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The Psychology of Confederate Symbols



Construction workers prepare a monument of Robert E. Lee for removal in New Orleans on May 19, 2017. (Reuters / Jonathan Bachman)

Mitch Landrieu, Mayor of New Orleans

- View this statue through a Black girl's eyes:
 - “Can you look into that young girl's eyes and convince her that Robert E. Lee is there to encourage her? Do you think she will feel inspired and hopeful by that story? Do these monuments help her see a future with limitless potential? Have you ever thought that if her potential is limited, yours and mine are, too?”

Outline

- How many monuments are there?
- When/why/where were confederate symbols popularized?
- What is ingroup-outgroup bias?
- Do confederate symbols intensify ingroup-outgroup bias?
- Do symbols intensify ingroup bias in general?
- Conclusions/discussion

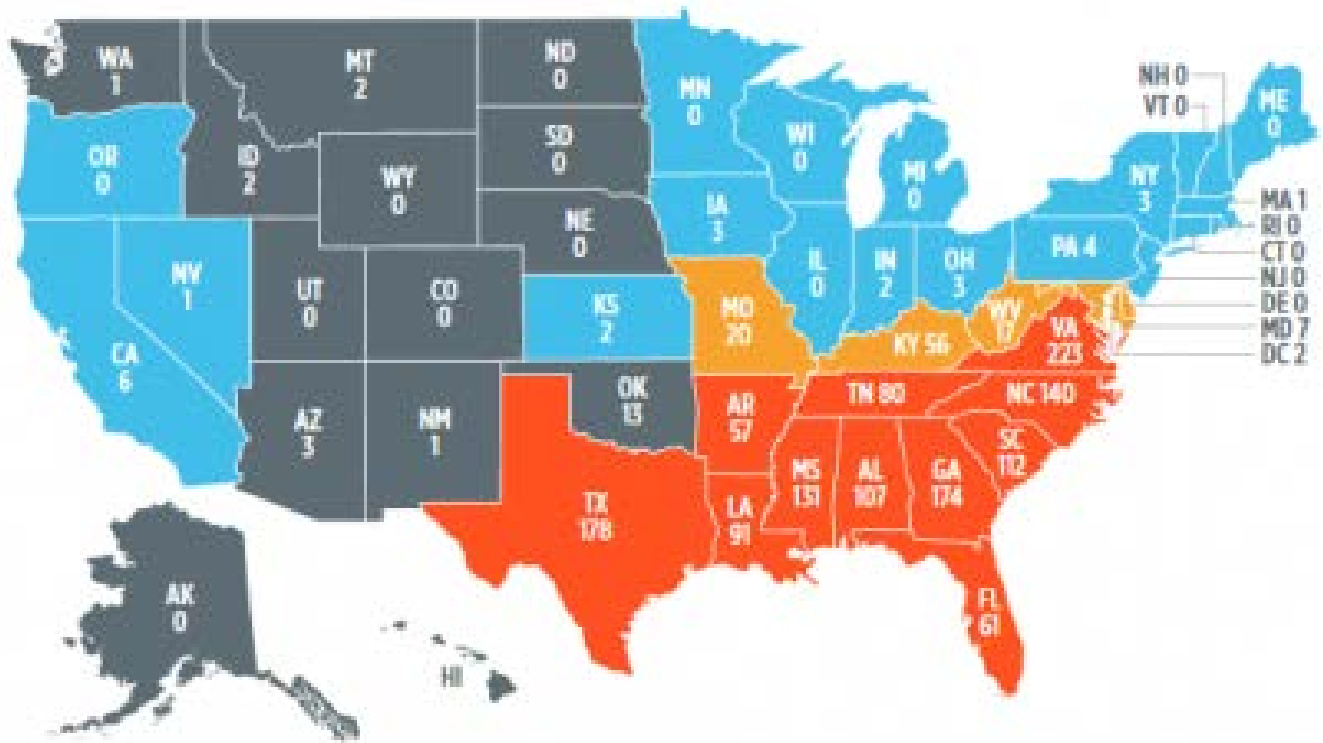
SPLC, 2017

- Over 1500 “confederate place names” around US including:
 - 718 statues, nearly 300 of which are in Georgia, Virginia or North Carolina
 - 109 public schools named for Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis or other Confederate icons
 - 80 counties and cities named for Confederates
 - 9 official Confederate holidays in six states; and
 - 10 U.S. military bases named for Confederates

Where are the Confederate Place Names? (SPLC, 08-2017)

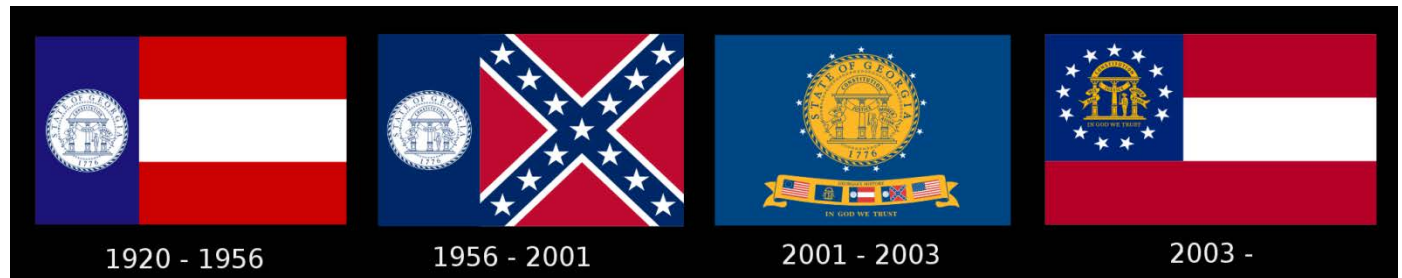
TOP 10 STATES

VIRGINIA	223
TEXAS	178
GEORGIA	174
NORTH CAROLINA	140
MISSISSIPPI	131
SOUTH CAROLINA	112
ALABAMA	107
LOUISIANA	91
TENNESSEE	80
FLORIDA	61



When/Why Were Confederate Symbols Popularized?

- Most confederate monuments erected at least 60 years after civil war
 - NAACP founded (1909)
 - ACLU founded (1920)
 - 19th Amendment (women's vote) passes (1920)
- Confederate flag popularized after 1954
- Symbols arose in reaction to the fight for civil rights



Georgia's flag history

What is Ingroup-Outgroup Bias?

Ingroup-Outgroup Bias

- Understanding prejudice
- Ingroup bias – favoritism toward one's group
 - E.g., school allegiance
 - Attitudes and behaviors
 - Even when groups formed randomly
 - Especially when resources are at stake
 - Enhances social identity and self-esteem
 - (Billig & Tajfel, 1973)

Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes



Any characteristic can be divisive

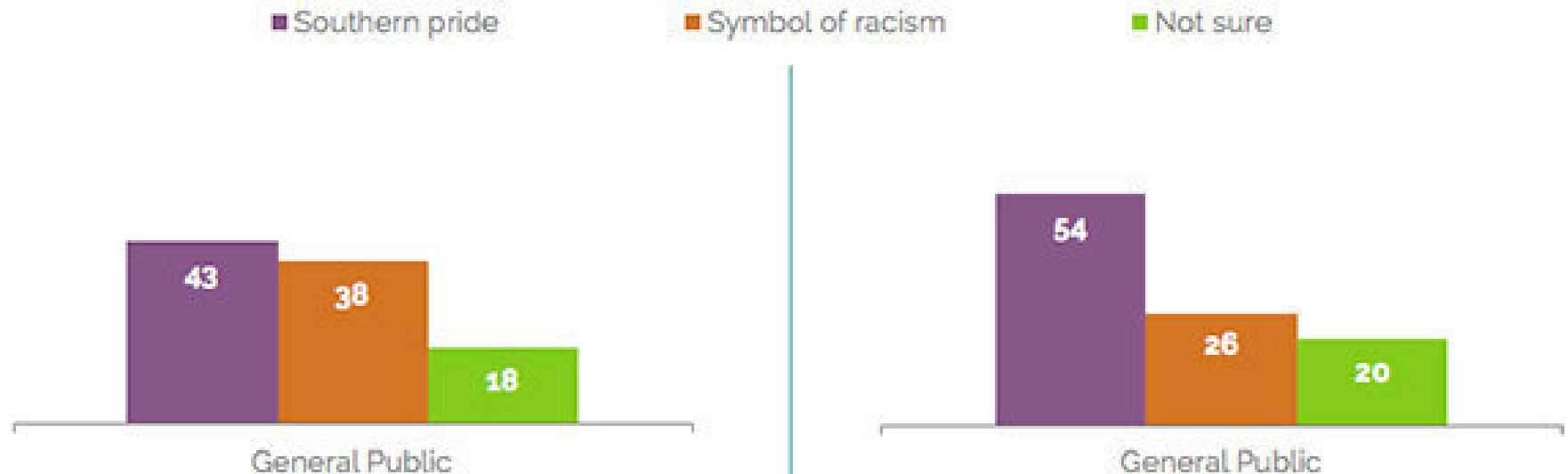
Do Confederate Symbols Intensify Ingroup-Outgroup Bias?

The Confederate Flag: Heritage or Hate? An Opinion Poll

Impressions of Confederate Symbols

Confederate flag

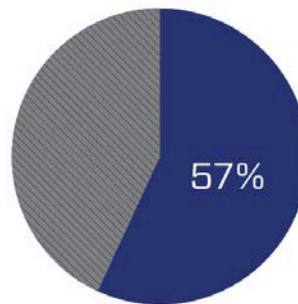
Confederate monument



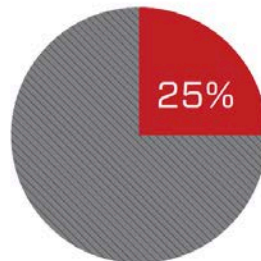
A Racial Divide in Opinions about the Flag

THE CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG:

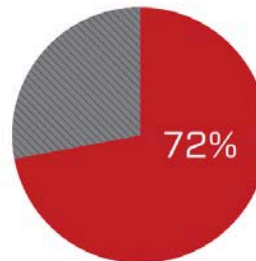
Hate or heritage?



Almost six in 10 Americans see the battle flag as primarily a symbol of Southern pride.



WHITES



BLACKS

But African Americans are vastly more likely to see it as a symbol of hate.

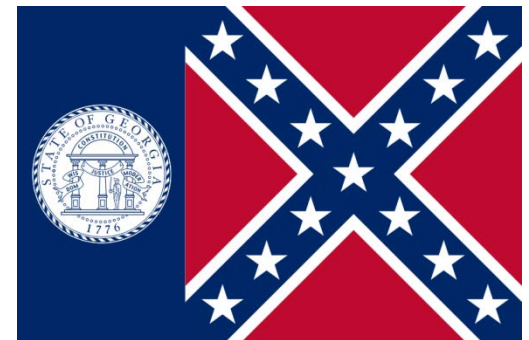
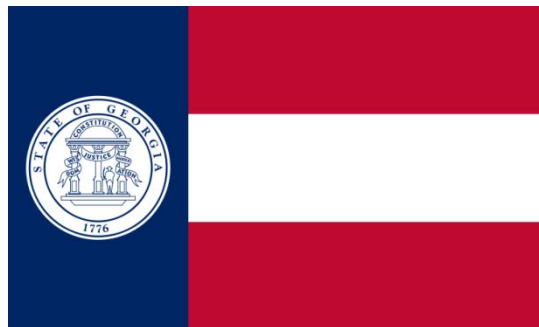
CNN, 2015

Heritage = Knowledge of History

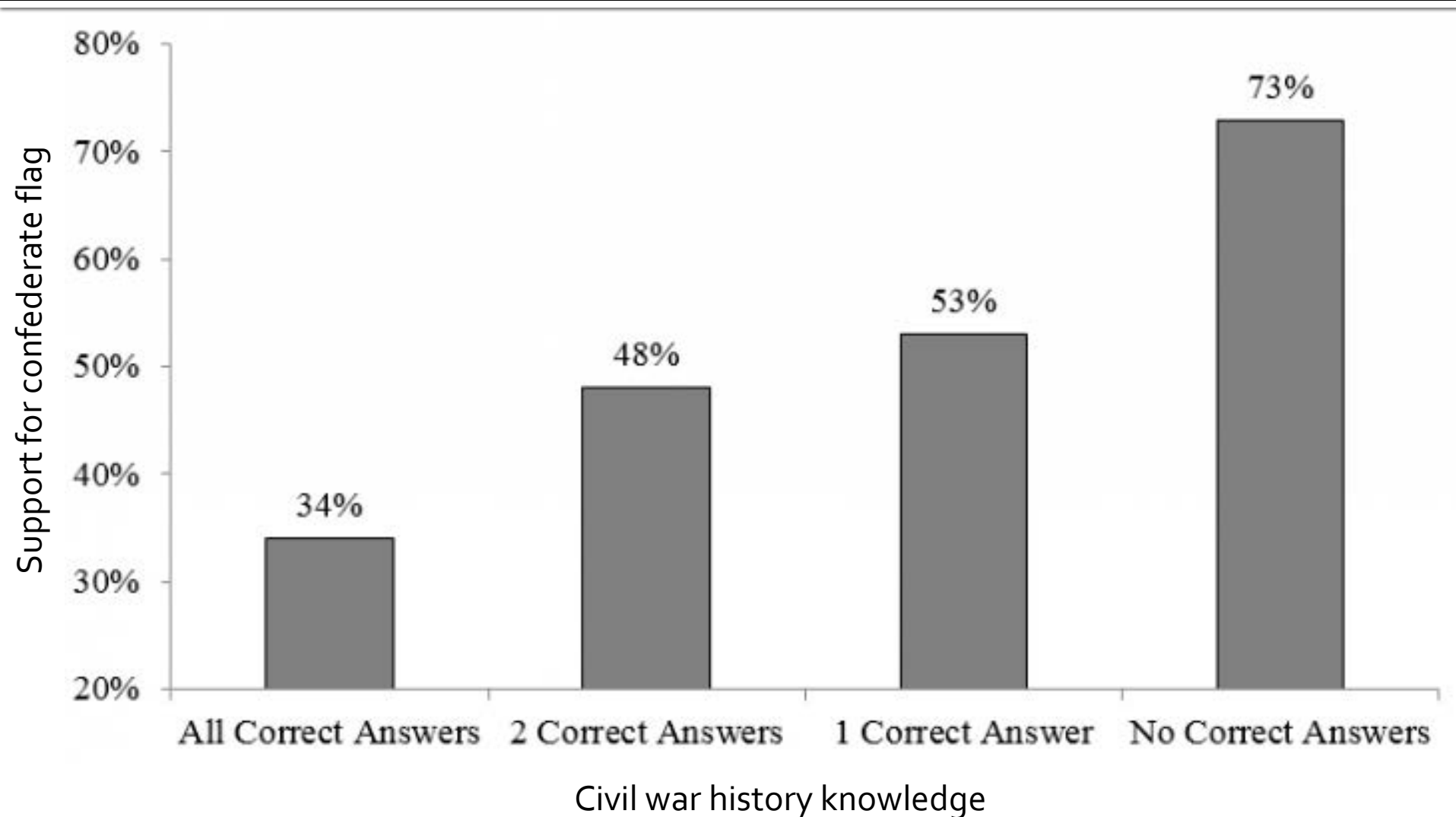
- N = 1000; representative sample; 1-3% ME
- 1/2 didn't know when the war took place
- Less than 1/5 knew what the Emancipation Proclamation was
- 1/3 could not identify Lincoln as a leader of the Union Army
 - Hundreds of respondents chose "Confederate Army," the Revolutionary War's "Continental Army," World War II's "Allied Forces"
- (ACTA, American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2015)

Heritage or Hate? (Strother, Piston, & Ogorzalek, 2017)

- Choose best flag of 3
- Measured:
 - Knowledge of civil war history (heritage)
 - Racial prejudice (hate)

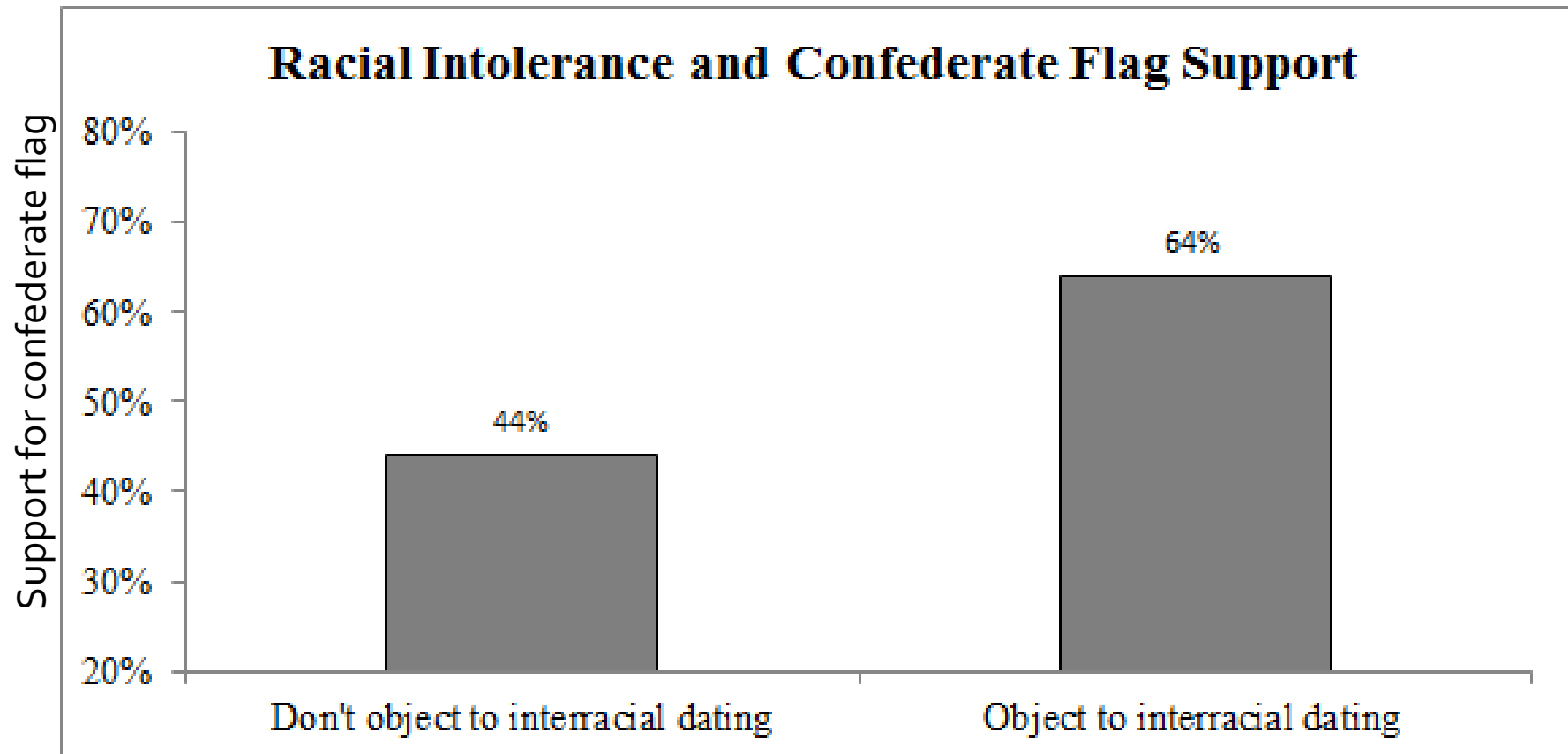


Heritage or Hate? (Strother, Piston, & Ogorzalek, 2017)

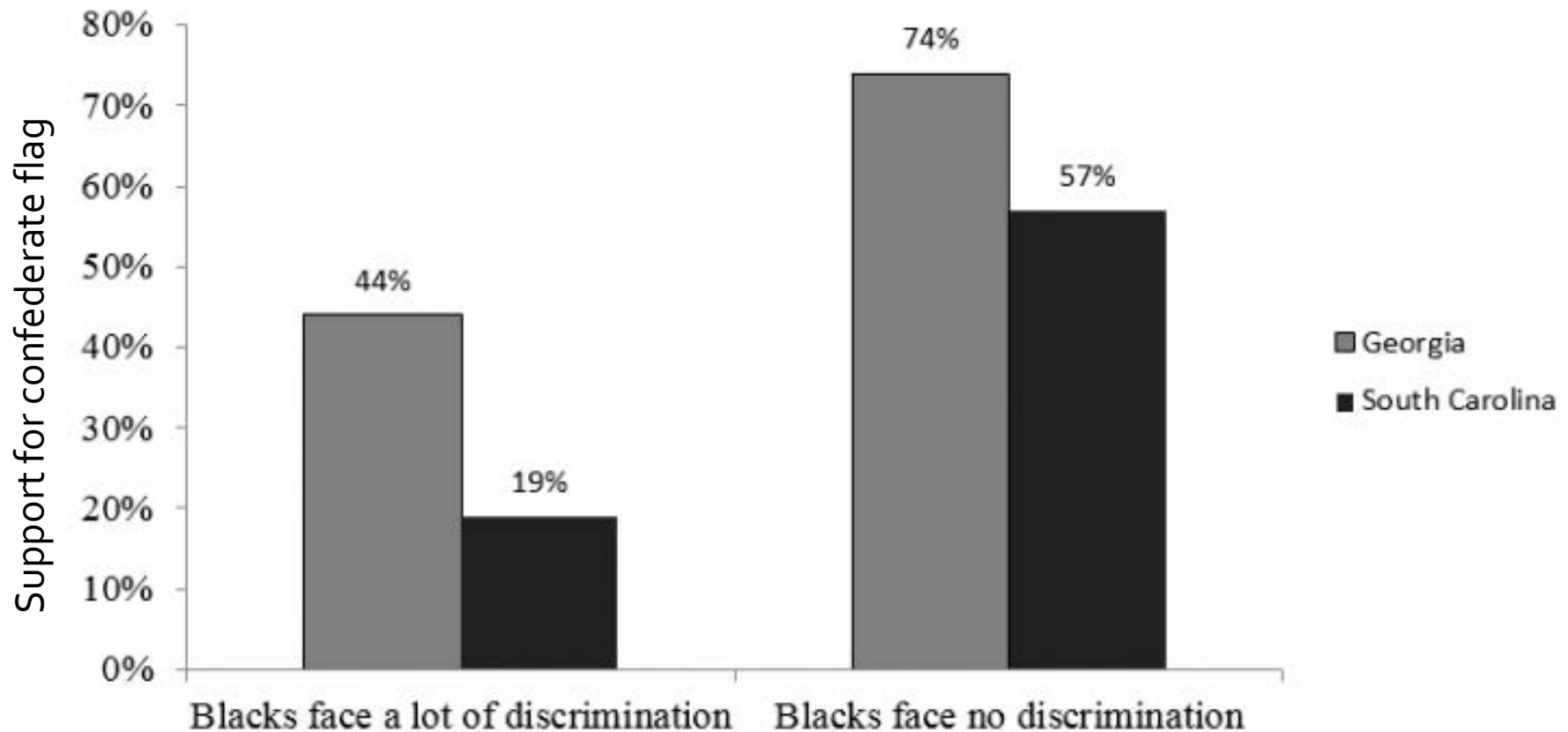


Heritage or Hate?

(Strother, Piston, & Ogorzalek, 2017)



Heritage or Hate? (Strother, Piston, & Ogorzalek, 2017)



Research: Hate Wins Over Heritage



But Do Confederate Symbols Influence Behavior?

(Ehrlinger et al., 2011)

Participants
Randomly Assigned

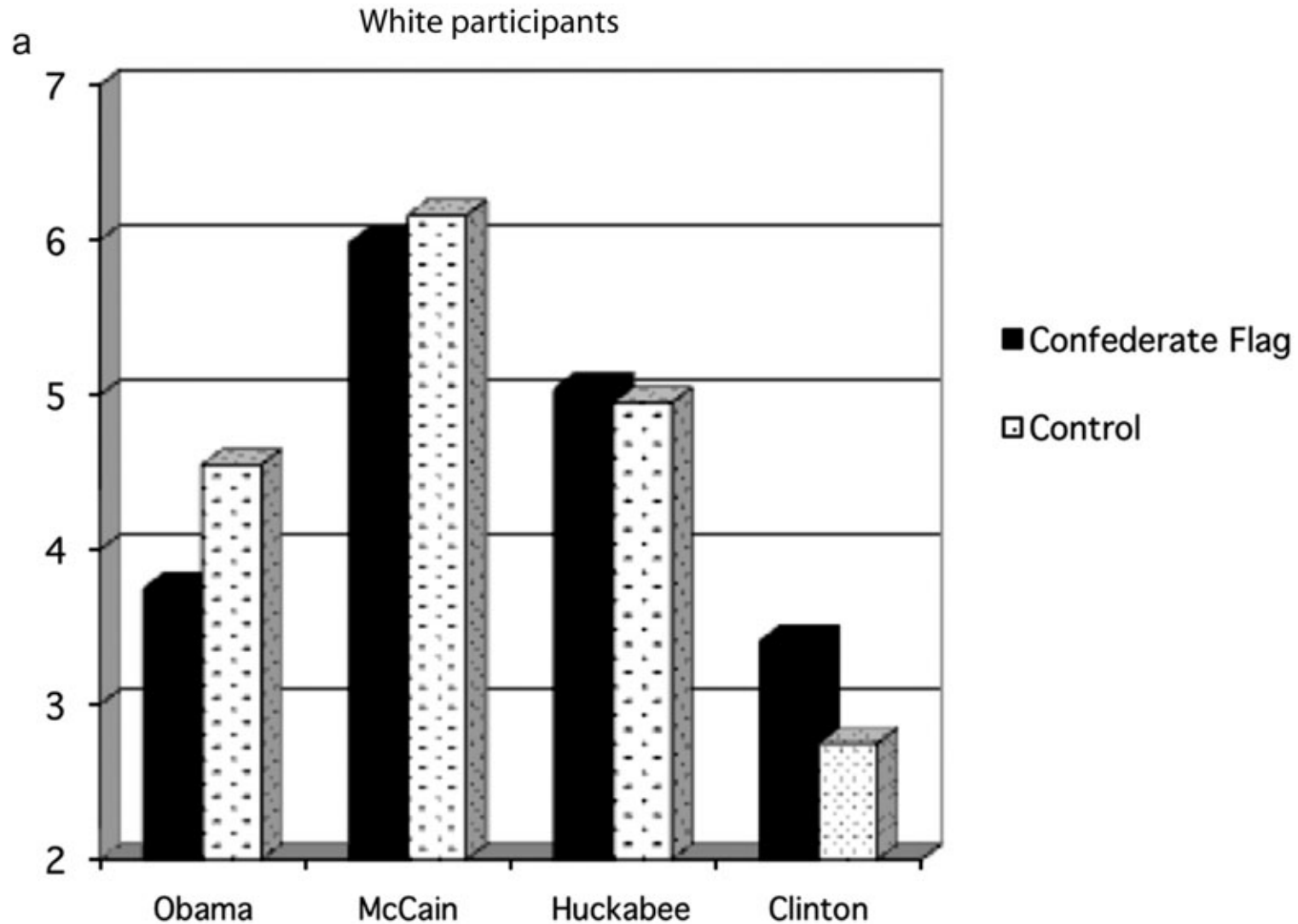
Confederate
flag (15ms)



No flag

- Measured voting preferences in primary
- Flag: Less willingness to vote for Barak Obama

But Do Confederate Symbols Influence Behavior? (Ehrlinger et al., 2011)



But Do Confederate Symbols Influence Behavior?

(Ehrlinger et al., 2011)

Participants
Randomly Assigned

Confederate
flag sticker



No flag

- “Oh, someone must have left this”
- Hypothetical black man who refused to pay rent until the landlord conducted repairs

County Courthouse in Vicksburg, Mississippi



Are Symbols Intensifying Ingroup Bias in General?



What About the American flag?

- Ps completed survey in presence or absence of American flag (Kemmelmeier & Winter, 2008)
 - increased nationalism (a sense of superiority over others)
 - but not patriotism (love and commitment to one's country)



What About the American flag?

- Exposure to flag polarizes Republicans and Democrats
 - Ingroup identification becomes stronger
- Flag exposure seems to increase out-group prejudice in general
- Chan (2017)



Members of the SF 49ers kneeling during the national anthem

Conclusions/Discussion

In Charlottesville...

- One person dead, 34 wounded over statue removal
- Obviously, the symbols have enormous significance
 - Significance is divorced from historical context
 - Seems to be rooted in racial prejudice
 - Symbols intensify ingroup identities/bias

Discussion

- How are symbols serving us?
- How are they dividing us?
- Are there good reasons to keep confederate monuments?
- Will removal of the monuments be a step toward solving underlying race problems?