

## **Abstract**

This master's thesis examines the rhetorical strategy of the Republican Party in the presidential campaigns in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century while its main part analyzes George H. W. Bush's campaign in 1988. This research aims to ascertain whether Bush's campaign carried racist features and whether the Republican candidate exploited the racial prejudice of white voters toward African Americans. Firstly, the thesis briefly outlines the history of racial discrimination in the United States and explores the presidential campaigns of Republican candidates who perfected the strategy of dog whistle politics when they enticed white constituents while sacrificing African-American votes by using implicit racial allusions that connected Blacks with words of negative connotations like "crime", "drugs", "law and order", or "welfare queens". Afterward, the thesis focuses on the strategy of Bush's presidential campaign in 1988. It analyzes some of the negative television commercials which strived to weaken the Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis and make him appear soft on crime. Predominantly the "Willie Horton" ad, which abused the story of an African-American man convicted of murder, helped to create this narrative. The study concludes with an analysis of speeches that George Bush delivered throughout the campaign. It finds out that television advertisements and Bush's speeches contained racial elements and that the Bush campaign can be described as covertly racist.

## **Keywords**

Racism, U.S. presidential elections, political campaign, George H. W. Bush, rhetoric, dog whistle politics, code words