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MRC Study: Race Controversy Buried After Four Days; Networks Gave Most Airtime to Reid Backers

## TV's Tilted Take on Harry Reid's "Negro" Remark

The controversy over Harry Reid's crack about Barack Obama's lack of a "Negro dialect" is apparently over, at least according to the broadcast networks. Although the story only broke Saturday afternoon, the last network news story aired Tuesday night on *Nightline*.

An MRC analysis found that from Saturday to Tuesday the networks ran a combined 37 items on Reid's "Negro" remark, including interviews and panel discussions. Broadcast opinions were heavily skewed in Reid's favor: 71% of interview guests, soundbites or quoted sources were supportive of the Democrat, vs. 29% who were critical of Reid.

It's an excellent case study in how the liberal media aid in Democratic scandal control. Over four days, the networks morphed the story from one of an embarrassing racial gaffe by the Senate's top Democrat into one about Republican over-reach in going after Reid, with some journalists even crediting the Senator with keen insight on race relations.

■ **Day One, Reid's In Trouble:** ABC's and CBS's Saturday evening newscasts both carried short items on the quote from Reid (NBC's *Nightly News* was pre-empted). CBS anchor Jeff Glor called it "a controversial remark [that] is shaking the political world."

■ **Day Two: Sunday Morning Fodder:** On ABC's *Good Morning America*, George Stephanopoulos sounded like a Reid shill: "This was a private conversation....His choice of words, obviously, was unfortunate. The Senator knows that." Later on *This Week*, Stephanopoulos moderated a panel discussion in which PBS anchor Judy Woodruff relayed the White House line: "This is the Mormon from Searchlight [Nevada] with an ear of tin and a heart of gold." Of the show's five panelists, only conservative Liz Cheney condemned Reid, calling his remark "outrageous."

■ **Day Three: Rallying Around Reid:** NBC's Andrea Mitchell was toughest Monday morning, calling Reid's remark "demeaning" of Obama. But NBC's *Today* also supplied a 100% pro-Reid panel: PBS host Gwen Ifill, who rejected any insult from Reid — "I don't understand what's

demeaning" — and NBC analyst (and soon-to-be Senate candidate) Harold Ford, Jr.: "I don't believe in any way that Harry Reid had any animus, racial animus."

Ifill on *Today* also argued that "there's actual political science" supporting Reid's suggestion that lighter-skinned candidates face less prejudice. ABC's Jake Tapper made the same point on Monday's *World News* (later expanded on Tuesday's *Nightline*): "Many prominent African Americans we spoke to today were offended by Reid's words, but many also said his observation was correct."

**Opinions on the broadcast networks skewed far more in support of Harry Reid (71%) than against him (29%).**

On NBC's *Nightly News*, Andrea Mitchell dismissed the idea that Reid was comparable to Republican Trent Lott, forced out as Senate Leader for his own racial gaffe in 2002. "Reid was praising

Obama, not longing for a pre-civil rights America," Mitchell insisted. "And while what Reid said was politically incorrect and clearly outdated, he wasn't inaccurate." To prove her point, Mitchell showed a soundbite from her boss, NBC Washington bureau chief Mark Whitaker: "Black politicians with a lighter skin have been more successful. It may not be a pleasant fact...[but] that's been the case historically."

■ **Day Four: Enough Already:** On CBS's *Early Show*, co-host Harry Smith was itching to be done with the controversy: "Is the Reid story over, and should it be?" After GOP Senator John McCain swiped at Reid ("I didn't know those words were still in the American lexicon"), *Today*'s Matt Lauer demanded to know if Reid had ever appeared to be "someone who is racially insensitive or worse." McCain said no.

The networks that quickly closed the books on Harry Reid's gaffe would be far rougher on any conservative who dared utter the same inflammatory phrases as the Senate's top Democrat. — *Rich Noyes*

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