

FEAR AND LOATHING IN WHITE, WORKING CLASS AMERICA: HOW
POLITICAL APPEALS TO INDIVIDUALISM, IMPLICIT RACISM, AND RELIGION
HAVE POLARIZED OUR TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

At the core of modern political division is a deep resentment for the culture of the opposing side. Political narratives deployed by politicians and media outlets emphasize polarized values that pit progressive leaning and right-wing Americans against each other, contribute to misinformation, and uphold systemic inequity. This paper focuses on the values of the white, working class, as this group has been the target of many political codes and appeals throughout American history due to its ability to sway a voting body. Politicians have exploited the unique economic and social circumstances of the white, working class such as their appeal to individualism and Evangelical religions and their fear of economic instability and civil unrest in a populist attempt to gain trust. Through rhetoric coated in conservative American values, politicians equate whiteness with morality and the protestations of liberal elites and minority groups with disorder to keep the social hierarchy intact so they can remain in power.

Fear and Loathing in White, Working Class America: How Political Appeals to Individualism, Implicit Racism, and Religion have Polarized our Two-Party System

INTRODUCTION

The propulsion of our two-party system into polarized extremes does not cater to the goals of either end of the political spectrum. Weaponizing political speech does not protect the values conservatives are clinging to preserve or advance the progress of minority groups progressives are putting their lives on the line for. Being forced to align oneself with ‘woke’, radicalized leftists or bigoted, right-wing traditionalists is detrimental to the public’s political agency. Conservative politicians have a history of empowering their platforms through the exploitation of people of color and individuals who do not adhere to traditional American values and religions. Politicians manipulate voters through linguistic appeals that target voter biases with deep, historical ties for the purpose of party popularity. The media then exacerbates this division by reiterating coded appeals and presenting extremist versions of their opposers’ views to upsize their followings, a tactic which only further alienates the two parties.

This paper will demonstrate how politicians have polarized white voters—the majority of the voting body (Igielnik & Budiman, 2020)—by wedging division between white, working class people and marginalized individuals, such as racial minorities and the poor, who are represented politically by progressive liberals. Additionally, this paper will discuss the role of Evangelicalism in uplifting white conservative values while rejecting agendas categorized as “radical leftist” indoctrination. Politicians, notably conservatives, utilize appeals that associate the protection of minority groups with lawlessness and economic devastation, and whiteness with hard work and traditionalism in the form of

religious virtue and social morality. At the heart of these appeals is a silent devotion to protect white dominance that propels working class voters away from the left's politically correct agenda. It is important to understand the presence of political appeals so the public can vote in a way that will benefit their needs, rather than being manipulated by those in power. Supporting politicians that utilize racial biases and appeals to individualism and Evangelicalism leads to voter misinformation, political polarization, and the upholding of institutional inequity. Further, manipulative rhetoric allows plutocratic politicians to remain in power without regard to those harmed in the process of generating support for their campaigns.

UNDERSTANDING THE WHITE, WORKING CLASS

To comprehend how political appeals operate it is vital to understand the audience these appeals were intended for. White people have made up the majority of the voting population for all of American history, accounting for over 90% of voters until 1964, over 80% until 1986, and over 70% until the 2016 election when the white majority fell to 69% of all voters (ANES, 2019). Though the proportion of non-Hispanic identifying whites in the voting population has gradually balanced out, more accurately reflecting America's racial composition, it is important to note that the white majority still maintains the ability to sway an election with their vote alone. This demographic's preferences have been prioritized in campaigns (Haney Lopez, 2013), as electoral success is largely dependent upon the support of white voters, most of whom self-identify as "average middle or working class" (ANES, 2019). Most Americans claim to be middle class despite the objective reality of their social position (Adair, 2001). People's subjective perceptions of their class status inflate or deflate depending upon conditions such as their access to

resources, education level attained, and their race (Sosnaud, Brady, & Frank, 2013). For the purpose of this argument the white, working class is not defined by income distribution, but a set of cultural values, such as a belief in personal responsibility, hard work, and traditionalism in religion and family structures that appeal to white, working-class voters as well as portion of middle class voters whose upbringings may cause them to reject elite culture and align with the working class instead.

Literature reveals white, working class culture derives from specific environmental and social circumstances. Many members of the white, working class do not further their education beyond high school or trade school, and work in hands-on or manufacturing trades that rely upon a stable economy (Williams, 2017). If members of the white, working class attend college they are often first-generation students with unique struggles that prevent them from socializing with economically privileged peers, as many commute to and from school instead of living on campus, and are reluctant to engage in extracurricular activities or utilize campus resources (Lightweis, 2014). This lifestyle is attached to a set of values that promotes individualism manifested as hard work and self-control, which white, working class families consider to be the sole predictors of success or failure. These values are intensified when white, working class families support traditional Evangelical beliefs, which exacerbates their dedication to individualism (Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). Unfortunately, a particular set of fears emerges from these values as well, which politicians have exploited to maintain the support of this demographic.

Economic Stability and Morality

Because members of this class remain in a fragile economic state due to their occupational outlooks, political appeals that allude to the potential of financial success or

distress are extremely impactful on voter behavior. Especially effective is economic rhetoric steeped in “moral values”, which researchers have found to have the strongest influence on voters, as these appeals combine cultural values with economic interests (such as lower taxes), the factor participants self-identified as the strongest predictor of their vote (Prasad, Hoffman, & Bezila, 2016). Even when rhetoric does not explicitly mention financial potential, white, working class people trust candidates they view as morally superior to prioritize their economic interests. They separate the wealthy into two categories: the “deserving” rich, perceived as having worked hard for their money while maintaining strong family values untainted by fame, and the “undeserving” rich, perceived as corrupt and likely to have accumulated their wealth immorally (Prasad, Perrin, Bezila, Hoffman, Kindleberger, et al., 2009). Compared to liberals, conservative candidates such as George W. Bush were deemed deservedly rich and scored higher in authenticity when rated by members of the working class (Prasad et al., 2009). This phenomenon, of distrusting liberal elite groups while idolizing wealthy conservatives, is rooted in strongly held values and defines the way white, working class people react to political plutocrats in differing parties.

White, working class men and women distance themselves from professionals like doctors, lawyers, and teachers, who prioritize attending college to work in fields that are not manually but intellectually driven. The white, working class have come to resent the elite class for their lifestyle of “concerted cultivation” or the practice of devoting oneself to work over family, and the rejection of traditional religion, as many elites prefer to identify as vaguely “spiritual” (Williams, 2017). The left’s focus on social justice and political correctness, pro-choice abortions, and universal policies (alluding to higher taxes)

insult the working class' values and wedge misunderstandings between the groups. These factors combined with a lifetime of perceived condescension from the elite, who pursue higher education and display their intelligence as a badge of social honor, has resulted in deep resentment and opposition from the white, working class (Williams, 2017). This translates to political opposition in elections as liberal elites, like Hillary Clinton who worked first as a lawyer, are considered the "status quo" option by intellectuals and are consequently rejected by the working class (Francis, 2008), even when democratic policies may benefit them (Prasad et al., 2009). Many members of the white, working class work long hours on their feet doing tedious manual tasks, which they consider harder work despite being paid less compared to professionals whose occupations they view as menial or unnecessary (Williams, 2017). No wonder Donald Trump's rallying protestation that he "loves the poorly educated" resulted in screams and cheers during his acceptance speech at the Nevada caucus (PBSNews Hour, 2016). The "deserving" rich have a lock on the white, working class who perceive them as relatable in an elitist political climate they feel excluded from (Prasad et al., 2009; Williams, 2017). Unfortunately, plutocratic politicians disguised as family men often manipulate the white, working class, who they entrust to prioritize their economic interests and uphold their versions of morality.

Individualism and Racial Bias

A majority of the white, working class has voted for the Republican party since the Civil Rights Act was passed under the Johnson administration in 1964 (Lupton & McKee, 2020). This is largely due to the emergence of the Southern Strategy adopted by early politicians such as George Wallace and Barry Goldwater that utilized racial codes that evoke fear to gain political popularity (Maxwell & Shields, 2019). The strategy plays upon

white hostility towards civil rights progress by framing economic struggles, high crime rates, and civil disorder as the fault of unruly minority groups (Haney Lopez, 2013), who receive unabated sympathy from the Democratic party while the working class feels their needs are ignored (Williams, 2017). The privilege of being white in America has prevented many people from thinking in terms of race, as is the unfortunate reality for a vast amount of black and brown Americans (DiAngelo, 2018). Where racial minorities are sensitive to the structural inefficiencies in the United States, as they have suffered from de jure and de facto segregation in institutions necessary to succeed (Rothstein, 2017), the way white Americans have been socialized may prevent them from recognizing the impact of institutions on race and class oppression (DiAngelo, 2018). One study found that white, working class Americans, despite reporting childhoods full of economic struggle, malnutrition, and casual abuse, were more likely to believe that they were to blame for their social status and held a firm commitment to individualism (Eppard, Schubert, & Giroux, 2018). Operating under an individualistic framework makes it difficult to believe structural inequality results in disproportionate harm to socially stratified and marginalized people, as one views their accumulation of wealth or misfortune as a product of their own volition (Eppard et al., 2018). It is easy for white individuals to deny the benefits of racial privilege, as the effects of white superiority remain invisible to the untrained eye. One would have to navigate American life as a racial minority or personally educate themselves on the impact of racism to gain a deep understanding, which many white people are resistant to (DiAngelo, 2018).

Because many white, working class individuals occupy rural areas or suburbs surrounded by members of their own race and class, their outlooks may be unchallenged

or reinforced by their communities (Williams, 2017). One study found that remaining alienated from people outside of one's race prevents empathy for the outgroup and predicts racism. The same study suggested isolation from those viewed as "others" helps maintain a false sense of superiority and dominance that diminishes when the groups become socialized (Nicol & Rounding, 2013). A lack of diversity in communities with a strong belief in individualism has caused the white, working class to look down upon struggling minority groups depicted by politicians as "tax eaters on welfare" or simply, as criminals (Haney Lopez, 2013, p. 192). The white, working class finds themselves in a unique position: privileged by race but not by class, in a meritocratic America where a college degree necessitates success (Souto-Otero, 2010). They are the product of unshakable individualism, too proud to admit they could use the assistance people of color have been stereotyped to rely upon (Williams, 2017). The economic structure of America has left the white, working class enraged, afraid, and in need of a scapegoat.

White, Evangelical Morality

Attempting to separate the impact of religion from understandings of race would disservice a body of work dedicated to intersecting these subjects. Protestant religion has shaped our nation's sociopolitical atmosphere since its foundation (Wogaman, 2004). Because white Protestants have maintained their position as a socially dominant group in American society, their values have heavily influenced institutions such as public schools and the political body (Harding, 2009). Members of the white, working class may resent those with different beliefs, as religion shapes many working class peoples' values. The white, working class may feel disrespected by those with a vague connection to the spiritual world, as is commonly practiced in elite circles, and reject their versions of morality

(Williams, 2017). The white, conservative Evangelical demographic is less educated and has major cultural conflicts with left-leaning whites due to the influence of feeling powerless, having less access to social networks, and resultingly, a lack of exposure to information that opposes their community's viewpoints (Brint & Abrutyn, 2010). For instance, 84% of individuals with conservative religious values take the word of God literally (Green, Rozell, & Wilcox, 2003). Many Evangelicals worry America is losing its Christian faith (PPRI Staff, 2020), especially white individuals whose fears are buttressed by a perceived loss of racial status in a country with an increasingly diversifying population (Mutz, 2018). Politicians have taken white Evangelicals' devotion to Christ for granted by convincing this demographic political influence can preserve American traditionalism.

This highly religious demographic has remained loyal to Republican politicians since 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was passed (Piliawski, 1994), as Democratic leaders compromised with Civil Rights activists perceived as violent and in violation of the values of many Evangelicals (Green et al., 2003). Though further research should be conducted to clarify the extent Evangelical influence has on conservative values, scholars have demonstrated a clear connection between a devotion to God and voters' loyalty to politicians who present as Christian (Albertson, 2015). Though Evangelicals overwhelmingly identify with conservatives, this demographic has not been "captured" by the Republican party in the way many people of color view themselves as confined to voting for the Democratic party. White Evangelicals must be continually appealed to for their political support (Frymer, 2011). While the issue of abortion is an undeniable stronghold bounding white Evangelicals to the Republican party, other factors buttress white Evangelical support for conservative politicians (McDaniel & Ellison, 2008). Among

these are a devotion to personal responsibility and traditional family values, which people of color are representative of rejecting in the white psyche (Nunn, 2002; Williams, 2017), and a symbolic association of blackness with immorality and sin, and whiteness with purity and godliness (Sherman & Clore, 2009).

Because religion is studied in a group setting, communities infuse their culture, norms, and values into their interpretations of the bible (Fish, 1980; McDaniel & Ellsion, 2008), which may explain why religious settings are often involuntarily segregated (Tisby, 2019). White retellings of the word of God are exclusive to white culture. Therefore, white Evangelical values exclude the experiences of black Americans, whose historical conceptions of Christianity were born out of the desire to escape slavery (Cone, 1985). White Evangelicalism operates on principles of individualism, as under a Protestant God every person is born equal and has the same shot at success (Emerson & Smith, 2001). This train of thought suggests everyone acts out of free will, independent of structures and institutions, and are personally responsible for their actions (Hechter & Kanazawa, 2019). This may cause members of the white, working class to view societal impediments such as racial inequality as separate from economic poverty rather than causing or contributing to one another. Institutions “that obviate personal responsibility” are considered destructive by Evangelicals (Tranby & Hartmann, 2008, p. 344). This may explain why Evangelical Protestants typically oppose welfare, which is viewed as a threat to traditional family structures and sexuality (Brint & Abrutyn, 2010).

The promotion of a nuclear family structure (two married parents) in white Evangelicalism extends the belief of personal accountability and self-control as demonstrated by sexual restraint and fidelity, which the white working-class treat as

testament to one's moral character (Williams, 2017). White Evangelicals denounce divorce and premarital sex (Wilcox, Chavez, & Franz, 2004), while black Evangelicals generally emphasize the importance of a network of kin and child-parent relationships over lasting parental affairs (Cherlin, 2009; Ellison & Sherkat, 1995). However, because whites are socially dominant in our society, the values of black institutions are considered inferior (DiAngelo, 2018). When white Evangelicals condemn motherhood outside of marriage, it is insensitive to the history of black women being impregnated by their masters to produce more slaves and ignores the institutional prevention of black men and women to maintain a nuclear family void of resources available to their white counterparts (Richie, 2012; Rothstein, 2017). Therefore, white Evangelical individualism operating to control welfare is inconsiderate to individuals navigating American life independent of race and class privilege. As politicians appeal to welfare cuts and reform, people of color and their progressive allies are rejected from identifying with white, working class Evangelicals and the politicians upholding their dominant values.

Unfortunately, appealing to principles of white, Evangelical individualism has harsher consequences than resisting welfare. Many white Evangelicals assume personal responsibility is the only factor in committing a crime (Hechter & Kanazawa, 2019). Furthermore, conservative protestant theology stresses individual repentance as imperative to human sin (Hunter, 1989). Though this ideology does not explicitly portray nonwhiteness as lesser than, an emphasis on personal responsibility can lead to manifestations of unintentional racism in the white psyche. Research finds individualism as promoted in Anglo Saxon dominated religious institutions causes white voters to support harsher punishments for criminals and to oppose socioeconomic policies that target

unrelatable minority groups (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995; Emerson & Smith, 2001). The white, working class' belief in individualism is reflected in politics, as voters consistently choose politicians tough on crime, who emphasize retribution over rehabilitation. The promotion of individualism operates in opposition to black Evangelicalism, which focuses on society's role in alleviating the collective suffering of black Americans by treating individuals with equity (McDaniel & Ellison, 2008). Because black Americans were disenfranchised after slavery was abolished by the 13th amendment and granted no assistance to navigate institutions that excluded on the basis of race, such as the housing and job market, black people may be more socially accepting of governmental help like welfare and rehabilitative punishments compared to whites who prefer bootstrap individualism and harsh punitiveness (Rothstein, 2017; Williams, 2017). Affiliations with white Evangelicalism influence voters' receptiveness to appeals that promote personal responsibility. These internalized values affect the way the outgroup—nonwhite and non-Christian Americans—are sympathized with and how harshly white Americans respond to policies targeting these groups, such as by supporting the death penalty (Henkel, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2006). As people of color are incarcerated and policed at disproportionate rates (Rios, 2011), the prevalence of white Evangelicalism in politics impacts the fate of many black and brown American's lives. Some politicians have used these preconceptions against people of color to elevate support for their platforms through religious appeals by declaring war on blackness and foreignness.

Research from the University of California has noted the heavy usage of Evangelical “imagery, ideologies, movements, and tropes” ingrained in the “manufacturing, packing, and distribution of whiteness” throughout the world (Blum,

Fessenden, & Kurien, 2009, p. 4). Conceptions of race, in America especially, go beyond phenotypic discrimination, conflating whiteness with divine godliness and encouraging the idea of a moral soul manifesting itself in white physical characteristics. In early America, protestants defending slavery frequently cited the bible story of “cursed” Canaan whose descendants through Ham settled in Africa. Canaan was told he would be a slave for his sins, compared to “blessed” Shem who settled in Asia, and Japheth who settled in Europe and was told his kingdom would “enlarge” (Blum et al., p. 5). When white Evangelicals interpret the bible literally, the struggles of African Americans can be attributed to personal destiny doomed by the actions of one’s ancestors. The pitting of whiteness against blackness as representative of morality and immorality is supported by automatic association research. Sherman and Clore (2009) explain that our conceptions of morality are embodied by feelings about physical aspects of the world. Many Americans associate whiteness with purity (Rozin, Millman, & Nemeroff, 1986) and physical cleansing (Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006), while blackness is perceived as dirty and having the ability to contaminate whiteness (Adams & Osgood, 1973). These automatic associations have been programmed in our brains through American socialization. Religiosity embedded in our culture and politics is one of the foundational reasons these associations persist and politicians are able to take advantage of them.

Because white Evangelicals are the most prominent religious figures in America, a country supposedly free of religious intolerance, less dominant religious values are demonized or dismissed by politicians as threatening to white social privilege. Individualism buttressed by Evangelicalism causes white, working class people to perceive any behavior that ranges outside of their values as refusing to conform to American ideals

(Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). Any objection to institutions that support stability and self-discipline (Williams, 2017), or that point out racism that is invisible to white Americans privileged with colorblindness (DiAngelo, 2018) will be processed as a threat to the heart of American values. This prevents politicians on both ends of the political spectrum from mentioning civil rights progress, increasing government assistance to the poor, or approaching crime reform from a rehabilitative lens in their agendas, in fear they will frighten the white, working class to vote for the opposing candidate.

THE SOUTHERN STRATEGY

Long ago, politicians found a way to conflate working class America's persisting fear of financial loss and the disruption of moral values with their prejudiced viewpoints of minority groups. The Southern Strategy, though defined variously by scholars, has two consistent patterns. The strategy utilizes fear mongering to conjure racial biases in voters through the use of code words or dog whistles that avoid directly mentioning race while alluding to harmful stereotypes such as Mexican immigrants as drug traffickers, black Americans as lazy and criminal, and Muslim Americans as terrorists (Haney Lopez, 2013). Politicians achieve this by juxtaposing images that conjure implicit biases about nonwhite people with the threat of economic loss, civil unrest, and the degradation of traditional family values. A less noted aspect is the inclusion of religious appeals within the Southern Strategy that separates and places Evangelical values on a pedestal above those of agnostic or atheistic beliefs upper class elites may identify with (Aistrup, 2014). The basis of the strategy relies on an "us" versus "them" mentality, portraying white, working class Americans as the victims of racial progress (Norton & Sommers, 2011) and the preservers of morality (Evans, 2009), and minorities as lazy benefactors, undeserving of government

assistance or political sympathy (Gilens, 1995). Rhetoric that falls under this category has convinced many white, working-class voters over time to worry opportunities for economic stability and social comfort are diminishing as racial minorities and progressives with differing values and beliefs gain more political power (Williams, 2017). Voters who respond to these values then equate the centering of social justice issues, such as racial equality, with the abandonment of traditionalism, and consequently limit themselves to the conservative party.

Origins

While politicians have utilized race-based rhetoric since American politics was in its earliest stages (Rable, 1985), the Southern Strategy differs as it marks the implementation of a pattern of strategized codes that targets a specific demographic with the intention of political gain. The Southern Strategy lent support to conservative politicians who took advantage of racial tensions stirred up by civil rights endeavors (Inwood, 2015) and placed the blame on liberal entities. Foundational literature from The Birch Society, published in 1958, seems to have inspired early politicians such as Wallace, Goldwater, and Nixon. Though written off as dedicated to generating conspiracy theories in the 1960s, many of The Birch Foundation's ideologies are now commonplace in conservative platforms (Haney Lopez, 2013). The Blue Book of the John Birch Society aims their attacks at taking down the liberal establishment by (a) denying the beauties of the welfare state and (b) seeking to preserve the opportunities and responsibilities of the individual, which have racial undertones, as well as (c) suspecting the venality of "the establishment's painstakingly manufactured but clay-footed gods, with their synthetic haloes" (Welch, 1961, p. 0). This foundation excuses racial pandering as necessary to

warding off corrupt liberal leaders, often depicted as atheistic Communists, that Americans should fear. Politicians have resorted to demonizing their opposers, whether racial foreigners, domestic minorities, or liberal Democrats, a last resort to gain traction over the opposing party (Haney Lopez, 2013).

Although Richard Nixon's election is credited with causing the political realignment that pushed social liberalism out of the Republican party (Mason, 2005), less credited politicians such as George Wallace and Barry Goldwater set the stage for Nixon to succeed. Governor George Wallace was perhaps the earliest politician to abandon his original agenda and settle for race-baiting to gain white, working class support. In 1958, Wallace learned his lesson after losing the Democratic primary to an opponent supported by the Ku Klux Klan. Two years later, Wallace who had never taken a tough stance on civil rights campaigned as a devoted segregationist (Haney Lopez, 2013), resulting in a win and four consecutive terms as Governor of Alabama. Though Wallace presented himself publicly as a racist, proclaiming "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" at his inaugural address, the former politician admitted race was more so a symbol for the preservation of state's rights and that he had no personal animus towards black people (Carter, 1996, p. 6). Scholars note race was simply the fastest route to success, and if there were an easier way, he would have taken it (Haney Lopez, 2013).

George Wallace laid the foundation for other politicians to pin white, populist rage against minority groups and their supporters: "hippies, civil rights agitators, welfare recipients, atheists, beatniks, antiwar protestors, communists, and street thugs who 'turned to rape and murder when they didn't get enough broccoli as little boys'" (Carter, 1996, p. 10). Wallace grouped liberal elites and the civilly disobedient and made it clear they were

representative of everything his updated campaign was against. Wallace appealed to white, Southern rage, describing a clear “them” his audience was superior to and whose influence they should strive to resist. Wallace did not recreate the infrastructure of the Republican party. His strategy only directed pre-existing white rage and provided liberals and racial minorities as a convenient scapegoat to blame (Carter, 1996). His extremist position against liberalism and civil rights lost him the Democratic primary against Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 and the presidential election of 1968 when he ran as a third-party candidate against Nixon. However, his tactics would inspire up-and-coming conservative leaders to target the white middle and working class in an attempt to maintain control over the electorate.

Similar to Wallace, Barry Goldwater’s anti-civil rights stance cost him the presidential election against Lyndon B. Johnson. However, this opposition was one of the factors that contributed to his unlikely domination of the Republican party leading up to 1964. Goldwater emphasized a “rugged individualism” centering personal responsibility and a rejection of federal intervention in local government’s affairs (Hammerback, 1972, p. 180). Catering only to the needs of those who owned or had the potential of owning land, he argued state’s rights and privatization should be prioritized (Taylor, 2016). As senator of Arizona, he voted against the Civil Rights Act and utilized his campaign platform to criminalize and group civil rights protesters, anti-war activists, and the liberal educators backing these efforts (Haney Lopez, 2013). Comprising the bulk of his supporters were a small fraction of college students resisting university endorsed liberalism, average Americans bitter about the state of the economy and civil disorder, and political conservatives with a desire to reinstate the racial status quo of an earlier decade (Hammerback, 1972).

Goldwater held the potential to appeal strongly to Protestant Evangelicals as well, dismayed with the Democratic election of John F. Kennedy who uniquely brought Catholicism into the White House (Lachman, 1968). For a moment in time, Evangelicals coalesced to support Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign (Steensland & Wright, 2014). Especially as he alluded to historical fundamentalism, which frames the founding documents of our nation (that excluded rights for people of color) as sacred, ageless, and to be worshipped like the ten commandments (Lepore, 2011). Conservative politicians can utilize historical appeals with religious undertones to uplift whiteness and oppose anyone attempting to dismantle the dominant power structure as capable of rupturing America's foundation. Goldwater utilized historical fundamentalism to strengthen his reputation as a traditionalist, pestering young liberals and civil rights protestors to "read some history" and show some "decent respect for our forefathers and our great traditions" (Hammerback, 1972, p. 180). When Goldwater referred to "our" traditions, he was dog whistling to the same silent majority George Wallace appealed to. While these appeals worked well on self-proclaimed racists, those wary of his reputation as a blatant segregationist abandoned him in the 1964 election. (Lachman, 1968).

Goldwater's campaign took a turn for the worse when he released a controversial campaign ad entitled "Choice", which emphasized the need for a return to law and order. The film was imbedded with video clips of half-naked women and gay men dancing provocatively, Mexican people selling narcotics to white teenagers, and black Americans rioting and being arrested. The film blamed Lyndon B. Johnson for riots and the degeneration of traditional values while calling for a change in leadership that would hold Americans personally accountable for engaging in crime and moral decay (White, 2011).

Goldwater utilized the chaos incited by civil rights and anti-war movements, insisting Democratic leadership lacking in punitive policies were the root of disorder (Haney Lopez, 2013) rather than the systemic failures of our institutions (Alexander, 2012; Rothstein, 2017; Richie, 2012). His “othering” of minorities and protesting youths, centering of personal responsibility, and insistence a “tough on crime” stance would render the country safer was appealing, but too overt (Lachman, 1968). However, these efforts solidified a strategy many politicians, both liberal and conservative, would utilize in future campaigns.

Wallace and Goldwater’s efforts demonstrate the effects of the racial component of the Southern Strategy on voters. Wallace’s overtly racist agenda resulted in nearly unanimous support in a state campaign but cost him multiple presidential elections. Goldwater’s rhetoric also cost him a presidential election but harnessed new support for the conservative party that contributed to the election of Richard Nixon in 1969. Wallace and Goldwater, as test-runners of the strategy, sacrificed support from liberal elites and minorities to appeal to a specific demographic of white voters. Where they failed, up-and-coming politicians, such as Nixon or Reagan, took note and adjusted their language to be less explicit and rely more heavily upon racial codes and religiosity to distance enraged and fearful white, working and middle-class voters from Democrats promoting themselves as progressive.

Conservative Realignment

Richard Nixon’s two terms as president from 1969 to 1974 congealed the shift in Republican ideology that persists today. Nixon utilized the groundwork set in place by Goldwater, calling upon a silent majority of white, working class voters to support a novel vision of conservatism in the electorate (Mason, 2005). While some historians claim

Nixon's call to Middle America was aimed at gaining support for his Vietnam strategy (Richard Nixon Foundation, 2019), centering the white working and middle class also gave Nixon the opportunity to divest this demographic away from the interests of protestors and Democrats, who were blamed for causing civil unrest. This was exemplified in his 1968 campaign ad "Crime" in which a narrator stated over photos of rioters being arrested that "crime had grown nine times as fast as the population" and "crimes of violence...would double by 1972" (New York Historical Society, 2020, 0:13-0:23). Nixon assured voters his presidency would free Americans from fear with prison reforms, an end to lawlessness, and an increased police presence, emphasizing poverty was not the cause of crime (Nixon, 1968). Scholars argue Nixon's declaration of a war on crime created a culture of fear that politicians have continually utilized to isolate working- and middle-class Americans from social justice issues, both domestically and within foreign policy (Simon, 2009).

Exhausted after a decade of political instability, many middle- and working-class voters "changed their minds about politics" (Mason, 2005, p. 3). Realignment occurred as Democratic concerns for social justice pushed a new majority of white, middle- and working-class voters to join the Republican party for good. Nixon's realization that there may be more opponents of radical liberalism, the term he coined to define those resisting law and order, than existing members of the Republican party in 1968 prompted the party's diversion away from social liberalism into realignment. Like Goldwater, Nixon took advantage of white Americans' xenophobic perceptions of foreigners and implicit fear of black Americans, blaming the Democratic party for allowing ideologies that were lacking in patriotism and comparing social rights movements to communist aggression, as suggested by The Birch Society a decade prior (Mason, 2005).

Unlike Goldwater however, whose opposition to the 1964 Civil Rights Act served as proof of his racism, the public's perception of Nixon's position on race relied heavily upon code words. His campaign ad stated, "We owe it to the decent and law-abiding citizens of America" to keep this country safe and rebuild a newfound respect for law enforcement (New York Historical Society, 2020, 0:27). This language serves as a dog whistle, relying on white voters to identify themselves as those needing to be protected. Rhetoric such as this incites division and politicizes opinions on law enforcement by out-grouping protestors as inherently disrespectful of authority, which violates the values many members of the white, working class were raised to uphold (Williams, 2017). The effect is detrimental, as white, working- and middle-class Americans are victimized and protestors (many of which were people of color) were portrayed as un-American and criminalized for exercising their constitutional rights (Welch, 2005). Because white, working class people were largely isolated from political violence within civil rights and anti-war movements, political discourse pointing fingers at protestors and their liberal backers harnessed resentment towards those groups that continues to polarize the modern American political sphere (Simon, 2009). Villainizing individuals representative of the Democratic party was largely successful for Nixon, who swept the 1968 election with a 500,000 vote advantage over his opponent (Nixon Library, n.d.).

Nixon's successes compared to Wallace's or Goldwater's demonstrates discreet coding is more effective when using racial appeals in highly publicized campaigns; hence Nixon's 301 electoral votes alongside Wallace's 46 as a third-party candidate in the 1968 election (Nixon Library, n.d.). Both utilized the same strategy, though Nixon did so without any mention of segregation. Due to the implicit nature of racial appeals, candidates like

Nixon and his supporters can comfortably deny race factored into campaign success. Most people do not openly condone racism (DiAngelo, 2018). When many Democrats defected from their party in the 1960s to side with Nixon's version of conservatism, they may not have been aware they were being influenced by racial codes. This is because implicit racism relies on "automatic mental associations", affecting self-proclaimed racists as well as those who identify as racially progressive (Ditonto, Lau, & Sears, 2013, p. 488).

Many white Americans, especially those who were raised amidst the remnants of the Jim Crow South, were socialized to accept that white dominance can only persist in the presence of a subordinate group. Social dominance theorists argue white people view gains for the nondominant group as a loss (Eibach & Keegan, 2006). This is especially prevalent for the white, working class, who perceive keeping minorities at the bottom of the social hierarchy necessary to their success (Roediger & Babcock, 1999). Yet most of this socialization is conceived without conscious awareness (DiAngelo, 2018). Political conservatism and Evangelical ideals of morality processed as traditionalism teaches white parents to reiterate "ideal versions of whiteness" by contrasting this with blackness "in an effort to counter threats to white supremacy and maintain the racial system of segregation" many view as vital to the protection of their values and finances (DuRocher, 2018, p. 33). When black and brown Americans are framed as an unrelatable outgroup, white people have a difficult time arousing empathy. Some people even experience pleasure when members of a different race are in pain, and pain in response to their pleasure (Cikara, Bruneau, Bavel, & Saxe, 2011). In fact, scholars have theorized that black advancement in any form enrages whites (Anderson, 2016). This is historically derived from the Reconstruction era, when poor whites perceived newly freed slaves as competitors for labor

positions (DuBois, 1935). Politicians like Nixon have relied upon symbolic racism that embraces white rage, denying black Americans have anything to protest about, and promoting the belief that minorities violate American values like individualism and self-reliance when they do exercise their rights (Kinder & Sears, 1981). Racial appeals have a history of distancing the white, working class, who are uncomfortable with the topic of racial reform, from liberalism as they are unwilling to sacrifice hard earned money to benefit unrelatable members of society who do not uphold their values (Williams, 2017).

War on Minorities

Ronald Reagan's efforts to reach the white, working class relied upon recycled stereotypes, depicting whites as workers, taxpayers and "the persons playing by the rules and struggling to make ends meet while brazen minorities partied with their hard-earned tax dollars" (Haney Lopez, 2013, p. 59). He politicized affirmative action efforts, set in place 20 years prior to his presidency, by framing whites as innocent victims of racially discriminatory quota systems (Haney Lopez, 2013). Regan's status as a White House Christian, despite that he never went to church (Roof, 2009), buttressed white Evangelical support as well, as he denounced government assistance with the creation of "The Welfare Queen" trope. The image of black women birthing multiple children to receive more assistance from the government perpetuates a stereotype in the white psyche politicians have utilized for gain, especially to reach white Evangelicals who strictly oppose pre-marital procreation and single motherhood (Brint & Abrutyn, 2010).

Research reveals this stereotype is strictly racial, as participants consistently conjured images of black women when read descriptions of "Welfare Queens" (Gillam, 1999). Further research reveals the impact of rhetoric appealing to individualism, as many

white Americans believe black people's values are what holds them from succeeding (Hurwitz, Peffley, & Sniderman, 1997). Whites unconsciously view their culture as dominant and are threatened by minorities with differing values and unrelatable social struggles (Eibach & Keegan, 2006). This silent resentment reveals itself in political elections when voters are swayed by promises to end or reform welfare. Rhetoric that uplifts white workers as more deserving and falsely attributing tax raises to funding the needs of the undeserving was uprooted from the campaigns of Wallace, Goldwater, and Nixon. Like Goldwater, Reagan emphasized states' rights and lower taxes to appeal to white, working class voters as conservative politicians had been practicing for over two decades. His 1980 campaign slogan "Let's Make America Great Again" (Huber, 2016) served as a dog whistle, promising a certain demographic would be better off than they were four years ago under Jimmy Carter's Democratic administration.

Reagan generated Evangelical support for his incumbency when he spoke in front of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983. Reagan took advantage of his religiously inclined audience, citing his disdain for abortion, the banning of prayer in public schools, and secularism, as he urged Evangelicals to join him in the "struggle between right and wrong, and good and evil" (Roof, 2009, p. 289). The framing of white, Evangelical values as morally superior would benefit him later in 1986, when he and his wife made a televised appearance from the White House to officially declare a war on drugs (Reagan Foundation, 2011). Skimming over the impact of other substances, Reagan centralized crack cocaine as the enemy (Elwood, 1995) threatening American values and responsible for killing children (Reagan Foundation, 2011). Reagan combined the public's fear of financial insecurity he had built upon during his first four years through the demonization

of welfare, with a fear of crime and a call to action for moral Americans to fight this “war”. He emphasized drug abuse was not a victimless crime and that it cost Americans 60 billion dollars a year at least (Reagan Foundation, 2011). Unlike Nixon however, who scapegoated Vietnam and other places abroad as responsible for the prevalence of substance use among young Americans (Richard Nixon Foundation, 2016), Reagan argued this was a domestic issue.

Framing drug addiction as an individual choice, the Reagans’ launched their “Just Say No” campaign (Elwood, 1995) which diverted attention away from social forces that perpetuate substance abuse and ignored the racial impact of targeting crack cocaine specifically. Employing religiosity in the subtext of a drug war, Reagan presented the government’s actions as a moral crusade to justify the hyper-criminality of black individuals in poverty and a resistance to solutions based in liberalism by portraying these entities as a threat to white, American families (Shields, 2014). Rhetoric with religious subtext that plays into racial biases and religious values can have detrimental effects on Americans’ perceptions of nonwhite, non-Evangelical conforming individuals. Asking Americans to join him in a fight against secularism, and later to fight drugs creates a bond between his status as a protector of the nation and white, working class voters he targeted with this speech. The notion of a moral “crusade” against crack cocaine, a drug that disproportionately harmed black communities, inspired white Evangelicals and working and middle-class Americans to “align themselves with a moral vision” to protect their blessed country (Roof, 2009, p. 289; see also, Elwood, 1995). Through the implementation of race and religion-based appeals, Reagan juxtaposed white morality and saviorhood with black criminalization (Lassiter, 2015), thereby “othering” people of color as enemies while

uplifting whiteness manifested in traditional, American values such as individualism and Evangelicalism to resist using drugs.

Scholars theorize black Americans constitute a “pool of surplus...inchoate criminals in the mind of the white psyche” which explains why policy makers anticipated the war on drugs would disproportionately affect the black community (Nunn, 2002, p. 385). The metaphor of fighting drugs as one does a war relies upon the perception of “a threatening other...waiting for a chance to destroy America’s freedom (Elwood, 1995, p. 96). Because crack was introduced first in heavily populated urban areas, where many people of color got trapped as white Americans moved to the suburbs to avoid integrating (Rothstein, 2017), the first image many white Americans conjure when thinking of a crack user is a black person (Hendricks & Wilson, 2013). Framing the fight against drug abuse as a domestic war outgroups black Americans and justifies harm against this targeted group as necessary to defending the country (Ivie, 1974). This rhetoric reinforces earlier narratives resisting the protection of black people and blaming them for economic instability and social disorder in an attempt to sympathize with and gain the majority of the white vote.

In 1988, following in the footsteps of Reagan, George H.W. Bush launched one of the most aggressively racialized campaigns in presidential history. Relying on old stereotypes that survived the evolution of the Southern Strategy, Bush released an attack ad criticizing his opponent, Governor Michael Dukakis, for allowing prisoners with life sentences to have weekend passes away from prison. The ad flashes a grainy mug shot of a black man named Willie Horton, who killed a young man and raped his girlfriend when he was released one weekend (National Security PAC, 2008). The strategy employed generalizes the actions of one man, leaving out the effects of the reform that did not end in

a worst-case scenario. The ad also highlighted George H.W. Bush's support for the death penalty, linking Dukakis' opposition with the outcome of the Willie Horton case and implying Dukakis was "weak on crime". This strategy, of appearing tough on racialized depictions of crime, was used as a last resort because voter support was dwindling. Support rose for Bush after the Willie Horton ad was released to the public. (Haney Lopez, 2013). The racial subtext of the ad generalized black men by recycling a trope that white people should protect their families from black murderers and rapists. There is a deep history of black men being portrayed as sexually predatory beasts, for example Emmett Till and the Scottsboro Boys, or the Central Park Five, all of whom were falsely convicted or brutally killed by vigilantes, as was the case for Emmett Till who was tortured to death for glancing at a white woman (Duru, 2003; Goldsby, 1996). The Willie Horton ad is a reminder of this historical connection as it was used by the Bush administration to equate violence and criminality with black skin.

As president, George H.W. Bush continued this racially oppressive narrative by supporting Ronald Reagan's efforts in the war on crack cocaine. In a televised address Bush cited personal responsibility as the cause of substance abuse contributing to disorder in America, placing blame upon "everyone who uses drugs, sells drugs, or looks the other way" (Elwood, 1995, p. 103). Bush clarified he was not speaking to all of America however, stating "nowhere is it worse than in our public housing projects" (Elwood, 1995, p. 104), a space occupied by many black Americans who are disproportionately impoverished from the effects of housing segregation (Rothstein, 2017). Bush states explicitly what Reagan implied through code words, suggesting black Americans should be held accountable for their actions: "If impoverished people who live in projects cannot

master their surroundings and eliminate drugs...then they are the drug war enemies who deserve a miserable existence or the punishment the law provides” (Elwood, 1995, p. 104).

Removing culpability from institutions, Bush extended the blame to immigrants, citing foreign nations such as Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru as the source of these drug addictions, and requesting working- and middle-class Americans to unite and resist their forces (Elwood, 1995). The out-grouping of minorities and foreigners taps into racial prejudices that strengthen white solidarity (DiAngelo, 2018). Copying language from Nixon, Bush outgroups black people and foreigners as drug and gang affiliated criminals, insisting innocent (white) Americans have the right to safety in their neighborhoods. Reagan’s rhetoric is also utilized when he refers to law enforcement officers as defending America against those who sell drugs (U.S. Information Agency, 1982). Bush sends a warning that those affiliated with crack should be careful, as the response to drug use or distribution will be harshly punished. Under Bush’s presidency a pattern of out-grouping people of color and elevating the role of state agents to intervene as a necessary response to crime was strengthened. This strategy eventually limited the ability of liberals and leftists to operate the political sphere without adopting “tough on crime” rhetoric.

Contradictory Appeals

Recognizing America's dissatisfaction with George H.W. Bush, a president revered as lacking empathy for the middle- and working- classes, Bill Clinton enticed voters with conservative values usually employed by Republican candidates (Rae, 1994). Clinton took advantage of his recognition as a working-class populist and a devout Southern Baptist, the largest group of Evangelical Protestants in the U.S. (Fahmy, 2020). He utilized subtle religious symbolism, urging Americans to join his “New Covenant” to build a better

democracy that would benefit all people (Roof, 2009, p. 292). The title of his 1992 campaign ad was “Hope”, the name of his small Arkansas hometown where he was raised by “income limited grandparents”. With a vision to restore the American dream, the ad implied hard work ethic was the sole contributor to Clinton’s success and that everyone would have a fair shot at life under his leadership (Heath, 2020). Personal responsibility was also exemplified in policies with racial overtones. Clinton was a longtime supporter of the death penalty, talked punitively about crime reform (Tata & Hutton, 2002), and stressed the necessity for welfare reform while campaigning “extensively in white suburbs” (Piliawsky, 1994, p. 2). He impressed Reagan Democrats with his rejection of government assistance, reinforcing the conservative ideology of personal responsibility. With the economy in a downward spiral at the end of Bush’s presidency, Clinton took the election. Though the majority of white voters remained loyal to the Republican party, with 41% going to Bush and 39% to Clinton, the distribution was closer than it had been in decades (Haney Lopez, 2013). Conjoining race appeals with a populist concern for the values of white middle- and working-class Americans, Clinton introduced “tough on crime” rhetoric to the Democratic party, thereby shifting the progressive ideologies once shaping the party to reflect more centrist views (Piliawsky, 1994).

In 1992, Clinton made an appearance on the *Arsenio Hall Show*, where he played the saxophone (Schultz, 2004) and was interviewed by the host, who is a black man. (Warriner, 2016). Some scholars propose Clinton’s appearance was an attempt to express solidarity with the black community (Haney Lopez, 2013) and younger viewers (Schultz, 2004), as he discussed the L.A. riots and admitted to having smoked a joint once. When asked about the consequences of racism, Clinton said black Americans do not vote because

they do not feel like they belong in the community, presumably the white community, and they do not work because they know they can make money selling drugs (Warriner, 2016). Though trying to emit understanding, Clinton outgroups and generalizes black Americans with these statements. Additionally, Clinton acknowledged that poor and working-class whites do not integrate with black people the way elite classes have access to, resulting in distance and misunderstanding (Warriner, 2016). Clinton dances around the concept of systemic racism, referring to black suffering as “urban” problems. His hesitation to address structural issues compared to Arsenio Hall’s explicit mention of racism (Warriner, 2016) may signal discomfort resulting from white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). This inability to discuss civil rights struggles openly has been made more difficult by conservative politicians, many of whom deem any such talk as racist in itself (Haney Lopez, 2013). Whether Clinton was avoiding the explicit mention of skin color to protect himself from conservative backlash, to maintain a good standing with white voters sensitive to the topic of race, or to protect himself from misspeaking on a subject he is uncomfortable with, is unknown. Regardless, it was made clear Clinton’s efforts to appeal to black voters were disingenuous, as he promoted policies to white voters, like ridding the state of Welfare (Piliawsky, 1994), that opposed the ideals he expressed in conversation with Hall. However, because black Americans have been forced to remain loyal to Democratic politicians as a result of Republican neglect and malice (Piliawsky, 1994), Clinton’s betrayal did not cost him the black vote. He took 83% of black voters, leaving only 10% to H.W. Bush in 1992 (Roper Center, 1992).

As re-election neared, relating to the black voting population became unimportant to Clinton. He signed the 1994 crime bill, signaling to states that had already adopted

tougher sentencing standards prior to the crime bill (Sabol & Johnson, 2020) that the Clinton Administration supported the carceral state. Even as it became clear that black Americans were disproportionately targeted by punitive sanctions on a local and national scale (Mauer & Huling, 1995), Clinton swept 84% of the black vote in the 96' election (Roper Center, 1996). Reenacting techniques employed by Nancy and Ronald Reagan, Clinton and his first lady exploited black Americans for political gain. Hillary Clinton outgrouped young, black youths associated with gangs and drugs, referring to them as “these people” and “super predators” that lacked in conscience and empathy (C-Span, 2016, 1:05-1:18). Prescribing dehumanizing characteristics to this demographic, whose violence was only a reaction to social stratification (Richie, 2012), further normalizes harm against young, black people, many of whom had no connections with crime. This is especially unfortunate as Republicans' intolerance for civil rights progress has trapped racial minorities into voting for Democrats in every election since 1964, thereby forcing them to choose the lesser of two evils rather than a candidate that represents their interests (Pilawsky, 1994).

Research notes that framing crime within the context of an “inner city”, language that implicitly evokes images of poor, black people (like the super predator stereotype) confirms a pre-existing relationship between a policy and a certain group (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005). By Clinton's presidency, racial othering in politics was commonplace. As a result, many white Americans have trouble empathizing with stereotyped versions of nonwhite individuals, whom they view as unrelatable (Cikara et al., 2011). Most white people are comfortable with the existing social order (DiAngelo, 2018), where societal institutions have deemed it necessary to heavily police the lives of black and Latino boys

(Rios, 2011). Due to white dominance, and the prevalence of racially biased “tough on crime” rhetoric in politics (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005), white Americans have come to view cracking down on crime not as a symbol of racial power dynamics within our political system, but a symbol of fighting uncontrollable demons or animals, as some state sponsored campaigns have depicted felons (Caldwell & Caldwell, 2001). Clinton’s campaign was aimed at gaining back the support of Democrats high in racial resentment who may have defected to Reagan’s party in the 1980s by distancing himself from liberalism (Wetts & Willer, 2019). This reveals the power of the Southern Strategy to sway Democratic identifying voters as well. As George Wallace once stated after rallying in the North “the whole United States is Southern!” meaning the entire country is susceptible to racism (Payne, 2004, p. 91).

Due to the impact of chattel slavery and continuous Civil Rights struggles, racially exclusive politics have mainly served to separate white and black issues, thereby dividing the white vote into liberal elites, who sometimes serve as allies, and white, working and middle class people who implicitly (or explicitly) oppose black advancement (Anderson, 2016). However, as the United States’ population has grown increasingly diverse, appeals rejecting racial and religious minorities such as Mexican immigrants or Arab Muslims have become more prevalent (Peek, 2011). Religious rhetoric has proven especially harmful to people of color that practice religions outside of Christianity (Alshrari, 2020), as America inserts its white, Evangelical dominance into foreign and domestic policy. Politicians such as George W. Bush have presented American religious values as ideal and synonymous with freedom and goodness, thereby disparaging religions with different conceptions of morality and harming the people that comprise these cultures (Roof, 2009).

Bush came to represent a “prophetic spokesman for God” to his religious supporters, as he continually appealed to Christianity in speeches addressing the public (Ashbee, 2006, p. 46). George W. Bush is considered the most religious president in American history. In 2001 the Bush administration granted permission for religious non-governmental organizations to receive federal funding, solidifying his status as a Christian president and America as an Evangelical nation (Bernstein, 2007). This combined with his reputation as a moral family man, deserving of wealth, caused many white, working class people to vote for him over John Kerry, who in comparison was perceived as immoral and more likely to increase taxes (Prasad et al., 2009). Bush’s status as a religious savior was elevated in the aftermath of 9-11, a crisis many Americans interpreted as a war waged between Christianity and Islam (Tessler, 2003). This falsehood was exacerbated by conservative media outlets, such as Fox News, who demonized university curriculums that offered information about Islam to incoming freshmen in an effort to make them more culturally aware after the national disaster. Talk show host Bill O’Reilly called Islam “our enemy’s religion” and said providing information about Islam in schools was comparative to teaching Mein Kampf in 1941 (Tessler, 2003, p. 175). The reach of xenophobic media narratives buttressed by Bush’s known affiliations with Christianity once again confirmed white dominance and Evangelicalism as normative in American society.

With an enemy to target, Bush’s rhetoric grew harshly nationalistic as his administration responded to the attacks by waging a war against Iraq and Afghanistan. In a speech Bush declared “free people will set the course of history”, implying non-Christian nations are lesser than and in need of a savior (Roof, 2009, p. 295). This extended the reach of America’s religious and racial dominance internationally. In moments of national crisis

especially, Americans' unconscious fears of minorities are exposed through the repurposing of medieval narratives that equate whiteness with morality and blackness or foreignness as an evil to be combated against (Gorski, 2019). As the "War on Terror" prevailed, an element of racial othering reappeared in Bush's rhetoric as he dictated which nations were "with" or "against" us. This created a discourse of civilization versus savagery as U.S. soldiers invaded the Middle East with imperialist intentions to spread Democracy (Lee, 2016). The 9-11 attacks exposed a sensitivity to foreign aggression and invasion most countries are not privileged with being unfamiliar with. This derives from Americans' sense of "chosenness" connected to Evangelical Protestant individualism (Roof, 2009, p. 295). Many Americans felt 9-11 was not only an attack on our soil, but on the foundation of our country's morals.

This had a harsh impact on American people of color perceived to be Islamic, especially because Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States (Alshrari, 2020). Scholars argue The Patriot Act, signed into law on October 26, 2001, violated people of color's constitutional rights. Under this law, innocent Muslim Americans could be deported for accidentally associating with groups that were perceived as a potential terrorist threat, leaving a lot of discretion to national security officers whose decisions relied heavily on stereotyping (Cole and Dempsey, 2002). Additionally, hate crimes against "Muslim-looking groups" increased unprecedentedly after 9-11, and rise again every year on the anniversary of the attacks (Ahmad, 2004, 1261). Bush's failure to encourage the protection of Muslim Americans juxtaposed with the elevation of Americanness as a necessary force to fight evil in the Middle East has caused extreme destruction to specific religious and racial groups within the United States. Bush followed the strategies of Nixon,

Reagan, and H.W. by waging a moral “war” against a targeted group. As Bush uplifted whiteness in the aftermath of a national crisis, it became clear his status as a religious savior only applied to a specific demographic of white, Evangelical Americans.

Summary of Racial Appeals

The Southern Strategy established a pattern of utilizing racially biased appeals, strengthened in the presence of Evangelical and individualistic rhetoric, for the sake of political gain. When racial integration was still in question, politicians such as George Wallace and Barry Goldwater voted against the Civil Rights Act and called for segregation to signal their conservatism to white, working class voters (Carter, 1996; Maxwell & Shields, 2019). When society deemed integration acceptable, the strategy evolved (McConahay, 1986). Conservative leaning politicians through the 60s, 70s, and 80s began alluding to race by way of coded language and dog whistles, implicitly conjuring stereotypes that provoke white fear or loathing for minority groups and associated liberals (Inwood, 2015). However, politicians had to be careful not to disclose their racism explicitly, so as not to isolate white voters who thought of themselves as supportive of racial equity (Ditonto, et al., 2013). For instance, when Ronald Reagan first alluded to welfare recipients as “strapping young bucks”, the liberal public expressed discomfort because the allusion to black men was blatant (Haney Lopez, 2013, p. 59). In future speeches, Reagan changed his phrasing to “young fellows” to sound more race neutral and avoid the question of his stance on civil rights (Haney Lopez, 2013, p. 59). Unfortunately for his campaign, this dog whistle may not have been heard by those less susceptible to racial cueing.

When politician's allusions to race were scrutinized by media outlets and opposers, racial overtones were denied. Denying racism operates within a good/bad binary, wherein racism is conceptualized as individual acts of cruelty against people of color (DiAngelo, 2018). This narrative, that only "bad" people who openly dislike people of color can be racist, ignores the systemic implications of race talk. Reagan, H.W. Bush, and Clinton utilized this binary to frame themselves as representative of all people, while subtly presenting concerns for black Americans' involvement with crime and their reliance on government money as the pinnacles of their platforms. While Bush and Reagan continued these conservative narratives expectantly, the impact of Clinton's presidency was uniquely harmful to people of color. Clinton's desire to win president relied upon appealing to the white, working class while attempting to appear desirable to a historically loyal majority of black Americans (Piliawsky, 1994). George W. Bush extended harm to people of color as he waged a literal war against Middle Easterners, which impacted Americans perceived to be Muslim domestically. These efforts however, are deemed necessary, especially in times of crisis when politicians feel it necessary to wage moral wars or "crusades" against racial and religious minorities. A political reliance on "tough on crime" rhetoric and an opposition to welfare, instilled by early conservatives utilizing the Southern Strategy, has forced the Democratic party to accept racially moderate positions to remain in the mainstream. This shift in politics harms racial and cultural progress by upholding white standards of comfort (DiAngelo, 2018) and stigmatizes the lives of people of color to appeal to a recognized silent majority of white, working class Americans that dominate the voting body (Haney Lopez, 2013).

POLITICAL APPEALS IN A POST RACIAL SOCIETY

While many white conservatives perceived the election of the first black president as a threat to the social hierarchy, where black subordination is necessary to the success of whites (Knowles, Lowery, & Schaumberg, 2009), media outlets and politicians utilized Barack Obama's win to symbolize the emergence of a post-racial society (Mazama, 2007). Obama challenged the status quo image of American presidents. If a black man born to an immigrant father could be president, *anyone* could. His win, that heavily relied on voters of all races (Pew Research Center, 2020) resulted in a nationwide celebration for supporters. Media coverage centered heavily on mixed race audiences crying, clapping, and cheering together at the pronouncement of the election results (CBS, 2008; Edge, 2010). Obama's distance from the mass reality of people of color was not questioned by his supporters when he took office in 2009. Neither was the notion that the United States had moved past the impact of slavery and civil rights struggles (Edge, 2010). The concept of a post-racial America, rid of racial conflict, was largely accepted by the voting public (Parks & Hughey, 2011). Media outlets emphasized Obama's potential to impact all Americans, signaling to the left the country had finally achieved colorblind integration, while simultaneously inciting fear in the far right that the fate of white America was in the hands of a racial other with the potential to dismantle American values (Hughey, 2014). Obama's hesitance to achieve racial strides for the black community and his willingness to overlook individual instances of racism while identifying as an African American leader disillusioned many supporters. More harmful however, was the conservative backlash in the aftermath of his presidency that reinvigorated the white, working class who were concerned black leadership would upend American traditionalism (Haney Lopez, 2013).

Though the conception of a post-racial society emerged before 2008 (Mazama, 2007), Barack Obama's win convinced many not previously persuaded that civil rights efforts had achieved their end (Zevnik, 2017). Though white liberals were the main proprietors of this claim, Zevnik (2017) argues this observation is rooted in conservative ideology and is a fantasy that ignores the common experiences of nonwhite Americans whose needs have been largely neglected and whose voices have been silenced in a white dominated political sphere (Alexander, 2010; Richie, 2012; Rothstein, 2017). In his concession speech, John McCain congratulated Obama, framing his opponent's victory as the beginning of a post-racial era in which members of all races have the same opportunity to succeed through dedication and hard work (Zevnik, 2017). Obama himself supported this same vision of colorblind achievement before the launch of his campaign, as well as throughout his presidency.

A prototype of black exceptionalism, Obama attended Columbia University followed by Harvard for post-graduate studies where he served as the first African American president of the Harvard Law Review (Atwater, 2007). DiAngelo (2018) states "narratives of racial exceptionalism (such as Jackie Robinson, Barack Obama, etc.) obscure the reality of ongoing institutional white control while reinforcing the ideologies of individualism and meritocracy" (p. 26). Obama's effort to group white and nonwhite people as more alike than different with values that apply to people of all races, religions, regions, and classes (Obama, 2009) operates under a colorblind lens exclusive to the most privileged members of society. The experiences of average black Americans, many of whom are not born to two collegiately educated parents as is true for Barack Obama, are not taken into consideration as he attributes his belief in core American values such as self-

reliance, discipline, and hard work as the indicators of his success (Obama, 2009). His emphasis on personal responsibility reflects values of white dominance that have served to oppress minorities with unequal access to resources. In *The Audacity of Hope* Obama states, “When I look at what past generations of minorities have had to overcome, I am optimistic about the ability of this next generation to continue their advance into the economic mainstream” (Marable & Clarke, 2009, p. 143), ignoring institutional discrimination restraining many people of color from achieving financial stability equal to whites (Alexander, 2010; Haney Lopez, 2013; Rothstein, 2017).

Obama’s pursuit of the American dream departed from the priorities of well-known black politicians, such as Jesse Jackson or Shirley Chisholm, whose campaigns were centralized around racial equality. This had a profound impact on black Americans. Even those aware of systemic inequity de-emphasized the impact racism would have on future opportunities as a result of Obama’s presidency (Reed & Louis, 2009). This may be attributed to a dual or double consciousness that rules black American’s conceptions of reality. In *The Souls of Black Folk* DuBois (1903) explains black Americans perceive reality partially through the lens of a black person, which is how they see themselves, and partially through the lens of how white society views them and forces them to adjust their behavior to fit these socialized standards. Most black people are aware institutional racism is an impediment to their success, as this has been ingrained in their upbringings. However, many black Americans are still likely to attribute their failures to personal motivation as the dominant society expects (Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007). This justification, strengthened by Obama’s emphasis on individualism, reflects the pervasiveness of white values socialized into the black American psyche (Welburn &

Pittman, 2011). Obama's presidency legitimized the idea that a post-racial era had emerged. This especially affected members of the black middle class who after 2008 further distanced themselves from impoverished black people and urged them to stop blaming "the man" for their hardships and take responsibility for their lives (Welburn & Pittman, 2011, p. 1). Obama's failure to differentiate the white and black experience in America and denounce institutional privileges afforded to whites maintained the existing social hierarchy and incited division in the black community.

As stated, Obama's attempts to lessen the impact of race on his campaign and during his presidency may have exemplified a hesitancy to disrupt the existing power structure (Dyson, 2016). Obama consistently avoided talking about race or deflected to issues unrelated to race, except in cases where the subject was inexorable (Zevnik, 2017). Scholars suggest his deliberate avoidance of racial rhetoric as a black president may have been an attempt to maintain the support of white elite and middle class voters (Haney Lopez, 2013) who are more comfortable when the topic of race is kept at a distance (Di Angelo, 2018). In fact, the admission of Obama's presidency as symbolic of a post-racial society may have served to soothe the guilt of many white liberals (Zevnik, 2017), though Obama never claimed this. In the Summer of 2009, Henry Louis Gates, a black professional and scholar, was arrested outside of his home by a white police officer who did not believe he lived there. This instance, only a few months after Obama's inaugural address, should have signaled America had yet to achieve racial equality (Smith, 2018). Yet, instead of starting a conversation about how excessive force is applied disproportionately to black men by the police, Obama chose to bring Gates and the white officer together to share a beer at the White House to alleviate tensions (Haney Lopez, 2013). Obama's efforts to

downplay the racial component of this interaction are a prime example of his allowance for white dominance to prevail in a “post-racial” America.

Another opportunity to bring attention to problematic racial dynamics arose in 2012 when Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by an armed civilian. During the aftermath of protests resulting from the shooting Obama called for “calm”, a “restoration of law and order”, and for protest violence to come to an end (Zevnik, 2017, p. 623). This narrative reiterates the conservative condemnation of civil rights protesting by earlier politicians such as Richard Nixon, whereby black rage at injustice is criminalized. During a televised address, Obama at least took the opportunity to acknowledge the existence of racial disparities in the justice system, stating Trayvon Martin could have been his son, and to briefly summarize the harsh history of institutional inequality that has forced many black Americans into poverty (Obama, 2013). However, Obama’s proposed solutions to these systemic failures reside within the existing structures that fail many nonwhite Americans, as he suggested cooperating with police departments and implementing social programs to get black boys more involved in their communities (as if this would have prevented the death of an innocent, unarmed teenager). Obama also cited troubling statistics that uphold the perception black people are more violent by emphasizing black on black crime is a larger problem and that Trayvon Martin was more likely to have been shot by another member of his race, without addressing the brutal history that led to this unfortunate reality (Richie, 2012). The president in this speech seems to tip-toe back and forth in an attempt to appease black and white audiences without diving too deeply into the concerns of either side. Barack Obama’s hesitancy to propose institutional changes and his condemnation of protestors resorting to violence reveal the influence of white control even upon a black

president. It should be noted that while Obama may have been attempting to maintain the support of white voters, he may have been attempting to avoid backlash from conservatives as has occurred when more radical black politicians such as Jesse Jackson have voiced their opinions on institutional racism (Haney Lopez, 2013). Approaching the presidency as a racial moderate may have been a safer move for the first black president, so as not to be characterized as a radical leftist attempting to dismantle the existing social structure.

However, even presenting as a racial moderate, Obama's inauguration was plagued by conservative backlash. Born in Hawaii to a black immigrant father, Obama was portrayed as a racial boogeyman with an upbringing unaligned with the cultural values usually exemplified by U.S. presidents (Atwater, 2007; Redlawsk, Tolbert, & Franko, 2010). Exacerbating this image was the widespread belief that Obama is Muslim (Hollander, 2010; Layman, Kalkan, & Green, 2014) despite his strict affiliations with Christianity (Atwater, 2007). Though Obama dismissed his image as a notable factor in his campaign (Zevnik, 2017), research notes that perceptions of race and religion heavily influenced voter behavior in the 2008 election (Ansolabehere, Persily, & Stewart, 2010). Many white voters were hesitant to trust a black man to succeed in office (Redlawsk et al., 2010). Voters high in implicit racial resentment chose a third party or abstained from voting in 2008, while voters high in explicit racial resentment voted for John McCain. Additionally, symbolic racism, which rejects the existence of discrimination and upholds the notion that black people violate American values, was the strongest predictor for white voters to vote against Obama in 2008 (Ditonto, et al., 2013).

Conservatives were quick to consider Obama's race a major influence in the 2008 election. They denied racism could exist under black leadership, advancing the post-racial

society theory and centering the needs of white Americans by warning that any civil rights movements after 2008 would be considered excessive and equated with “racial discord, demagoguery, and racism against white Americans,” (Edge, 2010, p. 428). These messages recycled aspects of black exceptionalism rhetoric, alluding that because a black man was able to achieve presidency, people of color could no longer use the excuse of race to explain their disproportionate misfortune. The denial of racial disadvantage is buttressed by a prevailing belief that anti-white bias is more prevalent than anti-black bias, and that reverse racism (which is non-existent) is on the rise (Norton & Sommers, 2011). Conservative influencers simultaneously pushed the idea that Obama’s race was the *only* considerable factor for voters. Talk show host Michael Savage referred to Obama as America’s first affirmative action president, stating that these programs unfairly disadvantage hardworking white people (Edge, 2010). Another conservative host, Rush Limbaugh, implied Obama’s race was the reason he was elected, downplaying his hard work and blaming the left’s “inability” to “say ‘no’ to a black man” (Edge, 2010, p. 433). Commentary such as this appeals to white, working class rage against black advancement (Anderson, 2016) that is believed to threaten the dominant social position of whites (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Historically, white anger has been misplaced as a result of voter manipulation caused by the implications of the Southern Strategy. Institutional de jure segregation pitted poor whites and minorities against each other for the same resources (Lepore, 2011; Rothstein, 2017). However, politicians scapegoated minorities as the cause of white, working- and middle-class economic struggles (Haney Lopez, 2013) instead of placing the blame deservedly on plutocrats who conservative politicians portray as the products of individualistic hard work and American exceptionalism (Littler, 2013). Conservative

narratives invoke fear that jobs will be lost and hard-earned money will be redistributed to less deserving members of society (Williams, 2017). This is why colorblind individualism is appealing to conservative whites whose experiences have privileged them to view the job market as an equal playing field for people of all colors and backgrounds. This error in thinking is only accessible to white privileged folks, as the effects of institutional racism are so pervasive they impact an individual's ability to compete for a job on the basis of having an "Anglicized" or "ethnic" sounding name (Watson, Appiah, & Thorton 2011). It is absurd for conservatives to promote the idea of an equal playing field within politics especially, as 45 out of 46 of elected American presidents are white. That alone presents a disparity worth noting.

While research notes black communities were not expecting much change under Obama's administration, black Americans became more optimistic of what they could achieve in their lifetimes (Zevnik, 2017). Unfortunately, the black community was deceived by the fantasy of a post-racial society as President Obama was depicted as an ape, thug, and terrorist among other explicitly racist images within the media (Joseph, 2011). Simultaneously, the image of Obama served to promote post-racialism within America, as left leaning outlets portrayed the president as a messiah, "whites' 'black best friend'", and as a mythical creature (Joseph, 2011, p. 389). These presentations enforce racist stereotypes that are harmful to black people on an individual level as white conceptions of blackness are dominated by media portrayals (Fujioka & Tan, 2009) Conversely, savior-like or otherworldly images depict Obama as a post-racial hero, however only under the condition that Obama transcends his own blackness as a symbol of racial equality (Joseph, 2011). These images and the animosity building around the impact of Obama as a black,

Democratic president may have caused more harm to the black community due to the backlash that occurred at the urging of the next president and his white, working class base of support.

POST-RACIAL DISILLUSIONMENT

Obama's portrayal as an elite Democrat and a racial and religious other, supportive of affirmative action and welfare, reinvigorated cultural tensions between liberals and working class, white voters. Backlash from conservative media outlets and politicians overtly opposed the symbolism of a black man in the White House and fueled a resurgence of old-fashioned conservatism throughout the nation (Williamson, 2011). Even as Obama compromised and adopted the language and policies of Republican leaders to propel independent and moderate support for his incumbent campaign, members of the Republican party such as Mitch McConnell made it clear that their top priority was to keep Obama a one-term president (Street & DiMaggio, 2011). This rejection of Democratic leadership, even under the adoption of conservative ideologies as demonstrated by Obama's economic trade-offs with right leaning plutocrats helps explain the trap the Democratic party has found themselves in. It seems an unspoken rule that appeals to neo-liberal individualism, a moderate stance on race through the criminalization of protest or welfare, and some allusion to an Evangelical God must be present within a campaign to generate enough support to win an election. The hyper-partisan GOP has a history of deeming progressive Democratic candidates radical socialists to scare and anger white, working class voters (Street & DiMaggio, 2012). This leaves no room for radical social reforms that promote a secular, anti-racist agenda and may improve the economy for the demographic that opposes progressives the most.

The failures of John McCain and Mitt Romney to appeal to a white, working class base of voters forced a public perception that conservatism was on the decline, with Obama in the White House and Democrats filling seats in the house and senate (Inwood, 2018). However, the revitalization of decades-old conservative narratives, led by a refurbished coalition of Tea Party Republicans, was well underway when the Affordable Care Act was passed in 2010 (Williamson, Skocpol, & Coggin, 2011). The Tea Party, though falsely depicted as a grassroots backlash to mainstream conservatism or a group of independents sporting a new spin on libertarianism (Williamson et al., 2011) has an ideological foundation in Southern Strategist ideologies as deployed by Wallace, Goldwater, Nixon, and Reagan (Olson, 2008). Coated in the rhetoric of individualism, racial othering, and the protection of Evangelicalism and traditional American values, the Tea Party established their four fueling hatreds as welfare, undocumented immigrants, Arab Muslim terrorists, and Barack Obama (Lepore, 2011), who constituted “a perfect storm of these animosities” (Haney Lopez, 2013, p. 152). Though confirmed affiliations with the Tea Party are nationally low among voters, the spread of their ideologies has been mobilized through mainstream conservative media outlets such as Fox News (Williamson et al., 2011), the network with the highest ratings and the most viewers in the nation (Watson, 2020).

Research dismisses the widespread belief that the Tea Party is a threat to establishment Republicans, as voting patterns on socio-economic policy issues do not differ between the groups, implying their distinctions are insignificant (Street & DiMaggio, 2012). Amidst a conservative rejection of political correctness dominating modern liberal discourse, politicians representing Tea Party ideals have found success stirring racial animus and painting progressive politicians as a threat to the economy. Their leaders and

the media influencers backing them have convinced working class Americans the federal government is stealing money from good workers and handing it out to individuals with a lack of self-discipline (Lepore, 2011), recycling logic from previous administrations. In response to Obama's second term, Tea Party protestors rallied and shouted "we want our country back" (Haney Lopez, 2013, p. 175), implying Obama's impact on the government is infiltrating the core values of America, perhaps turning our nation "black" (Stein & Allcorn, 2018). In this case, the Tea Party should not be interpreted as a threat to establishment Republicans, but as a revamping of the increasingly unpopular plutocratic priorities of the right, disguised as a populist grassroots movement of working class Americans concerned about the prosperity of moral values and a stable economy (Street & DiMaggio, 2012).

Donald Trump took advantage of the pervasive animosity towards President Obama and the historical relationship between plutocrats and the white, working class to gain support for his campaign. Trump's emergence into politics as a wealthy businessman with Evangelical affiliations and an agenda serving traditional families and workers aligns with the criteria white, working class voters require presidential candidates to display to be considered "deserving" of their wealth and moral (Prasad et al., 2009, p. 251). Additionally, Trump approached candidacy as an outsider with no prior record in government or military service, unafraid to express contempt for cultural elites (Pierson, 2017) or to disrespect fellow Republicans, such as John McCain whose war hero status was publicly scrutinized by Trump during his campaign (Conway, Repke, & Houck, 2017). At first mention of running, Trump was condemned by Democrats and Republicans alike (Inwood, 2018). His purposeful distance from the Republicans is reminiscent of Barry Goldwater or Richard

Nixon's relationship with the party. Trump disregarded the advice of fellow politicians with a vision of reinvigorating the dying ideals of American conservatism (Mason, 2005). Prioritized on Trump's agenda was a hardened stance on immigration and criminal justice sanctions, both socio-political issues with racial undertones (Pierson, 2017). Trump's appeals diverged from the natural evolution of Southern Strategy based rhetoric, bringing back a blatant expression of racism unheard of since George Wallace and Barry Goldwater's segregationist stances. MAGA supporters enjoyed the lack of disregard for others' feelings in response to a growing acceptance of political correctness in the media (Theye & Melling, 2018). Trump voters relished in his "authenticity" and deemed him the most genuine candidate for speaking his mind fervently. This was exacerbated by his celebrity status prior to his political involvement and the use of social media as his main method of communication leading up to the 2016 election, which allowed many Americans to grow comfortable with Trump's presence in their daily lives (Theye & Melling, 2018). Trump's reliance on racial coding and his status as a known celebrity, having been a wealthy public figure for decades prior to his presidential run, made him the ideal conservative-populist candidate to grab the white, working class' attention.

Racial Codes and Dog Whistles

Despite Donald Trump's declaration throughout his first term and most notably at the final presidential debate in 2020 that he is the "least racist person in this room" (C-Span, 2020c, 1:37:49), his presidential success has relied upon a blend of racial and xenophobic dog whistles that uphold traditional conservatism and whiteness as ideal. Trump emerged into modern politics claiming responsibility as originator of the "birthing" conspiracy theory that questioned the legitimacy of Barack Obama's citizenship status

(Hughey, 2012) and led to the creation of rumors about Obama's religion (Stein & Allcorn, 2018). This tactic of racial othering, that was re-used when Trump rejected Kamala Harris' vice-presidential nomination in the 2020 election, denounces the credentials of black and brown politicians and constructs white politicians as more "American" and therefore more qualified to lead the country (Hughey, 2012). Trump's campaign is undeniably loaded with white supremacist ideals that initially fueled Tea Party Republicans' perceived loss of status under the presidency of a black Democrat leading up to the 2016 election (Mutz, 2018). Research reveals Donald Trump's success in 2016 was directly related to whites' perceived fears of status loss as a result of a changing racial demography that may cause nonwhite Americans to outnumber whites by the mid 2000's (Major, Blodorn, & Blascovich, 2018). Trump's campaign manager, KellyAnne Conway, urged Trump to inspire the white, working class in ways Republican presidential candidates John McCain and Mitt Romney failed to. Conway, with a background in anti-immigration policy and associations with pro-white conservative "fringe" groups, developed the "missing whites" theory, that Republicans should not attempt to appeal to minority voters but take advantage of white, working class "antipathies" towards people of color (Inwood, 2018, p. 590). This insight came to form the basis of Trump's tough stance on criminal justice reform and border control. His tactics, reminiscent of those employed by Southern Strategy conservatives are far from an anomaly, as the media may have made them out to be. Trump's reliance on racial cues through the demonization of welfare and protest is rather a copied strategy designed to incite fear and loathing in white voters, specifically those with working class conceptions of what is moral and deserved.

Politicians, both liberal and conservative, have utilized their stances on welfare to position themselves with working class white voters, who generally oppose government “handouts”, often because they do not understand what they entail (Williams, 2017). As a political issue, welfare programs have become so stigmatized that recipients of governmental assistance feel deep shame about receiving money. In the 70’s, two thirds of Americans who could not find stable employment but qualified for the program refused to use welfare because of this stigma and the stereotyping surrounding it (Bloch & Taylor, 2014). This perception of welfare prevails modernly. Throughout his campaign and only term in office, Trump voiced his plans to “repeal and replace Obamacare” with reforms that “expand choice” and are lower in cost. In front of a congressional, this announcement resulted in a standing ovation from Republicans and silence from Democrats, some of which gave an emphatic thumbs down to convey their disapproval (PBSNews Hour, 2017, 0:04-0:30). Scholars note the rigor exemplified by conservatives to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act is historically rare. Twenty-six states filed lawsuits to challenge the constitutionality of the ACA and nineteen states passed legislation rejecting aspects of the policy (Jones, Bradley, & Oberlander, 2014). The issue of welfare, specifically Obamacare was the pinnacle of polarization coming out of Barack Obama’s two terms. Some scholars theorize politicians such as Trump openly opposed Obamacare and worked to speedily reverse many of the actions President Obama took in office to symbolize their disapproval of a black man’s influence on politics (Stein & Allcorn, 2018). Here, Trump is not unique. Every conservative politician and some Democrats, like Bill Clinton, have alluded to welfare reforms to gain support. However, Trump’s resistance to Obamacare

appears directly linked to anti-blackness as well as a general rejection of state endorsed liberalism, as was the case for earlier Republicans like Nixon, Reagan, and Goldwater.

Anti-blackness was not the only form of racial demagoguery dominating Trump's campaign trails. Trump tapped into white working-class peoples' value of individualism, hard work, and an entitlement to the land Americans' killed for and conquered to occupy. Trump reflected the attitudes of his potential voters, threatening American families with the fear of Mexican murderers and rapists crossing an open border under Democratic control (Inwood, 2018). Supporters of the Tea Party were significantly more likely than other white people to favor harsher immigration controls (Maxwell & Parent, 2013). The same study found Tea Partiers associated what it means to be "fully American" with "whiteness", English-speaking abilities, and status as a natural born citizen. These aspects, as emphasized under the Trump campaign by his strong opposition to immigration on the Mexican border, are just as likely to appeal to overt racists as well as those who do not identify as racist (Ditonto, et al., 2013) but may not be aware of their racial privileges and therefore feel entitled to only encounter English speaking, white passing Americans (DiAngelo, 2018). This anti-immigrant agenda was put on display at the Republican National Convention in 2020, confirming the Trump administration's commitment to white America as a priority. Attorney general Daniel Cameron informed the audience that Democrats "promise more to illegal immigrants than to you" (the American people) in defense of Donald Trump as president (C-Span, 2020b, 1:58:20-2:04:41). A commitment to American individualism is exemplified through the rejection of illegal immigration and the tokenization of legal immigrants. Trump's own wife Melania stressed "hard work and determination" earned her a green card (C-Span, 2020b, 2:13:20-2:39:07), not

acknowledging her privilege over Mexican Americans, who are targeted disproportionately by border patrollers whose stereotyping is justified to keep our nation safe (Durán, 2009).

Trump's ability to reach Latino voters, despite his inflammatory comments towards individuals immigrating from Mexico, surprised many scholars. The percentage of Latino voters in 2016 was estimated to be just short of 30% of all votes for Trump (Corral & Leal, 2020). Research reveals political conservatism in Latino voters may be directly tied to their high associations with Evangelical religion, with around 68% of Latinos confirming that religion is very important to them (McKenzie & Rouse, 2013). Latinos' tendencies to vote conservative, despite blatantly racist appeals being utilized to criminalize immigration, may reflect a desired proximity to whiteness, which is a result of white supremacy driving black and Latino individuals to feel in competition for resources in marginalized communities (McClain, Johnson Carew, Walton, & Watts, 2008). Trump's stereotyping of immigrants as "job stealers" combined with a white, working class tendency to idolize plutocratic businessmen they view as the creators of jobs (Walley, 2017), led to a largescale allowance of racist speech as a form of public spectacle (Kellner, 2016). These appeals not only uphold systemic inequities that portray whiteness as superior and politically relevant but may pit members of the same ethnicity against each other.

The most obvious of Trump's coded appeals is his campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" and the updated version applied to his incumbent campaign "Keep America Great Again". Because these statements do not contend a comparative period of time where America was in fact great, scholars have assumed this is a response to the Tea Party's urging to get their country back from Obama and the "radical left" (Lepore, 2011), despite Barack Obama's presentation as a political moderate. Factor in this campaign

slogan is not original but a derivative of Ronald Reagan's 1980 slogan "Let's Make America Great Again" (Huber, 2016), and it becomes clear the vision of America Donald Trump was campaigning to alter does not include the needs of those benefiting from the Obama administration or people of color whose lives depend on consistent racial progress. Trump's loyalty to the white, working class buttressed by a devotion to Evangelicalism and hard work reaffirms "Americanism" applies strictly to white leaders and their loyal followers (Blum et al., 2009).

Protecting Whiteness

Donald Trump and his supporters centralized individualism and a fear of economic and moral instability to justify their racial animus. Trump's willingness to "other" racial and religious minorities represented a perception many voters held that Trump was defending America's Christian heritage and values (Whitehead, Perry, & Baker, 2018). For instance, white Trump supporters were significantly more likely than whites who voted for other candidates to believe President Obama is Muslim (Maxwell & Parent, 2013), which deterred many voters from supporting him in 2008 (Ansolabehere et al., 2010). Additional research reveals voters who chose Trump in 2016 scored high in racial resentment and identified as conservative or independent, Evangelical, and held the opinion black people had too much to say in the outlook of politics (Chevigny, 2003). This summarizes the opinions of a large demographic of Trump supporters and demonstrates that these individuals' political behavior is shaped by their opinions on religion and issues that have been racialized such as crime reform, government assistance, and border control.

This thesis argues white, working class people generally view civil rights movements as disruptive and social welfare as unnecessary and rejective of their values

and religious beliefs. The opposition of welfare and the fear of crime portrayed as “black” issues in white dominated politics is dangerous as it stereotypes black people and makes their lives more unsafe (Fujioka, 2005). The more a racial group is “othered” the more their life and wellbeing is at risk. This was revealed as hate crimes upsurged along Trump’s 2016 campaign trail, resulting in over two dozen instances of violence committed against people of color by self-proclaimed white supremacists (Inwood, 2018). Because individuals in racial solidarity find it difficult to empathize with members of an outgroup, it becomes easy to disregard them (Cikara et al., 2011). White solidarity is taken to extremes when aspects of Evangelical religion are associated with a politician, as was exemplified in George W. Bush’s presidency. This section explains how Trump used his role as a moral white savior to reject the needs of non-dominant religious and racial groups and polarize our country’s political scene to unprecedented extremes.

One would think Trump’s usage of overtly racist and xenophobic language may have driven supporters away leading up to the 2020 election, as occurred in the campaigns of George Wallace and Barry Goldwater. However, research indicates Trump’s political incorrectness may have been the factor that contributed to his perceived success (Schneiker, 2020), as 55% of white Americans without college degrees approved of Trump’s first term (University, 2017). Scholars suggest his loyal base of support is built upon Trump’s status as a hero or savior of white ethnonationalism in an age of political correctness transforming America into a multicultural force many white, working class people are afraid of or express anger towards (Inwood, 2018). His tactic of racial “othering” deployed through incessant stereotyping and the attachment of definitive articles to minority groups in speech (ie. “the blacks”, “the Mexicans”) have elevated levels of white

nationalism (Gorski, 2019). This is especially prevalent in white, working class and white, Evangelical Protestant demographics. Working and middle class Americans who feel excluded from the political scene felt validated by Trump, who continually applauded their hard work and felt reassured by his promise to create jobs, as being employed is central to many working class Americans' moral identities (Lamont, 2018). Presenting as a populist, Trump dominated the white, working class demographic, though his agenda that benefited large corporations and wealthy families and had the potential of devastating rural and moderate-income families that supported him (Pierson, 2017). Keeping his plutocratic intentions hidden, voters were swept away by Trump's charisma and declarations to protect morality, especially as he convinced supporters the heart of America was in a situation of crisis due to Democratic influence (Shneiker, 2020). Reminding audiences of his status as a political outsider, Trump presented himself as a savior of anti-elitist traditionalism representative of "the truth" to elevate his campaign into the mainstream (Schneiker, 2020, p. 868).

White, working class Evangelicals felt their values and religious convictions were rejected by Barack and Michelle Obama in the White House (Parker & Barreto 2014) and that Trump as president would protect Christianity, even though Donald Trump is less religious than the Obama's (Marti, 2019), who regularly attend a Christian service (Atwater, 2007). This phenomenon demonstrates religion through the lens of whiteness, which excludes other groups, as white Christianity has historically operated under the assumption white is superior and directly tied to morality (Blum et al., 2009). This phenomenon, of uplifting whiteness and associating white values such as individualism with morality and the protestations of people of color, immigrants, and members of non-

dominant religions as lesser than was demonstrated wholeheartedly at the Republican National Convention in 2020. Former NFL player Hershel Walker, who is a black man, was tokenized to oppose the Black Lives Matter movement. His opposition to BLM was ridden with religious intentions, as Walker stated, “I pray to God [Trump] gets four more years” (C-Span, 2020a, 49:28-52:21). Ohio representative Jim Jordan contrasted civil rights with religion in an effort to demonize democrats whom he argued “won’t let you go to church but will let you protest” and “won’t let you work but will let you riot” (C-Span, 2020a, 46:22-49:20). Mike Pompeo assured white, working class voters they would be safe to live, work, and worship if Trump was re-elected and that communist spies would be sent back to China (C-Span, 2020b, 49:28-52:21). These instances, of whiteness being equated with Christian religiosity and blackness or foreignness with crime and disorder appeal strongly to white voters who bond over similar values and economic challenges they view as unique to their culture (Williams, 2017).

Religious support for Donald Trump strengthened his status as a “political messiah” as he juxtaposed golden-age nostalgia, applying strictly to whiteness, with the bloodshed of Muslim terrorists and the purification of American lands from illegal Mexican immigrants banned from entry by a border wall (Gorski, 2019, p. 10). 72% of white, Evangelical Protestants reported voting for Donald Trump in 2020. This is an extremely influential voting bloc, comprising 44% of all voters in the United States (Smith, 2020). While President Obama’s campaign operated on promises of “hope and change”, the unofficial themes of Trump’s campaign appeared to be “fear and decline” leaving voters desperate for a force of change, especially as Evangelical supporters expressed their view that America is going down the wrong path (Gorski, 2019, p. 7-8). For white, working class

voters, many of whom identify with Evangelical ideologies, Trump became a symbol of defense against “non-Americanness” (Schneiker, 2020). Trump manipulated this demographics’ devotion to national pride, convincing America it needed saving and that Trump alone could speak as their voice and restore the faith of America singlehandedly (Gorski, 2019).

As election day neared in 2020, it became clear Trump’s MAGA campaign had transformed into a direct response to Black Lives Matter protestors, exposing police brutality and calling for an end to systemic racism. As president, Donald Trump has repeatedly referred to Black Lives Matter as a Marxist organization. Trump has claimed the name of the organization is racist, and that the mission of the organization is to incite division and “fry pigs” [the police] like bacon” (Trump, 2020, 0:04-0:24). Reiterating this quote as representative of BLM’s purpose on multiple new outlets as well as at the 2020 Debate minimizes the mission of the organization and portrays everyone involved as violent. Further, when Trump sides with the police over civil rights protestors, he affirms the agenda of “blue lives matter” and “all lives matter” supporters is more important, and that the collective victimhood they have experienced is worse or comparable to people of color (Solomon, Kaplan, & Hancock, 2019), which is far from the truth. Trump’s siding with police over protestors is typical of Southern Strategy politicians, whose emphasis on law and order appeals to an individualistic white, working class (Hammerback, 1972; Haney Lopez, 2013). This rhetoric justifies violence against people of color, thereby making their lives more unsafe, while upholding the “goodness” of white backlash to protesting which is rooted in Evangelical beliefs that value authoritarianism, as is displayed

when the police act out their power against people of color and a white, Christian president like Trump deems their actions more “American” than protesting.

“Making America Great Again” is not an unachievable goal under the control of the institutions that currently rule the United States. Trump’s rhetoric is nothing more than a revitalized Southern Strategy taken to an extreme, which many scholars argue was the direct result of backlash faced from Barack Obama’s presidency, whom white, working class Americans viewed as an unamerican “other” (Walley, 2017). Pre-existing white supremacy fueled Trump’s campaign. Trump most likely only capitalized on the exploitation of people of color, in the same avenue of thinking as George Wallace, to elevate himself to a position of political power fueled by narcissism (Ashcroft, 2016). Nonetheless, Trump’s attempts to preserve white, working class values and morality as the pinnacle of policy concerns upholds institutional racism that disproportionately affects people of color. His promise to erase Obamacare, and further any action taken by Obama’s administration, symbolizes the cleansing of blackness forced upon white supremacist America by a black Democratic leader (Stein & Allcorn, 2018). His attempts to criminalize immigrant families, Muslim “terrorists”, and nationwide Black Lives Matter protests maintains a commitment to white dominance where white values are uplifted and Donald Trump is the savior, alike a God, upholding what is dear to the white, working class: hard-work and following the law. Thus to “Keep America Great Again” is to shield America from any further association with black leadership that may infiltrate white comfort.

Implications of Political Appeals

Members of the white, working class may be convinced the plutocrats representing them have voter interests in mind. However, research reveals that a median majority of

voter's interests were only accidentally upheld because this demographic's economic priorities overlap with those of the "deserving" rich. When working peoples' calls to action are separate from the wealthy, their needs are not met (Gilens & Page, 2014). This is because individual elites and corporations have considerable influence on public policy, whereas the general public has little to none (Goss, 2016). However, politicians lead voters to believe they have them in their best interests for the sake of political gain. Many of the politicians mentioned in this paper sacrificed or compromised their party's views for the sake of political advancement. For instance, Bill Clinton's conservative policies contradicted his position as a Democratic candidate with a strong base of support from people of color. Scholars note it wasn't Clinton's genuineness, but his charm that led voters on both sides to walk away from meetings believing he'd agreed with them when he was simply acknowledging their point of view for the sake of gain (Greenstein, 1998). The most successful politicians do not provide overly detailed statements of their policies, but evoke larger themes like Ronald Reagan, deemed "notoriously lacking in information" though successful at conveying a discretely plutocratic agenda cloaked in populism (Greenstein, 1998, p. 180). Race based appeals buttressed by religion and individualism are consistently resorted to in politics because they arouse strong emotions connected to the amygdala, the brain's fear and aggression center. These neural responses are especially strong when politicians allude to an outgroup, such as black Americans when speaking to a group of whites (Rule, Freeman, Moran, Gabrieli, Adams, & Ambady, 2010), the group most appeals are directed towards. Utilizing appeals that invoke fear and loathing produce consequences for Americans as misinformation is spread and parties become increasingly polarized. The most dire consequence of politically manipulative rhetoric, however, is that

American people are harmed as language transforms into policy and taxpayer money is used to uphold systemic racism in the criminal justice system, and all for the sake of politicians set on maintaining their own power.

Contributing to Misinformation

Many Americans ignore policy when voting and watch televised appearances of candidates when deciding which way to lean. They rely on verbal cues given to them by politicians to choose their candidate (Fernandez-Vasquez & Somer-Topcu, 2019). This is why appeals that evoke emotions connected to people's values and morals are extremely influential on voter behavior (Rule et al., 2010). Research reveals white, working class support for Republicans is largely driven by misinformation (Prasad et al., 2009). An example is white voters' strong opposition to "welfare", portrayed as a black assistance program by politicians despite that fewer black people in the U.S. rely on welfare than white people (Gilens, 1996). Voters were similarly misled about the distribution of welfare programs, assuming food stamps and general assistance consumes more resources than programs without racialized stigma attached such as social security (Gilens, 1996). However, even if voters are informed, voting on values appears a more reliable predictor of party loyalty. Even when researchers provided solid proof that a Democratic candidate's policies presented better economic outcomes, participants reasoned they would still vote for the Republican candidate, as their morals were better aligned (Prasad et al., 2009). Additionally, voters are more likely to believe a lie from a candidate of their party than the opposing party. Research found that when presented the truth about a number of false statements made by a participant's preferred candidate, in this case Donald Trump, this did

not discourage participants from voting for that party (Swire, Berinsky, Lewandowsky, & Ecker, 2017).

Republican voters are especially susceptible to conspiracy theories and revealed a hidden preference for these claims over the truth, as opposed to self-identified Democrats (Bost & Prunier, 2013). Researchers suggest conspiracy theories, such as Obama's birthing rumor, are widely believed because they reinforce the views and values of a group while denouncing the views of their rivals (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Political conspiracies also provide a means for "normal" people to seek solace from a government they do not trust by providing justification for engaging in protest against "perceived abuses of governmental power" (Bost & Prunier, 2013), such as giving government handouts to Americans in poverty, which is processed as a loss by many members of the white, working class (Eibach & Keegan, 2006). Additionally, when members of the white, working class engage in individual protest by believing or spreading political rumors, this allows them a sense of greater empowerment against socio-political entities they do not have faith in (Bost & Prunier, 2013). This is why Reagan's war against drugs was so symbolically powerful, as it represented a crackdown on civil disorder middle Americans felt was out of their control by scapegoating a familiar outgroup: poor, black Americans. Reagan's popularity and the public's receptiveness to the war on drugs occurred despite the fact that drug use was actually declining during this period in time (Hawdon, 2001). These conditions produce the anger and fear felt by white, working class Americans that overshadow policy. Because the actions of politicians remain opaque to the American public, voters often support any position upholding their values or perceived beliefs about outgroups. As noted, Republican voters are especially susceptible to political

misinformation. This may result in a large portion of the white, working class (and other demographics) voting against their interests and accidentally allowing plutocratic politicians to advance agendas that only benefit the wealthy (Goss, 2016).

Political Polarization

In our political climate, individuals are highly critical of statements that counteract their pre-existing beliefs and are unlikely to open their minds to the opinions of a political party they oppose (Swire et al., 2017). This was demonstrated in a study that found both supporters and opponents of the death penalty rated information presented about the topic as more convincing if the information upheld their views. Additionally, when participants were presented with an article containing mixed information (that supported and opposed the death penalty simultaneously), the strength of their original opinions on the topic increased (Lord, Ross, & Lepper 1979). This means, when in the presence of people with opposing values, our faith in our own beliefs strengthens significantly, which can increase tensions. The way political facts are processed and legitimized is influenced by our pre-existing beliefs that we are unlikely to deviate from (Swire et al., 2017). Politicians are aware of this and focus their appeals on voters they view as the most valuable. For conservative politicians, this audience is white Americans, the voting majority.

Scholars argue that extreme political polarization as it exists modernly, where Democrats appear as left-leaning progressives and Republicans as right-leaning conservatives, can be attributed to the “changing nature of the white identity” that occurred in the post-civil rights era (Olson, 2008, p. 704). While Democrats had long been the party of “the people”, including racial minorities as well as the white, working class, the campaigns of Wallace, Goldwater, and Nixon reconstructed political parties so average

Americans would reject Democrats as radical leftists for supporting civil rights movements, which led to a Dixiecrat flight. This began with Wallace, defecting from the Democratic party to run as an independent on an anti-integration platform, then Goldwater who ran against LBJ's civil rights campaign and failed. Finally came Nixon who solidified a new collective white identity by forming a bond between white workers near the middle and bottom of the social hierarchy and the wealthiest Americans, both equally concerned about the rising power of minorities and the security of white dominance and financial stability. By oppressing minorities in policy through coded language that alludes whites will stay in power, class conflict was reduced by granting struggling white laborers advantages over nonwhite Americans (Greenberg, 1980). Historically white dominance has been normalized through the admittance of psychological wages, such as granting the right to vote to whites before black and brown Americans who were deemed second class (DuBois, 1935). Even the "most degraded" whites enjoy privileges unavailable to the "most esteemed" black American (Allen, 1995, p. 237), which upholds the bond between those in charge of capital and a small selection of white laborers granted these stratifying advantages (Olson, 2008). However, before about 1962, voters did not view the Democratic or Republican parties as more or less committed to civil rights (Edsall 1992; Rae, 1994). Whether or not Americans agree with the existing social racial structure and subsequent system of values is the very factor polarizing our modern political sphere.

The effects of extreme political polarization, as employed through strategies by media outlets and politicians spinning narratives of division, are more detrimental than wedging misunderstandings between family members, however. Political polarization has increased party loyalty to the point where most Americans dislike the opposing party more

than they like their own party, which contributes to straight ticket voting down the ballot (Abramowitz & Webster, 2018). Swing voting nowadays is largely nonexistent. This means people are less concerned with the policies their candidates represent than the values the opposing party represents, which most of the time are based upon political stereotypes unreflective of action (Olson, 2008). The purpose of constructing these “unambiguous” positions on cultural issues, such as civil rights, crime, and good American jobs, is to contribute to the establishment of a collective identity that strengthens one’s loyalty to their own party (Futrell & Simi, 2004, p. 25). Cultural issues are a determining factor for many voters. In the 2004 election for instance, George W. Bush’s appeals to religion and moral values were cited as major determining factors of his win over John Kerry (Knuckey, 2007).

The effects of polarizing “moral values”, which rely on white normativity to distinguish good from bad in America, cause tensions that may manifest themselves physically. These appeals are highly racialized and are known to incite political violence (Chyzh, Neiman, & Webb, 2019). The more polarized parties become, the stronger groups cling to their collective identities and are willing to use violence against outgroups. For instance, hate crimes reached a five year high during Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign trail, under ridden with white supremacist ideals. Over two dozen instances of violence against people of color occurred during or in the aftermath of Trump’s rallies, all of which were carried out by self-identifying white supremacists (Inwood, 2018). Some scholars argue the pervasiveness of racist energy and division has transformed modern American politics into a culture of war (Giroux, 2017). Attempts to expose this refurbishment of white supremacy, which politicians dictate and policies imitate, such as extreme police

surveillance in black communities, has propelled the Black Lives Matter movement to gain unprecedented momentum fighting for the rights of people of color (Rickford, 2016). Unfortunately, politicians and conservative media heads have utilized this backlash as they handled civil rights movements in past decades, portraying the movement as violent and the people comprising it as blameworthy and unamerican. This forces Americans to either align themselves with radical leftist ideologies or extreme conservatism, neither of which will gain much momentum if representatives cannot gain genuine understandings of each side's views and set aside their plutocratic agendas.

Upholding Systemic Racism

White people have always had a systemic advantage over people of color, seeing that nonwhite members of society were not fully allowed voting rights until 1965. W.E.B DuBois (1903) notes white people have always been entitled to courteous treatment in public spaces. The courts have been dependent on their votes and “treated them with leniency as to encourage lawlessness” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 700). Historically, white votes elected public officials, and white people controlled the media that “flattered poor whites” and “almost utterly ignored” black Americans except in cases of “crime and ridicule” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 701). Considering whites comprise the bulk of influential society, early politicians did not attempt to appeal to minority groups whose votes they did not need. As a result, political appeals have been primarily directed at the values and desires of white voters. Conversely, people of color have been denied political participation and prevented from achieving wealth equal to whites due to de jure and de facto segregation in institutions like the housing market and within the criminal justice system (Richie, 2012; Rothstein, 2017). However, when they have attempted to fight for their rights—by protesting or

through formal proceedings—they have been demonized, and their efforts resisted by law and order conservatives and their white, working class supporters (Haney Lopez, 2013). This pattern is so pervasive even president Barack Obama’s electoral success relied heavily on appealing to ideals that uphold white dominance (Mazama, 2007) in order to appear American enough to lead the country. This section summarizes the consequences of political appeals that serve white concerns about crime and morality and disadvantage people of color.

Opinions on race are inextricably linked to political behavior. When inequality was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, a drastic political realignment occurred. In 1964, when people of color were granted equal rights under the law, Barry Goldwater utilized his opposition to the Civil Rights Act to contribute to his platform of unbridled individualism and the protestation of minorities and their supporters as problematic (Hammerback, 1972). Nixon regurgitated this logic to form a new coalition founded on a white collective identity, then Reagan, who coined the term “welfare queen” and equated black lives with disorder through the crack cocaine epidemic. George H.W. Bush followed in Reagan’s footsteps. Clinton continued the criminal black stereotype through his approval of crime reform relying on racial profiling, and George W. Bush extended this othering to Muslim Americans, appealing strongly to white Evangelicalism (Merskin, 2004). Both administrations revoked rights from a portion of Americans for the sake of “national security” that excluded citizens because of their race or religion.

Research reveals when crime is framed as a racially coded issue, white Americans are more likely to approve of punitive responses, like building more prisons, rather than preventative responses, such as antipoverty endeavors. It is evident how harmful rhetoric

can be to a population, as one study demonstrated stronger support for punitive sanctions when the word “inner city” was included when describing a criminal suspect (Hurwitz and Peffley, 2005). Consistent with this research, Mitchell and Sidanius (1995) found states in the U.S. with the highest rates of capital punishment were also documented as having the most inequality (Pratto, Liu, Levin, Sidanius, Shih, Bachrach, & Hegarty, 2000). Because whites view themselves as the victims of these crimes rather than the perpetrators, while overestimating the proportion of black and Latino individuals committing crime, they are more likely to support carceral solutions to crime (Ghandnoosh, 2014) and consequently to support politicians perceived as the toughest on crime. This logic prioritizes the protection of white families and falsely stigmatizes nonwhite Americans, thereby upholding a system of racial hierarchy.

“Tough on crime” rhetoric that promises punitive consequences has come to affect policy as well as the public’s perception of people of color. Policies that promote retribution go well with the promotion of individualism that appeals to many white, working class and Evangelical voters. Eventually, these appeals become policy, overshadowing the voices of scholars proposing systemic changes as necessary solutions. For instance, while Ronald Reagan declared a war on drugs, the chair of his administration's violent crime task force, Attorney General William French Smith, instructed members not to concern themselves about the root causes of crime (Carrington, 1983). This task force proposed the development of a comprehensive program of narcotics control which would increase source control and interdiction efforts, as well as increase prosecution efforts of drug related cases. It recommended replacing parole with mandatory sentences (Tata & Hutton, 2002), thereby keeping prisoners incarcerated for longer periods

of time. This war on drugs had a disproportionate effect on Black Americans specifically (Nunn, 2002). While arrest rates for white people went up 70% between 1976 and 1989, there was a 450% increase for black Americans. Between the years 1989 and 1991, when George H.W. Bush was president, drug arrest rates for whites increased 50% compared to black Americans whose rate of incarceration increased by another 350% (Silton, 2002). Scholars also note War on Drugs policing strategies increased police brutality in black communities while little progress has been achieved to reduce the availability of street-level drugs (Cooper, 2015). In this case racial poverty is exploited through appeals and utilized to excuse police brutality in neighborhoods with high concentrations of black and Latino men. This contributes to a system of mass incarceration some argue imitates the effects of Jim Crow discrimination, or even slavery (Alexander, 2010; Gilmore, 2000).

The desire to incarcerate black individuals specifically relates to power dynamics, wherein produced images of racial minorities have always been dependent on stereotypes that remind Americans of the ownership of black bodies as vital to an economy and social structure that benefits white individuals (Woods, 2006). This is why the regulation and control of the lives of people of color are more politically effective than allusions to racial progress, as white voters subconsciously find comfort when reminded of the racial hierarchy on which they rest at the top (Inwood, 2018). This may especially be true for white, working class voters, who are prone to having stereotypical conceptions of people of color due to regional segregation (Williams, 2017). Depicting people of color as lazy, undeserving, and criminal ignores a history of disadvantages and racial barriers that affect families today. Policies have restricted voting access to poor and minority populations, Native American properties have been destroyed to benefit plutocratic oil industries, travel

restrictions have targeted Middle-Easterners, black individuals are routinely killed by US security forces (Inwood, 2018), and white supremacist hate groups have grown unprecedently (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017) to name a few discriminate instances that underly the social structure of our society. As cultural portrayals find their way into policy, not only are people of color forced into disproportionate levels of social stratification, but they are subjected to labeling that affects even the way they perceive themselves. Research reveals men of color are aware they are the most feared in public spaces, while many white men in the same study found the concept of being feared strange, stating their appearances and demeanors are obviously not threatening without realizing this is a privilege (Day, 2005). Political rhetoric that “others” stereotypes people of color, many of whom internalize these media perceptions and commit to a lifestyle of crime and disorder, feeling as if society has left them no other option than to act out an inescapable label (Bernburg, 2019).

There are many factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of black and Latino individuals within the criminal justice system. Black individuals are exposed to violence at alarmingly high rates compared to other Americans, which may lead to their arrests. This is the result of systemic oppression that left many black Americans impoverished after the abolition of slavery (Alexander, 2010; Richie, 2012; Rothstein, 2017). Black Americans are also more likely to experience abuse within the carceral system, in court and at the hands of police officers and correctional guards, which are factors that may contribute to recidivism and eventual rearrest later in life (Richie, 2010). There are many forces holding people of color back from success in American society. They may feel forced to adjust their behavior in public settings to prevent racial conflict from occurring, as if their skin

color is a trigger (Day, 2005). Some scholars have even argued mass incarceration and prison labor are necessities to American capitalism (Gilmore, 2000). Michelle Alexander (2010) proposes the thirteen amendment is a loophole ingrained into our political system, as slavery is abolished except in the case of imprisonment. This keeps certain demographics on the bottom of society and working for free (Alexander, 2010; Gilmore, 2000). As societal restraints keep people of color imprisoned, their homes lives are impacted as well. Incapacitation rates affect marriage rates and occupational outlooks, as men of color are imprisoned disproportionately. This decreases the chances for families to secure stable incomes (Western & Wildeman, 2009) and increases the chances of violence occurring within the home (Richie, 2012). The impact of race-based rhetoric does not fade as politicians are sworn into office. People of color are plagued by these stereotypes in every aspect of their lives.

CONCLUSION

As politicians argue for the cancellation of welfare, increased police control and prison reforms, border control, and warn of terrorism, racial and religious minorities are caught in a vicious cycle where their exploitation is the fuel for political rhetoric that appeals to a demographic they are excluded from. People of color will not escape this cycle until politicians reconsider the impact of their rhetoric, ameliorate their tough on crime positions, and appeal to voters in a different way. Looking into the near future, President Joe Biden has the potential to make systemic changes protestors and activists have been calling for throughout 2020. However, Americans should be wary to accept the new president as a vessel moving the country back towards racial progress lost as a result of the Trump administration. From 2021 onward, the public should constantly evaluate

discrepancies between Biden's language and policy changes, as what is presented in rhetoric is often not reflected in action. The only way to disengage from the ubiquity of racial stereotyping that leads to extreme political polarization and disproportionate violence and suffering for people of color would be to have an open, honest conversation about what has occurred in the past and attempt to correct this reality by shifting the conversation to include every demographics' concerns, rather than utilizing appeals selfishly for political gain. Let us hope President Biden has what it takes to bring race into the conversation in a meaningful way, rather than resorting back to the colorblind rhetoric of a post-racial society that ceases to exist. This country's foundation is built upon white supremacist ideals that benefit only the most privilege Americans. It is time this history is addressed.

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