Entman, 1990). However, researchers have found that racism still exists in many forms, both overt and covert (see Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). A particular arena where overt racist still permeates is virtual spaces where anonymity disinhibits individuals leading them to act in manner they would not in person. This online disinhibition compels some people to say and do things that they wouldn’t otherwise do (Suler, 2004).

Media scholars contend that interactive news media has the potential to increase citizen democracy and increase participation in political affairs more than other technologies have in the past (see Becker & Slaton, 2000; Vandenberg, 2000; Chung & Yoo, 2008; Deuze, 2003). There are many important democratic features of the virtual public sphere. However, there is still significant debate surrounding the democratic potential of these virtual publics. An additional concern is that these spaces have the potential to become spaces filled with hostility and overt racism. The current research focuses this concern which only a few scholars have previously examined (see Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2009). But the current work will focus on online commentary about an immigration bill which turned into a discussion about particular immigrant groups from South of our Border.

Mediated discourse surrounding immigrant populations, specifically undocumented (illegal) is particular problematic. Researchers have found that the term illegal immigrant is often used to exclusively describe Latino immigrants, both documented and undocumented (Stewart, Pitts, & Osborne, 2011). This is problematic given that Latinos make up the largest ethnic minority in the United States at 15% of the population. Even more disturbing, media representations of immigrants feed into the fears and hostilities between Latinos and other racial groups in the United States (Stewart, Pitts, & Osborne, 2011, p. 9). Anti-immigrant movements from the late 1800’s which created nativist press still exist today. Dominant themes in the press suggest that immigrants take away jobs, commit crimes, spread disease, take advantage of social and economic services, fail to conform to American norms, etc (as cited in Stewart, Pitts, & Osborne, 2011). These mediated themes have become a part of the larger conversation about
immigrant populations, specifically, those from Latin countries. These conversations are not overtly racist, but rather reflect a modern racist frame of thinking.

Modern racism emerged as a need to explain covert forms of racism that constitute contemporary society (McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1993). The theory contends that modern forms of racism are not situated in individual assessments of minorities, but rather, the theory reveals how racist criticism is reflected in ways that minorities violate the traditional values of mainstream (Liu & Mills, 2006).

As Simmons & LeCouteur (2008) suggest, “discrimination can be articulated via a premise that the minority has done something to warrant” the discrimination experienced (p. 669). Specifically looking at media, Liu & Mills (2006) identified two ways that racism was achieved in print media related to two race-related events: “1) minorities were typically criticized for violating traditional mainstream values, and 2) nationalist discourse was repeatedly deployed to affirm the values and wellbeing of the majority and to defend against threat from outsiders (as cited in Simmons & LeCouteur, 2008, p. 669).” The purpose of the current research is to examine the extent that modern racism exists in the response to immigration policies and immigrant populations.

Methodology and Research Design:

Critical Discourse Analysis was used to examine the extent of covert and overt racism present in the discussion surrounding Kentucky’s Senate Bill 6. Since the coverage surrounding the bill was small we did not utilize a time frame, so we identified and collected all articles related to Kentucky’s Senate Bill 6 published in the Herald-Leader (we did not have institutional access to the Courier-Journal which is the highest circulating newspaper in Kentucky). The total number of comments was 781.

We removed comments that were not complete thoughts or phrases (such as one or two word comments); additionally, we removed comments that responded with a question as opposed to a statement. We also removed comments that did not directly discuss the bills or immigrant populations. After sorting through those comments, we implemented targeted sampling to identify the comments that opposed KY SB6. Watters & Biernacki (xxxx) define this type of non-random sampling as a “purposeful, systematic method by which controlled lists of specified populations…are designed to recruit adequate numbers of cases within each of the targets (p. 420).” They further suggest that “this type of sampling is useful when true random sampling is not feasible and when convenience sampling is not rigorous enough to meet the assumptions of the research design (p. 420).” From this population of comments (KY = 343), we randomly selected 150 from the Kentucky set to be included in the study.

Coding Tables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern (Covert) Racism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a threat to our economy and social welfare system; they cost us too much money, are a burden to welfare system, or take American jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants are a threat to public safety. Potential consequences are terrorism, drug cartels, violent and petty crimes, or increased health problems (such as H1N1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Federal laws are inadequate  | State-level laws, such as SB 1070, are necessary because there are no federal laws that address the issue appropriately, as federal laws are not being enforced, or the federal government is not taking responsibility.
---|---
Need to protect welfare  | The general social welfare of individuals should be protected by cutting down immigration numbers and restricting social rights; by tightening the nation’s borders; illegal immigrants should be deported or kept in detention centers.
---|---
Need to protect jobs  | Our jobs should be protected by cracking down on employers who knowingly hire illegal workers.

<table>
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Findings / Results (data excerpts):

**Modern (Covert) Racism**

**Economic Threats/Need to Protect Jobs**

We do not select 1 race but ALL ILLEGAL ALIENS. They were and are not citizens of this country but came here illegally for the freebies.

i think they need to pay there taxes & be a citizen. why should they be driving on our roads, going to college for free. i pay my fair share & so should everyone else in the country. if you're illegal, get your butt back where you belong!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I'd rather have my tax dollars go towards incarcerating and deporting illegal immigrants (which they deserve as criminals), rather than supporting and subsidizing their medical care, education, and other social entitlements that they do not deserve.
We pay taxes but yet illegals benefit more from our taxes that we do and they don't even contribute one red cent to it or to society, but the majority would love to drive cars drunk and kill, making medical and car insurance go up and leave the scene.

**Threat to Public/ Need to Protect Welfare**

then how come they are receiving welfare, food stamps, section 8? They are HERE to trash the USA just as they have their own country.

As far as I am concerned you have no rights to protest against the laws and legislature of my country. You want rights, then respect all of our laws (including immigration), learn our primary language, and lawfully gain citizenship. Then I'll support your rights fully. Until then, don't tell me as a citizen and taxpayer of this country what rights you think you have. You are an illegal immigrant.

**Federal Laws are Inadequate**

Our Government, has allowed the invasion of 30 million criminals in direct violation of Article IV, Section IV of our Constitution. they force American tax payers to pay Billions to provide Welfare, Prison cells, Educate the invaders children, free medical care, massive document fraud, & are destroying our schools, hospitals, communities, culture while Robbing, Raping, Killing & Assaulting American Citizens WAKE UP PEOPLE!

**Old Fashioned (Overt) Racism**

**Economic Threats/Need to Protect Jobs**

Kentuckians are loosing jobs and having difficulty in providing for their families. However, remember, those in this country ILLEGALLY, thus in Ky. illegally, are not Americans or Kentuckians !!!!!!! Go back to Mexico, or wherever you came from.

The influx has thrown the balance off in this country so much that Spanish is becoming the national language. At the rate they are crossing the borders, having children here and working under the table for very low wages, our country will be just an extension of Mexico with poorly educated first generation immigrants, and dragging the National Averages down to insure America can not compete educationally with other countries.

I am not a racist. Personally they all need to go home but it seems that only the Mexicans are truely milking the system. Try doing a survey on all those on government assistance and it might scare you. My question is are you legal or illegal. Mexican????????
Threat to Public/ Need to Protect Welfare

…understand that these illegal immigrants [referred to Mexicans previously] belong to gangs, the cartel, and other groups of people that will do far worse than just take American jobs that AMERICANS don't want to do.

It's not Asians that I see hanging out at the local Walmart every Friday night, or standing in the day-worker lines, or clogging the ER's.

Let them protest and send them back to Mexico where they belong.If they weren't illegal they would not have to protest.

They are ILLEGAL. Round them up, put them on a bus and send them to the nearest border and dump them there. Round up Reginald Meeks and take him with them. Let him cry racism in Mexico, maybe someone will care.

Crime is a huge thing amongst that group. If you're wanting to better yourself, then do it legally. Lexico (cardinal valley) is horrible now. Gardenside getting that way too. Something has to give.

Preliminary Analysis:

Although Kentucky ‘s bill did not specifically state a particular immigrant group would be targeted, it was discernible from the public’s reaction that this bill was created to thwart crossing from south of our border. And although many claim immigration policies are colorblind, lacking intent to discriminate against racialized immigrants, immigration policy has a long history of negatively impacting non-white migrants. As Kevin Johnson contends, U.S. immigration laws disparately impact people of color both domestically and abroad. And in recent years, immigration policies have directly impacted migrants from Latin countries. Even though policymakers adamantly claim no racial bias in passing immigration policy, the public does not hold back in expressing their hostility towards Mexican’s and Mexican ‘looking’ individuals. However, most American’s claim their positions are not racially motivated but rather directed towards the ‘illegal’ immigrant.

Dissemination of Knowledge:

This is a living project. We have already presented the initial data a several conferences and have received tremendous feedback that has propelled the project further:

- The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, New York, New York (March 2012)
- Racial Democracy, Crime & Justice Network Workshop, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH (July 2012)

We have also identified a variety of outlets to showcase the changes and additions to this work.

- American Society of Criminology, Chicago, IL (November 2012)
With continued feedback, we will begin dissecting the project into smaller papers for possible publication. We have identified the following outlets as the most suitable for our research:

- Crime, Media, Culture
- Race & Justice
- Discourse & Communication

This project has already spun a number of smaller articles. Those works in progress are listed below:

- (Blue)Grassroots Activism: The Role of Social Networks in Resisting Racialized Immigration Policy in Kentucky
- Protect the Homeland: Fear of the ‘illegal immigrant’ in Rural America (Book Project)