LET'S TALK ABOUT RACE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOW RACIALLY EXPLICIT MESSAGING CAN ADVANCE EQUITY
As we approach a time when there will no longer be any single racial majority in America, we have to ask ourselves hard questions. Are we comfortable with race, and racial dynamics, as our nation’s demographics change? Are we ready to embrace one another despite our perceived differences, or will we choose the cynical acceptance of what has become the norm in our country—ongoing segregation, Black voter suppression, economic exploitation, militarized policing, and mass incarceration? Can we counter the race wedge - the process of using race as a tactic to divide people in order to achieve a political outcome? Are we ready to embrace a new vision of shared prosperity? Are we willing to embrace a truly inclusive democracy?

We can assess where Americans land on many of these questions by understanding how people respond to messages about race in the first place. In CSI’s first communications testing report, Talking About Race: A Summary of Findings, we demonstrated that it is better to address race than to avoid it. Most notably, we demonstrated that progressive messages about health care reform and subprime lending that addressed race prevailed over conservative messages that avoided it, as well as over progressive messages that were race neutral.

**RACE WEDGE**

The term “race wedge” refers to the process of using race as a tactic to divide people in order to achieve a political outcome.

In this report, we explored whether talking about race directly could effectively move people to support progressive fiscal policies.

**FISCAL POLICY**

The term “fiscal policy,” for this particular round of testing, refers to three main themes: government’s role in job creation, tax reform, and increasing safety net services. At its core, this is a dialogue that’s more about values than driving government spending. Progressive fiscal policy values include ensuring that the wealthy pay their fair share in taxes and regulating the market, while supporting a social safety net and expansion of the middle class. Conservative fiscal policy values include limiting taxes on the wealthy and deregulating the market, while privatizing traditionally public resources.

With the participant data supplied by research consultants, the Analyst Institute in 2012 and Pacific Market Research in 2014, CSI successfully completed two rounds of testing with a nationally representative sample. We tested messages that re-frame people of color as contributing, hardworking Americans —“makers” instead of “takers”—with the goal of moving people toward supporting more progressive fiscal policies.

- **First round of testing: Does the Messenger Matter?**
  We tested progressive messages with White spokespeople and with racially diverse spokespeople against conservative messages to see if the race of the messenger affects how participants respond to the message.

- **Second round of testing: What Counters the Race Wedge on Fiscal Policies?**
  We tested several progressive messages against one conservative message to see if people’s attitudes about progressive fiscal policies differed based on the level of racial explicitness of the message and on the stereotypical or non-stereotypical nature of the spokespersons’ occupations.

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KEY FINDINGS

The results from our testing show that race explicit messages move people toward progressive fiscal policies and that people like and agree with messages that have a multiracial cast. While the testing revealed information in a number of areas, the following findings stand out:

1. Progressive policy messages that specifically name race are successful with the general public.
2. The majority of people are holding two frames at once on policy issues and race, both progressive and conservative.
3. Even people with high implicit bias, when watching a progressive, racially explicit message, agreed with progressive fiscal policies.
4. Talking about race does not elevate individual implicit bias.
5. Racially diverse spokespeople are better received than White-only spokespeople.

This shows us that we can talk about race more explicitly than ever before. Not only does this finding support on-the-ground efforts to highlight the experiences of people of color, but it also can be used to inform communications strategies for a range of issues, from housing to education to health care and beyond.

CSI has developed strategies for organizers and advocates in creating messages that build support for racially equitable policy solutions. Through multiple rounds of testing, we determined that to combat the dominant race narratives that deepen the race wedge and increase inequity, it is critical to include three components that we call ACT:

Affirm: Engage the audience with an initial emotional connector and affirm “shared fate.”
Counter: Explain the history of the problem and address race directly to counter the race wedge.
Transform: End with an engaging, emotional solution and transform the narrative.

It has never been more important to talk about race in the right ways. By 2042, the United States will be a nation comprised primarily of people of color. If persistent racial disparities and growing racial tensions accompany this demographic shift, the nation’s wellbeing will be in jeopardy. We have a collective responsibility to discuss race in the context of solutions that work for all of us. Our research demonstrates that we can talk about race explicitly and win.

FRAMES

Unconscious thought process consisting of networks of associations that we use to interpret information. Frames are used as a long-term strategy in changing perceptions.

IMPLICIT BIAS

Unconscious attitudes and stereotypes toward individuals and social groups that “affect our understanding, actions, and decisions.”
(Adapted from Kirwan Institute)