Tell Me How You Really Feel: 
Exploring the Role of Emotions in Black Politics
## Table of Contents

I. Forward: Black Affective Experiences in Politics..................................................3

II. Racialized Differences in Perceptions of and Emotional Responses to Police Killings of Unarmed African-Americans..........................................................13

III. Riled Up about Running for Office: Examining the Impact of Emotions on Political Ambition..........................................................30

IV. Missing the Mark? An Exploration of Targeted Campaign Advertising’s Effect on Black Political Engagement ..................................53
Forward: Black Affective Experiences in Politics

What role might emotions play in Black public opinion and political decision-making? Extant literature in political psychology and Black politics provide us with incomplete answers to this question. While political psychology scholars have only recently begun to explore collective emotional experiences in the form of affective polarization, scholars of Black politics have largely relied on cognitive understandings of racial identity (i.e. linked fate) and its implications for policy opinions and political participation. A burgeoning body of literature in Black politics is beginning to fill these voids. This Dialogue section is devoted to understanding how emotions like pride, anger, sadness, and fear shape Black politics. Through the use of cutting edge survey experiments, these articles address the role of emotions in reactions to police killing unarmed individuals, political ambition, and political mobilization via micro-targeting in campaign advertising. This Dialogue section will provide a critical interjection in the field as we aim to understand the political implications of the emotions of Black people who seem to be experiencing increasing levels of trauma on a daily basis.
Ferguson. Sandra Bland. Trayvon Martin. Eric Garner. Emmett Till. LaQuan McDonald. Rosa Parks. Tamir Rice. #SayHerName. Jena 6. Renisha McBride. Amadou Diallo. Rodney King. Hurricane Katrina. Barack Obama. #BlackLivesMatter. Stacey Abrams. Each of these names, phrases, events, or movements invokes a broad range of emotions across various communities in the United States of America. Particularly among Black Americans, collective emotional reactions (i.e. pride, shame, hope, fear, and or anger) to these incidents seem particularly acute and vocalized, as the Black individual or individuals associated with these happenings were everything from derided and murdered to praised and commended. Yet, consistent across all of these occurrences is the collective political action among the overwhelming majority of Black people that preceded or followed them: increases in voter registration, record levels of turnout in elections, changes in policy opinions, demands for changes to legislation, and last but certainly not least, protests. These real world instances provide the motivation behind the two research questions addressed in this Dialogue section. First, how and in what ways does one’s racial group identity shape how one experiences emotions? Second, what are the political implications of these Black affective experiences?

Bridging the Gap Between Political Psychology and Black Politics Literature

Extant literature in political psychology on emotions provides us with incomplete answers to these questions surrounding the role of affect in Black politics. Although this vast body of research suggests that emotions like pride, anger anxiety, hope, fear, disgust, and enthusiasm matter in public opinion and political decision-making, the scholarly focus is on how individuals experience them; predominantly aggregate responses of white people (Marcus et al 2000; Albertson and Gadarian 2015; Groenendyk 2011; Valentino et al. 2011). More often than not, the survey questions utilized in this research asks respondents, “Has [insert name of political candidate] because of the kind of person he is or because of something he has done, ever made you feel
angry/hopeful/afraid/anxious/proud? Yes or no? How often?” These candidate-centric emotions measures are often used to predict some aspect of public opinion or political engagement. A number of scholars also attempt to manipulate emotions by exposing respondents to various stimuli (i.e. vignettes and recall and write prompts) designed to invoke emotions like shame, anger, fear, and disgust at the individual level (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2010; Panagopoulus 2010; Valentino et al. 2011; Banks 2014; Banks and Hicks 2016; Kam and Estes 2017). Even these works do not provide the literature with a cogent understanding of the full functioning of emotions in politics, as they do not focus on the experience of emotions of members of groups.

Groups matter in politics. Whether racial, religious, gender, partisan, or socioeconomic, groups provide cues to people about how they should participate in politics and how they should evaluate policies and candidates (Converse 1964; Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Sides N.d.). Groups and emotions both inform how people experience politics. Our current political landscape confirms this notion: many women were proud of the candidacy of Hillary Clinton; numerous Republicans are anxious about immigration; a great deal of Black people are angry about police killing unarmed individuals of color. Only recently have political psychology scholars begun to explore the concept of group-centric emotions in the context of affective polarization. This research examines how dislike for individuals in opposite parties might stimulate or constrain attitudes and behavior (Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Webster and Abramowitz 2017). Yet, none of these works focus on the experience of emotions tied to racial group identity.

Scholars of Black politics have overwhelmingly relied on cognitive understandings of race and its implications for politics as opposed to emotions (Miller et al. 1981; Allen, Dawson and Brown 1989; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; Dawson 1994, 2003; Gay 2004; White 2007; McClain et al. 2009; Laird 2017). Since Blacks’ life chances were over-determined by race from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement, Dawson (1994) argues that during that period it was
cognitively efficient, since information was costly, to substitute racial group interests as a proxy for self-interests. Thus, those who study Black public opinion and participation believe that Blacks’ shared history of slavery and discrimination encourages them to evaluate policies and candidates based on their perceived impact on the racial group rather than the individual (Hutchings and Valentino 2004). However, this understanding of racial identity and its effect on politics is cognitive; after all Dawson (1994) did call his theory the Black utility heuristic, and as such does not explicitly account for emotions.

A burgeoning body of literature examines Black affective experiences in politics. The pioneers of this quantitative strand of research, White, Philpot, Wylie, and McGowan (2007) and Philpot, White, Wylie, and McGowan (2010), examine how Blacks and Whites emotionally respond to various racialized social and political events (i.e. the OJ Simpson Verdict, Hurricane Katrina aftermath, and Barack Obama winning the 2008 Presidential Election). Harris-Perry (2013) explores how the vicious stereotypes of Black women stemming from slavery (i.e. the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire) continue to shape the ways in which Black women view themselves as citizens in American politics and how they might go about politically organizing. Assessing the presidential candidacies of Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton, Simien (2015) argues that voters from marginalized racial and gender groups will take pride in and derive psychological benefits from their candidacies. Additional research either uses the previously mentioned candidate-centric emotions questions and aggregates responses of Black respondents to these questions (Simien 2015; Phoenix 2014), examines the role of enthusiasm in Blacks’ vote intention (Block and Collins 2018), explores the role of emotions in support for community nationalism (Banks, McKenzie, and White 2018), attempts to assess how Blacks’ emotional reactions to intra-and-intergroup violence shapes their attitudes about punitiveness (Burge and Johnson 2018), or uses physiological measures to understand how Black people emotionally respond to the police,
images of the confederate flag, and Donald Trump (Orey N.d.). We aim to contribute to this growing body of literature.

A Look Ahead…

This Dialogue section is devoted to understanding how emotions like anger, fear, sadness and pride shape Black policy opinions and political engagement. Using an original survey experiment, the first paper examines how both Blacks and Whites perceive and emotionally react to police killing unarmed individuals. Differing from previous research that tends to observe the aggregate responses of Blacks and Whites to racialized events (Newport 2012; PEW 2013; Phoenix 2015), these scholars vary the race of the victim in the police shooting as well as the perceived legitimacy of the officer’s shooting and find that both Blacks and Whites responses are rather varied, with Black people experiencing vastly greater amounts of anger than their White counterparts. What effects might these increased levels of anger have in the political arena? The authors of the second paper help answer this question by uncovering how Blacks’ emotions shape their political ambition. That is, they attempt to understand the extent to which Blacks’ experiences of emotions like anger, fear, sadness, hope, and pride, influences whether one considers running for office. These scholars find that anger is the primary emotion shaping Black candidate emergence. How might emotions shape evaluations of candidates seeking office as well as one’s vote intention? The third and final paper in this Dialogue section examines how Black people emotionally react to campaign advertisements that target Black voters by using stereotypic appeals. Findings from this study indicate that anger is the natural affective response when candidates use stereotypic appeals and that Black candidates are doubly punished, in terms of increased levels of negative evaluations and decreased levels of mobilization, for using these targeted appeals.

Black Americans’ lived experiences are powerfully sculpted by race. From slavery to present day, Black people have been and continue to be treated differently simply because of the color of
their skin (Baldwin 1953; Du Bois 1903; Dyson 2018; Ellison 1952; Giovanni 1968; Marable 2007; West 1994; Wright 1940). While many pundits and scholars in political science are attempting to make sense of the emotions of White people, this Dialogue section will provide a critical interjection in the field as we aim to understand the political implications of the emotions of Black people who seem to be experiencing increasing levels of trauma on a daily basis.
References


URL: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/pgi


URL: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/sgi


https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/111543


Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL.


Webster, Steven W. 2017. “Anger and Declining Trust in Government in the American Electorate.”

[https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-017-9431-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-017-9431-7).

