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Black Republicans: A Subaltern Struggle for Recognition

Bachelor's Thesis

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Year of the defence: 2023

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on April 26th, 2023

Emma Letham

References

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Abstract

Due to the Republican party's past and current discourse on race and civil rights, Black Americans' affiliation with the party appears to make little sense. How do Black Republicans consolidate their racial and political identities when aligning with a party which has been detrimental to Black group interests? Existing literature on the subject chooses to address Black Republican's political choices as a personal failure. However, it rarely deals with the context of systemic racism within which they operate, despite it being an undeniable aspect of U.S. society. This dissertation addresses the question above by conceptualising Black Republicans' politics as a subaltern struggle recognition in a White supremacist society. In the theoretical section, the dissertation provides a critical reading of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition informed by the work of Frantz Fanon to identify the specific mechanisms of recognition of the subaltern in a White supremacist society. With the theoretical conclusions in mind, the second part of the dissertation consists of a case study of Black Republicans in the period of 2016-2023, analysing their recognition (electoral success and campaign fundraising), political stances, and self-presentation. I concluded that the political behaviour and discourse of Black Republicans corresponds to the characteristics of recognition of the subaltern in a White supremacist society. The factor of their racial identity is all but eliminated from the equation. Accordingly, their political affiliation is a rational personal choice providing recognition and individual empowerment while simultaneously reproducing the system of White supremacy and hindering Black group interests. This highlights the role of White supremacy in conditioning subaltern citizens' political behaviour and the importance of considering systemic factors when studying group political interests.

Abstrakt

Spojení černochoů a Republikánské strany působí vzhledem k historickému a současnému diskurzu strany na téma rasy a občanských práv neintuitivně. Jak konsolidují černošští republikáni jako členové strany oponující skupinovům zájmům černochoů svou rasovou identitu se svou politickou afiliací? Existující literatura na toto téma vnímá politická rozhodnutí černošských republikánů jako jejich osobní selhání. Zřídka ale pracuje s kontextem systémového rasismu, který je nespornou součástí americké společnosti. Tato bakalářská práce reaguje na výše uvedenou výzkumnou otázku konceptualizací politiky černošských republikánů jako boje subalterních občanů za uznání ve společnosti

charakterizované bílou nadřazeností. Teoretická část práce s pomocí textů Frantze Fanona kriticky interpretuje teorii uznání Axela Honnetha a identifikuje tak konkrétní mechanismy uznání subalterních občanů ve společnosti charakterizované bílou nadřazeností. Druhou část práce tvoří případová studie černošských republikánů v období 2016-2023, která analyzuje jejich získané uznání (úspěch volebních kampaní a jejich financování), politická stanoviska, a prezentaci sebe samých. Politické chování a diskurz černošských republikánů korespondují s charakteristikami uznání subalterních občanů ve společnosti charakterizované bílou nadřazeností. Jejich rasová identita je přitom prakticky eliminována. Jejich politická afiliace je tak racionálním osobním rozhodnutím, které jim poskytuje uznání a individuální moc a zároveň reprodukuje systém bílé nadřazenosti a oponuje skupinovému společenskému zájmu černochů. Tento závěr upozorňuje na roli bílé nadřazenosti v ovlivňování politického chování subalterních občanů a na důležitost uvážení systémových faktorů při studiu politických zájmů skupin.

Keywords

Recognition, subaltern recognition, Black Republicans, White supremacy, systemic racism, racial identity.

Klíčová slova

Teorie uznání, uznání subalterních občanů, černošští Republikáni, bílá nadřazenost, systémový rasismus, rasová identita.

Název práce

Černošští Republikáni: Úsilí subalterních občanů o získání uznání.

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"For a person who has had their heritage denigrated and their culture and history denied and destroyed, it is strange that they would choose to wholeheartedly and blindly support the very system that caused the self-hate".¹

¹ T. Owens Moore, 'A Blueprint for Black Power Analysis of the Bufoonery of Black Conservatives', *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 2 (July 2013): 41.

1. Introduction

According to Tasha S. Philpot, approximately 30% of Black Americans currently identify as socially conservative.² Despite the relative prominence of Black conservative ideology, however, only rarely does it translate into open identification with the Republican party.³ Prior to the realignment of the American electorate following the election of FDR in 1932, most Black voters identified with the Republican party.⁴ The 1930s initiated a shift in the electorate, which was cemented by the developments surrounding the Civil Rights Movement: Blacks became steadfast supporters of the Democratic party, with no other U.S. electoral group voting as cohesively during presidential elections.⁵

Aside from establishing Black Americans as a reliable base for the Democratic party, the 1960s realignment also cemented the Republican party's transition from "the party of Lincoln" to the "party of Jim Crow".⁶ With this in mind, it is important to note that the Black American electorate has proven to hold a multidimensional and hierarchical concept of ideology: due to continuous political, social and economic inequalities race remains an important aspect of their political calculus.⁷ The GOP's record on civil and voting rights legislation informs Blacks' strong group consciousness and mostly drives them away from the Republican party.⁸ As a result, Black Republicans, whose prominence increased during the conservative decades of the 1970s and 1980s, are frequently labelled as opportunists and "sellouts" out of touch with the Black population.⁹

Accordingly, alignment with the Republican party appears to directly contradict the group interests determined by Black racial identity. Therefore, this dissertation considers the following research question: "How can a Black American consolidate their racial identity with the realities of being a Republican?"

To answer this question, I approach Black Republicanism as a subaltern struggle for recognition in a White supremacist society. Unlike previous studies of the motivations of

² Jane Timm, 'From Idol to "Sellout": How Ben Carson Is Losing His Legacy', *MSNBC*, 7 June 2015, <https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/ben-carson-losing-his-legacy-idol-sell-out-msna612661>.

³ Tasha S. Philpot, *Conservative but Not Republican: The Paradox of Party Identification and Ideology Among African Americans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 206.

⁴ Lewis A. Randolph, 'A Historical Analysis and Critique of Contemporary Black Conservatism', *Western Journal of Black Studies* 19, no. 3 (1995): 153.

⁵ Philpot, *Conservative but Not Republican*, 205–6.

⁶ John Nichols, 'The Party of Lincoln Is Now the Party of Jim Crow', *The Nation*, 26 August 2021, <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/voting-rights-congress-republicans/>.

⁷ Philpot, *Conservative but Not Republican*, 212.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁹ Timm, 'Idol to "Sellout"'.

Black conservatives and Republicans,¹⁰ which have theorised them as “clients of the Republican party”¹¹ and “Uncle Toms”, referring to their political choices as “buffoonery”,¹² this dissertation conceptualises Black Republican party affiliation as a consequence of the existing system of White supremacy. Rather than focusing solely on politicians’ personal defects, it highlights the systemic shortcomings which drive Black political actors to openly oppose their group interests.

Given that Axel Honneth’s classical theory of recognition¹³ is inadequate in accounting for the power dynamics of social hierarchies within which it operates, I first present a critical reading of Honneth’s theory, predominantly relying on the work of Frantz Fanon¹⁴ and Glen Sean Coulthard, who also draws on Fanon for his own critique.¹⁵ I hereby identified four key characteristics of recognition of the subaltern in a White supremacist society: the hierarchy of recognition, White-coded terms of recognition, the impact of recognition on the subaltern identity, and finally, the role of recognition in the reproduction of systems of White supremacy. I theorised that by the nature of the White supremacist system, subaltern actors will be compelled to seek recognition from the White majority by putting forward White-coded, neoliberal characteristics. Consequently, I also expected them to either downplay or completely “reject” their own racial identities, as well as refrain from discussing the systemic nature of racial inequality. Drawing on literature about U.S. voters and political candidates’ attitudes and behaviours, I established it was valid to conceptualise the campaigns of Black Republican political candidates as struggles for recognition according to the previously established terms.

The second section of my dissertation illustrates the phenomenon in a case study of Black Republican politicians in Trump’s and post-Trump America (2016-2023). I first illustrate how Trump’s America-first Christian nativist discourse has sanctioned displays of overt White supremacy and coercive racism. This phenomenon has simultaneously been accompanied by a widespread discourse of colour-blind racism, denying the existence and preventing the interrogation of systemic racial inequality in the U.S. By doing so, I establish Trump’s and post-Trump America and the contemporary Republican party as White supremacist spaces.

¹⁰ The available literature focussing on Black conservatism frequently uses the terms “conservative” and “Republican” as interchangeable. While I recognise the necessary difference between them, this dissertation will do the same, unless otherwise specified.

¹¹ Randolph, ‘Contemporary Black Conservatism’, 156.

¹² Owens Moore, ‘Blueprint’, 43.

¹³ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar for Social Conflicts.*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2021); Frantz Fanon, ‘The Fact of Blackness’, in *Postcolonial Studies: An Anthology*, ed. Pramod K. Nayar, First edition (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016), 15–32.

¹⁵ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

I then turn to analyse the campaigns of nine Black Republicans who were appointed to elected federal office or advisory and executive positions close to President Trump during the considered period of 2016-2023: Representative Mia Love (UT), Senator Tim Scott (SC), Chair of the President's Council on Sports, Fitness and Nutrition Herschel Walker (GA), Representative Burgess Owens (UT), Representative Byron Donalds (FL), Representative Wesley Hunt (TX), Representative John James (MI), Representative Will Hurd (TX), and U.S. Secretary for Housing and Urban Development Ben Carson (MI). With their successful appointment to office serving as the first indication of recognition, I further considered the fundraising successes of candidates' campaigns and compared them to the totals of average GOP candidates to determine their favourable positions. I followed by analysing the discourse of the candidates' campaigns, using predominantly campaign materials and websites, as well as supporting journalistic sources in cases where primary sources were unavailable. In the case of Walker and Carson, who did not have to run for the offices mentioned above, I considered their bids for Congress in 2022 and U.S. President in 2016, respectively. I compared the results of my research to the previously established characteristics of recognition of the subaltern in a White supremacist society, focussing on candidates' political claims and priorities in comparison to those of the Trumpist GOP, their self-presentation, and their handling of their own racial identities as well as the subject of race generally.

I concluded that, in accordance with my established theory, successful Black Republican candidates received disproportionately higher campaign funding compared to the average GOP candidate, as well as frequent sponsorships from conservative donors and endorsements from President Trump. This appears to be determined by the candidates' conservative political rhetoric and its alignment with the major issues concerning the contemporary Republican party, namely immigration, abortion rights, and the economy. Simultaneously, all candidates presented themselves in heavily neoliberal terms, frequently reproducing the bootstrap narrative in their personal histories, and denied the impact of an individual's race on their social standing or available opportunities. By performing Whiteness, all candidates achieved political success and recognition. However, by doing so on White supremacist terms, they became walking confirmation biases,¹⁶ effectively sanctioning and reproducing the hierarchical White supremacist system.

¹⁶ Nathalie Baptiste, 'How to Be a Walking "Confirmation Bias" (Role Model: Mia Love)', *The American Prospect*, 7 January 2015, <https://prospect.org/culture/walking-confirmation-bias-role-model-mia-love/>.

2. The theory of recognition in a White supremacist context

Drawing on Hegel's philosophy, Honneth reformulates Hobbes' reductive understanding of humans as strategic, self-interested individuals. Instead, he argues that humans are fundamentally intersubjective, i.e., formed in and through their relationships and interactions with others. Their behaviour therefore cannot be understood as isolated strategic decisions, but rather in the social context of their existence.¹⁷ As such, recognition by others or a lack thereof actively shapes the way individuals think about themselves and their position in society; it "forges identity."¹⁸ By acknowledging and articulating one's needs, identity formation constitutes a key step on the path to reaching the universal human goal and motivator of self-realization, as defined by Hegelian philosophy. Recognition, therefore, constitutes a vital human need.¹⁹ Drawing on this realisation, Honneth's theory argues that the historical struggle for recognition has served as the driver of the ethical development of society.

With this struggle in mind, it is apparent that recognition is also inherently linked to systems of oppression and discrimination. Take, for example, women's fight for their recognition by a patriarchal society, or non-White citizens' struggle to gain recognition from a White supremacist society. Honneth himself recognises the failure to award recognition (which he labels as "misrecognition") as an "injustice" which restricts the subject's freedom and "injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves".²⁰ This is an integral feature of systems of oppression and its specific impacts are documented, for example, in Fanon's seminal work *Black Skins, White Masks*. According to the main argument, White civilisation has imposed an "existential deviation on the Black man", thus preventing Blacks from fully participating in society and resulting in "fractured psyches", negative perceptions, or even rejections of one's racial identity.²¹

Minority individuals' efforts to avoid these outcomes in a systemically oppressive society frequently result in "false recognition", in which case individuals are recognised by the majority society for conforming to its norms and practices despite their being in contradiction with the individual's own identity. For members of systematically oppressed minorities in unequal societies, conforming to practices of domination can be viewed as a more efficient form of gaining "recognition" than struggling for it in spite of their perceived differences.

¹⁷ D. Clifton Mark, 'Axel Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition', in *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory*, ed. Jacob T. Levy, Online edition (Oxford Academic, 2015), 2.

¹⁸ Andrew Schaap, 'Political Reconciliation Through a Struggle for Recognition?', *Social & Legal Studies* 13, no. 4 (2004): 525.

¹⁹ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar for Social Conflicts.*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), x-xi.

²⁰ Mark, 'Axel Honneth', 4-5.

²¹ Fanon, *Black Skin*.

Playing the dominant group's game, so to speak, results in the perpetuation of systemic injustice by the oppressed communities themselves, thus impeding systemic change, as well as leading to the internalisation of the principles underpinning the oppressive systems.²² As a solution, this "politics of recognition" based on the subaltern's assimilation to majority norms and identities only presents a surface-level, symbolic or cultural change, without addressing the systemic foundations of the system of White supremacy.²³

This brief introduction to the concept clearly illustrates the implicit connection between recognition and systems of oppression. Fanon explicitly argues that in situations where colonial rule does not depend solely on the exercise of state violence, its reproduction instead depends on the state's ability to entice the colonised to identify with the asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of recognition granted or imposed by the state.²⁴ The same principle can be extended to White supremacy as the result of White European settler colonialism, a "political, economic, and cultural system in which Whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources" and where "conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread", despite the formal dismantling of their overt support mechanisms.²⁵ While Honneth does acknowledge that "members of marginalised and subaltern groups have been systematically denied" recognition, he does not provide further commentary on how systemic inequality has affected the mechanisms and implications of recognition.²⁶

Charles Taylor attempted to fill this gap in the recognition literature with his text adapting Honneth's theory for multicultural societies, specifically the U.S.²⁷ While Taylor does helpfully acknowledge that recognition of non-White subjects will be affected by the racial hierarchy in place and that misrecognition serves as a tool of further racial oppression²⁸, Taylor's work fails to adequately address the mechanisms and practices of systemic racism. This critique is supported by Lawrence Blum's text "Recognition, value, and equality: A critique of Charles Tylor's and Nancy Fraser's accounts of multiculturalism", as well as by First Nations scholar Glen Coulthard and his reinterpretation of recognition for the Canadian context rooted in the work of Frantz Fanon entitled *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*.²⁹

²² Mark, 'Axel Honneth', 10.

²³ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁵ Charles W. Mills, 'White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System: A Philosophical Perspective', in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doanne and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (London: Routledge, 2003), 36–37.

²⁶ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, X.

²⁷ Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in *Campus Wars* (Routledge, 2021), 249–63.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

²⁹ Lawrence Blum, 'Recognition, Value, and Equality: A Critique of Charles Tylor's and Nancy Fraser's Accounts of Multiculturalism', *Constellations* 5, no. 1 (1998): 51–68; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*.

In his text, Taylor dismisses the historical presence of racial oppression and regulation of discourse, as well as questions the oppressive nature of misrecognition.³⁰ Overall, Taylor's discussion veers away from recognition as a practice of non-discrimination to interpreting it as a value judgement with a particular focus on the worth and quality of minority cultures.³¹ This focus highlights the universality of White culture and the contrasting need for minority cultures to "earn their place". Blum further points out that awarding recognition to groups based on their cultural contributions is grossly reductive of their overall historical and social experiences, as well as guilty of comparing the incomparable.³²

The second major point of critique of Taylor's text is his fixation on the dichotomy between the "homogenising demands for recognition of equal worth" and the "self-immurement within ethnocentric standards".³³ Once again, Blum points out that Taylor is hereby missing the point of minority pursuit of recognition, that being the demand that "their distinguishing characteristic – race, gender, sexual orientation – not be taken as a badge of inferiority or deficiency".³⁴ Ultimately, by focusing exclusively on cultural and identity recognition without interrogating the systemic (legal, political and economic) origins of oppression, Taylor offers little insight into how to address the structural features of social oppression.³⁵ His defence of the notion that diverse or multicultural states can recognise and accommodate a range of group-specific claims without having to abandon their commitment to a core set of fundamental rights and principles is, in itself, contradictory in a White supremacist setting. If the rights and principles being upheld have been established by and designed to perpetuate White superiority, then the true accommodation of subaltern interests without systemic reform will be impossible.³⁶ Instead, Coulthard refers to the work of Frantz Fanon to demonstrate the incapability of liberal theories of recognition to explain their tendency to (re)produce colonial relationships.³⁷ I will draw on his analysis in the following section. While the circumstances of the Indigenous nations and the Black community in the US differ in certain specifics, the underlying principles and realities of White supremacy remain.

2.1 The hierarchy of recognition

The liberal theory of recognition maintains that the development of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem are all acquired through "being granted recognition by others whom

³⁰ Taylor, 'Politics of Recognition', 34–37.

³¹ Ibid., 70.

³² Blum, 'Recognition', 56–58.

³³ Taylor, 'Politics of Recognition', 72.

³⁴ Blum, 'Recognition', 60.

³⁵ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, 33–34, 40.

³⁶ Ibid., 29; Mills, 'White Supremacy', 27.

³⁷ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 25.

one also recognises”.³⁸ The realities of a hierarchical society invite us to question how this definition is skewed by the systemic inequality in place. Who does the system condition us to recognise? Therefore, *who* holds the power to *grant* recognition?

The dialectical and reciprocal nature of recognition is rooted in Hegel’s master and slave narrative, in which he demonstrates that (a) each consciousness seeks recognition in another, and (b) we can only flourish to the extent that we are recognised.³⁹ In this approach, social relations are placed at the fore of human subjectivity. Recognition is therefore importantly conceptualised as being dialectical, as well as reciprocal. To illustrate how this principle is affected by hierarchical social relations, Coulthard provides a normative reading of the narrative: “... it suggests that the realization of oneself as an essential, self-determining agent requires that one not only be recognized as self-determining but that one be recognized by another self-consciousness that is also recognized as self-determining.”⁴⁰ This implies the following.

Firstly, to be recognised as “self-determining”, the slave must be awarded recognition not by their peers but by their already-recognised master.⁴¹ Translated into the context of a White supremacist society, this indicates the subaltern will be compelled to seek recognition from the “ruling race”⁴² rather than their own ranks. Of course, to claim that the subaltern is exclusively dependent on Whites for recognition would be grossly reductive and deny the subaltern their agency. Drawing on the example in Neville et al.’s article, I am in no way denying that, for example, Black people turn to other Black people for comparison and recognition. However, the wide effect of the racialised system and cultural norms cannot be dismissed.⁴³

Secondly, recognition of the master from the dependent slave does not constitute recognition at all. Taylor dubs this “recognition by the losers”. In a White supremacist context, this is analogous to recognition from the subaltern community to which White society has denied equal status.⁴⁴ The existence of a social hierarchy therefore directly contradicts the reciprocity of recognition, instead making the relationship “one-sided and unequal”.⁴⁵ Accordingly, Fanon denies the existence of “absolute reciprocity” in racially hierarchical societies, instead highlighting that the continuing presence of the “master” makes the liberation of the “slave”

³⁸ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, xi.

³⁹ Taylor, ‘Politics of Recognition’, 50.

⁴⁰ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 27–28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 26–28.

⁴² Mills, ‘White Supremacy’, 40.

⁴³ Helen A. Neville, Brigitte Viard, and Lou Turner, ‘Race and Recognition: Pathways to an Affirmative Black Identity’, *Journal of Black Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2015): 250–51.

⁴⁴ Taylor, ‘Politics of Recognition’, 50.

⁴⁵ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 28.

inherently impossible by upholding the established hierarchical relationship institutionalised through White supremacy.⁴⁶

2.2 The terms of recognition

The hierarchal nature of recognition and the resulting reality of whose recognition “matters” in a White supremacist society brings us to question *the grounds* on which recognition is awarded. As a natural consequence of its hierarchical status, the “ruling race” establishes the “evaluative framework” based on which recognition is awarded to each individual.⁴⁷ White supremacy is engendered by practices and behaviours that produce or reproduce the racial structure which determines the standing and life of different races in the social hierarchy. The universality claimed by the resulting racial ideology disguises the fact of racial domination altogether.⁴⁸ Furthermore, its effect on the consciousness of all social actors, including the “ruling race”, will necessarily translate into the framework determining who is, for lack of a better term, worthy of recognition and on what grounds.

In factual and normative terms, White supremacy established White normativity by treating Whites as the normative reference point for society as a whole.⁴⁹ Following the end of Jim Crow racism which overtly discriminated on the basis of phenotype, racial discourse and practices have become more covert.⁵⁰ In the words of Indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred, “oppression has become increasingly invisible”, constituted through a “fluid confluence of politics, economics, psychology, and culture.”⁵¹ The resulting form of discrimination has been labelled by scholars as “new” or “colour-blind” racism.⁵² This manifests in the aforementioned normalisation of “Whiteness”, which is recentred through neoliberal markers of class, nationality and culture, as well related discourses about values, competence, hard work, and respectability. The resulting “moral economy of Whiteness” is fluid and capable of incorporating people of colour into its definition of Whiteness, using their examples to normalise the White/Western norm.⁵³ This concept of Whiteness coded in neoliberal terms equates to the evaluative framework for the granting of recognition, success, and acceptance by the “ruling race” in a White supremacist society. As a result, I expect subaltern actors to emphasise their neoliberal qualities.

⁴⁶ Schaap, ‘Political Reconciliation’, 533.

⁴⁷ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, xvii–xviii.

⁴⁸ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, ‘The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, “Post-Racial” America’, *American Behavioral Scientist* 59, no. 1 (2015): 1360–61.

⁴⁹ Mills, ‘White Supremacy’, 46.

⁵⁰ Bonilla-Silva, ‘Structure of Racism’, 1362.

⁵¹ Coultard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 48.

⁵² Bonilla-Silva, ‘Structure of Racism’, 1362–64.

⁵³ David Cisneros, ‘A Nation of Immigrants and a Nation of Laws: Race, Multiculturalism, and Neoliberal Exception in Barack Obama’s Immigration Discourse.’, *Communication, Culture and Critique* 8 (2015): 360.

The workings of colour-blind racism can be well demonstrated in the election of President Barack Obama in 2011. The appointment of the first non-White person to the highest political office in the country carried major symbolic significance and was frequently taken to indicate the beginning of the “post-racial” era of America at the time. Love and Tosolt dispute this, however, arguing that both the election result as well as the invocation of the post-racial lens are examples of White America’s attempt to “sanction what is acceptable Blackness”. President Obama secured White votes in spite of reading as phenotypically Black, by distancing himself from “regular” Black folks, presenting a raceless message, complying with neoliberal indicators of Whiteness, and abstaining from challenging White Americans’ conscience in relation to systemic racism. As such, Obama was a Black but acceptable candidate for White voters. He enabled White voters to make an exception while continuing to harbour substantial racial biases towards most non-White people.⁵⁴

2.3 Recognition and identity

The beginning of this chapter stressed one of the key functions of recognition: forging identity.⁵⁵ This implies that racial identity, too, is not inherent but instead acquired through human interaction. Stuart Hall notes that while growing up in Jamaica with a 98% Black population, he had never thought of himself as “Black”. Instead, this label was a mere umbrella term for much more nuanced racial identities.⁵⁶ The social construction of race and the identity Hall’s experience engenders is captured by Fanon in the following quote: “Not only must the Black man be Black, he must be Black *in relation to the White man* [emphasis added].”⁵⁷ In short, the Black racial identity is constructed as an “other” to the White majority.

Furthermore, it is understandable that not all racialised subjects will regard the significance of their race for their self and group-identification equally. This was addressed by Robert Sellers et al. in their “Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity” (MIBI), which was created as a measure of three stable dimensions (centrality, ideology, and regard). Their study concluded that individuals for whom race was a significant component of their identity were more likely to display an interest in Black studies and interact with fellow African Americans and vice versa.⁵⁸ Black or any other group identity, for that matter, is not a homogenous whole but

⁵⁴ Bettina L. Love and Brandelyn Tosolt, ‘Reality of Rhetoric? Barack Obama and Post-Racial America’, *Race, Gender, and Class* 17, no. 3/4 (2010): 30–32.

⁵⁵ Schaap, ‘Political Reconciliation’, 525.

⁵⁶ Stuart Hall, ‘Staré a Nové Identity, Staré a Nové Etnicity’, in *Postkoloniální Myšlení IV*, ed. Vít Havránek and Ondřej Lámský, vol. 0012 (Prague: Tranzit.cz, 2013), 68.

⁵⁷ Fanon, ‘Fact of Blackness’, 15.

⁵⁸ Robert M. Sellers et al., ‘Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity: A Preliminary Investigation of Reliability and Construct Validity’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73, no. 4 (1997): 805–15.

instead comprised of the experiences of individuals who ascribe to it.⁵⁹ The intersubjectivity of identity and its formation through and by interactions and the treatment from others implies identity is (a) a process rather than fixed characteristic,⁶⁰ and (b) generalisable to the extent that cases of White settler colonialism and its aftermath worldwide have shared many similarities in their treatment of indigenous populations. While I am aware of the differences in the perception of racial identities experienced by subaltern individuals, I theorise the conditions of the subaltern struggle for recognition under White supremacy carry the following two implications for the subaltern's treatment and/or overall conceptualisation of their own racial identity.

Firstly, subaltern individuals seeking recognition from the White "ruling race" are likely to either downplay or completely reject their racial identities. We turn again to the example of President Obama, who secured 43% and 39% of the White vote in 2008 and 2012 respectively.⁶¹ Love and Tosolt assert that (referring to the 2008 race and subsequent term) despite being a Black-passing mixed-race politician, President Obama was "not read as Black by the Black community".⁶² Bonilla-Silva further elaborates on the instrumental role of Obama's "raceless political stance" in convincing White voters he would not become "a Jesse Jackson or an Al Sharpton", which made him "throw under the bus anyone who made him look too Black or too political such as his former pastor Reverend Jeremiah Wright, professors Bill Ayers and Rashid Khalidi, and even his wife Michelle."⁶³ An example can be found in Michelle Obama's decision to straighten her hair during her time as First Lady rather than wear its natural texture or style it in braids, claiming Americans "weren't ready" for a Black First Lady with natural hair. Having left office, she has since made numerous public appearances with natural or braided hair, the contrast further enhancing the point.⁶⁴ We may therefore conclude that in order to appeal to the majority-White political establishment and secure its ballot-shaped recognition, President Obama downplayed his racial identity and instead "performed Whiteness".⁶⁵

I further expect that this need to set racial identity aside to secure recognition will be exaggerated in more homogenous White spaces, i.e. with the lower representation of non-

⁵⁹ Fanon, 'Fact of Blackness', 29.

⁶⁰ Hall, 'Staré a Nové Identity', 63.

⁶¹ 'How Groups Voted in 2008', Roper Center, accessed 27 February 2023, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/how-groups-voted-2008>; 'How Groups Voted in 2012', Roper Center, accessed 27 February 2023, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/how-groups-voted-2012>.

⁶² Love and Tosolt, 'Reality of Rhetoric?', 30.

⁶³ Bonilla-Silva, 'Structure of Racism', 1367.

⁶⁴ Gloria Oladipo, 'Michelle Obama Says Americans "Weren't Ready" for Her Natural Hair', *The Guardian*, 17 November 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/nov/17/michelle-obama-natural-hair>.

⁶⁵ White voters composed 74% and 72% of the entire electorate during the 2008 and 2012 elections, respectively. See 'Groups 2008'; 'Groups 2012'.

White individuals.⁶⁶ The MIBI study mentioned above showed that while Black students from a predominantly African American university were more likely to emphasise the uniqueness of the Black experience, Black students at a predominantly White university instead emphasised similarities between Blacks and other groups, indicating a stronger tendency to “blend” their identities.⁶⁷ However, the study does not detail whether students chose their universities based on their perceptions of their racial identities, or whether the different spaces of the universities retroactively impacted their subjective perceptions of racial identity.

At this point, it is also important to note that the analysis so far points to a blurring of the boundaries between the terms “recognition” and “false recognition” I outlined at the beginning of this section. While false recognition is defined as recognition for compliance with norms in contradiction with the subject’s identity, the above has established that will always be the case for the subaltern struggling for recognition in a White supremacist society. The recognition of the subaltern rooted in performative Whiteness is inherently false recognition. Conversely, true recognition of the subaltern in a White supremacist society does not exist. The terms are frequently interchanged when referring to similar cases.

Secondly, constant exposure of subaltern subjects to racist messaging alters their identities to reflect the White normativity enforced by the White supremacist society, resulting in the internalisation of imposed feelings of inferiority and their compensation through the adoption of White-coded characteristics and behaviour. This has been theorised as the “falsification of consciousness” and “fractured psyches” by Wilson and Fanon. Both authors understand the phenomenon as a form of protest against historical inferiority in a White supremacist society, i.e., part of the subaltern struggle for recognition.⁶⁸ Moore specifically employs this concept as a possible explanation of the behaviour of Black conservatives in the United States. In fact, Ronald E. Hall links the very beginning of the Conservative Black tradition to the psychological domination of so-called “house negroes” by their masters during the antebellum era. He argues that to secure their status, they would embrace and internalise the master’s political objectives, positioning themselves against the “inferior other” composed of the majority of Black folk. They would come to represent the “class aristocracy of the Black populous” which Hall compares to modern-day Black conservatism.⁶⁹

The resulting views focus on centralising Black behaviour rather than systemic racism as the barrier to Black advancement. This is based on the “Uncle Tom mantra”, according to which the advancement of one Black person directly “denies” the existence of systemic inequality

⁶⁶ David G. Embrick and Wendy Leo Moore, ‘White Space(s) and the Reproduction of White Supremacy’, *American Behavioral Scientist* 64, no. 14 (2020): 1935–45.

⁶⁷ Sellers et al., ‘Multidimensional Inventory’, 812.

⁶⁸ T. Owens Moore, ‘A Blueprint for Black Power Analysis of the Bufoonery of Black Conservatives’, *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 2 (July 2013): 44–45.

⁶⁹ Ronald E. Hall, ‘Rooming in the Master’s House: Psychological Domination and the Black Conservative’, *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 4 (March 2008): 569–70.

altogether.⁷⁰ The phenomenon is encapsulated by the words of Frantz Fanon: "... there is but one destiny for the Black man. And it is White."⁷¹

2.4 Recognition reproducing White supremacy

Throughout this chapter, I repeatedly indicated the tendency of recognition in hierarchical settings to reflect and reproduce the asymmetrical relationships underlying the system within which recognition operates. I have explored how the racial hierarchy of White supremacy negates the idea of "absolute reciprocity" inherent in the liberal theory of recognition,⁷² making the process of recognition an unequal exchange. I illustrated that, as a consequence, recognition is awarded to non-White subjects on the basis of terms informed by White supremacist principles, enticing them to perform Whiteness. And finally, I discussed the profound impact this has on the identities and psyches of the subaltern, leading to the suppression of their racial identity and the internalisation of racist and White supremacist values. All of the above leads to the necessary conclusion, that the politics of recognition in a White supremacist society ultimately serves the White supremacist system and is incapable of engendering its change.

For a more comprehensive account, I turn to Fanon's dual structured interpretation of colonialism, which he claims includes "not only the interrelations of objective historical condition but also human attitudes to these conditions."⁷³ White supremacy works much the same way. While its formal supports have been dismantled, largely erasing its *de jure* form, its principles remain in place and are daily re-enacted by a broad array of institutions and social settings. The realities of racial discrimination are therefore still *de facto* present.⁷⁴ Their continued prevalence is enabled by human and social attitudes to the issue. These are largely determined by the universality of White supremacist principles.⁷⁵ Individuals are therefore socialised into a society which not only internalises these implicit racial biases, but furthermore does not automatically see or problematise them. The inability or refusal to acknowledge the prevailing systemic racial biases directly enables their continued existence.

The socially conservative mechanism of recognition in a White supremacist society as I have problematised it above contributes to this process. By directly reproducing White supremacist values and traits in both the "ruling race" as well as the subaltern, recognition actively reinforces both the attitudinal as well as the institutional structures of White supremacy. This

⁷⁰ Owens Moore, 'Blueprint', 43.

⁷¹ Fanon, *Black Skin*, x.

⁷² Schaap, 'Political Reconciliation', 533.

⁷³ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 32.

⁷⁴ Mills, 'White Supremacy', 36–37.

⁷⁵ Bonilla-Silva, 'Structure of Racism', 1361.

prefigures the failure of the politics of recognition to modify, let alone transcend the hierarchy of White supremacy.⁷⁶

In response, Fanon reformulated the path to self-determination through a personal and collective self-affirmation to counter the assimilative effects of colonial/White supremacist recognition and end the subalterns' dependence on their oppressors for their recognition and self-worth. Coulthard specifically turns to intersectional theorist bell hooks' assertion that instead of looking "to that Other for recognition", we should recognise "ourselves and make contact with all who would engage us in a constructive manner."⁷⁷

3. Black Republican politics: a struggle for recognition

A review of the literature published on Black conservatives and Republicans reveals, that Black Republican politics match the characteristics of recognition in a White supremacist setting I have outlined above. I demonstrate this in the following section.

Firstly, Black conservatives receive significant support from the majority-White Republican party, White media, and White voters, while simultaneously alienating the majority of Black voters. In the 1980s, Black conservative politics experienced a revival after a leadership vacuum created by the deaths of Dr Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Fannie Lou Hamer. With the conservative shift of the overall electorate and increased media attention provided to organics and neoconservatives, Black conservatives gained a natural advantage over Black liberals in the American public debate for the first time.⁷⁸ Thanks to their appointment to prominent positions in President Reagan's campaign taskforces as well as his administration, Black conservatives gained the ability to determine access to the media and used this to spread their message.⁷⁹ Their ideas gained wide support from the White media which continues today.⁸⁰

The number of Black conservatives grew substantially in response to the Obama and post-Obama era, with over 50 Black Republicans campaigning for seats in the U.S. Congress after the election of 2008.⁸¹ In 2013, the Republican National Committee issued the "Growth and Opportunity Project" concerning strategies for future elections, emphasising the necessity of

⁷⁶ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 31.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 43, 48.

⁷⁸ Randolph, 'Contemporary Black Conservatism', 155–56.

⁷⁹ Angela K. Lewis, 'Black Conservatism in America', *Journal of African American Studies* 8, no. 4 (Spring 2005): 11.

⁸⁰ Owens Moore, 'Blueprint', 41.

⁸¹ Gregory John Leslie, Christopher T. Stout, and Naomi Tolbert, 'The Ben Carson Effect: Do Voters Prefer Racialized or Deracialized Black Conservatives?', *Social Science Research* 78 (2019): 71.

appealing to women and minority voters and recruiting and supporting diverse candidates.⁸² This effort to “seem interested” in winning Black support constitutes a strategy for winning White moderates’ support without making the policy changes necessary to widely attract Black voters.⁸³ The presence of Black candidates who lean into and openly support the party’s symbols and rhetoric serves as a confirmation bias, signalling that the party “cannot be racist” when its policy is sanctioned by a Black candidate.⁸⁴ As such, Black Republicans find themselves not only recognised but tokenised by the political right and are treated as exceptional for their defiance of the policy and behaviour expected from a Black politician.⁸⁵

Black Republicans receive disproportionate White electoral support, the pursuit of which in turn deeply shapes particular elements of their conservatism.⁸⁶ Research on White conservative support for minority Republican candidates published by Hood and McKee revealed that in elections for state governor or senator, White conservatives support minority Republican candidates at either the same or significantly higher rate than they do White Republican nominees. This is a recent phenomenon in American politics, clearly illustrating that for White conservative voters, the importance of political ideology takes precedence over the candidate’s race.⁸⁷ Further research looking into the attitudes of White “racially resentful” voters toward Black conservative candidates has argued that Black Republicans may be viewed more favourably than comparable White candidates thanks to the contradiction between their partisan affiliation and the racial and political expectations held by White voters.⁸⁸ Once again, race is not a determinative factor here, but the defiance of racial expectations is an important contributing factor to the success and popularity of minority conservatives among the White Republican base.⁸⁹ Crucially, the Black Republicans who receive a larger platform, funding, and following within the GOP are those most closely mirroring the stances of White conservative Republicans – and therefore most defiant of the expectations held of Black politicians.⁹⁰ Furthermore, evidence has shown that White voters across the spectrum are less likely to penalize Black conservative politicians than their White

⁸² Catherine Wineinger, ‘How Can a Black Woman Be a Republican? An Intersectional Analysis of Identity Claims in the 2014 Mia Love Campaign’, *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 9, no. 3 (2021): 567.

⁸³ Michael Fauntroy, ‘African American Republican Congressional Candidates: A Typology’, *Phylon*, Special Volume: Remembering the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of W.E.B. Du Bois and the 50th Anniversary of the Death of Martin Luther King, Jr., 55, no. 1 & 2 (Summer/Winter 2018): 117.

⁸⁴ Theodore R. Johnson, ‘Will 2022 Be the Year of the Black Republican?’, *The Bulwark*, 14 April 2022, <https://www.thebulwark.com/will-2022-be-the-year-of-the-black-republican/>.

⁸⁵ Christopher F. Karpowitz et al., ‘What Leads Racially Resentful Voters to Choose Black Candidates?’, *The Journal of Politics* 83, no. 1 (2021): 118; Jonathan Osborne, ‘Difference within Difference: A Study of Modern Black Conservative Rhetoric’ (Doctoral Dissertation, Boston, Massachusetts, Northeastern University, 2020), 3.

⁸⁶ Cornel West, *Race Matters*, Vintage Books Edition (New York: Random House, 1994), 78.

⁸⁷ V. M. Hood and Seth McKee, ‘True Colors: White Conservative Support for Minority Republican Candidates’, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 46, 50.

⁸⁸ Karpowitz et al., ‘Racially Resentful Voters’, 105.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁹⁰ Timm, ‘Idol to “Sellout”’.

counterparts with comparable ideological viewpoints.⁹¹ With all this in mind, Leah Wright Rigueur, author of *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (2016), expects the number of conservative Black Republicans to rise in the future.

Conversely, Black conservatives have historically received minimal support from the Black population. When Tim Scott (R-SC) won his Senate seat in 2014, it was thanks to 88% of votes from the district's White voters but only 10% of Black votes.⁹² This is not a coincidence in light of Owens Moore's assertion that Black Conservatives have "no intention, ability or will to develop an internal Black base".⁹³ Osborne then goes as far as to say Black conservatives often find themselves "ostracised" by Black communities.⁹⁴ Accordingly, the study by Leslie et al. revealed that "Black voters viewed co-racial deracialised conservatives as much more favourable than White deracialised conservatives". This is consistent with the general assertion that Black voters prefer co-racial political elites, inspired by the belief that they act in racially motivated collective interests. Black voters' dislike for Black racialised conservatives is statistically equal to their dislike for White racialised conservatives. Importantly, the research also revealed that Black conservatives were rated comparatively significantly lower than their White counterparts when speaking against politically correct speech, despite expressing the same sentiments.⁹⁵

Secondly, Black Republican candidates adjust their presentation to comply with White neoliberal values. Both Democratic and Republican Black candidates have typically deemphasised their racial identities when running in majority-White districts. In the case of the GOP, Black candidates who invoke a colour-blind strategy have been better able to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the party.⁹⁶ They have frequently replaced their racial identification with an emphasis on individualism, thereby rejecting their implicit association with a community based on shared appearance.⁹⁷ This is conceptualised as an effort to be "judged by their skill, not their skin", which sees Black conservatives actively working to prove their deviation from the negative stereotypes associated with Blackness related to intelligence, hard work, etc. The effort to embody acceptable Blackness is further enhanced by the active rejection of values associated with Black politics, including the advocacy for politically correct speech and the catering to Black group interests.⁹⁸ In some

⁹¹ Leslie, Stout, and Tolbert, 'Ben Carson Effect', 72.

⁹² Timm, 'Idol to "Sellout"'.

⁹³ Owens Moore, 'Blueprint', 42–43.

⁹⁴ Osborne, 'Difference within Difference: A Study of Modern Black Conservative Rhetoric', 3.

⁹⁵ Leslie, Stout, and Tolbert, 'Ben Carson Effect', 79.

⁹⁶ Wineinger, 'How Can a Black Woman Be a Republican?', 570.

⁹⁷ Osborne, 'Difference within Difference: A Study of Modern Black Conservative Rhetoric', 41–42.

⁹⁸ West, *Race Matters*, 78; Paul White and Robert W. Oldendick, 'Can Partisanship Trump Racism? White Voter Support for Black Republican Candidates', *The Journal of Political Science* 44 (2016): 147.

cases, this defiance is exaggerated to the point of “reverse racial favouritism” and the explicit advocacy for policies that will benefit Whites at the expense of Blacks.⁹⁹

Implicit in this is the articulation of the neoliberal belief that individual Black people’s faults, not systemic inequality, are to blame for their problems. If Blacks only “worked harder, placed less emphasis on achieving social equality, developed a strong character and engaged in more self-help,” they would fare better and eventually be accepted as equals by White Americans.¹⁰⁰ Leslie et al. argue that this active violation of race-based expectations is a *necessary* factor for Black conservatives to secure White support.¹⁰¹ Black conservatives are treated as exceptional because they literally present the exception to the perceived norm of Blackness.

4. Case study: Black Republicans in Trump’s America

4.1 The context of Donald Trump’s presidency

Donald Trump steered the Republican party away from four decades of Reagan-style, national-greatness conservatism, replacing it with populism and a discourse of Christian nationalism. This has not been an abrupt change, with hints building up in the names of Pat Buchanan, Ross Perot, Sarah Palin and Mike Huckabee, the emergence of the Tea Party, and an increasingly bitter discourse on immigration. But it was Trump who completed this shift and cemented it as the new political identity of the Republican party. The overarching point of this shift is that the party has become too preoccupied with hands-off economic theory and solving issues too detached from the “everyday problems” of “everyday people” and should instead move toward a more “practical” brand of conservatism.¹⁰² Trump also took a hands-on approach to the racist and nativist elements of Republican politics, which had so far remained signalled rather than spoken. He began to articulate the notions which had been “central to the party’s appeal since at least the mid-1960s but remained only implied under the impression of political correctness”.¹⁰³ Trump’s racist discourse pertained especially to debates about (undocumented) immigration.¹⁰⁴ This outspokenness about topics previously

⁹⁹ Leslie, Stout, and Tolbert, ‘Ben Carson Effect’, 71.

¹⁰⁰ Randolph, ‘Contemporary Black Conservatism’, 158.

¹⁰¹ Leslie, Stout, and Tolbert, ‘Ben Carson Effect’, 73.

¹⁰² Gerald F. Seib, ‘How Trump Has Changed the Republicans’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 August 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-trump-has-changed-the-republicans-11598023026>.

¹⁰³ Robert E. Terril, ‘The Post.-Racial and Post-Ethical Discourse of Donald J. Trump’, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2017): 498.

¹⁰⁴ Lindsay Huber Pérez, ‘Make America Great Again! Donald Trump, Racist Nativism and the Virulent Adherence to White Supremacy Amid U.S. Democratic Change’, *Charleston Law Review* 10 (2016): 226.

largely considered taboo goes to further confirm, in the words of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Trump's belief that "modern political correctness is just total baloney".¹⁰⁵

This audacious approach resonated with White Christian Americans, especially White evangelical Protestants, who constituted and continue to form a crucial base of Donald Trump's political support. So much so, that in 2016 Christian nationalism served as a strong predictor of votes for Trump, even after accounting for explanations including economic anxiety, racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia.¹⁰⁶ Trump's candidacy and subsequent administration relied on messaging around Christian nationalist themes combined with the denigration of immigrants and religious minorities, blending together to feed and reinforce voters' existing fear and distrust of "ethnoracial outsiders".¹⁰⁷ The promoted myth of Christian America carries not only assumptions about religion, but also race, nativism, and social hierarchy, implying that power should return to the hands of White, straight, native-born, Protestant men.¹⁰⁸ Researchers have highlighted further links between evangelicalism and neoliberal racism, including the tendency of evangelicalism to foster individualism and in turn reject group identity, thus reinforcing neoliberal world views and making its supporters less likely to accept narratives of systemic racial inequality. Instead, evangelicals are more likely to see a minority's troubles as an "unwillingness to embrace the Protestant work ethic", and therefore their own fault.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, Christian nationalism has proven to be one of the strongest predictors of Americans' negative feelings toward immigrants and immigration.¹¹⁰ Further party positions include strong opposition to gun control and abortion rights, a preference for small government, the wish to prioritise the securitisation of the southern border and the belief the government should work to maintain the U.S.' status as the "lone military superpower".¹¹¹

The merger of assumptions about Christian America with race described above has resulted in the confluence of "American" and "White" in terms of identity. Accordingly, White Americans are more likely to conflate their own racial identities with what it means to be "truly American".¹¹² The increasing ethnoracial diversity of the U.S. demographics and the pervasive articulation of non-White people as contradicting traditional American values,

¹⁰⁵ Seib, 'Trump Has Changed the Republicans'.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph O. Baker, Samuel L. Perry, and Andrew L. Whitehead, 'Keep America Christian (and White): Christian Nationalism, Fear of Ethnoracial Outsiders, and Intention to Vote for Donald Trump in the 2020 Presidential Election', *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 81, no. 3 (2020): 274–75.

¹⁰⁷ Baker, Perry, and Whitehead, 273.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁰⁹ Bruce Bartlett, 'Donald Trump and "Reverse Racism"', *SSRN 2726413*, 2016, 10.

¹¹⁰ Baker, Perry, and Whitehead, 'Keep America Christian', 273.

¹¹¹ Carroll Doherty, 'How Republicans View Their Party and Key Issues Facing the Country as the 118th Congress Begins', *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed 11 April 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2023/01/19/how-republicans-view-their-party-and-key-issues-facing-the-country-as-the-118th-congress-begins/>.

¹¹² Samuel L. Perry and Cyrus Schleifer, 'My Country, White or Wrong: Christian Nationalism, Race, and Blind Patriotism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2022, 5.

coded in distinctly neoliberal terms, bolsters the perception of “true America” slipping away.¹¹³ Hence, the resonance of the “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) messaging, as well as the clarity of its implication that America was “great” when it was predominantly White.¹¹⁴ The slogan invokes a “nostalgic, imagined, and inherently conservative past”.¹¹⁵ When asked what period Trump was referring to in MAGA, he first pointed to the turn of the 20th century, and then the “late ‘40s and ‘50s”. In both cases, he refers to entrepreneurship and America’s hegemonic standing in the international order.¹¹⁶ However, it is nothing short of tone-deaf and the least bit revealing that both cases precede the Civil Rights Era with no disclaimer to follow.

During Trump’s Presidency, his rhetoric and positions merged with the platform of the Republican party as a whole. In 2020, for the first time in history, the party merely readopted the 2016 version of its platform with the commentary that “The Republican Party has and will continue to enthusiastically support the president’s America-first agenda.”¹¹⁷ The further nationwide pervasiveness of Trump’s racist and nativist messaging manifested in a number of overt displays of coercive racism, for example, the United Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017.¹¹⁸ The ideology of overt White supremacy gained increased support in the U.S. since the beginning of Trump’s Presidency.¹¹⁹

Overt racist displays have been heavily accompanied by the promotion of colour-blind and post-racialist narratives which, as previously discussed, gained prominence during the Obama era, which ought to have proven that “racism against African Americans in the United States [was] no longer a serious problem”.¹²⁰ This discourse thoroughly rejects the sense of a racial burden, i.e. the notion that race carries meaning in the first place, let alone the assertion that it fuels a system of inequality.¹²¹ Instead, the invocation of race directly threatens the colourblind “ideal”, making anyone who does so “a racist”.¹²² Operating with the zero-sum idea that lowered discrimination against one group automatically increases it against another (an idea present throughout Trump’s worldview and politics) has in fact led White Americans

¹¹³ Huber Pérez, ‘Make America Great Again!’, 234.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 228.

¹¹⁵ Simon Mollan and Beverly Geesin, ‘Donald Trump and Trumpism: Leadership, Ideology and Narrative of the Business Executive Turned Politician’, *Organization* 27, no. 3 (2020): 405.

¹¹⁶ Gregory King, ‘Donald Trump Reveals When He Thinks America Was Great’, *CNN*, 28 March 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/26/politics/donald-trump-when-america-was-great/index.html>.

¹¹⁷ Gary C. Jacobson, ‘The Presidential and Congressional Election of 2020: A National Referendum on the Trump Presidency’, *Political Science Quarterly* 136, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 21.

¹¹⁸ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, ‘Toward a New Political Praxis for Trumpamerica: New Directions in Critical Race Theory’, *American Behavioral Scientist* 63, no. 13 (2019): 1778.

¹¹⁹ Pei Shaohua, ‘White Supremacism and Racial Conflict in the Trump Era’, *International Critical Thought* 7, no. 4 (2017): 598.

¹²⁰ Terril, ‘Post-Racial Discourse’, 493.

¹²¹ Ibid., 499.

¹²² Ibid., 495.

to see discrimination rising against their own race, fuelling accusations of reverse racism.¹²³ The perception of race as an “unmentionable” was particularly clear in Trump’s response to the Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, when he made no acknowledgement of racially motivated violence in U.S. policing, instead framing the protests as an issue of “law and order” and “race-baiting”.¹²⁴ This discourse did not end (nor begin) with Trump and remains present in Republican politics. A recent example is Governor Ron DeSantis’ (R-FL) crackdown on the teaching of racial history and diversity programs in Florida, labelled by him as “woke ideology”.¹²⁵

4.2 Black GOP candidates 2016-2023

At first glance, the majority-White (only 20% of all non-White U.S. lawmakers are Republicans¹²⁶) establishment of the Republican party does not strike the observer as a desirable environment for Black politicians. However, the rising prominence of White supremacist discourse within the GOP has not discouraged Black candidates from running on Republican tickets. Instead, their numbers have been steadily increasing. In 2022 The National Republican Congressional Committee lauded the historical high of 80 Black Republicans running on its ballots, 28 of whom made it past the nomination process.¹²⁷

It would be far outside the capacity of this dissertation to attempt to assess all the campaigns of Black Republicans during the Trump and post-Trump eras. Instead, I am focusing on the campaigns of those candidates who were either elected to federal office within the 2016-2023 window or were appointed to positions of close cooperation with President Trump. With this in mind, I curated a list of nine politicians:

- Representative Mia Love (UT): The first Black woman to be elected to Congress on a GOP ticket, 2015-2019.
- Senator Tim Scott (SC): The first Black Senator elected from the South since the Reconstruction, in office since 2013 but re-elected during the considered timeframe. Endorsed by Donald Trump.¹²⁸
- Representative Will Hurd (TX): 2015-2021.

¹²³ Bartlett, ‘Trump and Reverse Racism’, 3–4; Mollan and Geesin, ‘Trump and Trumpism’, 412.

¹²⁴ Jacobson, ‘The Presidential and Congressional Election of 2020’, 25–26.

¹²⁵ Chelsea Bailey and Brandon Drenon, ‘Florida’s Battle over How Race Is Taught in Schools’, *BBC News*, 11 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-64815035>.

¹²⁶ Lisa Macaro, ‘GOP More Diverse, but Congress Still Doesn’t Reflect America’s Demographics’, *PBS*, 7 February 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/gop-more-diverse-but-congress-still-doesnt-reflect-americas-demographics>.

¹²⁷ Nicole Ellis and Casey Kuhn, ‘A Record Number of Black Candidates Are Running on GOP Tickets This Midterm Season. Here’s Why That Matters’, *PBS*, 2 November 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/a-record-number-of-black-candidates-are-running-on-gop-tickets-this-midterm-season-heres-why-that-matters>.

¹²⁸ Meg Kinnard, ‘Trump Endorses SC’s Tim Scott in 2022 Senate Reelection Bid’, *AP News*, 3 March 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-elections-senate-elections-tim-scott-cbc5ddd676da8bb138cd102157e817c6>.

- Representative Burgess Owens (UT): In office since 2021. Endorsed by Donald Trump.¹²⁹
- Representative Byron Donalds (FL): In office since 2021. Endorsed by Donald Trump.¹³⁰
- Herschel Walker (GA): Unsuccessful Senate candidate in 2022, endorsed by Donald Trump.¹³¹ Chair of the President’s Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition 2018-2022.
- Ben Carson (MI): 2016 Presidential candidate, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development 2017-2021.
- Representative Wesley Hunt (TX): In office since 2023. Endorsed by Donald Trump.¹³²
- Representative John James (MI): In office since 2023. Endorsed by Donald Trump (2018).¹³³

I consider the following factors as indicators of the candidates’ recognition. Firstly, all candidates have either been successfully elected to federal office, or appointed to posts by the Republican party. This demonstrates recognition by the White conservative base, from whence Black Republicans secure the majority of their votes.¹³⁴ A breakdown of voter demographics for each candidate would be helpful for even more concrete conclusions, however, this data was unfortunately not available. The repeated electoral success of several politicians (Love, Scott, Hurd) further indicates their communities view or viewed them as serious political choices, rather than a “one-time fluke”.

The success of the candidates’ campaigns also points to the second factor, which is recognition by the majority-White Republican party. Apart from indicating the frequent endorsement of Black candidates by Donald Trump, I illustrate this with the use of campaign financing data in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The graphs display data on fundraising of all listed candidates’ campaigns during the 2016-2023 timeframe bar Ben Carson’s 2016 Presidential run, regardless of their ultimate success. This measure does, of course, have its limits. For

¹²⁹ ‘President Trump Endorses Utah Congressional Candidate Burgess Owens’, *KUTV*, 6 July 2020, <https://kutv.com/news/local/president-trump-endorses-utah-congressional-candidate-burgess-owens>.

¹³⁰ Jacob Ogles, ‘Donald Trump Gives Thumbs up to Byron Donalds’ Return to Congress’, *Florida Politics*, 14 December 2021, <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/480153-donald-trump-endorses-byron-donalds/>.

¹³¹ Ryan Bort, ‘Herschel Walker’s Campaign Greatest Hits: Werewolves, Secret Kids, and Compulsive Lying’, *Rolling Stone*, 6 December 2022, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/herschel-walker-incoherent-georgia-senate-campaign-1234642099/>.

¹³² ‘For Release: Wesley Hunt Endorsed by President Donald J. Trump’, Wesley Hunt for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://wesleyfortexas.com/for-release-wesley-hunt-endorsed-by-president-donald-j-trump/>.

¹³³ John James, ‘President Donald J. Trump Endorses John James for U.S. Senate’, YouTube, 30 July 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgUqOSzUfGc>.

¹³⁴ Ellis and Kuhn, ‘A Record Number of Black Candidates Are Running on GOP Tickets This Midterm Season. Here’s Why That Matters’.

example, given that recognition is awarded based on White supremacist values, determining the true motivation behind it – and thus the difference between recognition and, say, tokenism - remains out of reach. I acknowledge this possible set back while choosing to interpret the allocation of financial resources to candidates' campaigns, especially by conservative and Republican donors, as a testament of the party's and interest groups' overall commitment to supporting the candidates.¹³⁵

In the case of both races for the House of Representatives and for the Senate, it is clear at first glance that the candidates raised significantly higher totals than the average Republican. On average, the Black Republicans running for the House between 2016 and 2023 considered by this dissertation raised 8,8 times more funds than the average GOP candidate in their respective years. In the case of the Senate races, the Black candidates raised 14,5 times more than the average Republican.

For further comparison, I used aggregate data about the average funds raised by Black candidates from both parties and average totals raised by party candidates in 2018 and 2020 to compare the cases of Black Democrats and Republicans. In 2018, Black Republicans and Democrats running for the House of Representatives both raised 0,9 times more than their parties' average candidates. In the 2018 Senate race, Black Republicans raised 1,1 times more than average, compared to the Black Democrats' raising a mere fifth of the average Democrat's total. The 2020 House election saw Black Republicans raise 1,8 times the total of the average Republican, compared to Black Democrats raising only 1,2 times more than the average Democrat. The 2020 Senate race saw Black candidates from both parties raise double the average.¹³⁶

The case of Herschel Walker is especially notable, with the raised total of \$73,274,773 exceeding the Republican average almost 30 times and ranking Walker as the 2021-2022 Senate candidate with the 5th highest fundraising total (from across the spectrum). However, he is preceded by two Black Democrats in the list: Raphael Warnock (GA, \$180,898,147) and Val Demings (FL, \$79,502,411).¹³⁷ Walker was endorsed by President Trump¹³⁸ and heavily supported by the Republican party. He received a party campaign contribution of \$67,225, second overall only to his rival and the winner of the Georgia Senate race Raphael Warnock (\$69,618).¹³⁹ The Georgia race stood out as the most expensive of the 2022 election cycle and

¹³⁵ For details on the used data sources, see *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*.

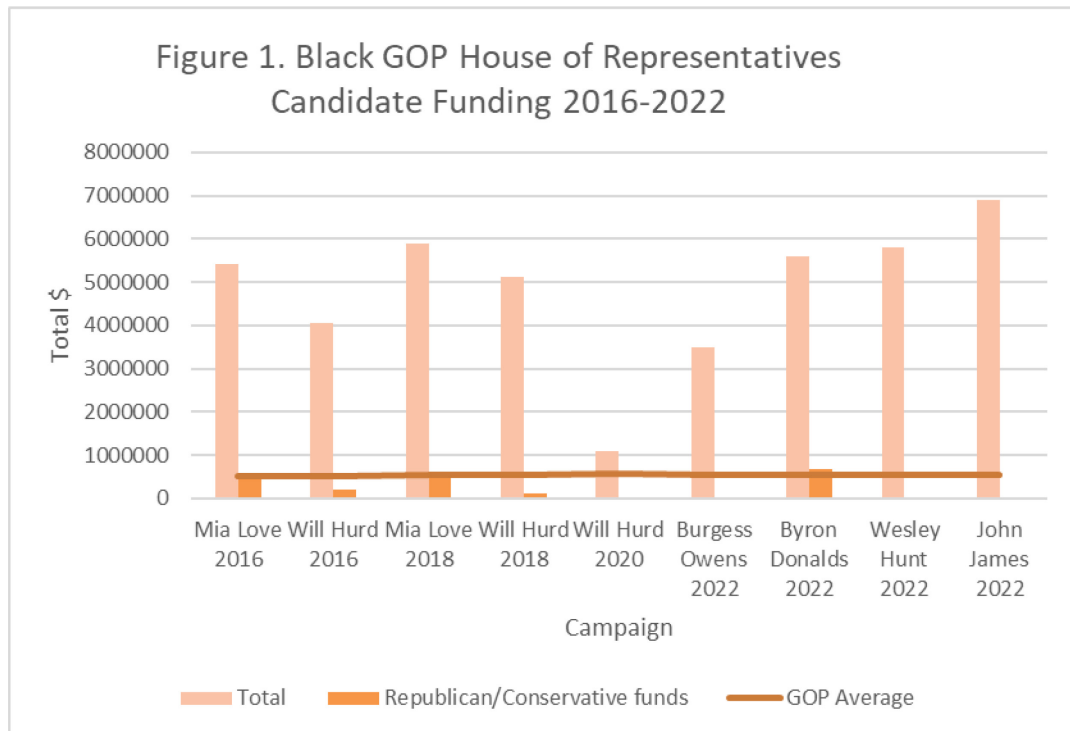
¹³⁶ 'Elections Overview', Open Secrets, accessed 19 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview>; 'Gender, Race and Money-in-Politics, 2018', Open Secrets, accessed 19 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/gender-race-and-politics?cycle=2018>; 'Gender, Race and Money-in-Politics, 2020', Open Secrets, accessed 19 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/gender-race-and-politics?cycle=2020>.

¹³⁷ 'Funding Totals', Open Secrets, accessed 8 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/fundraising-totals>.

¹³⁸ Bort, 'Herschel Walker's Campaign Greatest Hits: Werewolves, Secret Kids, and Compulsive Lying'.

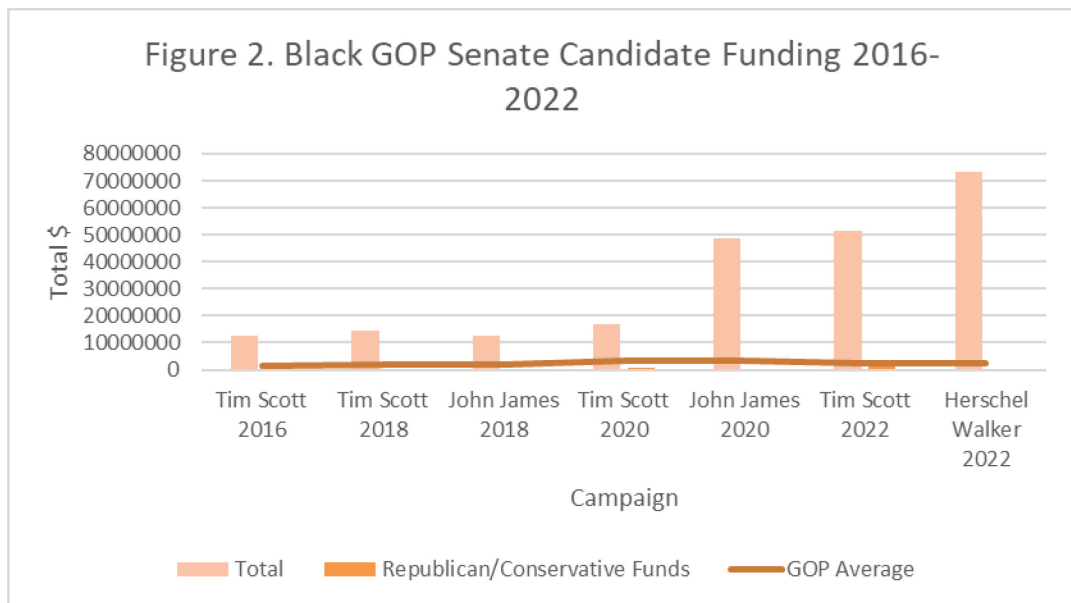
¹³⁹ 'Who Are the Top Candidates Raising Money from Party Committees?', Open Secrets, accessed 7 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/party-to-candidate-giving>.

key to determining overall control of the U.S. Senate, with the Democrats fighting to retain their seat and seize a Senate majority after the GOP conquered the House. It therefore attracted perhaps disproportional attention from both parties.¹⁴⁰



Source: Open Secrets¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Juma Sei, ‘Why Warnock’s Seat Means so Much to Senate Democrats’, *Npr*, 7 December 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/07/1141065758/why-warnocks-seat-means-so-much-to-senate-democrats>.
¹⁴¹ ‘Mia Love - Campaign Finance Summary’, Open Secrets, accessed 8 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/mia-love/summary?cid=N00033842&cycle=2016&type=C>; ‘Will Hurd - Campaign Finance Summary’, Open Secrets, accessed 10 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/summary?cid=N00031417&cycle=2016&type=I>; ‘Burgess Owens - Campaign Finance Summary’, Open Secrets, accessed 8 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/summary?cid=N00045812&cycle=2022&type=I>; ‘Byron Donalds - Campaign Finance Summary’, Open Secrets, accessed 10 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/summary?cid=N00034016&cycle=2022>; ‘Texas District 38 2022 Race’, Open Secrets, accessed 10 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary?cycle=2022&id=TX38>; ‘Michigan District 10 2022 Race’, Open Secrets, accessed 10 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary?cycle=2022&id=MI10>.



Source: *Open Secrets* ¹⁴²

The graphs further indicate the role of Republican and conservative donors in financing some of the political campaigns, which were listed as the highest contributing industries to Love’s 2016 (\$441,818) and 2018 (\$487,712)¹⁴³ campaigns, and Owens’ 2022 campaign (\$546,473).¹⁴⁴ This data was not available for James’ 2018 and 2020 Senate campaigns, Walker’s 2022 Senate campaign, and Hunt and James’ 2022 campaigns for the House of Representatives.

4.3 Candidates on the issues

In the chapter on recognition, I presented the following assumptions about the behaviour of non-White politicians seeking recognition in a White supremacist society. Firstly, I expected them to hold and promote strong rather than moderate conservative views, based on the historical success of strongly conservative Black Republicans (see “Black Republican politics: a struggle for recognition”). Secondly, I expected them to present themselves through neoliberal values, e.g., hard work and self-reliance (see “The terms of recognition”). And thirdly, I expected them to either downplay or omit any mentions of their own racial identities (see “Recognition and identity”). To assess how these assumptions hold up in the case of Black Republicans, I turned to the selected candidate’s campaign materials where possible

¹⁴² ‘Tim Scott - Campaign Finance Summary’, Open Secrets, accessed 10 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/summary?cid=N00031782&cycle=2016&type=I>; ‘Michigan Senate 2018 Race’, Open Secrets, accessed 10 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary?cycle=2018&id=MIS2>; ‘Michigan Senate 2020 Race’, Open Secrets, accessed 10 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary?cycle=2020&id=MIS1>; ‘Georgia Senate 2022 Race’, Open Secrets, accessed 10 April 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary?cycle=2022&id=GAS2>.

¹⁴³ ‘Mia Love - Campaign Finance Summary’.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Burgess Owens - Campaign Finance Summary’.

(Walker, Owens, Donalds, Hunt, James, Hurd), and campaign/politician's websites (Scott) and academic and journalistic sources where primary campaign sources were unavailable (Love, Carson). While the cited materials do not always pertain to a successful campaign, the candidates' messaging has remained consistent throughout their political careers. Due to its limited scope, this study does not produce a comprehensive understanding of each candidate's politics, nor does it claim to do so. The specifics of individual races, the geographically determined concerns of candidates' electorates and intersectional aspects of candidates' identities (e.g., Mia Love had to navigate not only being a Black Republican, but also a member of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, a woman, and a daughter of immigrant parents) are only a few of the factors which will have impacted candidates' campaigns beyond their Black Republican identities.

The candidates' campaigns most frequently addressed subjects of immigration, abortion rights or being "pro-choice", the economy and the Second Amendment, with further frequent mentions of law enforcement, traditional family values, and opposition to political correctness. The choice of issues as well as the opinions candidates have expressed place their politics closely in line with the Trumpist wing of the Republican party. This allegiance is also reflected by the voting records of politicians serving in Congress during Trump's Presidency: Will Hurd voted in line with Trump 80,4% of the time, Tim Scott 90,6% of the time and Mia Love 95,7% of the time.¹⁴⁵

All candidates save for Love and Scott have expressed strong opposition to illegal immigration and supported immigration reform and the securitisation of the southern U.S. border. Southern candidates were understandably more vocal about the matter, with Donalds and Hunt openly supporting President Trump's "build a wall" policy and vouching to "continue working on building a wall".¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, Texan Will Hurd has been a vocal opponent of the Trump border wall, calling it a "third-century solution to a twenty-first-century problem".¹⁴⁷ Donalds and Hurd have simultaneously admitted the value and brain drain brought to the U.S. by legal immigration, claiming to "support immigration reform that encourages the American Dream".¹⁴⁸ However, the crux of the immigration legislation

¹⁴⁵ 'Tracking Congress In The Time Of Trump: Will Hurd', FiveThirtyEight, accessed 9 April 2023, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/congress-trump-score/will-hurd/>; 'Tracking Congress In The Age Of Trump: Tim Scott', FiveThirtyEight, accessed 9 April 2023, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/congress-trump-score/tim-scott/>; 'Tracking Congress In The Age Of Trump: Mia B. Love', FiveThirtyEight, accessed 9 April 2023, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/congress-trump-score/mia-b-love/>.

¹⁴⁶ 'Immigration - Byron Donalds', Byron Donalds: Republican for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://www.byrondonalds.com/immigration>; 'Issues - Wesley Hunt', Wesley Hunt for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://wesleyfortexas.com/wesley-on-the-issues/>.

¹⁴⁷ Eric Benson, 'Will Hurd Has Defied Both Liberals and Donald Trump. Is He the Future of the GOP or a Party of One?', *Texas Monthly*, April 2019, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/will-hurd-has-defied-both-liberals-and-donald-trump-is-he-the-future-of-the-gop-or-a-party-of-one/>.

¹⁴⁸ 'Immigration - Byron Donalds'; 'Will Hurd on the Issues', Will Hurd, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://www.willbhurd.com/issues/>.

discussed pertains to the implementation of “sensible admission and removal procedures”¹⁴⁹ (Carson) and boasting support for stricter detainment laws (Owens, including “H.R. 1496 Sarah's Law”, requiring an illegal alien present in the US charged with a crime resulting in the death or serious injury of another person to be immediately detained, and “H.R. 6122 Protect American Taxpayer Dollars from Illegal Immigration Act”, preventing the federal government from paying settlements to migrant families detained at the border).¹⁵⁰

The candidates also agree on the issue of abortion rights, positioning themselves as “unapologetically pro-life”¹⁵¹ and “pro-family”¹⁵² and promising to “confirm pro-life justices”.¹⁵³ Owens and Scott list their past support of specific anti-abortion bills, with Tim Scott calling the passage of *Roe vs. Wade* a “tragedy” and Ben Carson labelling abortion the “leading cause of Black death in the United States”.¹⁵⁴ On a related note, Walker and Scott have emphasised the importance of family and the “traditional definition of marriage”.¹⁵⁵ During the 2016 presidential campaign, Ben Carson infamously declared being gay was a “choice” and compared gay people to the paedophile advocacy group North American Boy/Man Love Association and “people who believe in bestiality”.¹⁵⁶ Carson later apologised, following with the disclaimer that “there have been no definitive studies that people are born into a specific sexuality”.¹⁵⁷

In terms of economic policy, all candidates align as “fiscally conservative”,¹⁵⁸ promising to fight for “lower taxes, fewer government regulations, and more free-market capitalism”,¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁹ María Galán-García, ‘The 2016 Republican Primary Campaign on Twitter: Issues and Ideological Positioning for the Profiles of Ben Carson, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Donald Trump.’, *El Profesional de La Información* 27, no. 5 (2017): 854.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Immigration - Burgess Owens’, Burgess Owens for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://burgess4utah.com/issues/immigration/>.

¹⁵¹ CNN, ‘Rep. Mia Love Slams President Trump in Concession Speech’, YouTube, 27 November 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9Mx0QH79FQ>.

¹⁵² ‘Issues - Herschel Walker’, Herschel for Senate, accessed 7 April 2023, <https://www.teamherschel.com/issues/>.

¹⁵³ John James, ‘John James Releases New Ad: Flight Suit’, YouTube, 5 July 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyfkzZuq210>.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Life - Burgess Owens’, Burgess Owens for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://burgess4utah.com/issues/life/>; ‘Conservative Values - Tim Scott’, U.S. Senator Tim Scott for South Carolina, accessed 7 April 2023, <https://www.scott.senate.gov/issues/conservative-values>; Janell Ross, ‘The Brief High and Many Lows of Ben Carson’s Presidential Campaign’, *The Washington Post*, 2 March 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/03/02/the-brief-high-and-many-lows-of-ben-carsons-presidential-campaign/>.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Will Hurd on the Issues’; ‘Issues - Herschel Walker’; ‘Conservative Values - Tim Scott’.

¹⁵⁶ Ben Jacobs, ‘Ben Carson: Prison Proves Homosexuality Is a Personal Choice’, *The Guardian*, 4 March 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/04/republican-contender-ben-carson-homosexuality-cnn>.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Dr. Ben Carson Apologizes For Saying Being Gay Is a Choice’, *NBC News*, 5 March 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/dr-ben-carson-apologizes-saying-being-gay-choice-n317676>.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Taxes - Burgess Owens’, Burgess Owens for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://burgess4utah.com/issues/taxes/>.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Issues - Herschel Walker’.

advocating for a “balanced budget”¹⁶⁰ and arguing against “wasteful government spending”.¹⁶¹ Their general consensus on foreign policy has been realist, from a theoretical standpoint, and motivated by a vision of American hegemony of the international system: Donalds advocated for policy to maintain the U.S.’ “status as the #1 economy in the world” and the “leader of the free world”, as well as a “strong stance against Russia and China”,¹⁶² which has been partially echoed by Carson.¹⁶³ Similarly, Hurd conceptualised the ideal foreign policy as one that “inspires fear in [the U.S.’] enemies and causes [the U.S.’] friends to love [them]”.¹⁶⁴ Walker, Owens and Hunt, have all noted the need to support and fund the military and “honour [our] heroes in uniform”, with Wesley Hunt and John James using their histories of active service as fundamental pillars of their campaigns, in which James presented himself as a “Conservative Warrior”.¹⁶⁵

Those candidates who directly addressed the subject of the Second Amendment (Walker, Owens, Donalds, Hunt, James) have also agreed on the right to bear arms being a “fundamental truth outlined in the 2nd amendment”¹⁶⁶ of which they are “strong supporters”. Hunt explicitly labelled himself as a “gun owner” and Donalds boasted his endorsement by the NRA.¹⁶⁷

Finally, Walker, Hunt and Hurd have vouched to “defend, not defund the police” without addressing any of the concerns about racially motivated violence present in American policing.¹⁶⁸ Following the murder of George Floyd, which sparked much of the debate on police reform in the U.S., John James published a video in which he denounced the act as well as the following Black Lives Matter protests, without addressing the issue of race at all.¹⁶⁹ Interestingly, Senator Scott proves somewhat of an exception to this rule. After the murder of Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, Tim Scott introduced the “Walter Scott Notification Act” requiring reporting on the discharge of officers’ weapons and the

¹⁶⁰ ‘Federal Spending - Burgess Owens’, Byron Donalds: Republican for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, https://www.byrondonalds.com/government_spending.

¹⁶¹ ‘Issues - Wesley Hunt’.

¹⁶² ‘Foreign Policy - Burgess Owens’, Byron Donalds: Republican for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, https://www.byrondonalds.com/foreign_policy.

¹⁶³ Gerry Mullany, ‘Ben Carson on the Issues’, *The New York Times*, 3 May 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/us/politics/ben-carson-on-the-issues.html>.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Will Hurd on the Issues’.

¹⁶⁵ ‘About Herschel - Herschel Walker’, Herschel for Senate, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://www.teamherschel.com/about/>; ‘Educational Freedom - Burgess Owens’, Burgess Owens for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://burgess4utah.com/issues/educational-freedom/>; ‘For Release: Wesley Hunt Endorsed by President Donald J. Trump’; John James, ‘John James: Conservative Warrior for U.S. Senate’, YouTube, 4 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63hefBINOhY>.

¹⁶⁶ ‘2nd Amendment - Burgess Owens’, Burgess Owens for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://burgess4utah.com/issues/2nd-amendment/>.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Issues - Wesley Hunt’; ‘2nd Amendment - Byron Donalds’, Byron Donalds: Republican for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, https://www.byrondonalds.com/2nd_amendment.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Issues - Herschel Walker’; ‘Issues - Wesley Hunt’; ‘Will Hurd on the Issues’.

¹⁶⁹ John James, ‘Love Stronger than Hate’, YouTube, 4 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAi-7cuxSwg>.

widespread use of body cameras, referring to police reform as “critical issues for many communities of colour”. Following the murder of George Floyd, Scott was then involved in building a comprehensive package on police reform in the U.S. Senate focusing on allocating resources to hire forces matching the communities they served, ending the practice of using chokeholds, increasing the use of body and street cameras, the requirement of full reporting following the use of force or weapons, and making lynching a federal crime.¹⁷⁰

4.4 Candidates’ self-presentation

I identified three recurring motives in the candidates’ self-presentation. Firstly, candidates have heavily emphasised their own conservative, Christian values. Carson, James, Owens, Walker, Love and Donalds have all explicitly mentioned faith and Christianity as guiding principles in their lives.¹⁷¹ Scott also explicitly credited meeting a “mentor who showed him the wisdom of conservative politics” for his political success.¹⁷² Byron Donalds’ website lists his endorsements from the NRA, Tea Party Express, Gun Owners of America, Republican Liberty Caucus and Florida Family Action, among others, as well as a “100% rating from Florida Right to Life”.¹⁷³ And in a study of Mia Love’s self-appointed political identity, Wineinger points out that Love “presented her Black womanhood in ways that underscored her conservatism”, aligning herself with “White, Christian constructions of family, motherhood, and citizenship”.¹⁷⁴

Wesley Hunt and John James both also emphasised their history of military service, with James especially making it a fundamental pillar of his campaigns. One of his 2018 campaign videos opens with a shot of him standing beside a missile in an aircraft hangar and the following words: "Hunting terrorists in the sky above Baghdad, there are two things you need: faith in God and a Hellfire missile."¹⁷⁵ Walker also mentioned he “strongly considered joining the Marines” in his website bio and highlighted his current work visiting military bases to help remove stigmas around mental health.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ ‘Balancing the Scales of Justice - Tim Scott’, U.S. Senator Tim Scott for South Carolina, accessed 7 July 2023, <https://www.scott.senate.gov/issues/balancing-the-scales-of-justice>.

¹⁷¹ Ross, ‘Ben Carson’; John James, ‘John James for Congress’, YouTube, 31 January 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftno_p3iS4w; Natalie Andrews, ‘GOP Hopes to Add Black Lawmakers to House’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/gop-hopes-to-add-black-lawmakers-to-house-11603892455>; ‘Meet Burgess - Burgess Owens’, Burgess Owens for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://burgess4utah.com/about/>; ‘About Herschel’; CNN, ‘Rep. Mia Love Slams President Trump in Concession Speech’.

¹⁷² ‘Biography - Tim Scott’, U.S. Senator Tim Scott for South Carolina, accessed 7 April 2023, <https://www.scott.senate.gov/about/biography>.

¹⁷³ ‘Byron Donalds: Republican for Congress’, Byron Donalds: Republican for Congress, accessed 5 April 2023, <https://www.byrondonalds.com/>.

¹⁷⁴ Wineinger, ‘How Can a Black Woman Be a Republican?’, 580–81.

¹⁷⁵ James, ‘John James: Conservative Warrior for U.S. Senate’.

¹⁷⁶ ‘About Herschel’.

Secondly, the candidates reproduced the bootstrap narrative of achieving the “American dream” and strongly aligned themselves with neoliberal values. Walker described himself as a “kid from small-town Georgia, who’s lived the American dream”, highlighting his “work ethic, commitment to excellence, and love for America”.¹⁷⁷ The American dream narrative was also echoed by Donalds, who added to it his upbringing by a single mother, as well as Tim Scott, who writes about “growing up poor, in a single-parent household”.¹⁷⁸ Scott continued to mention later opening a small business, this entrepreneurial narrative also articulated by Walker and James.¹⁷⁹ Mia Love presented an immigrant iteration of the American dream, invoking stories of her background as a first-generation American daughter of Haitian immigrants. During a speech at the 2012 Republican National Convention, Love emphasised self-reliance, claiming that “when tough times came, [her parents] did not look to Washington, they looked within”.¹⁸⁰

Thirdly, the candidates present an overarching narrative of being everyman’s politicians rather than chasing grand Washington careers. Carson openly described himself as “the candidate who really didn’t want to run”, citing a sense of mission rather than political ambition as the driving force behind his 2016 candidacy.¹⁸¹ In one of his campaign videos, John James claims outright “I hate politics, but I love this country”, extending his military service narrative of placing service to the country “before self”.¹⁸²

Mentions of race in general in the candidates’ campaigns are few and far between. Furthermore, only two candidates directly addressed their own racial identities. Byron Donalds did so with an emphasis on violating expected Black political behaviour. He described himself as “everything the fake news media says doesn’t exist: a Trump-supporting, liberty-loving, pro-life, pro-2nd amendment, politically incorrect Black man,” adding that he did not enter politics to “get into a mould of what a Black person is supposed to be in politics.”¹⁸³ In 2019, Will Hurd argued that the Republican party will experience trouble securing voters in Texas if it “doesn’t start looking like Texas”, referring to himself as the “face of the future Republican party”.¹⁸⁴

Other than the reference to race and police reform by Tim Scott mentioned above and the lack thereof by John James, none of the candidates have directly addressed the subject of race during their campaigns. The exception is Ben Carson, who recalled once being asked the

¹⁷⁷ ‘About Herschel’.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Byron Donalds: Republican for Congress’.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Biography - Tim Scott’; ‘About Herschel’; James, ‘John James for Congress’.

¹⁸⁰ Jamelle Bouie, ‘Mia Love’s Immigrant Rhetoric’, *The New Yorker*, 29 November 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/mia-loves-immigrant-rhetoric>.

¹⁸¹ Ross, ‘Ben Carson’.

¹⁸² James, ‘John James for Congress’; James, ‘John James: Conservative Warrior for U.S. Senate’.

¹⁸³ ‘Byron Donalds: Republican for Congress’; Andrews, ‘GOP Hopes to Add Black Lawmakers to House’.

¹⁸⁴ Washington Free Beacon, ‘CNN Guest: Will Hurd Is Pro-Life, “On Anti-Choice, I Should Say”’, YouTube, 2 August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1j1il9iJUKU&t=85s>.

question why he did not talk about race more often during the first televised debate among the GOP presidential candidates. In response, he said it was “because he was a neurosurgeon”, adding: “You see, when I take someone to the operating room, I’m actually operating on the thing that makes them who they are. The skin doesn’t make them who they are, the hair doesn’t make them who they are, and it’s time for us to move beyond that. Because, you know, our strength as a nation comes in our unity. We are the United States of America, not the divided states, and those who want to destroy us are trying to divide us and we shouldn’t let them do it.” This was a paradox in Carson’s case especially, whose racial identity contributed to his popularity among conservatives. For example, Rupert Murdoch tweeted about how satisfying it would be to have a “real Black” in the White House.¹⁸⁵ Mia Love had taken the same racially neoliberal approach two years earlier when she was asked about race in an interview on CNN the day after winning her Congress seat, arguing that “this had nothing to do with race”. Furthermore, Love cast herself as an opponent of the Congressional Black Caucus, saying she would join and “try to take that thing apart from the inside out”, signalling minimal or no interest in being a political representative working explicitly on behalf of the Black community.¹⁸⁶ In her 2018 concession speech, however, Love did criticise Donald Trump and the GOP at large for not adopting a more personal and open attitude to minority voters.¹⁸⁷

5. Conclusion

For over 50 years now, the Republican party has held an unfavourable record on civil rights and diversity, with its recent focus on the rejection of political correctness working hard against the problematisation and discussion of White supremacy and contemporary racism in American public discourse. During the Trump era, his and the Republican party’s discourse directly contributed to a rising number of cases of coercive racism, as well as its general prominence. Overall, there is little doubt that the actions and general positioning of the GOP have hindered the group interests of Black Americans in American society. And yet, the number of prominent Black Republicans has grown during the Trump era. Black Republicans’ politics have been aligned with the staunchly conservative position of the Trumpist wing of the Republican party, including on issues explicitly related to the advancement of Black American citizens. For example, all of the discussed candidates voiced a clear rejection of gun control measures at a time when gun violence in the U.S.

¹⁸⁵ Terril, ‘Post-Racial Discourse’, 495–96.

¹⁸⁶ Bouie, ‘Mia Love’s Immigrant Rhetoric’.

¹⁸⁷ CNN, ‘Rep. Mia Love Slams President Trump in Concession Speech’.

disproportionately affects and harms Black Americans.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, they choose “not to see race”, both in cases of clear racial violence and injustice such as racially motivated police violence, as well as a general factor impacting the life experiences and opportunities of non-White American citizens. It is quite the paradox that it is the candidates’ race which makes their colour-blind discourse so significant. By either denying the significance of their racial identity altogether or emphasising their American dream-level success despite being Black, Black Republicans serve as a confirmation bias of White supremacist and neoliberal racist rhetoric. As such, they not only sanction the White supremacist principles operating in American society but further disable its problematisation and deny the need to do so in the first place.

By shifting the focus from blaming individual failure or “foolishness” to observing a struggle for recognition in a White supremacist society, this dissertation provides a novel conceptualisation of Black Republicans and their political choices. While an uncritical approach does indeed support viewing Black Republicans as somewhat of an oxymoron, approaching Black Republican politics as a subaltern struggle for recognition in a White supremacist society, as this dissertation has done, stages it as a source of short-term empowerment for Black politicians.

Viewing their political careers as a subaltern struggle for recognition in a White supremacist society explains their success, and subsequently, how they navigate their racial and political identities. As I have laid out above, the criteria for recognition in a White supremacist context are informed by White normativity, rewarding subaltern actors who reproduce them. Black Republicans provide a textbook example of this principle. They cater to the Republican party and its majority-White voter base by emphasising staunch conservative views and all but dismissing the group interests of the Black American population. They further alienate themselves from their racial identities by emphasising their White-coded qualities associated with “true, White Americanism”, actively working to defy the widely held expectations of who and what a Black politician should be.

As such, racial identity is almost taken out of the equation. Black Republicans’ messaging places ideology above race, denying it any defining power – whether that is the definition of their politics or the race-determined opportunities and obstacles they may have to face. Black Republicans consolidate their political identities with their racial identities by suppressing the latter, shaping them either into nonexistence or into something “Whiter”, more acceptable. If we were to take a step back and look at the bigger picture, we will see the continuum of White supremacy and Black Republican politics: the social system at play incentivises Black politicians into denying the significance of their racial experiences, rewarding them with

¹⁸⁸ Alex Nguyen and Kelly Drane, ‘Gun Violence in Black Communities’, Giffords, 23 February 2023, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/memo/gun-violence-in-black-communities/>.

recognition and votes, and in turn reproducing it. From this angle, Black Republicans are not an oxymoron at all. Instead, their behaviour is completely rational and corresponds to what the society they live in is prepared to reward, in this case with campaign funding, party attention, and votes.

The aim of this dissertation is not to deny Black Republicans agency and portray them as puppets of a White supremacist system. Ultimately, every politician makes a choice. From an ethical point of view focusing on group interest, decolonial practice and subaltern empowerment, Black Republicans are perhaps still “buffoons” and villains. It remains impossible to determine the true motivations behind their political choices; they may be convinced Republicans at heart, they may be opportunists, as they are so frequently labelled, or they may be both. After all, in essence, a subaltern struggle for recognition in and from a White supremacist society is opportunistic. It is not true, reciprocal recognition, but rather a case of learning the rules of the game and playing by them to succeed. Subaltern group interest is not on the list of White supremacy’s priorities. But seeing as the reproduction of White supremacy is the result either way, determining Black Republicans’ motivation is only second, or perhaps irrelevant, in comparison.

Rather than judging Black Republicans’ individual choices, this dissertation emphasises the long-term impacts of White supremacy in fracturing subaltern psyches and turning them against their own group interests. It highlights the importance of addressing not only material realities when studying group interests and political behaviour but also the consideration of social contexts and the subjects’ positioning in the social hierarchy. This invites further research into the recognition of the subaltern by White supremacist societies and its connections to subaltern empowerment – and whether false recognition, such as that I describe, can provide true empowerment in the first place.

Furthermore, by highlighting how the mechanisms of the recognition of the subaltern operate in the U.S. political space, it invites a conversation about the future of subaltern political representation and individual parties’ attitudes towards it. The Democratic party has been accused of taking its non-White voter base for granted, while simultaneously attracting the non-White demographic just by virtue of “not being Republican” and promising liberal racial policies without delivering.¹⁸⁹ The conclusions of this research show that if the Democrats continue to fail to deliver on non-White expectations and in-party recognition¹⁹⁰, they may face difficult consequences as especially non-White politicians seek recognition elsewhere.

¹⁸⁹ Armstrong Williams, ‘Black Americans in the Season of Trump’, *Transition* 122 (2017): 13.

¹⁹⁰ Nadia E. Brown and Danielle C. Lemi, “‘Life for Me Ain’t Been No Crystal Stair’: Black Women Candidates and the Democratic Party”, *Boston University Law Review* 100, no. 5 (October 2020): 1613–36.

Summary

Republikánská strana nese od 60. let minulého století přívěsko „strana Jima Crowa“, motivované jejím přístupem k boji za občanská a volební práva černochů v USA. Strana se dlouhodobě negativně staví k problematizaci a diskusi o systémovém rasismu a bílé nadřazenosti v americké společnosti. Během a po období vlády prezidenta Donalda Trumpa navíc jak jeho diskurz, tak diskurz strany přímo přispěly k rostoucímu počtu případů agresivního, evidentního rasismu. Navzdory očekáváním však narostl také počet černochů kandidujících za Republikánskou stranu, vedoucí k historicky nejvyššímu počtu černošských republikánů v americkém Kongresu od období rekonstrukce.¹⁹¹

Tato práce přistupuje k politice černošských republikánů jako k boji subalterních občanů za uznání ve společnosti charakterizované bílou nadřazeností. Vzhledem k tomu, že klasická teorie uznání nebere v potaz společenský kontext, ve kterém operuje, bylo nejprve nutné ji reinterpretovat pro kontext rasově hierarchizované společnosti, především za pomoci textů Frantze Fanona a Glena Seana Coultharda. Tato reinterpretace odhalila čtyři klíčové charakteristiky uznání subalterních občanů ve společnosti charakterizované bílou nadřazeností.

Za prvé, uznání v rasově hierarchizované společnosti nefunguje na recipročním základu, jak je tomu v případě klasické teorie uznání. Namísto toho je uznání subalterním občanům poskytováno téměř výhradně bílou většinou. Výsledkem je druhá charakteristika, a sice, že kritéria pro získání uznání jsou silně informována společensky normalizovanými prioritami bílé většiny. Pro subalterní aktéry je výsledkem důraz a odměnění neoliberálních charakteristik (např. individualismus, důraz na tvrdou práci), které jsou asociované s bílou rasovou identitou. Ve snaze získat uznání od bílé většiny tak subalterní aktéři přirozeně upozadují nebo zcela odmítají svou vlastní rasovou identitu. V americké společnosti proto můžeme pozorovat fenomén tzv. „barvoslepečí“ nebo „neoliberálního“ rasismu, který zcela odmítá společenský význam rasy, a přitom reprodukuje s ním asociované předsudky. Konečně, jak bylo stanoveno v předcházejících třech bodech, uznání je subalterním aktérům udělováno navzdory jejich rasové identitě, na základě jejich přiblížení bílému společenskému ideálu. Uznání subalterních aktérů ve společnosti charakterizované bílou nadřazeností tak aktivně reprodukuje principy systémového rasismu.

Politické chování černošských republikánů kopíruje výše popsané principy. Jejich voličskou základnu tvoří bílí konzervativci a republikáni, na které také cílí svým diskurzem a prezentací. Naopak černošskou komunitou jsou velmi často odsuzováni jako zaprodanci a pokrytci.

¹⁹¹ Alex Samuels, 'Congress Will Have The Most Black Republicans In Over A Century', *FiveThirtyEight* (blog), 15 November 2022, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/congress-will-have-the-most-black-republicans-in-over-a-century/>.

Ztotožňují se s pravicovou ideologií shodují se s většinovou Republikánskou stranou na zásadních společensko-politických tématech, včetně ekonomiky, práva na interrupci a držení zbraně, a vnímání amerického excecionalismu. Sami sebe zároveň prezentují jako produkty amerického snu s důrazem na vlastní podnikavost, nezávislost, a oddanost své zemi a víře. Tato práce tohle potvrzuje na příkladech devíti černošských republikánských politiků a političek, kteří byli v období 2016-2023 úspěšní ve federálních volbách nebo jmenováni do poradních či vládních pozic blízkých prezidentu Trumpovi. Kromě jejich volebních úspěchů jsou dalšími důkazy jejich uznání aktivní podpora od Donalda Trumpa a částky k financování kampaní několikanásobně převyšující republikánský průměr.

Všichni kandidáti dosáhli individuálních úspěchů, zároveň ale aktivně vystupovali proti skupinovému zájmu černošů. Svým vystupováním a diskurzem reprodukuje principy systémového rasismu a zároveň popírají jeho existenci, čímž znemožňují jeho problematizaci. Je paradoxní, že právě rasa kandidátů přikládá jejich vyjádřením větší váhu: popření existence rasové hierarchie příslušníkem rasové menšiny je samo o sobě důvěryhodnější.

Závěr práce se odklání od vnímání stranické příslušnosti černošských republikánů jako jejich osobního selhání, a namísto toho k ní přistupuje jako k výsledku působení socializace ve společnosti definované systémovým rasismem. Poukazuje tak jak na cyklický charakter bílé nadřazenosti, tak na nepominutelnost systémových vlivů při studiu politického chování různých demografických skupin.

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Bachelor's Thesis Summary

THESIS PROJECT	
Name: Emma Letham	
E-mail: 89570091@fsv.cuni.cz	
Study programme: Area Studies (Teritoriální studia)	
Semester and academic year of commencement: Winter 2022/2022	
Semester and academic year of submission: Summer 2022/2023	
Head of the Bachelor Thesis seminar: prof. PhDr. Michal Kubát, Ph.D.	
Supervisor: PhDr. Jan Hornát, Ph.D.	
Thesis title: Black Republicans: A Struggle for Subaltern Recognition	
Characterisation of the thesis topic (max. 10 lines):	
	<p>This thesis focusses on the politics and identities of Black Republicans in the U.S. At first glance, the politics of Black Republicans appear counterintuitive. Given the Republican party's both past and present record on civil rights and matters of race, Black Republicans are acting against their racial group's interests. How do they consolidate the racial and political aspects of their identities? This thesis approaches the question not as an error in personal judgement on the candidates' part, as existing literature has done, but instead a rational choice in a society defined by White supremacy. The thesis, therefore, views the politics of Black Republicans as a subaltern struggle for recognition. It engages with Axel Honneth's theory of recognition through a critical lens, provided primarily by the work of Frantz Fanon, and applies the resulting findings in a case study of nine Black Republicans in the Trump and post-Trump era.</p>
Justification of modifications and changes to the topic since the assignment of the project until the submission of the thesis (max. 10 lines):	
	<p>The topic has changed significantly, from the original descriptive intention to provide a typology of Black conservatism in the U.S., to the current analytical and explanatory focus. As a result, the structure of the thesis shifted to include three distinct sections: theory, its application to the current socio-political context of the U.S., and finally a case study. In order to be able to analyse Black Republicans, a theoretical/methodological shift was necessary, rooting the analysis in the concept of recognition. This was then approached through a</p>

critical/decolonial lens, to account for the realities of American society.

Structure:

1. Introduction
2. Reading recognition in a White supremacist context
3. Black Republicans: a struggle for recognition
4. Case study: Black Republicans in Trump's America
5. Conclusion

Sources and literature (selected bibliography, max. 30 key titles):

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- Wineinger, Catherine. 'How Can a Black Woman Be a Republican? An Intersectional Analysis of Identity Claims in the 2014 Mia Love Campaign'. *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 9, no. 3 (2021): 566–88.

Student's signature and date:		
Schváleno	Datum	Podpis
Vedoucí práce		
Vedoucí bakalářského semináře		
Garant oboru		