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# How S. C. Daily Newspapers Framed the Removal of the Confederate Flag from the State House Grounds in 2015 Through Letters to the Editor and Editorials

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How S. C. daily newspapers framed the removal of the Confederate flag from the State House grounds in 2015 through letters to the editor and editorials

by

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## ABSTRACT

The removal of the Confederate flag from the State House grounds in Columbia, South Carolina during the summer of 2015 was an action that had been discussed previously in the state since the flag went up over the State House in 1961. While the state legislature acted swiftly to have the flag removed after Gov. Nikki Haley's announcement on June 22, the two and a half weeks between her announcement and removal on July 10 was filled with opinions from citizens all across the state and in areas of the United States where Confederate monuments and memorials still have a public presence. Newspapers in the state facilitated a platform in which these varying opinions could be expressed between the readers with their letters to the editor section and provided some of their own views in the editorial section. These two sections of the local daily newspapers in South Carolina were examined for the arguments and primary points of concern made by the writers regarding the Confederate flag's removal. A framing analysis of the letters to the editor and editorials in local newspapers across South Carolina revealed five distinct frames of perspective on the flag's removal. Additionally, some of the writers advocated for the flag to be removed or to remain on a monument on the State House grounds. The results showed some distinct patterns between the circulation sizes of newspapers and regions of the state where the newspapers were published and what frames were used as well as calls to action regarding the flag.

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## INTRODUCTION

While attending a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on the evening of Wednesday, June 17, 2015 in Charleston, S.C., a disturbed young white male pulled out a concealed gun and killed nine African-American worshippers including Rev. Clementa Pinckney, a state senator who was the pastor of the church (Tyler, 2016). Dylann Roof, the shooter, went into Emanuel A.M.E. having made his decision long before sitting down with the welcoming parishioners (Smith, Hawes, & Darlington, 2016). After committing the murders, Roof fled into the night. Police captured him the next morning, June 18, in Shelby, N. C., just over 240 miles north of Charleston. South Carolinians of all backgrounds were left to pick up the pieces and with choices to make about how to best move forward as a state more unified than divided along racial lines, specifically between black and white citizens. Emanuel A.M.E. congregants have experienced a history of racially motivated violence throughout the church's existence dating back to its founding in 1816 (Chappell, 2015). However, this was an unprecedented act of racially motivated violence committed by an individual in the 21st century of U. S. history, and the church's history, at the hands of a killer born and bred on South Carolinian soil. There were citizens across the state who felt that more could be done to provide a sense of unification, to show some effort in bridging the divide that exists between white and black communities in South Carolina (Borden, 2017). The local newspapers of the state played part in providing a forum through letters to the editor

where people from around South Carolina and the U. S. could provide insight and perspective on what actions to potentially take; at the same time, the newspapers themselves provided their own insight and perspective through editorials.

The killing spree carried out by Roof opened old wounds, exposing living remnants of historical racial division and inequality. In the two weeks that followed the murders in Charleston, there were calls to action to address the tragic aftermath of the shooting, including calls for action by state government representatives to respond appropriately, acting for South Carolina as a whole (Henderson, 2015). South Carolinians and state lawmakers discussed various ways to provide acknowledgement of the heinous crime and proclaim that the shooter's actions did not represent the underlying sentiments and values of White people within the state in regards to their Black neighbors. One prominent call to action was for the removal of the Confederate flag from the Capitol grounds in Columbia (Izadi & Phillip, 2015). Commenting on a rally where this call to action was made openly by activists in public, state Senator Darryl Jackson, who is African American, told CNN, "The politics of the flag are the politics of the primary voter." Sen. Jackson expressed regret in his belief that the rally would not have an impact on the legislative process (Henderson, 2015). The call to remove the flag, which was met with both opposition and support across the state, gained momentum when Governor Nikki Haley threw her support behind it (Diamond & Bash, 2015). The counter-call to action advocated for keeping the flag on the State House grounds at the Confederate Monument on the north side of the Capitol where it was being flown as a memorial to those who fought and died in service to the Confederate States of America (French, 2015). The public voiced their opinions on the issue through polls, social media, and

response to national and local news coverage provided by legacy media outlets (Henderson, 2015). The news media outlets provided updated information about the initiative for removal of the Confederate flag, informing local citizens of the views that were being expressed around the state and in their local area on the issue. The selection and presentation of these views through editorials by the daily newspapers' editorial boards and the decisions on which letters to the editor to run on the topic of the Confederate flag's removal represents voices of perspective in the debate, giving a framework of their concerns about the Confederate flag coming down or remaining where it was.

The creation and dissemination of the individual frames promoted through public debate are the focus of this study, with the goal of further understanding and acknowledging the process of frame creation and when those frames are shared by local news outlets, like daily newspapers. This study is intended to identify primary frames in the Confederate flag removal discourse in letters to the editors – the people's opinions, and editorials – the newspapers' opinions, in thirteen daily newspapers in South Carolina. It is a valuable area of study rich in its content and complexity because the removal of the Confederate flag was, and continues to remain, a subject of deeply divided opinion among the residents of not only South Carolina and the other states that have a history of slave-ownership, but the entirety of the United States of America, as all Confederate monuments continue to receive public scrutiny about their existence in public spaces (Kahn, 2017). Variables such as population, demographics of race within each of the determined regions, and existence of Confederate monuments within each region will be considered in explaining editorial decision-making as well as the choices made by those

who wrote letters to the editor that were published. The variables could help explain the frequency at which similar opinions are expressed through editorials and letters to the editor in specific regions of South Carolina.

This research will provide a comprehensive look at the way South Carolina daily newspapers framed the debate to remove the Confederate flag, beginning with coverage on the day Gov. Nikki Haley announced her support to bring the Confederate flag down, June 22, 2015, and ending July 12, 2015, which was the Sunday after the flag's removal. The study will offer additional insight into frame development regarding journalists and publications that serve a local or regional audience and how communities are represented within their local daily newspapers based on their geographical locations. The frames that result from this study are guided by previous framing theory research and a contemporary application of that research to the topic of the Confederate flag's removal from the South Carolina State House grounds in the summer of 2015.

Previous research suggests that media framing can affect readers' viewpoints on an issue (Gitlin, 2003; Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1991; Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Druckman, 2001). The present research will not be able to determine any effects, but will provide, however, a calculated observation of what frames are coming from the daily newspapers' editorial boards on the topic of the Confederate flag's removal from the State House grounds, as well as what frames are dominant in the letters to the editor that the newspapers choose to run. The present study follows the findings of previous researchers who defined the value of observing editorials (Golan, 2010; Habel, 2006) and letters to the editor (Nord 1995; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001, 2002, 2007; Thornton, 1998a; 2007; 2011) for academic value. Acknowledging the established territory of framing

theory, the present research will explore the theory of framing in a contemporary context that is new and essential to providing further evidence of its value for potential future study.

# CHAPTER I

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Framing theory**

The theory of framing, from a media perspective, is based on an idea that how an issue of public interest is portrayed by news media outlets has influence over the way audiences think about the issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The development of framing theory research over time provides evidence that frames shown by news outlets serve the function of suggesting to audiences the possible ways to interpret an event and how those news outlets' frames can substantially influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Frames can “define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies” through discourse surrounding topics of societal interest (Entman, 1993, p. 52), guiding a newspaper's audience members to create individually personalized perceptions based on the way the information is presented. Frames can exist in the way journalists describe people, actions of events, and words that are specifically chosen to depict a topic of public interest and/or concern. A frame can be applied to specific attributes of a message or the type of message that is sent. In the present study, the potential influence of the daily newspapers in South Carolina will not be determined. Instead, the purpose for conducting this research is to identify the frames

that exist in both editorials and letters to the editor in a way that is defined for any researcher to recreate.

Framing theory has a number of strands and antecedents, particularly in psychology and sociology. Austrian psychologist Fritz Heider in 1959 determined that humans process complex sets of information daily by “reducing social perception to judgments about causal attribution,” meaning that individuals form their impressions of societal issues based on the potential causes of the public’s, or their own, behavior (Bryant & Oliver, 2009, p. 18). The personally held belief of an attributed cause towards an issue of public concern allows for an individual perspective that creates definitional boundaries to the issue at hand, which may align with other individuals’ perceptions. In the current study, this would be an individual’s rationale for either accepting, rejecting, or remaining indifferent towards the removal of the Confederate flag from the Capitol grounds. Frames used by one person when observing an issue of public interest can relate to other individuals’ points of perspectives and be separated into categories based on similarities in rationale for their held perspectives. These categories are defined by socially shared ideals and perceptions, which makes them “relatively stable” in their construct (Bryant & Oliver, 2009, p. 18). This stability provides for a somewhat consistent point of reference to a topic of public discussion, defined in this study as a primary framework. Primary frameworks are the more generalized concepts of a frame, but a primary framework and frames are still relatively similar in the way both are identified and further classified.

## **The effects of framing and accessibility to frames**

“A framing effect occurs when a phrase, image, or statement suggests a particular meaning or interpretation of an issue” (Bryant & Oliver, 2009, p. 20). However, it is possible that individual frames which audience members develop independent from news media influence can exist through passed down perspectives on an issue from personal sources. Thus, news media outlets may not always introduce individuals to frames in a topic of societal discussion. South Carolinians, especially those with a generational link to the state, can be exposed to frames of perception about the Confederate flag from other family, community, and cultural environment before news media influence takes place. Even if certain frames are introduced to an individual by news media, this does not mean that these frames will supersede those frames which have been introduced by friends and family. Because of the role of personal environment on the development of individual frames, frames may differ based on geographic region if a newspaper reflects its community and frames create a link between the concepts of a given issue to develop particular beliefs. Belief in a concept or concepts can lead to action, and any responsibility for actions related to that belief can be attributed to individual factors that range from personal to societal to environmental, among others (Iyengar, 1991). Frames may differ based on geographic region if a newspaper reflects its community and news editorial decisions are made for the benefit of a specified regional audience. This study examines the audience makeup of a region and looks for similarities in frame appearances throughout the daily local South Carolina newspapers, especially if those papers are not from the same region.

Media coverage of social events or issues and the presentation of their frames provides accessibility to an audience, where some readers may have only had exposure to one frame or none about the issue previously. The greater accessibility that a person has to the constructs or issues of a frame, then the more likely they are to be used for interpretation. If the construct is both applicable and accessible, then it is even more likely to be used by the individual. They cannot be separated from one another in isolation (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Additionally, the more accessibility that a person has to a construct or factor of the issue at hand, in this case it is the rationales for the retention or removal of the Confederate flag from the State House grounds, then the more likely it will be that the individual applies that construct to the issue (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Being exposed to constructs and considerations within an issue will affect accessibility while not having any impact on applicability (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016). The individual will apply their own interpretation or understanding to an issue of controversy like the Confederate flag's presence on State House grounds, but news media outlets provide more accessibility to frames that may ultimately change the perspective of the individual. While the present study will not be able to directly identify any media effects on the audience for the frames that are used in the editorials and letters to the editor, the analysis will include the appearances of identified primary frames in each of those sections. The purpose is to identify what frames are most commonly used by each daily South Carolina newspaper's editorial board and in the letters to the editor chosen for publication by those newspapers.

## **Defining the ‘Primary Framework’**

Framing researchers have identified “master frames,” which are conceptualized as frames that could be universally applied, no matter the topic of discussion (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). However, Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar (2016) suggest that scholars should not continue to pursue identifying master frames; instead, researchers should focus on frames particular to their research. The conflicting nature of the history each individual perceives regarding the Confederate flag from multiple viewpoints over time creates different approaches to the discussion of whether to celebrate the flag in public or to resign the symbol to the annals of history for research and observation. It is these varying viewpoints that cause individuals on either side of the discussion to have a personal rationale for their opinions, using similar terms in their defense of the provided opinion.

While there is no ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ opinion on the representation of the Confederate flag, the ideals that create the framework of an individual’s perception also exists for other people who hold similar views. These common threads of logic and perspective reveal linguistic traits that can be identified in a responding individual’s words depicting exactly why they hold a particular opinion on the subject. Identifying these commonalities in the responses from local citizens to their newspaper’s editor-in-chief and in editorial boards that provide their outlook to their readers allows for an examination of the opinions expressed within the state of South Carolina on both sides of the argument for leaving the Confederate flag on the State House grounds or removing it. These uniquely identified commonalities that are eventually refined into comprehensive frames can be organized by their similarities in reasoning and purpose for their stance on

the issue. So, it is important for the researcher to identify and specify frames for the research at hand. These identified, rationalized, and justified frames can be observed in relation to one another through editorials and letters to the editor, which will help provide more insight into the way local newspapers and the journalists represent their audiences ranging in number from thousands to tens of thousands of people, all while maintaining a voice of perspective as a part of that society.

The primary framework observed in this study is the removal of the Confederate flag from the State House grounds in Columbia, S. C., in the summer of 2015. The frames that exist within this primary framework are multitudinous in support of, and in opposition to, the Confederate flag's physical presence at the capitol. News media outlets use frames in their news coverage, including the daily newspapers which are the focus of the present research. Each of these frames within the comprehensive primary framework can be later evoked through the local daily newspaper's editorial board's decisions for which collective perspectives are expressed in the editorials and what letters to the editor should run in their publications as the issue of the Confederate flag's removal continued forward towards a decision ultimately made by South Carolina's lawmakers representing a hurt and divided constituency.

### **Letters to the editor**

Letters to the editor are a public record of opinion of issues in everyday life for the writers in that encapsulated moment, playing a part in the news agenda according to a snapshot of the readership (Thornton, 1998a; Thornton, 2007). The unpredictability of the audience response to topics of public interest provides a landscape in which journalistic

tendencies are fairly absent in lieu of a perspective outside of the traditional media scope (Young, 2011). “Letters to the editor are a directly accessible voice of some readers” (Thornton, 1998b, p. 42). Scholarly research has sought to discern the value of letters in assessing and understanding public opinion (Foster & Friedrich, 1937; Tarrant, 1957; Klempner, 1966; Grey & Brown, 1970; Lander, 1972; Buell, 1975; Pasternak & Kapoor, 1976; Pritchard & Berkowitz, 1991; Nord, 1995; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001; 2002; 2007; and Thornton, 1998a; 2007; 2011). Similarly, the purpose of the present research is geared toward understanding the discussion within letters to the editor, specifically about the primary framework of the Confederate flag’s removal. The letters to the editor section of a newspaper is a place for assessing contestation in a matter of public interest (Reader, Stempel, & Daniel, 2004; Thornton, 2010). In the present research, the concept of framing theory and its relevance to the views expressed in the chosen letters to the editor creates a gateway to understanding what the public is talking about in regards to the primary framework of the Confederate flag removal discussion.

Concerns over whether to observe letters to the editor for academic study are warranted. There is research to support drawbacks to the observation of letters to the editor such as major disparities in education, income, sex, residential location, and professional career choices among the likely respondents (Thornton, 2007; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001; Buell, 1975; Reader, Stempel & Daniel, 2004). “Despite warnings not to make sweeping assertions about public opinion based on letters, they are valuable historical artifacts that show topics on the public discussion agenda at a particular time,” stated Thornton (1998b, p. 42) in his observation of the public debate over journalistic ethics in letters to the editor. Relevance, authority, entertainment, and brevity were found

by Wahl-Jorgensen (2001, 2002) to be the criteria for most editors when selecting letters from the public to print. Relevance is the timeliness of a given event, defined by the limited date range in the present study which encapsulates a few weeks' time from the promotion of the decision to take the Confederate flag down to the Sunday publication following the removal a couple of days earlier. The brief amount of lines that respondents use to display their outlook in letters to the editor provides limited amounts of space per individual to provide multiple frames of perspective, leading to an expectation that one to two frames will be invoked in each letter. Authority and entertainment come from the character expressed through the letter to the editor and their perceivably noteworthy outlook on the primary framework based on the selection made by the editor for publication (Young, 2011). Utilizing letters to the editor, regardless of the inability to accurately judge public consensus or opinion expressed in the letters, a researcher can observe the content in relation to other newspapers and their letters to the editor over the same amount of time, accounting for what frames appeared and how often across the selected South Carolina daily newspapers.

## **Editorials**

Editorials provide opinions regarding topics of public concern on behalf of a newspaper's editorial board. The purpose of studying the content within editorials is to gain further insight into messages from newspapers based on ideological perspectives of the owners and managers of these publications and how that shared perspective may be serving their audience (Henry & Tator, 2002). Editorials are highly subjective and can provide a backdrop of perspective for which the public can base their own opinions when

discussing a topic of interest, creating opportunity to change and develop the entire frames of arguments by individuals that were previously made in the debate on the topic of interest (Hynds & Archibald, 1996). This “expression and persuasive communication of opinions” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 13) through editorials allows for a newspaper to do more than report the facts to the public and extends into the area of potentially affecting readers’ perceptions of an issue based on their agreed upon input that was approved by multiple members of the publication prior to print. Shen (2004) gave evidence that editorials provide salience to portions of an issue that can actively affect an audience’s decisions towards the entirety of the particular issue. In terms of the present research, this means that editorials provide insight into frames and the development of those frames in the context of the entire primary framework, which can and does affect the newspapers readers. This purported influence of editorials is also supported by the works of Hynds and Martin (1978) as well as Hynds’ later research with Archibald (1996), in which the articles determined that editors themselves perceived editorials as influential, especially in local communities, while improving the quality of editorial writing purportedly increased readership as well as increasing citizen involvement in local governmental affairs.

Campbell, Wei, Leung, Mikashavidze (2016) stated in their research on presidential endorsements in newspaper editorials, “...editorials have effects on voters through framing issues, which addresses how issues are presented and understood. Unlike news stories, at least in mainstream news media, editorials seek to persuade; framing is a significant part of reaching that goal” (p. 6-7). Framing theory in the present study is used to identify the scope of perspective on the Confederate flag’s removal in South Carolina

from the State House grounds in 2015, though the idea of framing extends to the purveyors of those observed frames in print via letters to the editor and editorials. In Golan's (2010) research of the medical marijuana debate as filtered through editorials (and op-eds), he supported the direction of his study by stating, "Framing is widely used by mass communication scholars as a theoretical framework for the analysis of media content" (p. 51), meaning that the application of framing theory to editorials sufficed for further research needs, even in a contemporary context. In clarification of the attachment to framing theory research, Campbell et al. (2016) reported that frames are not conceptually equivalent to arguments; an argument is a particular stance on a policy or issue, whereas a frame creates meaning for the policy/issue. When editorials are produced, the creators of the piece are then encouraging for the observation of all of the facts in the issue to be regarded in a particular way, with more salience towards some facts compared to other equally viable facts in the process (Kuypers, 2002). This allowance for deviation from hard news reporting with all of the facts laid out for observation to readers, rather than personalized skew from the editorial boards, gives reason to pursue the research into the selected editorials and determine what the daily local newspapers of South Carolina were telling their audience in 2015.

### **The Church, The War, and The Flag: An historical lineage**

There exists an extensive and tumultuous history of the location where the shooting happened: Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston. Morris Brown, a free black minister, founded the church, the first southern African Methodist Episcopal church, in 1816 (Hawes, 2015). The church was burned to the ground in 1822 in retaliation for a planned slave revolt organized by a former slave, Denmark Vesey, who purchased his

freedom after winning a \$1,500 lottery in Charleston. Vesey, a member of the A.M.E. church, was planning an attack against the city of Charleston that would have seen the city burned and its white inhabitants killed. Although the plan was unable to be carried out after a slave revealed them to his owner and Vesey was executed, he became an abolitionist symbol (Chow, 2015). Rev. Morris Brown fled to Philadelphia after the church was burned. The church was carried on in spirit by the former congregants and was physically rebuilt at the end of the Civil War in 1865. The name Emanuel, which means “God with us,” was added to the church’s name when it was re-established (Hawes, 2015).

This history of Emanuel A.M.E. church and the significance of Vesey’s attempted overthrow of the society that included the enslavement of black people as a constitutional right provides particular significance regarding the location of the massacre as chosen by an unabashed racist and murderer. Also significant to mention is South Carolina’s role in the Civil War. South Carolina was the first state to secede from the United States, also called the Union, on December 20, 1860. Confederate soldiers overtook South Carolina’s Fort Sumter in 1861, which was the first official act of what would be known as the Civil War (Steele, 2011). Once the war was over in 1864, South Carolina was one of the last states to return to the Union. This history of the relationship with the Confederacy (all states that aligned themselves with the Confederate States of America during the Civil War) and anti-Americanism plays part in the acceptance and reverence of the symbols regarding that time in history. The contemporary and most commonly used iteration of the Confederate’s flag is a symbol which embodies that history long after the four years of fighting were over.

A McClatchy-Marist poll conducted in 2015 showed that a majority of respondents believed the causes of the Civil War and the motives of the Confederacy's split from the Union were to preserve the rights of individual states to do as they please or to maintain the status quo which allowed for the enslaving black people. Slavery would be challenged by the forthcoming Lincoln administration (Brown & Clement, 2015). According to the *Washington Post* article which published the results of the poll, and three professors of history from Harvard University, Howard University, and the University of South Carolina in a PBS report, the consensus of historians is that the main underlying cause for the Civil War was slavery (PBS News Hour, 2011). The McClatchy-Marist poll also found that whites, Southerners (as a whole), and respondents over 60-years-old were less likely than other U.S. citizens to believe children should be taught in school that the main cause of the Civil War was slavery. This division in thought and ideals for the reasoning behind the Confederacy deciding to ultimately segregate itself from the rest of the states may be important to the development of frames used in discourse about the Confederate flag on public grounds.

U.S. Senator William Porcher Miles of South Carolina proposed throughout 1861 that a new flag be drawn up utilizing the St. Andrews cross, which makes the shape of an "X" on a flag or banner. Inside the cross were stars to represent the seceding states and the similar red, white, and blue color scheme, but designed to be noticeably different from the Union flag design (Coski, 2009). This is still the flag pattern that is used today in representation of the Confederacy and the Confederate States of America, providing the contemporary title of 'Confederate flag'. In November of 1861, a ceremony was held to present flags for the divisions of the army and it was recognized as a great day of

celebration for Confederate soldiers (Jeffrey, et al., 2000). During battles, if the flag bearer fell, he would quickly be replaced and the Confederate flag was held in very high regard by the men who fought under it. When the time came for surrender, there were groups who decided to tear up their flags and divide them among the men who served in that troop. “This undeniable bond between the common soldier of the Confederacy and the [flag] is the foundation of modern heritage organizations’ insistence that the flag deserves respect as a symbol of soldierly valor” (Jeffrey, et al., 2000, p. 96). The armies of the Confederacy carried the most pride for the citizens of the Confederate States of America, so the battle flag ultimately became “the de facto symbol of the nation and the cause” (Jeffrey, et al., 2000, p. 97).

In 1889, a variety of veterans’ organizations that represented soldiers of the Confederacy joined together as the United Confederate Veterans, or the UCV. Meetings and reunions for the UCV kept the memory of the Confederate States alive. During these events, especially parades, the veterans would be the center of focus, often hoisting their Confederate battle flags (sometimes still kept from the Civil War) with the white crowd waving smaller versions of the same flag (Jeffrey, et al., 2000). This kind of revelry and dedication has been passed down over generations and there are still active groups like the Sons of Confederate Veterans and Daughters of the Confederacy who hold a similar affection for this history. The importance of the historical telling of the flag’s creation and reverence among the soldiers who fought under the Confederate flag, as it is known today, is to highlight an emotional connection that is passed on through generations. In these events after the Civil War into the 1900s, the iconography of the flag was not forgotten in southern households where a Confederate soldier held a part of the family

lineage. This embedded history gives further comprehension to the viewpoints to be expressed within arguments and counter-arguments for the removal of the Confederate flag from the State House grounds.

The Confederate flag also grew synonymous over time with outspoken racists such as Byron De La Beckwith, who murdered Mississippi NAACP director Medgar Evers in 1963 and wore a Confederate flag lapel pin to his trial. Racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan carried the Confederate flag to all of their rallies with a direct message of upfront, deliberate racism. Proponents of a favorable and honorable history of the Confederate flag say that these types of people or groups took a “good” symbol out of context and used it for their own hateful agenda (Thornton, 1996). However, the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council (another group comprised of white supremacists) used the Confederate flag in their pursuits no differently than the state governments and institutions throughout the South in the 1950s and 1960s used it for the purposes of maintaining segregation. The Confederate flag, and other symbols of the Confederacy, were created to represent a segregated South and separation from the Union. These flags and historical symbols were reminders that public history worth recording only happened to white people and “also served as preemptive rebuttals to the possibility of publicly remembering otherwise” (Thornton, 1996, p. 237).

The Confederate flag first found a home in the South Carolina legislature on the walls of the House chambers in 1938 after a bill was introduced by Union County state Representative John D. Long. There was no mention of segregation, defiance of national policy, or southern traditions in the bill (Prince, 2004). Later, in 1956, the Confederate flag was presented formally in the state Senate after a similar bill was passed (Associated

Press, 2000). During 1956, the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1955 was causing a lot of grief among southern lawmakers who were now doing all that they could to ensure that racial segregation of schools be maintained (Prince, 2004). In 1961 the Confederate flag was raised over the State House to commemorate the Civil War centennial, but there was no language in the legislation to have the flag removed from the flagpole (Associated Press, 2015). Opponents of the Confederate flag and Civil War centennial, however, believed that it was more of a signal of resistance to the ongoing Civil Rights Movement. The NAACP state chapter in South Carolina regarded each of these outlooks as having merit; that the Confederate flag could be used for both affectionately recalling the Confederacy, along with the soldiers who died in its defense and a defiance to equal rights for black citizens (Satris, 2000).

The NAACP, black legislators and other opponents to the Confederate flag being flown over the State House did so because the flag was viewed as a longstanding symbol against the Civil Rights Movement (Cary & Dykes, 2015). This historical division over the Confederate flag at the State House demonstrates the deeply entrenched legacy of the Confederate flag, which had a home for 75 years on State House grounds, whether in the legislative chambers, flying high atop of the capitol, or to welcome guests entering the north side of the capitol to visit where lawmakers decide rules that shape the very lives of South Carolinians. In 1994 the NAACP threatened an economic boycott against the state until the removal of the flag.<sup>1</sup> In response, Columbia Mayor Bob Coble joined with business leaders in a lawsuit designed to force the removal of the flag. This effort proved

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<sup>1</sup> The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had a significant impact in the legislation that resulted from the Civil Rights movement (Meier & Bracey, 1993). The effect of the NAACP would eventually grow, leading to enough strength in numbers for an orchestrated monetary protest.

fruitless and a year later in 1995, lawmakers added a law to protect the Confederate flag's placement at the Capitol during the ongoing renovations to the State House at that time. Then-Governor David Beasley, a Republican, proposed moving the flag off the capitol and onto a monument on the grounds, but that bill died in the Senate in 1997 (Associated Press, 2015). In 1999, the cover of the legislative manual showed images of the Confederate flag flying in the background. This drew a negative reaction from black legislators, as well as civil rights groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which withdrew from Charleston as host city for its annual convention in 2000 (Associated Press, 2015). The end of the 20th century saw the flag stay on top the State House but it would not retain its position for much longer.

In 2000, amid continued debate about the Confederate flag flying atop the State House, the NAACP initiated its economic boycott on January 1, 2000 (Worland, 2015; Associated Press, 2015). A presidential debate at the beginning of the year held in West Columbia, S. C., between Republican nominees George W. Bush and Sen. John McCain included a question about the Confederate flag at the State House and their stance on the issue. Bush, the former governor of Texas, stated that ultimately the choice was up to South Carolinians, regardless of his opinion. Sen. McCain of Arizona was more vocal, claiming that he understood both sides of the argument and stated, "Some view it as a symbol of slavery, others view it as a symbol of heritage. Personally, I see the battle flag as a symbol of heritage" (Bruni, 2000). After the debate, a rally of about 6,000 people was held at the State House to support the Confederate flag. Less than ten days later, roughly 45,000 people marched to the State House and held a rally in opposition to the Confederate flag on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (Associated Press, 2000). An attempt by

then-governor Jim Hodges, a Democrat, to remove the flag from the State House and onto a monument was struck down by legislators a month later, in February of 2000. In April, Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., walked to Columbia in five days, traveling 120 miles, in order to protest the Confederate flag being flown on the capitol dome. That same month the Senate voted to take down the flag from the State House, with the House of Representatives following suit in early May. Governor Hodges signed the bill on May 23, which removed the Confederate flag from the Senate on June 30, from the House chambers on July 1, and from atop the State House at the beginning of July. A compromise was reached and legislation was agreed upon stating that the flag would be moved to a monument outside of the capitol building but still on the State House grounds. According to the legislation, the flag could be removed from the monument only through legislative action (Associated Press, 2000). The nearly forty years between the Confederate flag's placement on the top of the State House and its relocation to a monument on the Capitol grounds was a comparatively short amount of time from the Confederate flag's complete removal in 2015. The timing between the relocation and removal may have had an impact on the memory of those who believe that this event was a part of a movement to get rid of all publicly displayed Confederate relics (CBS, 2017).

The NAACP continued its boycott that began at the turn of the new millennia. NAACP President Cornell William Brooks explained that the boycott was continued because the flag should not fly in a place of honor such as anywhere on state property but should be moved to "a place of study" such as a museum (CBS News 2015; Associated Press, 2015). The boycott hurt tourism and negatively affected other economic activity in the state; for example, the NAACP and its members took their business outside of South

Carolina and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) refused to hold sports tournaments and championships in the state (Cabell, 1999). Ted Pitts, president and CEO of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce said to NBC News in a July 2015 article, "As employers continue to work to recruit talented and diverse employees in South Carolina, removing the Confederate flag from the State House grounds will be good for business growth and job creation" (Ortiz, 2015). The article from NBC News also had a response from Gov. Nikki Haley on the issue from when she was campaigning for re-election. According to the report, Haley said at the time that "'not a single CEO' had complained about the Confederate battle flag when she was trying to lure more businesses to the state" (Ortiz, 2015). Frank Knapp Jr., the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce co-founder and CEO at the time of the NBC News report, commented in the report that, "The business community is very much in favor of what has transpired at the State Capitol...But we still have areas of South Carolina that are just desperately poor. Taking down the flag is not going to fix that" (Ortiz, 2015). These sentiments about the economic impact of the issue of whether the Confederate flag should stay in place or be removed demonstrates the viewpoint from state leaders that the decision for removal was not particularly influenced by factors outside of public opinion, like lost revenue for South Carolina. Acknowledging potential reasons for why the Confederate flag was removed from the Capitol grounds leads to a clearer understanding that the motivations leading to the Confederate flag's removal was more about public opinion and perception than underlying economic concerns.

Sentiment for removing the flag from State House grounds increased in the aftermath of the Emanuel A.M.E. murders. It gained momentum after a statement

supporting removal by Gov. Haley on June 22, 2015. The state Senate passed a bill, with only three Senators in opposition out of 46 total and the House passed the bill 94-20. The bill was signed into law on July 9, 2015 and required that the flag be removed within 24 hours. The NAACP immediately lifted its boycott and the NCAA removed its sanctions, which allowed for South Carolina to become eligible once again to host NCAA basketball and baseball tournaments, as well as bowl games for football season (Cloninger, 2015).

After the arrest of Dylann Roof on June 18 came the search for his background and what kind of life he led, as is the case with mass murderers in contemporary news reports. Online photographs posted by Roof before the shooting showed him displaying the Confederate flag alongside notable contemporary white supremacist symbols like the flags of South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) when those majority-black African countries were ruled by whites (Robles, Horowitz, & Dewan, 2015). The use of the Confederate flag by Roof in association with his clear ideological stance of racial intolerance is important to note for the context of the time in which the decision was made to remove the flag from the Capitol grounds. The crime that Roof committed was calculated and something he said he “had to do” (Smith, Hawes, & Darlington, 2017). Roof claimed that he did not have direct hatred for black people; however, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Richardson reported that Roof showed absolutely no remorse for the murders, wrote “racist filth” while in jail after his arrest, and decorated his shoes with symbols of white supremacy (Smith, Hawes, & Darlington, 2017).

The Confederate flag is a symbol that carries positive and negative connotations regarding its significance among different people. Conservative attitudes toward the

Confederate flag have been shown to be more strongly correlated with attitudes towards perceptions of race instead of southern heritage (Cooper & Knotts, 2000). Yet, it is this identity and generationally passed “heritage” that causes so much backlash among segments of white communities in the South when Confederate relics are removed from locations often reserved for public admiration (Taylor, 2015). In an attempt to take the flag out of the context of slavery, Confederate flag advocates argue that the Civil War was caused by the challenge to states’ rights, which is the ability for each state within the United States to make and enforce their own laws (Loewen, 2011). Loewen (2011) notes that the official declaration by South Carolina to secede included a stated rejection of Northern states that did not participate in slave-owning practices and allowed black men to vote. The current opinion of the American public regarding the Confederate flag is certainly divided along racial lines, according to a Pew Research poll, as 41 percent of African-Americans view the Confederate flag negatively and 45 percent have no reaction, leaving only four percent potentially having a positive opinion. The same poll found that 21 percent of the white U. S. population had a negative reaction to the Confederate flag, though information from the study also yielded that 58 percent of the total U. S. population had no reaction to the Confederate flag at all. Just nine percent of the total U.S. population viewed the Confederate flag with a positive reaction, with eight percent of the total U.S. population confirming that they display the Confederate flag on their car or an item of clothing they own (Pew Research, 2011).

African Americans whose ancestors were enslaved do not have fond recollections of the Confederacy. Neither do Blacks without direct ties to ancestors who were bought and sold as property in the South (Agiesta, 2015). Many still have to live in an

environment around neighbors and fellow citizens who take pride when recalling this dark point in American history. For them, the Confederate flag represents of a time of extreme inequality that does not present a path to a future of equal opportunity (Agiesta, 2015). The presented history of the Confederate flag in South Carolina contains many viewpoints for expression through frames. These determined frames will be identified in this research, which attempts to provide valuable insight into a discussion of various attitudes in an environment recorded by local newspapers through editorials and letters to the editor on a topic that has such strong opinions on both sides of the argument.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have been developed according to the history and contemporary discussion of the Confederate flag flying on South Carolina State House grounds and based on the presentation of framing theory. History suggests different mindsets or consciousness on racial matters exist among the population as a whole in different areas of the state. Newspaper history also suggest that differences may exist among newspaper editorials and selection of letters to the editor based on the circulation size of newspapers.

RQ1: What are the dominant frames concerning the flag in editorials?

RQ1a. By region?

The purpose of including research question 1a is to determine if there are more appearances of particular dominant frames in editorials based on the region of the state the newspaper is published in. Observing editorials prior to letters to the editor provides

an opportunity to establish the position of each local daily newspaper from their perspective on the issue of the Confederate flag's removal, which will be later compared to the opinions shared within letters to the editor by region. Each region of the state has a distinct racial makeup and population, as well as its own Confederate monuments, which are all reasons that might affect frames.

RQ1b. By circulation?

The purpose of including research question 1b is to determine if there are more appearances of particular dominant frames in editorials based on the circulation size of a newspaper. While region of the state is addressed in research question 1a, the focus on circulation size in research question 1b provides additional insight into potential reasons for the inclusion of one frame as dominant in comparison to other frames based on how many people will read the newspaper. The potential rationales of frames used as dominant by editorial boards can be examined based on their readership rates, regardless of where the newspaper is located in the state.

RQ2. What are the dominant frames concerning the flag in letters to the editor?

RQ2a. By region?

The purpose of including research question 2a is to determine if there are more appearances of particular dominant frames in the letters to the editor based on the region of the state the newspaper is published in. Research question 2a is meant to provide the public response to the issue of the Confederate flag's removal and how the use of dominant frames by letter writers compares to the dominant frames used by the editorial boards in the same region. The audience makeup of a region by population and race is as

important for research question 2a as these demographics are for research question 1a, because these attributes of the geographic area could be indicators of why particular frames are used as dominant more often than others by letter writers.

RQ2b. By circulation?

The purpose of including research question 2b is to determine which frames appear as dominant in the letters to the editor based on the circulation size of a newspaper. Though the demographics of a region can provide clues for the rationales of letter writers, the appearance of frames as dominant based on the circulation size of a newspaper can also give insight as to why letter writers felt the way they did about the issue. The comparison of dominant frames used by editorial boards in research question 1b with the findings from research question 2b will demonstrate how newspapers of a particular circulation size framed the removal of the Confederate flag through their own words and those of their readership.

RQ3. What are the calls to action for the flag in editorials?

RQ3a. By region?

The purpose of research question 3a is to determine if there is a difference in the calls to action in editorials based on the region in which each newspaper is published. Similar to the goals of research question 1a, research question 3a observes the regional differences in population, racial demographics, and the number of Confederate monuments. However, research question 3a is posed in order to make inferences regarding rationale for how often newspapers called for the Confederate flag to be removed, to be left on the State House grounds, or gave no clear decision on what should

happen to the flag. The usage of dominant frames by editorials by region determined in research question 1a will be compared to the calls to action in editorials by region to see if there are any discernable patterns.

RQ3b. By circulation?

The purpose for including research question 3b is to determine how the calls to action within editorials vary based on the circulation size of a newspaper. The circulation sizes of the selected daily newspapers provide additional insight into potential reasons for the calls to action based on how many people will read the newspaper. Comparing the dominant frames by circulation in editorials discovered through research question 1b to the calls to action determined by research question 3b will give further explanation to the choices made by editorial boards according to their distribution sizes.

RQ4. What are the calls to action for the flag in letters to the editor?

RQ4a. By region?

The purpose of research question 4a is to determine if there is a difference in the calls to action in letters to the editor based on the region in which each newspaper is published. Comparing the results of calls to action in editorials determined in research question 3a with the calls to action by letters to the editor found through research question 4a will reveal the differences in the way editorial boards and letter writers considered the future of the Confederate flag on the State House grounds by the region in which the newspaper was published. Additionally, the results from research question 2a will provide further possible explanation for the frames used by letter writers by region compared to the calls to action by letter writers.

RQ4b. By circulation?

The purpose for including research question 4b is to determine how the calls to action in letters to the editor vary based on circulation size. Comparing the results of calls to action in editorials through research question 3b with the calls to action by letters to the editor determined by research question 4b will demonstrate how editorial boards and letter writers considered the future of the Confederate flag on the State House grounds according to the circulation size of a newspaper. The results from research question 2b will give additional potential rationale for the frames used by letter writers by circulation size compared to the calls to action by letter writers discovered through research question 4b.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

This study employs content analysis to identify the dominant frames. Based on the historical background and familiarity with the media's coverage of the Confederate flag issue, the author determined that frames identified in the framing literature do not fit this project. Therefore, the author conducted a preliminary analysis of roughly seventy percent of the applicable letters to the editor and editorials identify possible frames. A preliminary analysis was conducted by examining each piece of content for their individual frames of perspective concerning the removal of the Confederate flag from the State House grounds, specifically what words were used in the defense of their position and what they think should happen with the Confederate flag on the State House grounds in Columbia.

#### **Sample**

NewsBank, which has cataloged newspaper articles by date and publication, among other important factors, was used as a database for the newspaper content. The study is limited to editorials and letters to the editor in South Carolina daily newspapers published between the dates June 22, 2015 and July 12, 2015, inclusive. The search term "Confederate flag" was used to select the qualifying editorials and letters to the editor. No outside editorials or letters to the editor reprinted from other publications were used. Each editorial and letter in the study has been evaluated for its dominant frame by using a

coding sheet designed to record the region of the state in which each article appeared, the circulation size of the newspaper, and the calls to action in each editorial and letter. This research is intended to identify how often specific frames appeared within those regions and each publication for both editorials and letters to the editor.

## **Coding**

During the research, the author coded all of the selected editorials and letters to the editor for evaluation. For intercoder reliability, an additional coder (previously unknown to the researcher) was trained by the author. The second coder coded roughly fifteen percent of the total editorials and letters to the editor (31 varied items). From a list provided, the coder identified the region where the newspaper is published. This designation is necessary to separate the areas of the state based on the specified region where the paper is typically distributed. Next, the coder identified the newspaper's circulation size as small, medium, or large. After determining circulation, the coder selected whether the item was a letter to the editor or an editorial. Then, the coder determined the dominant frame of the selected item using five distinct frames which were identified and defined during the preliminary analysis. The five frames are: (1) Heritage, (2) Hate, (3) Religion/Faith, (4) Racial Unity, and (5) Legislative Leadership. Guided by Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), Iyengar (1991), and Entman (1993), the frames were operationalized as follows:

The *Heritage* frame focuses on the idea that the Civil War was not about slavery and/or expresses that the Confederate flag represents Confederate soldiers who died to protect their land and families from a military invasion by Northern soldiers. There is a

quality of nostalgia to these viewpoints and typically fond remembrance of the Confederate lives that were lost during the Civil War.

The *Hate* frame focuses on the Confederate flag as a symbol of hate from the Civil War era that represents Confederate soldiers as having fought to protect slavery, and has since been used to symbolize hateful actions by white supremacist groups and to terrorize African Americans.

The *Religion/Faith* frame focuses on a religious sense of purpose and what would a chosen religious text or organization believe should happen; users of this frame sometimes quotes Scripture and references deity figures, such as God and Jesus Christ, for reflection.

The *Racial Unity* frame focuses on the fate of the flag tied to racial unification. Race will be mentioned, specifically black and white members of the local community or the state of South Carolina.

The *Legislative Leadership* frame focuses on the fate of the Confederate flag ultimately being in the hands of political officeholders. These items may discuss specific legislators and their decisions or what is at stake with the choices that they make when it comes time to vote.

*Other* was also available for selection if none of the five frames were determined to be the dominant frame used in the letter to the editor or editorial.

Also coded was each relevant item's call to action, if present, on what should be done with the Confederate flag on the State House grounds. Those options are: remove it, leave the flag up, and no clear decision. If the writer of the letter or editorial states that they believe the flag should be removed from Statehouse grounds, regardless of

reasoning, then “removal” is the option to select by the coder. If the writer endorses someone else calling for the flag to be removed, this can also be counted as an expressed support for removal. If the writer states that they believe the flag should be left where it is on the pole, or on Statehouse grounds, regardless of reasoning, then “leave it” is the option to be selected by the coder. If the writer endorses someone else calling to keep the flag on the State House grounds can also be counted as an expressed support for continuing to let the flag fly. If the writer makes no clear statement on what they believe should be done with the Confederate flag at the Statehouse grounds specifically, then “No clear decision” should be selected by the coder.

Using the 2014-2015 South Carolina Newspaper Media Directory, which is published annually by the S.C. Press Association, the locations of the newspapers were identified to determine where each paper was located per the regions of the state and circulation sizes of newspapers were organized to create categories defined as small, medium, and large.

## **Regions**

The regions of South Carolina are taught in the state’s educational curriculum and are traditionally defined as six distinct regions based on geography: Blue Ridge Mountains, Piedmont, Sandhills, Inner and Outer Coastal Plains, and the Coastal Zone. For the purposes of this study, these geographical regions were condensed to three regions that are respective to those boundaries, with an emphasis on segmenting the regions by counties. These three regions are titled Upstate, Piedmont, and Coast. The lower foothills of the Appalachian Mountains which comprise the northwest corner of the

state are represented by the following 11 counties: Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, and Union. This area has been identified as the Upstate. The middle section of the state that includes the traditional Piedmont and Sandhills regions, with a portion of the Inner Coastal Plains has been identified in this study as the Piedmont region and includes the following 21 counties: Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, Chester, Chesterfield, Clarendon, Darlington, Edgefield, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, Lee, Lexington, Newberry, Orangeburg, Richland, Saluda, Sumter, and York. The third region determined for the purpose of this study is comprised of the remaining 14 counties that lie between the Piedmont region and the coastline is the Coast region, which includes the following counties: Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, Colleton, Dillon, Dorchester, Florence, Georgetown, Hampton, Horry, Jasper, Marion, Marlboro, and Williamsburg.

The qualities of each of these three regions that have been identified for the purpose of this study vary between each county, though the collection of counties that comprise these regions contain specific demographic information which can shed light on potential reasons for coverage based on the geographical location of a particular newspaper in the state. The population of the Upstate region, according to 2010 U.S. Census data, is 1,372,430, while the Piedmont population totals 1,746,511 and the Coast region population is 1,506,440 based on the same census data. These numbers should help demonstrate that although there may be more counties included in one area of the state compared to another, the overall populations are fairly equally distributed. There are also no counties that contain more than one newspaper observed in this study. Beyond population totals for the entirety of each region, the population of the counties that

contain a local daily newspaper used in this study yielded 1,066,581 for the Upstate region, 863,158 for the Piedmont region, and 918,600 for the Coast region. This additional insight provides further evidence that though some regions may contain more counties and a higher population overall, the counties where each newspaper is serviced may have greater individual population totals.

In addition to the consideration of population numbers, it was also important for this research to determine how many Confederate monuments existed within each region in order to provide further evidence that factors outside of exposure to frames in news media may be determining how letter writers and editorial boards frame their positions on the removal of the Confederate flag from State House grounds and whether a call to action on the flag is made. According to a digital map made by the Southern Poverty Law Center that is constantly updated to show Confederate markers and monuments across the U.S. (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018), there are 16 known Confederate monuments in the Upstate region, with at least one in every county that contains a local daily newspaper used in this study; three have been identified in Oconee County where *The Journal* is produced. That same map shows 19 Confederate monuments in the Piedmont region, with additional facts that three towns in this region are named after Confederate historical figures (John F. North, Joseph B. Kershaw, and Robert E. Lee) and a county as well (Lee County, named after Robert E. Lee). York County, which contains *The Herald*, has three Confederate monuments. The Coast region has six total Confederate monuments according to the SPLC map, and a county named after a Confederate general as well (Hampton County, named after Wade Hampton, III). Florence County, where the *Morning News* is published, is the only county with a local daily newspaper used in this

study that does not have a marked Confederate monument or memorial on the SPLC map. While this digital resource is limited in the ability to provide all of the Confederate markers and monuments in the state, this is a helpful resource to provide evidence that some regions of the state have a greater presence of public Confederate memorials than others.

Lastly for the purpose of including regional data, it is important to note racial demographic differences amongst the three regions. Utilizing the same U.S. Census Bureau data map that gave detailed records of population, you can also find out the percentages of white and Black citizens in each county. Across the state, these two demographics rarely made up less than 95 percent of the total population of a county, meaning that the racial lines are essentially drawn between two races. In the Upstate region, all of the counties that contained local daily newspapers had a higher percentage of white population. The lowest margin of difference in population based on race in the Upstate was found in Greenwood County, which contains the *Index-Journal*. In Greenwood county, 64.2 percent of the population is white and 32.4 percent of the population is Black. Oconee County is starkly different in the racial demographic makeup with 89.3 percent white population compared to 7.7 percent Black population. There are more instances in the Piedmont region of counties having a greater percentage of Black population compared to white, most notably Orangeburg County, which has 62.3 percent Black population compared to 34.6 percent white population. *The Times and Democrat* is published in Orangeburg County. Richland County, which contains the capital and *The State*, has an almost equal distribution with 47.9 percent Black population and 46.3 percent white population. Richland County also is one of the few counties where these

two races make up less than 95 percent of the total population (94.2 percent). The Coast region has three counties where the Black population is greater than the white population, but none of those counties contains a local daily newspaper. The closest population similarity among the counties with a local daily newspaper in the Coast region is Florence County, which has a 53.9 percent white population compared to a 42.9 percent Black population. The greatest disparity in the population percentages is in Horry County, where *The Sun News* is published, with 82.6 percent of the population listed as white and 13.3 percent of the population as Black.

### **Circulation Size**

The researcher determined the circulation size categories of small, medium, and large by listing all of the daily newspapers in order by circulation size and dividing the categories into three distinct sections that would be roughly similar in the amount of newspapers per category. The small circulation newspapers were determined to be those with a circulation of less than 18,000; medium with a circulation between 18,000 to 32,000; and large being newspapers with a circulation greater than 32,000. The rationale for these divisions came when the researcher noticed that the gap between the smallest circulated newspapers (*The Beaufort Gazette*, *The Journal*, *The Times and Democrat*, *Index-Journal*, *Aiken Standard*), which topped out at 12,832 (the *Aiken Standard*), and the next section of newspapers beginning with *The Herald* (circulation of 18,296), was more than a 5,400 circulation difference. The variance between the smallest circulation newspaper, *The Beaufort Gazette*, and the *Aiken Standard* is just over 4,200, so the noticeable gap between the *Aiken Standard* and *The Herald* signified a considerable jump

in circulation size. The first three newspapers in the “medium” circulation category only varied by 2,000 in circulation size (*The Herald, Morning News, Independent Mail*), though there was more than an 8,500 gap in circulation numbers between the *Independent Mail* and the next most circulated newspaper, the *Herald-Journal*. However, the change in circulation size between *The Sun News* (which had a circulation rate close to, though slightly more than, the *Herald-Journal*) and *The Greenville News* amounted to a gap of 13,500. Thus, the *Herald-Journal* and *The Sun News* were lumped together in the medium circulation category, leaving *The State* and *The Post and Courier* to accompany *The Greenville News* in the large circulation category.

### **Intercoder Reliability**

Utilizing the intercoder reliability resource of Krippendorff’s Alpha, it can be determined whether the secondary coder is responding as accurately to the selections as the primary coder to make the research as congruent as possible (Krippendorff, 2011). The nominal data, from two observers, with no missing data qualifications for testing based on Krippendorff’s research, is applied to provide reliability for the coding of at least 80 percent between the two coders (above the minimal amount of 70 percent reliability, which provides statistical evidence of reliability of the coding choices). The reasoning for using the lowest standard of reliability between two coders based on Krippendorff’s Alpha (2011) is because of the presence of multiple frames within the provided articles, allowing for more possibility of incorrect responses by the second coder. It is the intention of the study to provide a clear representation of the frames to be selected for coding, in which those standards could be applied to similar future studies.

Intercoder reliability was determined using Krippendorff's Alpha and the overall intercoder reliability score for the secondary coder yielded a result of (.802) for dominant frame identification and (.825) for call to action identification. There were 31 out of 205 total editorials and letters to the editor (a 15 percent sample) used for intercoder testing, which were proportionately distributed by content. The samples selected were not all chosen at random. This decision was made to ensure that there were both clearer and easier to interpret letters and editorials, as well as more difficult examples that included a multitude of frames employed by the writer. The comparative results from the selected samples resulted in five disagreements for determining the dominant frame and three disagreements for determining the call to action. This result was determined to be satisfactory for the purposes of the study and provided confidence that someone unfamiliar with the work was able to use the coding instructions to successfully identify the correct dominant frame and call to action in the selected editorials and letters to the editor.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The murders of nine people attending a Bible study on a Wednesday night at a historically tried and tested black church in Charleston, S. C., have given life to the debate over Confederate relics and public representations of the Confederate forces as they are memorialized in shared public spaces all across the U.S., and especially in southern states like South Carolina. An analysis of frames in letters to the editor and editorials in South Carolina newspapers discussing the removal of the Confederate flag from the State House grounds in Columbia within a couple weeks after the atrocious act Dylann Roof committed shows the nature of the ongoing conversation about Confederate monument removals taking place across the South and more generally the conversation in which the country is dealing with ugly aspects of racism in its history. This analysis is meant to dive further into the research questions and what their evidence from local daily newspapers in South Carolina contributes to the conversation about and history in the U.S. In the following results, each research question is stated and immediately answered based on overall data, followed by a breakdown of the data based on individual newspapers by one of the three regions in which they are produced (Upstate, Piedmont, Coast) and circulation sizes (small, medium, large).

## **Overall Results for Editorials**

There were 39 relevant editorials which were published in the newspapers during the 21-day period covered in the study. The largest number carried by any newspaper was eight; on the other end of the spectrum, three newspapers did not have any relevant editorials, and two newspapers each had only one. In terms of frames, the most frequently appearing dominant frame in the editorials was Legislative Leadership with 18 appearances, while the Racial Unity frame was next with 13. The third most frequent frame was Hate with eight appearances. Both the Heritage and the Religion/Faith frames did not appear as a dominant frame in any of the editorials (Table 4.1).

### **RQ1a: What are the dominant frames concerning the flag in editorials by region?**

The dominant frames in editorials by region were: Racial Unity, Hate and Legislative Leadership in the Upstate; Legislative Leadership and Racial Unity in the Piedmont; and Legislative Leadership, Hate and Racial Unity in the Coastal region. Multiple dominant frames are listed when they appear with relatively the same frequency.

The Upstate region has the most daily newspapers with a total of five, which are the *Independent Mail* in Anderson, *The Greenville News*, the *Index-Journal* in Greenwood, *The Journal* in Seneca, and the *Herald-Journal* in Spartanburg. Of those newspapers' dominant frames in editorials, the Racial Unity and Hate frames were used five times each as the dominant frame, while the Legislative frame was used four times, for a total of 14 (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 Frame appearances in editorials by region**

Region	Heritage	Hate	Frames			Other	TOTAL
			Rlgn	Runity	LegLead		
Upstate	0	5	0	5	4	0	14
Piedmont	0	1	0	5	9	0	15
Coast	0	2	0	3	5	0	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>39</b>

Looking initially at those numbers, the equal balance of Racial Unity and Hate as the dominant frames in the Upstate region’s editorials potentially suggests that the newspapers’ editorial boards tried to be sensitive to the Black population’s rejection of the Confederate flag and pointed out in particular the perception and use of the flag as a symbol of racial hatred. Conversely, the equal presence of the frames could suggest that the newspaper editorial boards tried to be sensitive to all opinions and thus could not favor any of the solutions. The nearly equal presence of Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame might provide evidence of indecisiveness; that they tried to appeal to both whites and Blacks who held opposing opinions, so the newspapers abandoned their own leadership position and said it was up to the legislature – the highest level of elected officials in the state – to solve the problem. The racial rates within the Upstate region contain the greatest disparity between the populations of the white and Black communities, which gives some benefit of the doubt to the editorial boards, who could have written their editorials to appease an audience that did not contain much Black representation. Additionally, the considerable number of Confederate monuments present

across the Upstate region (16) compared to the region's editorials, which used Hate as the dominant frame compared to the other regions is interesting. The two newspapers that contained four of the five Hate usages as dominant in the Upstate region, *Index-Journal* and *The Journal*, come from the least populated counties in the region, Greenwood and Oconee, where a local daily newspaper was published. Those two counties also had both the lowest and highest margins separating racial makeup between whites and Blacks, respectively. This finding is very interesting and gives more support to the appearance of a balancing act across the region as a whole, while each newspaper in the region seemed to have a different approach, like *The Greenville News* which relied more heavily on Racial Unity in the most populated county of the region and was by far the most circulated newspaper in the region.

The Piedmont region contains four daily newspapers: the *Aiken Standard*, *The Herald* in Rock Hill, *The Times and Democrat* in Orangeburg, and *The State* in Columbia. These newspapers collectively wrote 15 relevant editorials during the period. Of these editorials, Legislative Leadership was the dominant frame nine times and Racial Unity was used as the dominant frame five times. Hate was used as the dominant frame once in the Piedmont region. Legislative Leadership was also the most frequent dominant frame used by all of the newspapers in the Piedmont region, each of which produced at least one editorial using the frame. Legislative Leadership being used as the dominant frame at almost double the rate of the next most frequent frame could be seen as an appeal to lawmakers as the capital is in the Piedmont region. While *The State*, the largest newspaper by circulation in the Piedmont region, is in the capital, it is the newspapers in cities at the geographical top and bottom of the region, Rock Hill and Aiken, which

account for two-thirds of the total Legislative Leadership frames used by newspapers in the Piedmont. The racial makeup of Orangeburg County where *The Times and Democrat* is published has the highest percentage of Black citizens in the population and is the only newspaper that contained an example of Hate as the dominant frame. However, *The Times and Democrat* also published four other editorials that had dominant frames of Racial Unity and Legislative Leadership, which is what the *Aiken Standard* and *The State* also focused on. Racial Unity was used as the dominant frame in newspapers where the county had a less prominent gap in racial makeup compared to counties that were more populated by whites (York and Aiken) in which the newspapers mostly used the Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame (*The Herald* and *Aiken Standard*). It is also worth noting that York county, where *The Herald* is published, has as many Confederate monuments as the other three counties where daily newspapers are published in the Piedmont region combined. The reliance on Legislative Leadership was somewhat expected in the region that contained the state capital and houses of legislature however, this data appears to show that the newspapers in the Piedmont region were wanting to acknowledge the issue while avoiding taking any hard stances. The lack of editorials on the part of *The State* through their editorial board and reliance on editorials from other newspapers also played a part in a reliance on legislators to take complete control of the situation, maintaining that unity along racial lines was also the most important consideration in the proposed removal of the Confederate flag.

The Coast region contains four newspapers, which include *The Beaufort Gazette*, *The Sun News* in Myrtle Beach, the *Morning News* in Florence, and *The Post and Courier* in Charleston. In the Coast region, the Legislative Leadership frame was used most

frequently, appearing five times, while Hate and Racial Unity were used as dominant frames a combined total of five times. The Coast region is interesting because it contains both the smallest circulation newspaper, *The Beaufort Gazette*, which did not have any editorials, and the largest circulation newspaper in this study, *The Post and Courier*, which has the most editorials for an individual newspaper. Similar to the Piedmont region, it can be assumed that the reliance upon Legislative Leadership means that these editorial boards were defaulting to the state legislature for a decisive response on what should happen to the Confederate flag. Further examination of the newspapers that comprise the Coast region reveals a deficiency of editorials spread across all of the newspapers, with *The Post and Courier* carrying the proverbial load. The other three newspapers in the region provided a combined two relevant editorials, pointing towards a lack of intent to even address such an important issue by these editorial boards. *The Sun News*, which is published in Horry County where the racial difference between the white and Black populations is highest with more than 82 percent of the population being white, contained one of the two Hate usages as dominant in the region. *The Sun News* only published one relevant editorial for this study. *The Morning News*, which is published in Florence County where the racial makeup has the least amount of disparity among counties in the Coast region that contain daily newspapers, used Legislative Leadership as the dominant focus in its only editorial. *The Post and Courier's* editorial board took the most initiative in the region to create input on the proposed removal of the Confederate flag, and while they did use Hate as the dominant frame once, they relied on Racial Unity and Legislative Leadership in the rest of their editorials. The Coast region had the least number of Confederate monuments compared to the other regions, which

may be an indicator of why this issue was not as widely talked about within the entirety of the region. Beaufort County is the third most populous county in the Coast region that has a daily newspaper, though it contains the least circulated newspaper which contained no relevant editorials for this study. This may be a signifier that readers within Beaufort County either don't like to read local newspapers or that they may be subscribing to *The Post and Courier* which is published close by. This could mean that the editorial board at *The Beaufort Gazette* defaulted to *The Post and Courier* for any vocal editorials that would engage readers regarding topics of importance and controversy.

**RQ1b: What are the dominant frames concerning the flag in editorials by circulation size?**

The dominant frames in editorials by circulation size were: Legislative Leadership, Racial Unity and Hate in small newspapers; Legislative Leadership in medium-sized newspapers; and Racial Unity and Legislative Leadership in the large newspapers.

Among small newspapers, Legislative Leadership was the most used dominant frame, appearing eight times, while Racial Unity appeared six times as the dominant frame, and Hate had five appearances. In medium circulation newspapers, Legislative Leadership was clearly the most frequently appearing dominant frame; it was used four times. The only other dominant frame in the medium-sized newspapers' editorials was Hate, which appeared once. Among large newspapers, Racial Unity appeared seven times in editorials as the dominant frame, and the Legislative Leadership frame appeared six

times. Hate appeared twice as a dominant frame in the large newspapers' editorials (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Frame appearances in editorials by circulation**

Newspaper	Frames						TOTAL
	Heritage	Hate	Rlgn	Runity	LegLead	Other	
<b>Small</b>							
The Beaufort Gazette	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Journal	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
The Times and Democrat	0	1	0	2	2	0	5
Index-Journal	0	2	0	2	3	0	7
Aiken Standard	0	0	0	2	3	0	5
<b>TOTAL (Small)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Medium</b>							
The Herald	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Morning News	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Independent Mail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Herald-Journal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Sun News	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL (Medium)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Large</b>							
The Greenville News	0	1	0	3	1	0	5
The State	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
The Post and Courier	0	1	0	3	4	0	8
<b>TOTAL (Large)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>39</b>

In the category of small newspapers, the *Index-Journal*, the second largest of the small circulation newspapers, published seven editorials; three used Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame while two used the Hate frame and the other two used the Racial Unity frames. *The Beaufort Gazette* had no editorials regarding the Confederate flag's removal from the State House grounds. *The Times and Democrat* had

five editorials; two used Racial Unity as the dominant frame, two used Legislative Leadership, and one used Hate. The *Aiken Standard*, the largest of the small circulation newspapers, also published five editorials, three of which used the Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame and two used Racial Unity. *The Journal* had two editorials, each of which contained the dominant frame Hate (Table 4.2). The smallest circulation newspapers chose three frames – Legislative Leadership, Hate, and Racial Unity – at a nearly equal rate, with Legislative Leadership being the most used. The small newspapers were more likely among any other circulation size to use Hate as the dominant frame, though still relied more on Legislative Leadership and Racial Unity as dominant frames.

In the category of medium circulation newspapers, the largest of the medium newspapers, *The Sun News*, published one relevant editorial; Hate was its dominant frame. *The Herald*, the smallest of the medium circulation papers, had three editorials, all of which contained Legislative Leadership as their dominant frame. The *Independent Mail* and the *Herald-Journal* both did not have any editorials addressing removal of the flag. *Morning News* only had one relevant editorial; it used Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame. The medium circulation newspapers also showed preference to Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame within their editorials, similar to the small circulation newspapers, with one use of Hate as the dominant frame. The lack of editorials published in medium circulation newspapers could indicate that they are afraid of taking harder stances on such a controversial issue in the state or even acknowledging the issue at all.

In the category of large circulation newspapers, the largest daily newspaper, *The Post and Courier*, had the most editorials with a total of eight. Legislative Leadership

appeared four times as the dominant frame, Racial Unity appeared three times, and Hate once. *The Greenville News* had five editorials, using Racial Unity as the dominant frame three times, and Legislative Leadership and Hate frames once each. *The State* published two relevant editorials, one with Racial Unity as the dominant frame and the other with Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame. The largest of the newspapers went with Legislative Leadership and Racial Unity as the two dominant frames with a couple of Hate selections as the dominant frame as well.

An analysis of editorials in individual newspapers, and newspapers grouped by circulation size, shows patterns and similarities in their coverage of the Confederate flag's removal despite differing external factors like region of the state where the newspaper is published (as determined in research question 1a). The large circulation newspapers ran three times as many relevant editorials as the medium circulation newspapers, while the small circulation newspapers had nearly four times as many editorials as the medium circulation group. This could be an indication that small newspapers were not afraid of losing readers since their circulation sizes were already small, so they were much more vocal about this topic compared to medium circulation papers that may be more cautious in discussing a topic of heated debate that was being had across the state and country. Comparing the newspapers across circulation sizes indicates a pattern in editorials, suggesting that Legislative Leadership was ubiquitously relied upon as the dominant frame of perspective, regardless of the audience, circulation size, or region of the newspaper. Racial Unity was the second most used frame among the newspapers, with a smattering of Hate frames as dominant frames. This data may suggest the editorial boards felt that the state legislators were going to be the ones to defer to

since the vote was ultimately in the hands of South Carolina's lawmakers. However, there were also a considerable amount of calls for racial healing amongst the newspapers' editorials to come together as a state, regardless of what the legislative decisions were for the Confederate flag.

### **Overall Results for Letters to the Editor**

There were 166 relevant letters to the editor during the 21-day period covered in the study. The largest number of letters to the editor carried by any newspaper was 37; the smallest was two. The most frequently appearing dominant frame in the letters to the editor was Hate, which appeared 44 times; next in line was Heritage, which appeared 40 times and Legislative Leadership 36 times.

### **RQ2a: What are the dominant frames concerning the flag in letters to the editor by region?**

The dominant frames in letters to the editor by region were: Heritage in the Upstate; Hate in the Piedmont; and Heritage, Legislative Leadership, and Hate in the Coastal region.

The Upstate region had 54 relevant letters to the editor that were published in the five daily newspapers. Heritage was used 16 times as a dominant frame, while Hate, Racial Unity, and Legislative Leadership were used as the dominant frame a combined 30 times at nearly identical rates each (Table 4.3). The Upstate region has the greatest disparity in racial makeup among the three regions between whites and Blacks and has the highest combined population among counties that contain a daily newspaper.

Additionally, there are several counties that contain multiple Confederate monuments and markers in the Upstate region. These facts about the region can all establish reasons for the prominent reliance by letter writers on Heritage as the most used dominant frame.

The Piedmont region had a total of 49 letters to the editor. The most frequently used dominant frame in letters in the Piedmont region was Hate (18), which was used with nearly the same frequency as Racial Unity (7), Heritage (6), and Religion/Faith (4) frames combined. The second most frequent dominant frame in the Piedmont region was Legislative Leadership (10), which was used at almost half the rate of the Hate frame (Table 4.3). The Piedmont region has the most counties where the Black population exceeds that of the white population, as well as two counties with a higher Black population which contain local daily newspapers. This region also has the most Confederate monuments compared to the other regions and has three towns, as well as a county (Lee County), named for notable historical figures of the Confederacy. The racial makeup of the Piedmont region could explain the use of Hate as the dominant frame in letters, while the fact about Confederate markers and monuments is seemingly counter-intuitive to the lack of Heritage as the dominant frame.

The Coast region had the most letters to the editor out of the three regions with a total of 63. Heritage (18), Legislative Leadership (17), and Hate (15) frames appeared with similar frequency and accounted for the vast majority of the dominant frames (50) used in the region (Table 4.3). The Coast region letters used Heritage as the dominant frame 18 times, which was more than it was used in any other region (and tied with Hate in the Piedmont region as the most frequently appearing dominant frame in any region). Heritage was also the most used dominant frame in the Upstate region as well compared

to the other frames. Legislative Leadership was the dominant frame more often in the Coast region, appearing 17 times, compared to the other two regions – Piedmont (10) and Upstate (9) (Table 4.3). The Coast region has a mostly white racial makeup while also containing the fewest number of Confederate monuments. These are interesting facts considering the heavy use of Heritage as the dominant frames in letters within the Coast region. The overall population of the Coast region falls in the middle of the two other regions, as well as the combined populations of counties where daily newspapers are published, which is interesting since the Legislative Leadership frame is used the most in this region instead of the most populated region.

**Table 4.3 Frame appearances in letters to the editor by region**

Region	Frames						TOTAL
	Heritage	Hate	Rlgn	Runity	LegLead	Other	
Upstate	16	11	6	10	9	2	54
Piedmont	6	18	4	7	10	4	49
Coast	18	15	2	9	17	2	63
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>166</b>

For the letters to the editor, the selection of dominant frames varied greatly depending on what region the newspaper was located in. In terms of dominant frames for all letters to the editor, the primary two frames used as dominant were Hate and Heritage, with Hate appearing a few more times overall. The Legislative Leadership frame was a close third, though could be seen as a way to avoid viewing the Confederate flag with a

sense of pride or disgust. The indication of the Hate and Heritage frames as the two most utilized primary frames in letters to the editor is that these are the opposing mindsets of the population who had a vocal opinion about the fate of the Confederate flag. Racial Unity was not nearly as important of a dominant frame as it was in editorials, appearing in a third of the editorials but only in roughly a sixth of the total letters. Most letter writers were focused on what the flag meant to themselves, rather than to other people. The number of letters to the editor favored the Coast region newspapers, which has one less newspaper than the Upstate region, but had nine more letters overall. The middle of the state, the Piedmont region, was more concerned with Hate as the dominant frame for viewing the flag, whereas the two surrounding regions had a much greater focus on Heritage as the dominant frame.

Both letter writers and the editorial boards gave considerable acknowledgement to the power the state legislature had in the issue of the Confederate flag's removal overall. By region, the Upstate usages of Hate, Racial Unity, and Legislative Leadership as the dominant frames were used at almost equal rates between the editorials and letters to the editor. The primary use of Heritage as the dominant frame in Upstate letters to the editor compared to the primary use of both Hate and Racial Unity as dominant in the Upstate editorials does provide some evidence that the newspapers in this region were acknowledging the sentiment of their readers who believed in a more positive outlook of the Confederate flag while denouncing the symbol as one aligned with a hateful message. The Piedmont region letters and editorials aligned in their usages of Racial Unity and Legislative Leadership as dominant frames comparatively. However, there is a tremendous disparity in the usage of Hate as the dominant frame in letters to the editor in

the Piedmont region compared to Hate in editorials at an 18-1 difference, respectively. While the Piedmont region had the least number of Heritage frame appearances among the three regions, the misalignment of the Hate frame usage, especially when it was so readily used in the Upstate region where Heritage was the most used dominant frame, seems tough to justify. A key factor to consider is that the Piedmont region also had the most editorials among the three regions. There does exist the possibility that because Hate was the most used dominant frame by letter writers that the editorial boards did not want to pile on with hard stances on the issue and found more level ground by deferring power to the legislators who would have the final vote anyways. The Coast region had some significant disparities, which is mainly due to the fact that there were so few editorials published outside of one newspaper, *The Post and Courier*. Heritage and Legislative Leadership being the two most used dominant frames by letter writers in the Coast region could also signify reasons for the lack of editorials in the region. While there were two examples of Hate in the Coast region editorials as the dominant frames, the majority of the editorials relied on Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame, meaning that the end result was acknowledging the voices of readers in the letters while giving the reigns to the legislators and making some calls for Racial Unity as well.

**RQ2b: What are the dominant frames concerning the flag in letters to the editor by circulation size?**

The dominant frames in letters to the editor by circulation size were: Heritage in the small and medium-sized newspapers; and Hate in the large newspapers.

By circulation size, the most frequently appearing dominant frame in the letters to the editor in small newspapers was Heritage with 10 appearances, followed by Racial Unity with six, and Hate with four. For the medium-sized newspapers, the dominant frame that appeared the most was Heritage with 20, followed by Legislative Leadership with 12 appearances, and Hate with 10. For the large circulation papers, Hate was the most used dominant frame with 30 appearances, followed by Legislative Leadership with 21, Racial Unity with 12, and Heritage with 11 (Table 4.4).

Among the small newspapers, the *Aiken Standard*, had the most letters to the editor with eight. The dominant frame was Heritage, which appeared in three letters. No other frame appeared more than once in the *Aiken Standard*. *The Beaufort Gazette* had the second most letters to the editor with six; Racial Unity and Legislative Leadership appeared twice each as the dominant frames. *The Journal* had five letters to the editor; the most frequent frame was Racial Unity, which appeared in two letters. The *Index-Journal* also had five letters to the editor; Heritage was the most frequent dominant frame, appearing in four of the letters. *The Times and Democrat* had a total of two letters to the editor, with Heritage and Hate appearing once each as the dominant frames. As a whole, the small circulation newspapers published letters that mainly relied on the dominant frame of Heritage, with Racial Unity close behind. Hate, Legislative Leadership, and Religion/Faith frames were also used although the three frames together were still less than the total of Heritage frames.

Of the medium circulation newspapers, The *Herald-Journal* carried the greatest number of letters to the editor with 22. The most frequent dominant frame in the *Herald-Journal* was Heritage, which appeared eight times. The second-most frequent frame was

a tie between Hate and Legislative Leadership, which appeared five times each. *The Sun News* had 13 letters to the editor, which was second among the medium circulation newspapers. Heritage was the most frequent dominant frame in those letters, appearing five times, while the Hate frame appeared four times. The *Morning News* had 11 letters to the editor, the third most among the medium circulation category. Heritage appeared as the dominant frame in five letters, while the Legislative Leadership frame was dominant in four. Fourth in the number of letters among medium-sized papers was *The Independent Mail*, which had six total letters. Heritage was the dominant frame twice, while none of the other frames appeared more than once as dominant. *The Herald* had the least number of letters to the editor among medium-sized newspapers with two, which also ties for the lowest number of letters to the editor among all of the selected newspapers. Hate was the dominant frame in one letter in *The Herald*, and Racial Unity was the frame in the other letter. As in small newspapers, Heritage was the most frequent dominant frame in letters to the editor in medium circulation newspapers. Racial Unity, Religion/Faith, and Hate frames combined appeared 21 times in letters to the editor in medium newspapers, which is barely more than the total number of Heritage frames. The 12 usages of Legislative Leadership could indicate that there was an expectation by the citizens in those moderately sized areas that legislators would be the source for a solution, although Heritage still dominated the overall rationale for letter writers.

Of the large newspapers, *The State* had the most letters to the editor with 37. Hate appeared as a dominant frame more often than any other frame in *The State*'s letters to the editor at 15 times. Second was Legislative Leadership with nine appearances and third was Racial Unity, which was used five times as the dominant frame. *The Post and*

*Courier* had the second most number of letters to the editor with 33. The most frequent frame in those letters was Hate, appearing 10 times, followed closely by the Legislative Leadership frame with nine appearances. The third most frequent frame in the letters was Heritage, which was used seven times. The newspaper with the least number of letters to the editor in the large circulation category was *The Greenville News*, which had 16. Hate was the most frequent dominant frame in *The Greenville News*, appearing five times; next was Legislative Leadership and Religion/Faith, which appeared three times apiece as dominant frames. In the largest circulation papers, Hate was by far the dominant frame with the next closest being Legislative Leadership and Racial Unity. Heritage appeared as the dominant frame almost equal to the usage of Racial Unity in large circulation newspapers. These results might indicate that the larger circulation areas, which would include the biggest cities in South Carolina, had citizens who saw the Confederate flag as hateful or at least openly co-opted by hate groups to the point where the feeling of hate was ever-present regarding the flag. The fact that Legislative Leadership appeared the second most used dominant frame behind Hate suggests that people in those more densely populated areas feel that the best option is to call upon legislators to make a decision regarding the decision on what to do with the Confederate flag on the State House grounds. It is also probable that more calls for legislative action in the large circulation areas take place because there is greater exposure to politicians who are more vocal leaders in the state legislature because those representatives have more constituents compared to areas of the state where newspaper circulation is small.

**Table 4.4 Frame appearances in letters to the editor by circulation**

Newspaper	Frames						TOTAL
	Heritage	Hate	Rlgn	Runity	LegLead	Other	
<b>Small</b>							
The Beaufort Gazette	1	1	0	2	2	0	6
The Journal	1	1	1	2	0	0	5
The Times and Democrat	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Index-Journal	4	0	0	1	0	0	5
Aiken Standard	3	1	1	1	1	1	8
<b>TOTAL (Small)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Medium</b>							
The Herald	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Morning News	5	0	1	1	4	0	11
Independent Mail	2	0	1	1	1	1	6
Herald-Journal	8	5	1	3	5	0	22
The Sun News	5	4	1	1	2	0	13
<b>TOTAL (Medium)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Large</b>							
The Greenville News	2	5	3	2	3	1	16
The State	2	15	3	5	9	3	37
The Post and Courier	7	10	0	5	9	2	33
<b>TOTAL (Large)</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>166</b>

The circulation sizes of the newspapers and frame usage rates between letters to the editor and editorials shows some interesting relationships between the viewpoints of letter writers and the newspapers' editorial boards. Among the small circulation newspapers, Hate was used as the dominant frame more times than in the letters, both used Racial Unity the same amount of times, and editorials relied on Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame more than twice as much as letter writers. Small circulation letters primarily used Heritage as the dominant frame, which is interesting to note since the small circulation newspapers used the Hate frame more than any other

circulation size group. While the disparity in Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame in the small newspapers' editorials compared to letters (8-3) may indicate that the small newspapers were primarily calling on the state legislators to enact change, it is evident that the small circulation newspapers were also taking a harder stance on the negative perception of the Confederate flag as a symbol of hate compared to other circulation size groups. The medium circulation newspapers had very few editorials and nearly all of them used Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame, which is a stark comparison to the 30 combined usages of Heritage and Hate as the dominant frames in letters at a 2-1 ratio, respectively. While Legislative Leadership was the second most used dominant frame in medium newspapers' letters to the editor, the writers were mainly focused on whether the Confederate flag was a symbol of heritage or hate, compared to the editorials who mainly stayed silent or deferred action to the legislators. As previously noted, this could be an indication that medium circulation newspapers were aware of the ongoing argument over the individual perceptions of the flag and limited their discussions about the issue in order to retain readership for fear of retribution over hard stances on what the flag symbolizes. The large newspapers' editorials were reliant on Legislative Leadership and Racial Unity as the dominant frames compared to the letter writers in large newspapers who discussed Hate and Heritage a combined 41 times at a nearly 3-1 ratio, respectively (30-11). Legislative Leadership was the second most used dominant frame in large newspaper letters, which can provide justification for the prominent use of the same frame as dominant in editorials. However, the large newspapers only used Hate as the dominant frame twice in their 15 editorials, with a much stronger emphasis on Racial Unity. This could be an indication that the newspapers were aware of the greater

presence of the Confederate flag being labeled a hateful symbol in their editorials compared to a positive heritage outlook, and so the newspapers opted to call for healing along racial lines in the state. The decreased absence of Hate as the dominant frame as the circulation size increased is interesting and shows that smaller papers were more willing to take greater considerations about the symbolism of the Confederate flag compared to sitting in neutral waiting for legislators to decide if the flag should be removed from the State House grounds.

**RQ3a: What are the calls to action for the flag in editorials by region?**

The dominant call to action was removal of the flag in all three regions.

There were three options available for coding calls to action: call for removal of the flag from the State House grounds, for the flag to be left where it was, or no clear decision on what should happen to the flag. By separating the calls to action regarding the flag according to the region in which the newspapers were published, comparisons can be made to the frames used by region addressed in research question 1a. Also, variations in the calls to action based on the region in which each newspaper is published in can be further examined.

The Upstate region had nine calls for removal and five with no clear decision. The Piedmont region had 11 calls for removal and four with no clear decision. The Coast region had six calls for removal and four with no clear decision. There were no calls made to keep the flag in its then-current position on State House grounds by any of the editorials (Table 4.5). The omission of calls for the flag to stay on the State House grounds is interesting to note, though not surprising. Compared with the finding from

research question 1a that the Heritage frame was not utilized as the dominant frame in any editorials from the daily local newspapers, it was reasonable to conclude that these editorial boards were against displaying the Confederate flag at the State House, as well as any public property. This conclusion is further strengthened by the result that there were 26 calls for removal in the editorials compared to 13 editorials that expressed no clear decision.

The regional differences show that the Coast region, which had the least number of editorials compared to the other two regions of the state, was the closest to a 50/50 split with six calls for removal and five no clear decision editorials. The racial makeup of the Coast region's counties as predominantly white and the population total in the middle of the two regions could provide some context to the nearly even split in active calls for the flag's removal. The Coast region was also lacking in editorial appearances by any newspapers outside of *The Post and Courier*, which means that the newspapers in the region were not giving enough of a voice from their editorial boards on what should happen with the Confederate flag.

The Piedmont region's editorials had nearly three times as many calls for removal as no clear decision – 11 to remove versus four with no clear decision. The Piedmont region had the most editorials published (15) while having one less newspaper than the Upstate region. The racial makeup of the Piedmont region was the closest to an even distribution of white and Black citizens and few counties with significant disparities along racial lines. While the counties that comprise the Piedmont region have the most total collective population, the counties where local newspapers are published in the region has the lowest population. There are also more Confederate monuments in the

Piedmont region compared to the other two regions. These facts regarding race, population, and the presence of Confederate monuments in the Piedmont region demonstrate that the newspapers within the region were the most decisive in supporting the wishes of the diverse and widely distributed population despite a considerable presence of Confederate monuments.

**Table 4.5 Calls to action in editorials by region**

Region	Calls to Action			TOTAL
	Remove	Leave	No Clear Decision	
Upstate	9	0	5	14
Piedmont	11	0	4	15
Coast	6	0	4	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>39</b>

Nearly twice as many editorials in the Upstate region newspapers issued a call for removal of the flag (nine) compared to the number of editorials expressing no clear decision (five). The racial makeup of the Upstate region is the least diverse, with a strong presence of white citizens compared to Blacks. While the combined population of the county contains the least amount of people, the counties in the Upstate region where newspapers are published is greater than any other region. There are also a considerable number of Confederate monuments in the Upstate region, with nearly as many as the Piedmont region while having 10 less counties in the Upstate. The rate of calls for removal compared to newspapers' editorials containing no clear decision is greater than

the Coast region while having a greater disparity along racial lines and more Confederate monuments. This provides evidence that the daily newspapers in the Upstate region were not beholden to the factors that would one would expect to limit the active calls for the Confederate flag's removal where they could have made no clear decision on what should happen.

It is important to note that all of the regions contained more editorials with calls for removal than no clear decision, meaning that the editorial boards were not only avoiding vocalizing support for leaving the Confederate flag flying on the State House grounds but were actively calling for the flag to be removed or endorsing calls for removal. The calls for removal among the regions in editorials compared to the frames that were used in editorials by region also provides some interesting insights. The results from research question 1a compared to the results from research question 3a demonstrates that primary dominant frame usages do not equate to the rates of calls for removal. In the Upstate region, which had more examples of Hate as the dominant frame compared to other regions did not have more calls for removal than the Piedmont region, which relied much more heavily on Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame. The Coast region relying on Racial Unity and Legislative Leadership as the dominant frames while having the most neutral presence of active calls for removal compared to no clear decision could signify the lack of desire in the region to make a definitive stance on what should happen to the Confederate flag. Also recall the disparity in editorial appearances among the newspapers in the Coast region, where the vast majority came from *The Post and Courier*. The lack of editorials says more than the presence of frames and calls to action.

**RQ3b: What are the calls to action for the flag in editorials by circulation size?**

The dominant call to action was removal of the flag in all three circulation sizes of the newspapers.

The variation between the number of editorials among the three circulation size categories is similar to the regional differences. There were 19 editorials in small newspapers, five in medium-sized newspapers, and 15 editorials in large newspapers (Table 4.6). However, the trend of smaller newspapers having nearly four times as many editorials as the medium-sized newspapers and four more than the large newspapers was unexpected, yet worth noting that increased circulation did not result in more editorials regarding a similar topic.

Among the 19 small newspaper editorials, 11 called for removal, and eight had no clear decision. Of the five medium-size newspaper editorials, all of them contained active calls for the Confederate flag's removal. The large newspapers had 15 editorials, with 10 calls for removal and five instances of no clear decision (Table 4.6).

Interestingly, the medium circulation newspapers had the least number of editorials, but they contained the strongest advocacy, comparatively, for removing the flag from its position on the State House grounds. The large circulation newspapers had editorials calling for the flag's removal at twice the rate they provided no clear decision. It could be reasoned that the smaller circulation newspapers were covering more rural areas of the state and thus attempted to voice their opinions while restraining themselves from being overly active in their calls for the flag's removal. As noted in research

question 3a, there were no calls for the flag to stay on the State House grounds in the editorials.

**Table 4.6 Calls to action in editorials by circulation**

Newspaper	Calls to Action			TOTAL
	Remove	Leave	No Clear Decision	
<b>Small</b>				
The Beaufort Gazette	0	0	0	0
The Journal	1	0	1	2
The Times and Democrat	2	0	3	5
Index-Journal	4	0	3	7
Aiken Standard	4	0	1	5
<b>TOTAL (Small)</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Medium</b>				
The Herald	3	0	0	3
Morning News	1	0	0	1
Independent Mail	0	0	0	0
Herald-Journal	0	0	0	0
The Sun News	1	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL (Medium)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Large</b>				
The Greenville News	4	0	1	5
The State	2	0	0	2
The Post and Courier	4	0	4	8
<b>TOTAL (Large)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>39</b>

The comparison between frames in editorials by circulation addressed in research question 1b and the calls to action in editorials by circulation addressed in research question 3b is worth acknowledging to provide greater context to the calls to action that were made based on circulation. The small newspapers had both the most calls for removal and no clear decision in their editorials, while relying on Legislative Leadership

and Racial Unity frames. The small newspapers also had the most uses of Hate as the dominant frame among the newspaper circulation groups, meaning that while small newspapers took the most active stance in calling for the Confederate flag's removal, they were also relying upon legislators to decide for the citizens of the state what should be done with the flag. The medium newspapers were primarily reliant upon the use of Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame, while also having the most definitive stance on calling for the removal of the flag. This result runs counter to the idea that medium newspapers were trying to keep their distance in addressing the issue of the Confederate flag's removal, though the overall lack of editorials in the medium circulation newspapers still provides evidence that they were not as willing to discuss the issue as small and large circulation newspapers. The large newspapers primarily used Racial Unity and Legislative Leadership frames while having double the calls for removal compared to no clear decision. Though there were only two examples of Hate as the dominant frame in large newspaper editorials, there still existed calls expressed by the large newspapers to have the Confederate flag removed, regardless of the reason, whether it was Racial Unity or the belief that legislators should act.

**RQ4a: What are the calls to action for the flag in letters to the editor by region?**

As established in research question 2a, the Coast region had the most letters to the editor discussing the Confederate flag, a total of 63, despite having one less newspaper than the Upstate region. The Upstate region had the next most with 54 letters and the Piedmont region had the least with 49 letters. Overall, the disparity between the three call to action options of removal, leaving the flag in place, and no clear decision was

noticeable with most of the calls, 87 of 166, containing no clear decision on what should happen to the flag. Of the letters to the editor taking a decisive stand, 66 called for removal while 13 called for leaving it in place; that is, five times as many letter writers called for removing the flag compared to those who advocated keeping it on the State House grounds.

**Table 4.7 Calls to action in letters to the editor by region**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Calls to Action</b>			<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>Remove</b>	<b>Leave</b>	<b>No Clear Decision</b>	
Upstate	15	4	35	54
Piedmont	22	6	21	49
Coast	29	3	31	63
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>166</b>

The Coast region had almost the same amount of calls for removal by the letter writers, 29, as no clear decision being made on the flag’s fate, 31 (Table 4.7). The Coast region also contained the least amount of calls between the regions, for keeping the flag on State House grounds, only three, while having the most calls for removal compared to the other regions. The racial makeup of the Coast region as predominantly white, while having the least number of Confederate monuments among the three regions, could explain the balance in active calls for removal and no clear decision made, as well as the region having the least number of letters with active calls to leave the Confederate flag on the State House grounds.

The Upstate region had more than two times the amount of no clear decision results, 35, compared to calls for removal, 15 (Table 4.7). The Upstate region had the least number of calls for removal among the three regions and the most no clear decision results, while containing four calls to keep the flag on State House grounds. The Upstate region has the greatest disparity of racial makeup among the three regions and a considerable number of Confederate monuments, while having the most populated counties where daily newspapers are published compared to the other regions. These facts provide strong evidence that the factors of race, population, and presence of Confederate monuments likely played a significant role in the way letter writers approached the topic of the Confederate flag's removal. While there were less calls for keeping the flag on State House grounds in the Upstate region letters to the editor compared to the Piedmont region, the lack of a clear decision among the letters in the Upstate region is potentially a greater indicator that there was less enthusiasm for the Confederate flag's removal compared to other parts of the state.

The Piedmont region had the most calls among the three regions to keep the flag where it was within in their letters to the editor, six, while containing nearly identical rates between calls for removal, 22, and no clear decision, 21 (Table 4.7). The Piedmont region had the least amount of no clear decision results between the regions. The Piedmont region contains more Confederate monuments compared to the other regions, while also having the least amount of disparity along racial lines. The Piedmont region also had the least populated counties where daily newspapers were published compared to the other regions. These facts in comparison to the reality that the Piedmont region had the most calls for the Confederate flag to stay on State House grounds and the least no

clear decision results could point to stronger individual opinions on what should happen to the flag and that an increased presence of Confederate monuments could lead to a stronger sense of importance in having the Confederate flag fly on public property at the state capital.

The results in calls to action between editorials and letters to the editor by region provide evidence that there are considerable differences in what the newspapers and public believe should happen with the Confederate flag. The Upstate region had the most notable difference in the calls to action for the Confederate flag compared to the letters to the editor. The editorials in the region called for the flag's removal at nearly twice the rate of providing no clear decision, while the letter writers gave no clear decision at more than twice the rate of calling for the flag's removal. The Piedmont region editorials were much more vocal in calling for the flag to be removed while the letter writers were split about evenly between calling for removal and giving no clear decision. The Coast region had nearly the same rate of calls for removal compared to no clear decision, with editorials having slightly more calls for removal whereas the letter writers slightly favored no clear decision.

Comparing the calls to action in letters to the editor by region with the frames that were used in letters by region can also provide some insight into the decisions for calls to remove. The Upstate region letters primarily used Heritage as the dominant frame and had several more no clear decision results compared to active calls for removal. Legislative Leadership and Heritage made up close to half of all the dominant frames used in the Upstate region letters. The predominant use of these two frames in coordination with the lack of calls to action in the Upstate region suggest that there was

not much of an active push in this region for the Confederate flag to be removed. The Piedmont region had the least usage of Heritage as the dominant frame among letter writers compared to the other regions, though had the most calls to leave the Confederate flag on the State House grounds among the regions. Hate and Legislative Leadership as the two dominant frames in the Piedmont region could be the reason for a nearly even split between calls for removal and no clear decision. The Coast region primarily used Heritage, Hate, and Legislative Leadership as the dominant frames while having nearly even calls for removal compared to no clear decision and the least amount of calls to leave the flag where it was. The greatest usage of the Heritage frame did not result in more calls for leaving the flag, which was an interesting result. Additionally, this demonstrates that when the flag was seen as hateful and there were more calls for legislators to decide what should happen with the flag, then the results eventually evened out. The result shows that Hate as the dominant frame is a potential indicator that there will be more calls for removal and Legislative Leadership and Heritage will provide no clear decisions, though this phenomenon is not true across all regions.

**RQ4b: What are the calls to action for the flag in letters to the editor by circulation size?**

There is a distinct increase in the volume of letters to the editor based on circulation size, with the small newspapers containing 26 letters, medium-size newspapers containing 54 letters, and large circulation newspapers containing 86 letters (Table 4.8).

The small newspapers contained letters to the editor that had a combined eight calls for removal and 13 letters with no clear decision, while only five of those 26 letters called to keep the flag flying on the State House grounds (Table 4.8). The medium circulation newspapers had more than five times as many calls to remove the flag with 16 compared to the three letters to the editor calling to keep the flag in place. No clear decision was the main call among the medium circulation newspapers with 35 letters, which made up well over half of all of the letters to the editor that were in medium newspapers (Table 4.8). The large newspapers had 39 letters to the editor with no clear decision on what should happen to the Confederate flag, compared to 42 calls for the flag to be removed and five calls for the flag to stay on the State House grounds (Table 4.8). While the calls for removal and no clear decision in the large newspaper editorials are close to the same, it is interesting to note that the large newspapers were the only circulation size category with more calls for removal compared to no clear decision and there were eight times as many calls for removal compared to the amount of calls for the flag to stay on State House grounds in large newspapers.

Comparatively, the circulation sizes of the newspapers demonstrated that no clear decision on what should happen to the flag was the primary choice among the letters to the editor that were published in the small and medium newspapers. As the circulation sizes increased in these first two categories, the gap between calls for removal and no clear decision grew considerably larger. The calls for keeping the flag on State House grounds stayed nearly the same in number as the circulation size of the newspapers increased.

**Table 4.8 Calls to action in letters to the editor by circulation**

Newspaper	Calls to Action			TOTAL
	Remove	Leave	No Clear Decision	
<b>Small</b>				
The Beaufort Gazette	2	0	4	6
The Journal	2	0	3	5
The Times and Democrat	2	0	0	2
Index-Journal	0	2	3	5
Aiken Standard	2	3	3	8
<b>TOTAL (Small)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Medium</b>				
The Herald	0	0	2	2
Morning News	5	0	6	11
Independent Mail	2	0	4	6
Herald-Journal	5	2	15	22
The Sun News	4	1	8	13
<b>TOTAL (Medium)</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Large</b>				
The Greenville News	6	0	10	16
The State	18	3	16	37
The Post and Courier	18	2	13	33
<b>TOTAL (Large)</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>166</b>

Comparing the calls to action made in editorials by circulation, as determined in research question 3b, to small newspaper letters to the editor, the letters had more no clear decision results than calls for removal whereas the editorials had more calls for removal than no clear decision. There were also five calls for the flag to stay on the State House grounds by letter writers, meaning that small newspaper letter writers strongly leaned towards taking no action compared to wanting the flag removed, which was represented conversely in the editorials. The medium circulation newspapers had more than twice as many no clear decision results on what should happen to the flag compared

to calls for removal, compared to the medium newspapers' editorials that all contained calls for removal. The number of editorials in medium newspapers was limited to five whereas the number of letters in the medium category increased by double from the small newspapers. While the medium newspapers took a strong stance in their editorials for removing the flag, their voice was essentially lost because they did not produce many editorials in comparison to how many letters were run. Thus, the editorial boards had some semblance of a presence while mainly letting the conversation be dominated by the letter writers. The large newspapers were the only circulation size category that had more calls for removal compared to no clear decision made, though the results were roughly similar with only a difference of three. The large newspaper editorials by comparison contained twice as many calls for removal compared to no clear decisions. Additionally, there were only five total calls for the flag to remain on the State House grounds in the large newspapers' letters to the editor, which is the same as the small newspapers. The large newspapers' editorials were more vocal in calling for the removal of the flag than the letter writers, though the letter writers having a much more prominent role in calling for the removal of the Confederate flag compared to the other circulation size categories is worth noting.

Comparing the frames used in letters to the editor by circulation size, as determined in research question 2b, and the calls to action in letters to the editor by circulation is also useful to understanding the pattern of calls to action among the varying circulation size categories. The small newspapers' letters primarily relied on Heritage and Racial Unity as dominant frames and had no clear decision on what to do with the flag 13 times and five calls to leave the flag on the State House grounds. Legislative Leadership

was barely used as the dominant frame compared to Heritage and Racial Unity, meaning that reliance on legislators was not always an indicator of no clear decision being made. Instead, Heritage as the dominant frame appears to show that the letter writers in small newspapers wanted to talk about what the flag means to themselves personally without consistently taking a stance on the flag. This consideration is further supported by the use of Heritage and Legislative Leadership as the dominant frames in medium circulation newspapers. There were twice as many no clear decision results in the medium newspapers' letters as there were calls for removal, though the letters only had three calls for the flag to stay on the State House grounds. Thus, Heritage as a dominant frame does not increase the likelihood of a call to leave the flag in place, but rather seems to result in more no clear decisions on what should happen to the flag. This is also true with the inclusion of Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame, which was the second most used among medium newspapers. The large circulation newspapers had several more usages of Hate as the dominant frame compared to any other circulation size category and also had the most uses of Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame, with the result being the most calls for removal, though no clear decision was the result at nearly an equal rate to the calls for removal. This finding can provide a conclusion that Hate as the dominant frame results in an increase of calls for removal and Legislative Leadership as the dominant frame results in no clear decisions.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The research questions that were asked within this study were designed to explore what dominant frames were used by editorial boards of local daily newspapers in South Carolina and by people who wrote letters to the editor to those publications regarding the topic of the Confederate flag's removal from the State House grounds. The research questions also investigated whether the regional location of the newspaper played a role in the amount of the particular frames chosen as dominant by the editorialists and letter writers. Additionally, the research questions sought to determine the rates at which calls to action for the future of the Confederate flag were made by editorial boards and letters writers and how the rates varied depending on size and region of the newspapers. The results from these questions yielded some expected, and some surprising, findings about the way newspapers went about discussing the removal of the Confederate flag within their editorials and selected letters to the editor.

Understanding the nature of a topic that has garnered significant public scrutiny over time, embedded in historical roots that define generations of citizens, is not a simple task. Considering that events like the removal of the Confederate flag in South Carolina in the summer of 2015 led to violence like that at the Charlottesville, Va. rally in 2016, it is important to acknowledge the value of attempting to understand how the public frames

these instances from their viewpoint and the response of their local news outlets. In the Charlottesville rally, a woman was killed and a number people were injured by a person driving a car into a crowd who supported keeping the statue of Robert E. Lee in a public space (Hartung & Simon, 2017). Utilizing the outlets of editorials and letters to the editor, researchers are able to gain greater insight into the published thoughts of the collective majority opinion of their local newspaper staff and what their readers have to say.

In the case of the Confederate flag's removal from the State House grounds in South Carolina in July of 2015, the present research examined editorials and letters to the editor in thirteen daily newspapers as a sampling of the public to determine what points of view were being expressed across the state. The results showed a public that most often viewed the Confederate flag as either a symbol of heritage or hate, while also expressing the reality that state legislators would have to make the final decision. The editorial boards of the newspapers generally deferred to the state legislators but also called for unity on racial terms across the state. The fact that the Heritage frame played such a prominent role for the letter writers but was only mentioned in passing and never as the dominant frame in any of the editorials notes a striking dissimilarity in the mindsets of individuals and the daily newspapers nearest to them. Some of the editorials acknowledged all five of the frames defined in the present research but clearly relied on one frame as most dominant in each example. In terms of a call for action on the flag, it was surprising to see how many letter writers chose not to state a clear decision on what they thought should happen, especially considering the lack of calls for keeping the flag on State House grounds since the Heritage frame was most invoked among letter writers.

It could point to the acknowledgment that even though these citizens held a certain belief, they realized that the flag was likely to come down or that their legislators would act in their stead and to make a call to stay up should be represented in a legislative vote. The advocacy by both editorial boards and writers of letters to the editor in calling for the removal of the Confederate flag from State House grounds signifies that this was an important step to be taken in their minds, whether to promote racial unity or to keep the symbol of the Confederacy off of public grounds, particularly at the state capital.

There is always the possibility that these editorial boards and the selected letters to the editor are indicative of the mindset that each newspaper held regarding the Confederate flag. However, some thought-provoking observations are in order. It is worth noting that in small circulation newspapers like the *Index-Journal* in Greenwood, nearly all of the letters to the editor used Heritage as the dominant frame, while the editorial board expressed that the Confederate flag symbolized hate and called for racial unity by removing the flag. *The Post and Courier* had a nearly equal ratio of Hate, Heritage, and Legislative Leadership frames in their relevant letters to the editor, and has the largest circulation of these daily newspapers. These two newspapers, which contained editorials predominantly calling for removal and used the Hate frame as the dominant frame at least once in each of their editorials, seems to oppose the mindsets of a sizable portion of their letter writers. It is also worth noting that, as a whole, editorials had no calls for leaving the flag on the State House grounds in any of the daily local newspapers. While there were citizens across the state who expressed a desire for the flag to be left where it flew, none of the sampled newspapers stated such a similar desire in any of their editorials. There is no way to determine all of the responses that these newspapers received on the

Confederate flag in the few weeks between former Governor Haley's call for the flag's removal and the actual removal. However, giving the benefit of journalistic principle to each of these publications allows the present research to provide some valuable insight into the removal of Confederate symbolism from public property, a topic which expands beyond this particular moment in history. Such insight can be applied to future cases of state-wide uproar over Confederate symbols being removed from public spaces where they had previously stood for generations.

While this research is meant to be comprehensive in acknowledging, determining, defining, and examining the frames of perspective that were used in daily newspapers' editorials and letters to the editor across South Carolina during a very specific window of time, it was created for the purpose of increasing our knowledge about framing theory. This study offers an example of how to pursue framing research regarding local newspapers and how they cover and address controversial issues steeped in the country's divisive racial history, such as removal of public Confederate monuments or markers. While the researcher would have welcomed the inclusion of more newspapers in the state and even a discussion with editorial boards of the local daily newspapers that were examined, the necessary time needed would not have allowed this addition to be possible. Future research using data from these newspapers could potentially include using the frames determined in this study to look at op-eds and front-page news articles, as well as create some definitional boundaries for a possible study on visual framing for newspapers that included photographs of the Confederate flag during this same time period.

Limitations of this research begin with the inability to access letters to the editor and editorials for *The Sumter Item*, which is a daily newspaper that was not included in

this study. The other daily newspaper in South Carolina that was not included, *The Island Packet* (Hilton Head) was omitted by the researcher because the majority of the content is similar to *The Beaufort Gazette*. The researcher was also reliant upon a map created by the Southern Poverty Law Center to determine where Confederate monuments and markers were at across the state. While this resource was helpful, it was undetermined through additional research if this was a comprehensive list for the entirety of the state.

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