

Everyday White Supremacy:
Fundamental Rhetorical Strategies in Racist Discourse

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines racism as discourse and works to explicate, through the examination of historical and contemporary texts, the ways in which racism is maintained and perpetuated in the United States. The project critiques the use of generalized categories, such as *alt-right*, as an anti-racist tactic and notes that these rigid categories are problematic because they cannot account for the dynamic and rapidly changing nature of racist discourse. The dissertation argues that racist discourse that is categorized as *mainstream* and *fringe* both rely upon a fundamental framework of rhetorical strategies that have long been ingrained into the social and political fabric of the United States and are based on the foundational system of white supremacy. The project discusses two of these strategies—projection and stasis diffusion—in case studies that examine their use in texts throughout American history and in *mainstream* and *fringe* media. “Everyday White Supremacy” contributes to important academic and societal conversations concerning the how the academy and the public use category to address racism, anti-racist practices, and rhetorical understandings of racist discourse. The project argues for shift away from the use of categorical naming to identify racist groups and people towards the practice of identifying racism as discourse, particularly through its rhetorical strategies. This paradigm shift would encourage scholars, and the general population, to identify racism via the processes by which it is propagated rather than its existence within a person or group.

DEDICATION

To Victoria,

Thank you for your patience with me during the hardships that this work creates.

Thank you for making me laugh when I felt like I couldn't.

Thank you for supporting me always.

I love you.

To my parents Peggy and George,

Thank you for the sacrifices you have made to provide me with happiness and opportunity.

Thank you for instilling me with compassion and the courage to stand up for my principles.

Thank you for reminding me to always keep swinging.

I love you

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As I progressed through my doctoral degree and began to outline the dissertation, my interaction with students helped to form some of the guiding questions of the project: How do academics and the general public understand and talk about race and racism? Furthermore, how do these discursive practices operate rhetorically to affect the ways in which race and racism are understood, maintained, and perpetuated within the society of the United States? During the introduction to each of my classes, I explained that my research focused on racist discourse, especially concerning racist movements, usually describing them as *white supremacist groups*.¹ Students would often approach me after learning this information with questions—specifically questions about how they might identify if someone was a *white supremacist*, due to their appearance, a tattoo, or some other form of symbolism that would be easily detectable and positively categorize an individual as *racist*. Generally, these questions correlated to the ways racist groups and organizations are presented in the media: shaved heads, tattoos, and symbols commonly associated with infamous organizations like the Ku Klux Klan or the Nazi Party. The questions all sought a similar answer; a simple and detached way to categorize a person as a *racist*. Their questions were all founded on two common assumptions: that racism was a binary personal characteristic and that racism primarily existed within *fringe* or

¹ One of the main focuses of this dissertation is upon the exploration of the use of categorization in the identification and study of racism. In this dissertation, I use italics stylistically to identify when I am speaking about a category that pertains to how we understand, identify or speak about racism or racist discourse. While I use italics for emphasis in other ways throughout the document, I have found that the use of italics to signify a category makes the concepts in the project easier to understand and makes the prose easier to read. If categories I wish to emphasize conflict with other stylistic use of italics (like subtitles) I will denote categories using ellipses.

extremist groups. My students were often unsatisfied with my response that racism is not a personal characteristic but resides within discourse and action, and that the only way to see if a person prescribed to racist ideology was to talk to them or analyze their discourse or actions. As I would later come to realize in my research on racist discourse, my students' questions were representative of how much of our society, including academics, approached the existence of racism within the nation. Indeed, in my own research on racist discourse, I noticed a similar pattern; both academic and popular treatments of racist movements focused less upon racist discourse, and more upon the organization, history, leaders, symbolism, and extremist actions (generally violence) of groups within the nation. Furthermore, I recognized a dearth of research which sought to understand the connections between racist discourse existing in *mainstream* and *fringe* texts. In response to this gap in the field, this dissertation examines the ways media in the United States discusses racism and racist discourse, arguing that the use of simplistic categorization to identify and analyze people, groups, and ideologies is problematic because it removes necessary context from discussions of racism and is often rhetorically co-opted in racist discourse. The dissertation then offers two case studies that identify and analyze rhetorical strategies that operate in racist discourse across time and from both *mainstream* and *fringe* media outlets. These case studies assert that identifying and analyzing racism through discourse, rather than through simplistic categorization, is vital in the fight against the maintenance and perpetuation of racist ideology in the United States.

This dissertation draws upon a broad interdisciplinary corpus of research. An interdisciplinary body of scholarship was vital in the production of this document and in the construction of how I understand race, racism, and racist discourse. Indeed, a rich

understanding of the theory, history, philosophy, of racism is essential in scholarship on racist discourse and to anti-racist efforts generally.

Literature Review

Racist discourse, as a locus of study, has existed in the United States since well before the Civil War and spans a wide array of academic fields and disciplines. Scholars from fields including Critical Race Studies, African American Studies, Rhetoric and Composition, Communication, History, Sociology, Philosophy, among others, have worked to investigate and theorize racist discourse. The interdisciplinary nature of studies racist discourse has helped to create an impressively rich and complex, albeit often disconnected, body of knowledge on the subject. Rhetoric, in a similar fashion, is a discipline that is often characterized by its interdisciplinary nature. While rhetorical scholars are most often found in English and Communication departments, rhetorical scholarship exists in a wide variety of fields, although not always explicitly identified as such. Thus, the study of the rhetorics of racist discourse is positioned in no one field, but instead draws from a multiplicity of academic disciplines. Furthermore, the study of racist rhetoric necessitates a detailed understanding of the many scholarly studies of race not specifically tied to discourse to provide context for rhetorical analysis. The context for this dissertation's rhetorical analysis is couched in the work done by scholars who outline and theorize the philosophical and historical foundations of race, racism, white supremacy, and whiteness. Charles W. Mills' work in *The Racial Contract* (1997) and *Blackness Visible* (1998) demonstrates how white supremacy, which Mills defines as a political system of oppression reliant on race, is a product of the philosophical belief in a racial hierarchy and the colonialist and oppressive actions taken to uphold and install that

belief politically and culturally on a global scale. Focusing on the system of white supremacy within the United States, many scholars have developed theories and models demonstrating the ways U.S. institutions and social mores were founded on, or pervaded by, racist ideologies and philosophy. Joel Olson's *The Abolition of White Democracy* (2004) argues that the idea of race in the United States was constructed via slave laws to support aristocratic interests by creating a "cross class alliance" between the white upper and lower classes (16). In a similar fashion, David R. Roediger (1999) and Theodore W. Allen (1994), both advance theories on how the construction of 'white' as a race was developed and perpetuated in the United States. Other theorists have discussed the continuing prevalence of institutionalized racism. George Lipsitz describes white identity as a "possessive investment" and describes the how military, financial, medical, cultural, and other institutions were constructed in ways that gave advantage to whites via disadvantage to people of color. In *The White Racial Frame*, Joe R. Feagin outlines the concept of the white racial frame, which describes institutionalized racism in America through "stereotyping, bigotry and racist ideology" as well as "the visual images, array of emotions, sounds of accented language, interlinking interpretations and narratives, and inclinations to discriminate" (i). Omi and Winant, in their thrice revised *Racial Formation in the United States*, discuss the formation of race in the United States and discuss how the concept of race has shifted in the post-World War II era.

The study of the shift in the discourse of racism post-World War II and after the civil rights movement signaled a shift in academic thought on the rhetorics of racism. Howard Winant and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's many works both discuss this shift in depth. Howard Winant argues that World War II and the civil rights movement created a "racial

break,” or a social atmosphere that deemed overt racism unacceptable, thereby pushing definite, recognized racist views, policies, and actions out of the mainstream discourse. After the racial break, racism operated in less obvious ways, often characterized by scholars as ‘invisible’ to mainstream society. Bonilla-Silva’s work includes a similar idea, instead dubbed “New Racism,” a concept which breaks contemporary racism in five parts emphasizing the “covert nature of racial discourse...the avoidance of racial terminology... the invisibility of most mechanisms to reproduce racial inequality...the incorporation of “safe minorities”...[and] the rearticulation of some racial practices characteristic of the Jim Crow period” (“New Racism”, 272). Other scholars and intellectuals have constructed similar frameworks for this concept of the ‘invisibility’ of racism including “Racism 2.0” (Wise, 2009), “colorblind racism,” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) and “Dog Whistle Politics” (Haney-Lopez, 2014).

The concept of racist discourse as disguised or invisible helped to inspire a resurgence of study on the discourse and rhetoric of whiteness within the academic community. Whiteness posits whiteness as the collective cultural and discursive practices which work to maintain and perpetuate the political system of white supremacy. Matthew W. Hughey (2014) and Mike King (2015) both discuss how whites rhetorically create moral panics through the construction of a white victimization narrative. In rhetorical studies, Nakayama and Krizek (1995) and Tammie M., Kennedy, Joyce Irene Middleton, and Krista Ratcliffe (2005) both argue for the importance of understanding how whiteness constrains and affects the rhetorical situation, and therefore societal discourse. Keith Miller argues that the rhetorical study of whiteness is far from limited to contemporary academics, noting that black rhetors and intellectuals like Malcolm X have

spoken of whiteness in their work (2004). Indeed, scholars like Frantz Fanon (1952, 2008), W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988), have theorized whiteness, often as the antithetical construction of blackness.

While rhetorical studies in the academy through the 1960s were dominated by the study of Greek and European westernized rhetorics, the field has since expanded to include rhetorical theory and practice of cultures and perspectives outside Western canon. Many of these rhetorical studies, particularly those from minority groups in the United States, concern issues of race or racist speech. Given the foundational nature of race and racism in the social fabric of the United States, race and racism are often prominent features of many minority groups lived experience, and therefore prominent in rhetorical constructions. While many of these scholars are not cited directly within the case studies of this dissertation, their work was critical in formulating my understanding of race, racism, and racial politics in the United States. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* is often cited by rhetorical scholars for its treatment of borderlands and Chicano/a rhetorical theory. Borderlands rhetoric speaks to the unique ways that colonialism and racism affect the lives and identity of Chicana/os and creates a consciousness that is metaphorically modeled after the characteristics of the physical borderlands, specifically those between the U.S. Southwest and Mexico. Jacqueline M. Martinez's work *Phenomenology of Chicana Experience and Identity*, speaks of the ways rhetoric operates the processes of assimilation, de-assimilation, and racial identity. Karma Chavez argues that 'securuity' operates as an ideograph to maintain and perpetuate the "anti-immigrant, anti-terrorist, and protectionist ideology" which exists in the United States, especially concerning the U.S.-Mexico border. In his analysis

of Arizona's SB1070, Josue David Cisneros argues that the law rhetorically places citizenship as a performative aspect of the body while simultaneously positioning brown bodies as a "source of foreignness and fear." Together, these help create a border rhetoric that calls for the "policing and persecuting of immigrant-others" as a form of "civic duty" (147-8). The edited collection *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic* outlines the many ways that post-contact Native rhetors and rhetoricians identify the rhetorical "terministic screens" by which indigenous peoples are represented in colonialist discourse and work to "revise, replace, or tear down those screens" using an "acute awareness of audience" (5-6). *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, by Geneva Smitherman, provides the history of black language structure in the U.S. and argues for four broad black modes of discourse: call-response, signification, tonal semantics, and narrative sequencing (103). David Howard-Pitney describes the rhetorical nature of the African American Jeremiad by analyzing the words of famous black speakers and writers including Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Shirley Wilson Logan's work on the rhetoric of eighteenth century black women has illuminated the rhetorical strategies combating lynching, slavery, and racism utilized by Maria Stewart, Frances Harper Fannie Barrier Williams, Anna Julia Cooper, among others. While these authors do not always focus on racist rhetoric explicitly, their treatment of strategies that rhetors of color combated racist speech, ideology, and institutions gives valuable information about how racism and racist discourse operated.

The specific study of the rhetorics of racist speech is as interdisciplinary as the theoretical foundations which provide it context. Perhaps the most influential rhetorical

scholar on the field is Kenneth Burke, whose theories on identification and division as well as his work on the rhetoric of Hitler, among many other concepts and theories, have influenced vast amounts of rhetorical scholarship concerning racism. This is particularly evident in McPhail's *The Rhetoric of Racism*, in which McPhail draws upon Burke to argue for the idea of rhetoric as coherence. In communication studies the work of Teun van Dijk is particularly notable. His work, beginning in the early 1970s, uses linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis to study the communication of racism. Van Dijk's scholarship is expansive, extensively cited, and is globally focused. In *Racism Without Racists*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva draws upon personal interviews to argue that colorblind racism operates rhetorically under four frames, "abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism." Joe Feagin and Leslie Houts outline "frontstage/backstage," the concepts that whites use space rhetorically, changing the way they speak while in the company of non-white people to make their discourse socially acceptable.

Many scholars who have contributed to the study of the rhetorics of racism are scholars whose work is classified under hate speech, hate group, or racist movement studies. While these studies are often largely descriptive, they also provide important insights into the rhetorical structure of racist discourse. Abbey Ferber (1998) and Kathleen Blee (2003, 2007) have completed extensive work on far right racist movements and discuss, among other things, the rhetoric of women and the rhetoric of masculinity in such movements. The study of racist social conditions and movements is also pertinent to rhetorical studies. Alexander Tsesis studies the rhetoric of American colonialists regarding black slaves and Indigenous people as well as rhetoric in Germany

before the Holocaust to argue the ways language can cause destructive social movements. Patricia Roberts-Miller and Candace Roberts-Epps study the rhetorical defense of slavery and Jim Crow, respectively, and demonstrate how those rhetorical strategies lead to negative historical outcomes. Roberts-Miller draws upon Burke to demonstrate how projection and factionalist rhetoric led to a silencing of discussion and ultimately to a civil war. Roberts-Epps discusses the rhetoric of massive resistance in the South concerning *Brown v Board*. Both of these projects' discussions of rhetorical strategy will inform this dissertation intimately, as the rhetoric of racists past often echoes into contemporary discourse. Other scholars investigate various mediums and topics of racist discourse. Charles Goehring and George N. Dionisopoulos discuss the racist novel *The Turner Diaries* as constitutive rhetoric while Richard C. King and David J. Leonard illuminate the way racist discourse interacts with popular culture. D.L. Cloud analyzes the specific medium of hate mail noting the ways in which gender and identity are incorporated, as well as noting that hate rhetoric often serves not to persuade the audience, but to reaffirm the beliefs of the rhetor themselves. The fact that racist groups have largely migrated from physical groups to online communities necessitates the study of online racist rhetoric. In *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights*, Jessie Daniels documents some of the ways racist groups use the internet to spread their message, focusing on the use of "cloaked websites," or websites who work to seem legitimate but spread racist messages. The study of racism online often looks at the ways it spreads; in 2012, Adam Klein outlined his theory of information laundering, which illuminates the mechanisms by which racism works into mainstream discourse online. Similarly, Roderick Graham (2016), argues that the purveyors of racist discourse

use a tactic known as “inter-ideological mingling” to spread their messages on Twitter. Other authors have worked to study specific online racist communities, notably the long running website Stormfront. Marie Priscilla Meddaugh and Jack Kay argue that *Stormfront* works rhetorically to appear less offensive, allowing users a rhetorical space between overt hate speech and “reasonable” racism.

Significance of Project

This dissertation is a reflection of the field that it enters; it uses the above scholarship both directly and contextually to construct its arguments.² This dissertation intervenes in the field in several ways. First, the project critiques the use of the classification systems used by academics and anti-racist institutions. While the study of racist groups is undoubtedly important, this project argues that the use of generalized definitions like *alt-right* or *racist fringe*, particularly without context or elaboration, creates a reductive understanding of the way racist discourse circulates throughout the United States. The conception of racism existing on a static spectrum from *mainstream* to *fringe* gives groups espousing overt racist discourse the rhetorical capital to define what is acceptable as *mainstream* via their own construction of what is *fringe*. Many of these groups have demonstrated an understanding, and conscious manipulation, of this dynamic. As I demonstrate in Chapter Two, this dynamic works interchangeably among groups, with those classified as *fringe* providing cover for those in the *mainstream* who

² I use the term field here to denote the body of scholarship which studies racist discourse, which is inclusive of a wide variety of subfields and disciplines. Scholars contributing to this work reside in English, Communication, Sociology, Philosophy, History departments, among others. While the foundation of this dissertation reflects my training in Rhetorical Studies in an English department, my scholarship follows the interdisciplinary nature of studies of racist discourse through the utilization of a wide variety of academic disciplines.

draw upon racist discourse. This critique is also significant because it collects and analyzes the various ways racist rhetoric, ideologies, and groups have been classified by academics and the media, a project that is largely absent in the field. Next, the project posits that the study of rhetoric can illuminate and identify the overlap between the *mainstream right* and the *fringe right*. While scholars in the field have worked to demonstrate how *fringe* groups ‘mainstream’ their language, absent from the field is a study that argues that the language of both *mainstream* and *fringe* operate from the same foundational grounds, thus creating an overlap between them. The final two chapters of this dissertation provide extended analysis of two rhetorical strategies that are utilized in racist discourse throughout time and the political spectrum. Using these strategies as examples, I argue that a focus on rhetoric to identify racist speech, rather than a focus on categorization of people and groups, is a potential strategy in the project to counter harmful racist ideology and rhetoric within public discourse. Finally, the project works to extend the theories and work of rhetorical scholars who have explicitly studied racist rhetoric. The project draws most heavily on the theories of Kenneth Burke and Patricia Roberts-Miller. While Burke and Roberts-Miller’s rhetorical analysis focuses on the rhetoric of Adolph Hitler and pro-slavery rhetoric, this dissertation seeks to extend their theories of projection and stasis shifting to analyze contemporary racist rhetoric in both the *mainstream* and the *fringe*. The project is particularly interested in the application of Roberts-Miller’s treatment of proslavery rhetoric to contemporary conservative discourse. Roberts-Miller argues that the rhetoric which was wielded by proslavery advocates was a result of the authoritarian hierarchy of a government which sponsored slavery, noting that “There is a mutually reinforcing cycle; fanatical commitment to a

system is created and recreated through conditions that are themselves justified by a fanatical terror of social change” (220). While Roberts-Miller argues that slavery was the system that created authoritarian culture and rhetoric in the antebellum South, this project will argue for a much broader conception: that rhetorical projection and scapegoating in the defense of racism is the result of the political and philosophical construction of white supremacy in the United States and has been and continues to be utilized to protect and perpetuate white supremacy throughout American history. By concentrating on white supremacy, not only slavery, as the system that creates a “mutually reinforcing cycle” of factionalized rhetoric, this dissertation demonstrates how Roberts-Miller’s theories of proslavery rhetoric reverberate in public discourse as a reflexive response to protests against racism. Furthermore, this project extends Roberts-Miller’s treatment of “stasis shifting” by offering the neologism “stasis diffusion.” Stasis diffusion describes the rhetorical process of responding to a claim or argument by forwarding a series of tangential, but often related, claims that work to distract the opposing rhetors and audiences through the introduction of multiple stases. The concept of stasis diffusion is significant in studies of racist discourse as it elucidates a fundamental rhetorical strategy used in racist discourse across time and political ideology. Furthermore, it is significant in rhetorical studies more generally, as it is useful as a model to analyze a wide variety of persuasive efforts.

Methodology

Analytical Approaches

The project utilizes a varied contingent of methodological approaches. Considering the nature of the texts under scrutiny and the interdisciplinary nature of the

field, no single approach was sufficient to complete the analysis of this dissertation. The two primary methodological approaches for this dissertation are ideological criticism and close textual analysis. One of the primary research questions this study wishes to address is: in what ways is the ideology of white supremacy protected and extended in contemporary right-wing discourse? Drawing upon the works of Mills, Olson, Du Bois, Omi and Winant, and others, this project works to define what ideas and identities make up the ideology of white supremacy. While *mainstream* and *fringe* conservative movements are often seen as two separate entities or identities, their views on race and racism often converge. This project draws upon ideological criticism to demonstrate how rhetors from the *mainstream* and the *fringe* use similar rhetorical strategies to protect and extend the ideology of white supremacy but are able to maintain (for the most part) their distinct political/ideological identities. This ideological criticism is supplemented by close textual analysis which is crucial in understanding the often-subtle ways rhetors across the political spectrum forward similar ideas using differing language. Because the linguistic choices of rhetoric are one of the ways the rhetors are categorized ideologically, understanding the distinct linguistic and rhetorical differences of each text will inform the way they communicate ideology.

The project also relies upon other rhetorical methodologies. Because much of the data is drawn from television programs, the use of visual/ performance criticism is important. Although visual critique is minimized in the project's analysis because it cannot be compared in a significant manner across various media (television, website, ect), it is important to consider the ways rhetors use images or performance to alter or enhance their rhetorical persuasiveness. The project also draws upon public memory

criticism to supplement its rhetorical analysis. The construction of memory (or the forgetting of memory) is often used in defense of condemnation of race and racism, a topic which has a deep and contentious history within the United States. The understanding or construction of the past is often leveraged rhetorically to argue for an action in the present; this is particularly significant concerning racism, which has been battled over since the beginnings of the nation. Attention to the ways in which the rhetors studied in the project represent, forget, or construct history is vital in understanding how their rhetorical strategies persuade their audiences.

Text Collection

Text collection for this project was guided by the goal of demonstrating that the rhetorical strategies considered were present across time and political ideology. To illuminate the use of rhetorical strategy across time, the project sought contemporary texts (within the last 10 years) and texts within times of major racial debate in the United States. Thus, the project draws upon texts during anti-slavery efforts and during the civil rights movement to demonstrate the temporal endurance of rhetorical strategy. To demonstrate the use of rhetorical strategy across the political spectrum, the dissertation sought out texts that are generally considered to fall within the ideological categories of *mainstream* and *fringe*. The shifting and subjective nature of categorical groups makes a clear distinction of these texts difficult (for example, *The O'Reilly Factor* might be considered *mainstream* by some and *fringe* by others). However, inconsistency inherent in categorization, particularly in racist discourse, is central to one of the main arguments of the dissertation: that categorization is a rhetorically weak method of understanding and analyzing racist discourse and is used to maintain and perpetuate racist ideologies.

Chapter One, while largely dealing with theoretical concepts, draws primarily upon texts from Richard Spencer and the Citizens' Council to underscore the limitations of categorization. Chapter Two draws extensively on the television show *The O'Reilly Factor* as well as the websites *Breitbart News* and *The Daily Stormer*. The third chapter draws upon texts from television personality Tomi Lahren and from newspapers reports concerning the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter One, *Talking About Racist Discourse: The Rhetoric of Naming and Categorization*, primarily explores how academics and the general public speak about racism. The chapter argues that the use of categorization to construct a hierarchical stratum of racist people and groups based on their use of recognizable racist language or symbolism is a rhetorically weak anti-racist strategy. The chapter begins by outlining the history of categorization in the field of rhetoric and in the construction of the concept of race during and after the Enlightenment. Following the argument forwarded by David Theo Goldberg and Charles Mills, among others, that categorization was vital in the creation of the concept of race itself, the chapter argues for the need to scrutinize the use of categorization of people and groups as a rhetorical tactic in anti-racist efforts. *Talking About Racist Discourse* turns to linguistic and sociological scholarship of categorization to explain that the primary function of categorization—the creation of efficiency thought and action through “the distortion and simplification of the stimulus world”—leaves categorization efforts open to rhetorical manipulation. The chapter argues that the use of categories which create reductive and simplified descriptions of racist groups, people, and ideologies creates a space of rhetorical cleavage that allows racist rhetors to

delegitimize anti-racists arguments. Through an examination of texts from Richard Spencer, *The Daily Stormer*, and the Citizens' Council, the chapter argues that rhetors consciously manipulate categorical definitions, use their categorization to normalize racist ideas, and slip out of categorical recognition through simple name changes. Ultimately these tactics allow overtly racist groups to mask their ideology and enter the mainstream while simultaneously providing cover for racist discourse in mainstream media. The chapter concludes by arguing that the practice of using categorization to identify and analyze racist people, groups, and ideologies needs to be supplanted by a practice of identifying racist people, groups, and ideologies through their discourse and rhetoric. The implementation of this practice would necessitate the general public to understand the complex nature of discourse, the history of racism in the United States, and the core rhetorical strategies which operate to perpetuate racism. Thus, the following two chapters begin the work of identifying and analyzing some of the core rhetorical strategies which operate in racist discourse.

Chapter Two is a case study that operates to identify and analyze a fundamental rhetorical strategy used in racist discourse. Specifically, the chapter argues that the construction of a racial worldview through projection is used in racist discourse in the United States across time and across political ideology. The theoretical framework of the chapter relies primarily on Kenneth Burke's analysis of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in his article "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle," and on Patricia Roberts-Miller's analysis of proslavery rhetoric in her book *Fanatical Schemes*. The chapter relies on two key concepts within Burke's analysis: the construction of a worldview and the process of projection. Burke argues that the success of Hitler's rhetoric was in the construction of a

worldview for the German people that offered a simple solution to a complex problem. Hitler's worldview was constructed through the use of projection, which Burke describes projections as "the "curative" process that comes with the ability to hand over one's ills to a scapegoat, thereby getting purification by disassociation...hence, if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel, or "cause," outside the self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an enemy within (202-203).

While Burke's outline of Hitler's use of projection and the construction of a worldview are helpful in understanding the concepts generally, Roberts-Miller's work expands these concepts by applying them to proslavery discourse in the antebellum United States. Coining the term "cunning projection," Roberts-Miller argues that projection, regardless of whether a rhetor uses it consciously or subconsciously, is rhetorically useful. She argues that the rhetoric of proslavery rhetors used cunning projection, among other rhetorical tactics, to construct and maintain a highly factionalized worldview concerning slavery and race that worked to limit critical thought and eliminate dissent. The second chapter draws upon Burke's theories of projection and the construction of a worldview and Roberts-Miller's application of these theories to racist discourse in the United States to analyze contemporary racist discourse. Primarily analyzing the rhetoric of the television program *The O'Reilly Factor*, the chapter argues that the show uses projection to construct a racial worldview based upon four assertions:

1. Minority communities have a harder time succeeding in the United States.
2. Systemic (or institutional) racism was corrected through legal means and therefore does not explain the discrepancy.

3. Minority communities have a harder time being successful because they do not have the personal responsibility that is necessary to succeed in the United States.
4. People who argue that institutionalized racism creates continued oppression enable minority communities to eschew hard work and personal responsibility in favor of entitlements.

Through continued repetition of these assertions, a racial worldview is created for the audience of *The O'Reilly Factor* that attributes racial inequality and oppression to personal failings of communities of color, particularly the black community. The conclusion of the chapter demonstrates that the rhetorical strategy used on *The O'Reilly Factor*, a program which is commonly categorized as *mainstream*, is also utilized by rhetors who are categorized as *fringe*. Drawing upon articles published by the websites *Breitbart News* and *The Daily Stormer*, the chapter demonstrates that the strategy of using projection to construct racial worldview is common across the political spectrum. I assert that the major difference between the racist discourse used by *mainstream* and *fringe* rhetors are not their fundamental rhetorical strategies but use of language and symbolism that is easily identifiable to the general public as *racist*.

Chapter three develops the concept of stasis diffusion and argues that it that has been employed in racist discourse throughout the history of the United States and across the political spectrum. The theoretical framework of the chapter relies upon the rhetorical doctrine of stasis and Patricia Roberts-Miller's concept of stasis shifting. The chapter begins with an overview stasis doctrine, drawing upon the analysis of George Kennedy and Ray Nadeau to provide a basic definition of stasis as the precise issue at which those engaged in argument disagree. Roberts-Miller, whose work relies on a similar definition

of stasis, argues that a key rhetorical tactic in proslavery rhetoric involved shifting the stasis, or forwarding claims that do not respond to the argument's original stasis.³ Stasis shifting is rhetorically useful as a strategy of distraction; shifting the stasis allows a rhetor to avoid addressing a point for which they have a weak argument or a point that they do not want their audience to consider. Instead, the rhetor 'shifts' the stasis by responding to an argument with claims that center on another stasis; for example, Roberts-Miller demonstrates how proslavery rhetors attempted to distract away from the argument that the practices of slavery were condemned in the Bible by "moving the discussion away from specific practices of slavery to slavery in the abstract" (139). While Roberts-Miller's definition of stasis shifting is valuable in understanding single stasis shifts, rhetors engaging in racist discourse often shift the stasis several times within an argument. To model this phenomenon, Chapter Three proposes a new concept: stasis diffusion. Stasis diffusion is a rhetorical strategy in which a rhetor responds to an argument or statement through a series of tangential, but related, arguments which 'diffuse' the stasis of the argument. The rhetorical effect of stasis diffusion, like stasis shifting, is to distract the opposing rhetor and/or the audience, from the original argument and to shift the argument to a stasis that is either easier to argue or has nothing to do with the original argument. The chapter demonstrates the use of stasis diffusion through historical and contemporary case studies. First, the chapter analyzes the news coverage of the Emmett Till lynching, illuminating the various ways newspapers diffused the stasis that Till's murder was racially motivated. Second, the chapter analyzes a short viral

³ Roberts-Miller defines stasis in *Fanatical Schemes* as "the hinge of an argument—the place that two (or more) positions disagree" (240).

commentary made by Tomi Lahren in response to Colin Kaepernick's 2016 kneeling protest of the national anthem, arguing that Lahren diffuses the stasis that racial oppression and police brutality are issues within the United States through a series of appeals that undermine Kaepernick's character, equate the protest with disrespect for the Armed Forces, and delegitimize protestors based on their racial, social, or economic status. The chapter goes on to argue that stasis diffusion operates on micro and macro levels. Micro stasis diffusion is characterized by its use in a single argument, often by a single rhetor. Macro stasis diffusion, on the other hand, is characterized as a process that involves the coalescence of the arguments of many rhetors over a period of time. The chapter theorizes that macro stasis diffusion is one way to account for the vast amount of arguments used in racist discourse throughout the history of the country and argues that stasis diffusion has been and continues to be a major hinderance to anti-racist efforts in the United States.

CHAPTER 2

TALKING ABOUT RACIST DISCOURSE: THE RHETORIC OF NAMING AND CATEGORIZATION

“The world is not divided into good people (like us) who never engage in demagoguery and bad people (them) who do. We can’t determine whether rhetoric is demagoguery by deciding whether the rhetor is a “good” or “bad” person. To judge their rhetoric, we have to look at their rhetoric”- Patricia Roberts-Miller

Racism is often described as the exception and not the rule in modern society. The practice of describing racist speech and actions as largely extremist in nature has remained a relative constant in recent decades. In his 1990 book *Racist Culture*, David Theo Goldberg argues that the approach to discussing racism is flawed and indictive of “not taking racism seriously.” Goldberg asserts that “racist expressions are generally reduced to personal prejudices of individuals, to irrational appeals to irrelevant categories, to distinctions that delimit universal liberal ideals” (7). This static understanding of racism—an understanding that identifies racism predominantly through overt benchmarks such as racial slurs, epithets, and symbolism —has been decried by scholars including Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Howard Winant, Charles Mills and Jane H. Hill.⁴ Like these scholars, Goldberg posits that racism is not an extremist ideology that has been eradicated or has faded away, but is a fundamental aspect of the social, political, and economic systems of the country. As a fundamental aspect of the country, racism continually reformulates itself to operate within changing societal conditions. In

⁴ See Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (1997), Howard Winant *The New Politics of Race* (2004), Jane H. Hill *Everyday Language of White Racism* (2008), and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* (2010). For more context surrounding the shifting of racial politics in the U.S. see: Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (1984), Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (2004) Ward, *Defending White Democracy* (2011), Feagin, *The White Racial Frame* (2013).

describing the ways in which racism operates in contemporary society, Goldberg asserts that liberalism, not simply extremism, works to perpetuate racist ideology:

The possibility of a new racism, a more subtle and silently sophisticated racism, is assumed away as it orders social formation anew. It is denied just as it maps the contour internal to and bordering the postcolonial, postcommunist, postmodern, *postapatheid*, and increasingly transnational era. It is contradictorily celebrated as multicultural diversity just as it rationalizes hegemonic control of difference, access, and prevailing power. In short, liberal meliorism...blinds itself to the transformations in racist expressions, in racist culture. It runs from the alterations in the varying forms of racism, in the contents of their representations, in the modes and implications of their significations, and in the functions and outcomes (*Racist Culture*, 8)

Abbey Ferber's *White Man Falling*, which studies the white supremacist movements in the United States, echoes Goldberg's critique of the way we speak about racism, noting "the tendency to focus on leaders in a particular movement, and to explore the character traits that lead individuals to join the movement, contributes to the belief that racism is something rooted in one's personality rather than institutionalized in our society at every level" (9). This same concept is echoed in Jane H. Hill's 2008 book, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, in her assertion that most white American's follow what she calls the "folk theory of race and racism." Hill's theory is made up of three tenets, including: a belief that race is a "basic category of human biological variation," that racism is "entirely a matter of personal beliefs, intentions and actions," and that "prejudice is natural to the human condition" (6). This framework undergirds much of the racist discourse espoused in the United States by those considered *mainstream* and by those considered *fringe*.

Ferber's and Hill's concerns, nine and eighteen years after Goldberg's, demonstrate not only that racism is entrenched in our society, but that the ways we talk

about racism are likewise entrenched and must be scrutinized and updated as societal norms shift and change. For Ferber, this process begins by first helping scholars and the general public recognize that racism is foundational to the social, political, and economic frameworks of the nation and that the locus of study should not be excluded to actors and groups who perpetuate racism but should also include the discourse that creates and maintains racist ideology itself. Understanding racism as a pervasive characteristic of American culture demands that we acknowledge that racism is sustained not through overt means or extremist actors alone but also by society as whole. Indeed, Ferber argues that “the relationship between the white supremacist movement and the mainstream is one that needs to be rethought,” in part, because “defining white supremacy as extremist in its racism often has the result of absolving the mainstream population of its racism, portraying white supremacists as the racist fringe to some non-racist majority” (9).

Unfortunately, in the decades since Goldberg, Ferber, and Hill’s concerns were published, the problem of “not taking racism seriously” persists both in academic and mainstream conversations. Such persistence prompts a discussion over how racism is discussed and analyzed in the media and in academic study. This conversation found a catalyst in the 2016 election cycle. The acceptance and perpetuation of overtly racist discourse by a presidential candidate (and later president) forced many Americans to confront Ferber’s assertion that racist discourse exists in *mainstream* and *fringe* spaces in a similar manner. The response to the acceptance of so called *fringe* racist discourse among popular sources highlighted a societal dependence on the use of categorization to identify and combat racism. Perhaps the best example of this dependence is the media’s adoption of the category *alt-right* to describe the popular acceptance of overtly racist

discourse and rhetors. For many Americans and media outlets, the term seemingly materialized out of nowhere. This led to nearly every major news outlet running stories which sought to explain the term to its readers.⁵ Despite the media attention, finding an agreed upon definition of *alt-right* was, and continues to be, a contested and complex issue. In fact, one of the few commonalities in the efforts to describe the *alt-right* is in defining it as an amalgamation of a series of groups and ideologies that actively defies definition. Although the category of *alt-right* was new, the racist discourse that was espoused by those identified as belonging to the category employed rhetorical strategies common of racist discourse. Indeed, the creation of the term *alt-right* was a conscious rhetorical strategy constructed as an effort to rebrand, and therefore legitimize, discourse historically categorized as *racist* by dissociating it from more commonly known pejorative categories such as *racist*, *white supremacist* or *neo-Nazi*. Because the racist arguments espoused by the *alt-right* were not explicitly tied to people or groups categorized negatively, their ideas were often accepted by prominent figures and the general public, despite their rhetoric largely mimicking racist discourse of the past.

This chapter argues that the categorization of racist groups and racist discourse into hierarchical strata that signify a ‘degree’ of racism (e.g. *alt-right*, *white supremacist*, *far right*) is often based, especially outside of academia, on ambiguous or shallow criteria that requires the presence of overtly prejudicial language or symbolism to be present to classify a person or group as outside the *mainstream* or *racist*. These classifications

⁵ For some examples see Bokhari and Yiannopoulos (2016), Collins (2016), Ehrenfreund (2016), Michael (2016), Stack (2017).

make it easier for racist discourse to exist, and be persuasive, in socially acceptable conversations.

Thus, this chapter argues for two key strategies: First, for a departure from the practice of categorization of racist groups and people and a move towards a focus on the specific ways discourse is harmful towards oppressed communities. Second, in order to educate the general public and broaden the concept of racism beyond a binary centered around prejudice that denotes something *racist* or *not racist*, arguments about racism need to be given with proper and detailed historical context to demonstrate exactly why and how they work to harm or oppress people of color.

First, the chapter outlines the history of the use of categorization in the canonical works of rhetoric and in the construction of the concept of race. The history of categorization within rhetorical studies and its connection to the construction of race helps to illuminate the persistence of its use in rhetorical work on racism. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the use of categorization has been used to negative effect in the past and highlights why using it in contemporary anti-racist rhetorical strategy is ineffective. Next, the chapter elucidates how categories are used rhetorically and argues that their basic function—the creation of more efficient cognitive functioning—can act as a double-edged sword by eliminating the detail and context needed to effectively judge if an object or idea is categorized correctly. Finally, the chapter argues that the use of categorization when discussing racist groups, people, and ideology is problematic because it allows overtly racist groups to mask their ideology and enter the mainstream while simultaneously providing cover for racist discourse in mainstream media. The chapter concludes by arguing that a focus on discourse, rather than a focus on

categorization, would help citizens more effectively recognize and push back against racist groups and ideologies.

The practice of categorization has a deeply rooted history in the field of rhetoric. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, which remains one of the single most influential texts in rhetorical studies, is constructed primarily using categorical organization. Bizzell and Herzberg chart this hierarchical structure in their introduction to canonical rhetorical studies, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, noting that an understanding of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* requires the ability "to classify his complex terms in relation to each other" (171). Considering *Rhetoric* is thought to be a compilation of lecture notes, it is unsurprising that Aristotle's categories of appeals (*ethos, pathos, logos*) are still widely used in introductions to rhetoric and writing programs across the United States. Indeed, perhaps the first skill that is required of students entering rhetorical studies is the understanding and application of classification concerning discourse.

While Aristotle's influence on the field of rhetorical studies is undeniable, his use of categorization also influenced much of Western philosophical and scientific thought. Many of Aristotle's works centered around the process of categorization, including his study of animals *Historia Animalium*, which separated animals in various categories. This categorization is provided gradation in *De Anima*, where Aristotle discusses the idea of the soul, placing life in a series of categories where each category contained the previous within it. While Arthur O. Lovejoy argues that Aristotle did not hold that this gradation was rigid or linear, and even had ideas to the contrary, he concedes that "it was he who chiefly suggested to naturalists and philosophers of later times the idea of arranging (at least) all animals in a single graded *scala naturae* according to their degree of

“perfection”” (58). The idea that every being could be classified in a hierarchy, often called the Great Chain of Being, used Aristotle as its foundation. According to Lovejoy, the idea of the Great Chain of Being was a “conception of the plan and structure of the world which, through the Middle Ages and down to the late eighteenth century, many philosophers, most men of science, and indeed, most educated men, were to accept without question” (59).

The fact that many in the fields of philosophy and science viewed the world as constructed in hierarchical categories helps to explain the inception of the concept of race. David Theo Goldberg argues the concept of race arose in Europe in the fifteenth century and was heavily influenced by the processes of scientific and philosophical categorization present in European society (21). Goldberg and philosopher Charles W. Mills both illustrate how European philosophers including Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, Hume and Kant formulated, in part, their ideas about race through an understanding of the world as constructed in hierarchical categories. Mills notes that Kant’s theories of race were particularly hierarchical in nature, remarking that Kant “demarcates and theorizes a color-coded racial hierarchy of Europeans, Asians, Africans and Native Americans, differentiated by their degree of innate *talent*” (71). Outside studies of philosophy, Goldberg contends that emerging scientific fields in the Enlightenment “defined a classificatory order of racial groupings” (29).⁶ Furthermore, because Europeans were responsible for the construction of a hierarchical categorization of humanity, the characteristics considered ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ were drawn from European

⁶ Mills, citing Emmanuel Eze, notes that Kant taught anthropology and geography as well as philosophy. This scholarship likely had an influence on his construction of hierarchical racial classifications (Mills 70).

societal and physical norms. Early categorical separations of race drew on religion, (Christian or non-Christian), rationality, and physical difference (White or non-White). Thus, as European colonialization efforts ‘discovered’ people and cultures that represented the ‘other,’ the philosophic and scientific communities endeavored to categorize racial difference and use these categorical differences as justification for conquest and enslavement (Goldberg 29-30). Through this process, often enforced by violent means, European thought, values, and bodies became understood as the hierarchical pinnacle of humanity while all others were relegated as categorically subservient. This basic premise is the foundation for the ideology of white supremacy.

White supremacy, according to Charles W. Mills, is a global construct reflective of an agreement among whites to categorize sections of humanity as “white” or “non-white,” and leverage this hierarchy in the “exploitation of [non-white’s] bodies, land, and resources, and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities” (11). This “Racial Contract,” as Mills defines it, is a political system based on race that operates as an oppressive framework that subjugates, de-humanizes, and destroys non-whites to the social, material, and psychological benefit of whites.⁷ This political system was established over time through a series of ‘agreements,’ both legal and informal, conscious and unconscious, among whites, that situated race as “the common conceptual denominator...to signify the respective global statuses of superiority and inferiority,

⁷ Mills’ uses the term “white” as shorthand in his work. However, he explains that white supremacy does not operate entirely on phenotypical characteristics. Instead, he explains: “the “Racial Contract” decolorizes Whiteness by detaching it from whiteness, thereby demonstrating that in a parallel universe it could have been Yellowness, Redness, Brownness, or Blackness. Or, alternatively phrased, we could have had a yellow, red, brown, or black Whiteness: *Whiteness is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations*” (127).

privilege and subordination” (21). These agreements were informal, such as the construction of white identity and society as ‘civilized’ and non-white society as ‘savage,’ as well as formal, as in the case of slave codes written into American colonial law after 1660 (Jordan 44). Perhaps the most basic premise of the Racial Contract is embodied by the creation of the categories of “person” and “subperson.” Mills explains that subpersons “are humanoid entities who, because of racial phenotype/genealogy/culture, are not fully human and therefore have a different and inferior schedule of rights and liberties applying to them” (56). For Mills, the placing of humans in hierarchical strata and its subsequent social and legal codification created “not merely racial exploitation, *but race itself* as a group identity” (63).

The creation of race and the political system of white supremacy demonstrates the rhetorical power of categorization. By designing a system of categories that differentiated humans into hierarchical strata, and constructing those categories based on the characteristics and values of those at the top of the hierarchy, whites created a self-maintaining system in which they could justify the continued exploitation of non-white populations. However, it also demonstrates slippage and inconsistencies inherent in categorization, and particularly in racial categorization. The history of the categorization of *white* in the United States illuminates these inconsistencies. Hill notes that the legal definition of *white* has frequently changed, that the social definition of who should be considered white was inconsistent and shifting, and that phenotypical classification often failed (leading to political constructions such as the infamous ‘one drop’ rule which were aimed at negating the inability to effectively categorize a person based on their phenotype). These fluid and continually changing racial categorizations demonstrate how

racial categorization is a social and political construction rather than the mapping of biological fact, as argued by the folk theory of racism (Hill 9-10).

Rhetorical Manipulation of Categorization in Racist Discourse

Categorization is so commonly used in rhetorical strategy, in part, because it is a foundational aspect of thought and communication. Psychologists have argued that categorization is both a ubiquitous and important aspect of human thought. Indeed, categorization is thought of as so vital to human thought that “the ways in which people understand the world, act upon it and react to it depend on how they categorize it” (Edwards 515). For rhetors, an understanding of how humans understand, interpret and act in the world is vital when constructing persuasive arguments as it allows them to communicate messages that resonate with (or deconstruct) the ways in which their audience understands the world. In a basic sense, categorization helps humans to navigate the world more efficiently by organizing things that are not wholly identical into groups that treat them as the same. A simple example of this might be the category ‘furniture,’ which would include a variety of very different structures (couches, chairs, desks, ect) in a single category. Rosch argues that there are two basic principles of categorization:

The first has to do with the function of category systems and asserts that the task of category systems is to provide maximum information with the least cognitive effort; the second has to do with the structure of the information so provided and asserts that the perceived world comes as structured information rather than as arbitrary or unpredictable attributes. Thus maximum information with least cognitive effort is achieved if categories map the perceived world structure as closely as possible (190)

For Rosch, categories are a balancing act between a ‘true’ representation of the world and a representation of the world that allows humans to make decisions in the most efficient manner possible. However, because language allows us to describe the world around us

in infinite ways, categorization will always exclude information in favor of efficiency. Michael Billig notes that “[c]ategorization involves treating the objectively non-equivalent as being equivalent; in other words, by definition categorization involves simplification and distortion of the stimulus world (81). This simplification and distortion of the world can be extremely helpful for humans in particular contexts. Take, for example, the category of *edible plants*. If one were to be lost in the woods, an understanding of what plants fit into the category *edible* (and which do not) would be vitally important. However, by creating efficiency in human thought through simplification and distortion, more nuanced information can be lost. While the category in this context (lost in the woods) can help an individual efficiently choose what to eat, additional details about the plant that might be important in other circumstances—for example, their medicinal properties, might be lost.

Given that categories involve simplification and distortion, the construction of what defines a category, or what is included within a particular category, is a keenly rhetorical process. Rosch points out that for the purpose of efficiency, categories tend to be seen as distinct, however, she also notes that “most, if not all, categories do not have clear-cut boundaries” (259). We see the slippage between categories quite often in everyday life—like the ambiguity of the category *phone* and *tablet* creating a new *phablet* category—and in serious, consequential proceedings, such as the famous supreme court case *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, in which Justice Stewart stated that hard-core pornography “may be undefinable,” but that “I know it when I see it.”⁸ The often unclear

⁸ In a later case, *Miller v. California*, the court outlined a test for categorizing obscenity, arguing that “A work may be subject to state regulation where that work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest

nature of categorical boundaries is a symptom of human language being unable to perfectly, and efficiently, describe one's perception of the world.⁹ In other words, because categories are socially constructed and employed through discourse, they can be used rhetorically in many ways. In the study of racist discourse, the reliance on categories can be problematic in two major ways. First, on a micro-level, the use of broad and shallowly defined categories allows rhetors to regain legitimacy by changing the symbolism or discourse that categorizes them, or by redefining categories themselves. This process often takes advantage of the use of generalizations inherent in categorical structure. Second, on a macro-level, categories are manipulated to influence the societal acceptance of various political ideology. Specifically, the use of categories makes the use of the "Overton Window" strategy easier to accomplish.

One of the problems in broad categorization is the inability to find, or agree upon, what should be included in any given category. For example, let us return to the category *fringe*. The inverse of this category would perhaps be *mainstream*, *normal*, or *accepted*. However, the categories of *mainstream* and *fringe* rely on the definition of the other for its own; that is, what constitutes the *mainstream* (or the perception of what constitutes it) affects how the *fringe* is defined and vice versa. Additionally, the categories themselves are socially constructed and therefore always contested, dynamic, and changing. Edwards argues that "because categorical descriptions involve choice, and are rhetorically

in sex; portrays, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and, taken as a whole, does not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value." While this test is more detailed in terms of categorical boundaries, the definitions of what is "patently offensive" or "serious...value" are debatable and constantly in flux.

⁹ Additionally, perception of the world often varies from person to person, across time, and culture.

consequential, they also potentially display the speaker as positioned, interested and accountable in a loosely moral sense for how things are described, and for the interactional consequences of descriptions” (523). Thus, the accuracy, objectivity, and use of categorical definitions is often directly connected to the ethics and intent of those defining them. Since categories attempt to create efficiency of information through simplification and distortion, they are open to rhetorical manipulation. Once an entity (be it a group, person, or movement) identifies the words, phrases, or themes that are used to define them as a category, they can respond by excising those particular words or challenging the categorical definition used to refer to them. This type of rhetorical manipulation is common within racist discourse, particularly because people, groups and ideas rarely ever inhabit only one category or conform to a category completely. This phenomenon is what categorization theorists call the “prototype” of a category, or the “clearest cases of category membership defined operationally by people’s judgments of goodness of membership in the category” (Rosch “Principles” 259). For example, the symbols most closely related to the Ku Klux Klan might be the hood or burning cross, and the attributes most associated with Nazis might be the swastika or the Schutzstaffel lightning bolts. If these symbols become associated strongly enough to society, as opposed to a self-selected group, their absence can help a group slip out of a particular category. This phenomenon can be seen in the creation of the category *alt-right* by those who had been previously placed in older, more recognizable pejorative categories. The man who coined the term *alt-right*, Richard Spencer, has demonstrated a clear understanding of the rhetorical nature of categories. For example, interviewers often ask

Spencer whether he identifies as *racist* or as a *white supremacist*.¹⁰ In many of these cases, Spencer moves to question the definition of these particular categories. When asked if he is a racist, Spencer responds:

The word racist is certainly not one I identify with. It's a word I avoid because it is not a real term. It doesn't really mean anything. It's extremely vague and it is always pejorative...and it was invented as such. So it's basically, Sarah Palin is racist, this institution is racist, America is racist...but also when they use it personally, it's a way to silence someone, and it is a way to make sure someone is socially ostracized, that you don't listen to them (Allsup)

There are several rhetorical moves being made in this statement. First, Spencer denies identifying with the categorization of him as *racist* (in other interviews, Spencer even argues that no sane person identifies as such). By separating his own views and identity from this category, Spencer works to legitimize himself and his ideas. Spencer's next move is to undermine the legitimacy of the category itself by arguing that it is not only poorly defined but used as an ad hominem attack on a person's character rather than on the arguments they are making. Spencer's argument here relies on the acceptance of the folk theory of racism, particularly the tenets that assert that racism resides in people, as a personal characteristic and that stereotypes the category *racist* as consisting only of people who are "anachronisms, who are ignorant, vicious, and remote from the mainstream" (Hill 6). Hill notes that the idea that racism is a personal characteristic and that people who use racist language are *fringe* makes "ordinary Whites intensely resistant to recognizing the racist history and content of common expressions in their own language" (179). Spencer uses the folk theory of racism as leverage; because white

¹⁰ It should be noted that these types of questions come from both proponents and detractors of Spencer. The fact that those who support his ideology ask these questions may indicate that the rhetorical undermining of these categories is an important and persuasive move for Spencer.

people simultaneously are afraid of being categorized as *racist* and believe that only stereotypical *racists* use racist language, they are quick to accept that the category of *racist* or *racism* is being overextended. Combined with the fact that the project of white supremacy has worked to eliminate a detailed history of racism within the country, Spencer's audience (and much of the white population in the U.S.) often do not have the context needed to understand why a word or action is racist, and therefore gravitate towards Spencer's assertion that the categorization of racism is used as a weapon.¹¹

Another reason this move could be persuasive to Spencer's audience is the juxtaposition of Spencer's physical appearance and the stereotypical image of a person who fits into the *racist* category. Spencer, who defies the stereotypical image of someone categorized as a *racist*, *white supremacist*, or *neo-Nazi*, argues that many basic categorical terms do not accurately describe him.¹² The prototype of the category *racist* is constructed not only through popular media examples but also by infamous real-life examples. These examples often focus on what most of society would consider undoubtable cases where people have personally expressed that they believe other races are inferior or have committed egregious acts of racial violence. In popular culture, the depiction of racists often tends to lean towards extreme examples, showing *racist*

¹¹ Mills argues that the Racial Contract "prescribes for its signatories...an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions...producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made," adding that "as a general rule...*white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race* are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years...and these phenomena are in no way *accidental*, but *prescribed* by the terms of the Racial Contract" (18-19).

¹² Spencer's bucking of the stereotypical image of white supremacist or neo-Nazi is relatively simplistic, as many of the stereotypes around white supremacists rely on physical appearance. Spencer typically wears a suit, does not have any visible tattoos, and does not shave his head. Aside from this, Spencer does not generally use overt Nazi symbolism (wearing of swastikas, ect) or symbolism from other prominent racist groups (KKK, Aryan Nations, ect).

individuals as using racial slurs, uneducated, violent, and clothed or tattooed with Nazi or KKK imagery. The extreme representation of this category often leads people to view racism as *only*, or at least mostly, an extreme behavior rather than one that is commonplace.¹³ Ta-Nehisi Coates argues that the archetype of the category racist has become almost mythical, noting “in the popular vocabulary, the racist is not so much an actual person but a monster, an outcast thug who leads the lynch mob and keeps *Mein Kampf* in his back pocket” (“Playing the Racist”). Having the prototype of the racist category represent the extreme examples of the category creates a definition where the inclusion of less clear-cut examples is harder to validate. Furthermore, by focusing the prototype of the category of *racist* on people, as opposed to ideologies or words, the definition of the term *racist* often insinuates that racism is an immutable character trait rather than a dynamic ideology. A common understanding of racism as a character trait precludes a widespread and nuanced understanding of racism as a political system where personal prejudice and systemic racism operate together to maintain and perpetuate racial oppression. Another problem with understanding racism as a character trait is that proving that someone holds a particular trait is, outside of their express confirmation, impossible. As Jay Smooth argues, the rhetorical difference between what a person *is* and what they are *saying* is vital because it is relatively easy for someone to defend their own

¹³ Some examples of this depiction include the character Boyd Crowder from the television show *Justified*, who has a massive swastika tattoo and destroys a black church with a rocket launcher, Merle Dixon from the *The Walking Dead*, Derek and Danny Vinyard (as well as other characters) from *American History X*.

personal thoughts, emotions, and beliefs, but it is harder to defend the validity of their words.¹⁴

Spencer demonstrates his understanding of the rhetorical nature of prototypes when he compares the category white supremacist to the category racist, conceding, “I would say white supremacist might have more of an objective validity in the sense that white supremacist is like a slave owner...someone who wants to lord over other races” (Allsup). This statement is an example of Spencer doing the rhetorical work of constructing, or working to confirm, an extreme prototype for a category that has been defined in both broad and specific ways.¹⁵ If the prototype of white supremacist is only someone who owns slaves or “lords” over others, then the category becomes virtually meaningless. In a contemporary United States where legal ownership of humans has been outlawed, Spencer’s understanding of white supremacist is so exclusive that it represents no significant portion of the population (if any at all). Furthermore, Spencer’s definition of white supremacist undermines a definition of white supremacy that provides a nuanced understanding of how the concepts of race and racism operate in the United States and may help the population understand how to effectively implement anti-racist ideologies. Spencer’s use of this rhetorical tactic also explains his discussion of the term Nazi.

¹⁴ For a more in-depth treatment of how white people avoid claims that they are *racist* after using racist language, see Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, specifically her third chapter.

¹⁵ The history of the definitions of white supremacy and white supremacist are complex and dynamic. In the early twentieth century, the term white supremacy was used as an acceptable political platform (Ward). However, over time the term, at least in everyday language, became associated with extreme, or overt, racist groups and individuals. At the same time, academics have defined the term much more broadly, arguing that it is a political system of oppression that does not necessarily rely on extremist action or ideology. The conflicting definitions, which are far from uniformly accepted, make placing a person or group within the category difficult.

Spencer disavows the label of *Nazi* that many have placed on him arguing that Nazism is a “historical term that is not going to resonate today,” and that “German National Socialism is a historic movement of the past...it arose at a very particular time and had particular motive and ideas and policies and styles, and those aren’t mine” (Stack, “Attack”). This relatively simple linguistic move—the denial that one fits into a particular category because they do not adhere to the category’s recognizable traits—demonstrates the weakness of using static categories to describe people, groups, and ideas because they can be easily subverted by rhetors through the avoidance of prototypical characteristics. This can happen in simple, subtle ways, because people often focus on specific, recognizable words, symbols and ideas to identify a category. Perhaps the most infamous category of political ideology is that of *Nazi*. The words and symbols of the Nazi regime have been engrained as negative into the social fabric of many nations, including the United States. Symbols such as the swastika and phrases such as “seig heil” act as a way for people to easily recognize the category of Nazi. Many who promote Nazi ideology have recognized that these symbols are rhetorically inviable and have worked to avoid these symbols and terminology within their discourse. The website Stormfront, which was the most popular forum website catering to those championing the ideology of white supremacy, made an active effort to ban the use of racial slurs and images of swastikas and other Nazi symbols in an effort to make the site more palatable and persuasive to a mainstream audience that might find that discourse offensive (Belrich). At the time, Stormfront was the largest website hosting overtly racist discourse and their move to remove some symbolism that would be categorized as *fringe* or *extremist* is an example of their rhetorical strategy to move toward a *mainstream* categorization.

Spencer, in some ways, has also applied this strategy to his discursive style. For example, Spencer's use of the phrase 'hail victory' is rarely recognized as the use of 'seig heil,' even though this is the direct English translation of the phrase. On one hand, Spencer's argument that his views diverge from the Nazi platform can be understood as a rhetorical trick to distance himself from a category that is socially loathed while still espousing the same basic ideology. On the other hand, there is some truth to Spencer's statement; his discourse is not simply a direct regurgitation of Nazi discourse but discourse that is tailored and affected by the context in which it is given. If we refuse to recognize this distinction, and instead categorize Spencer simply as a Nazi, we risk missing the the discourse is different, and therefore potentially persuasive, to a given audience. Because the major end-goal of Spencer's ideology is similar to that of the Nazi regime—the creation of an ethno-state—many find it efficient to attack his ideology by placing it in a category, that of *Nazi*, that is almost universally discounted in American society.

Using categorical efficiency by leaning only on well-known categories and prototypes does have drawbacks. Burke notes that efficiency “is excellent for those who approach social problems with the mentality of the ‘in and out’ trader. It is far less valuable for those interested in a ‘long-pull investment’” (Burke 250). While in the short term, labeling Spencer a Nazi (or neo-Nazi) is efficient for those who wish to signal to the general public (who recognizes and accepts this category as negative) that a particular person's ideas should not be supported, in the long term, this process can lead to a population that is unable to identify those ideas (particularly when they are repackaged), to understand *why* those ideas are negative, or, perhaps more importantly, *how* to

effectively counter those ideas.¹⁶ Indeed, the allowance of racist discourse operates (or at least should) to educate the population on how to oppose speech and ideologies which they find socially unacceptable. It is important to recognize the permission of racist discourse as an opportunity to understand and illuminate the dynamic nature of racist discourse. Understanding how it changes and evaluating new ways to combat each iteration of racist discourse is one of the important functions of the freedom of speech.

Although Spencer's creation of the *alt-right* and his treatment of categories such as *racist*, *white supremacist*, and *Nazi* are some of the newest examples of the rhetorical manipulation of categorical naming, they are certainly not the only example. The process of renaming groups that have been associated with negative categories has a longstanding history. The Citizens' Councils, a response to the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* ruling, was a series of groups originating in Mississippi that advocated for segregation and worked to suppress black voters. In an effort to distance themselves from the sullied reputation of the second Ku Klux Klan, the Citizens' Council painted themselves as a group which operated on a policy of non-violence and non-secrecy. The organization went as far as denouncing Councils which exhibited too many Klan-like characteristics as "extremist" (McMillen, xxiii).¹⁷ Through this veneer of respectability, the group garnered membership from "governors, congressmen, judges, physicians, lawyers, industrialists, as well as an assortment of lesser men" (McMillen, 11). While the organization lost most of

¹⁶ The ability to counter ideas that we disagree with serves a multiple purpose. It allows us to change the minds of others, but perhaps more importantly, to reason with ourselves why those ideas are negative and how our behaviors are dictated by them in our everyday lives.

¹⁷ McMillen uses the specific examples of the Citizens' Councils of Kentucky and the Seaboard White Citizens Councils, both of which "more nearly resembled Klans than Councils" and were "prone to violence and strident anti-Semitism, committed to secrecy and other behavioral patterns associated with hooded night-riders" (xxiii). The

its influence after the first decade of its operation, it continued to publish its newsletter, *The Citizen*, until 1988. When the organization was finally disbanded, several of the members helped to form the Council of Conservative Citizens, an organization which held much of the same racist ideology, but due to its more ambiguous name, grew in membership and powerful association throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. In 2004, the Southern Poverty Law center revealed that “no fewer than 38 federal, state, and local officials who are still in office...have attended CCC events since 2000” (Beirich and Moser). Although high profile connections to the group have diminished, their website, which operates under the name “conservative-headlines,” was named by Dylann Roof as one of the influences for his 2015 murder of nine black members of a South Carolina church (Roof 1). The ability of the group to reach new audience while espousing the same, or at least similar, ideological arguments for over sixty-three years is in part due to their ability to slightly rebrand themselves with new, socially acceptable names.

Categorization and the *Mainstream/Fringe* Binary

The process of categorization helps to shape the landscape of politics and media in the United States. The ways in which we categorize media outlets, groups, and movements often determines their social legitimacy. The most common way politics in the United States is visualized is through the left-to-right political spectrum. This spectrum often spans, at least in a colloquial understanding, from *far-left* to *far-right* with a *centrist* position in the middle. However, these political positions are also often categorized with a degree of acceptability or legitimacy, with the center position representing the most socially acceptable and the ends of the spectrum being classified as *fringe* or *extremist*. Racism, racist groups, or racist discourse, are commonly located

under one of the *fringe* ends of the spectrum. While conceptually this might make sense—as the social fabric of the country often professes racism as morally repugnant—it does not reflect the historical or contemporary reality of the country’s social, legal, and political atmosphere, which has normalized and accepted racist attitudes, laws, and behaviors. Because categories are often defined not only by what is included in them, but what is excluded from them, locating only openly racist people, groups, and institutions as *fringe* on the ideological spectrum categorizes the *mainstream* as *not racist* and allows them to promote ideology that is still harmful to oppressed communities but is not overtly racist in nature. As I will explain in the next chapter, the exclusion of ‘everyday,’ or non-overt racism from the categories of *fringe*, *extremist*, *white supremacist*, or even *racist*, is partially responsible for the fact that many *mainstream* websites use the same rhetorical and discursive strategies as *fringe* websites but are not condemned by society in the same fashion. Locating the category *racist* mainly as *fringe* or *extremist* exists both in the popular media and within academic discourse. While academic research does identify the ways in which racism is normalized in everyday society, there is a large section of research and media which operates as compendiums of racially extremist people, groups, or movements.¹⁸ Abbey Ferber argues that this trend in academic works is harmful

¹⁸ In *White Man Falling*, Ferber gives the example of Nazis, *Communists, Klansmen, and Others on the Fringe* by John George and Laird Wilcox. For a more detailed treatment of academic research on white supremacist groups that focus on *extremism*, see Ferber’s *White Man Falling* (8-10). Other examples include the Anti-Defamation League’s “Hate Symbols Database,” which generally provides extremely surface level information on symbols commonly used by racist groups, the SPLC’s “Hate Map,” which provides vague information (other than location) of specific racist groups. While not in the scope of this paper, there are likely many other examples of the fetishization of racist groups and leaders. These are common on educational entertainment television channels, in which the content often focuses on the group’s leaders, violent actions, and recognizable racist symbolism.

because it “often has the result of absolving the mainstream population of its racism, portraying white supremacists as the racist fringe in contrast to some non-racist majority” (9). The strident categorization of *racist* as *fringe* and *mainstream* as *non-racist* is used rhetorically by those in both *racist* and *mainstream* categories to perpetuate racist argument and ideology; *mainstream* rhetors often argue that their discourse is acceptable because they are not *fringe* and *fringe* rhetors often use *mainstream* racist discourse to argue that their ideas should be considered acceptable.

The Daily Stormer, which was the most popular neo-Nazi website in the United States until it was dropped by multiple hosting companies, demonstrates how rigid categorization can be leveraged rhetorically. The website’s “style guide” for the creation of articles outlines the rhetorical strategy used to attract and indoctrinate viewers.¹⁹ The guide notes specifically that *The Daily Stormer* wants to separate itself from the most harshly categorized websites, noting:

What we don't want to present is the view presented by some of the "hardcore" white nationalists, who claim that all culture is Jewish and say we have to reject everything and live outside of society. The claim that culture is all Jewish is basically accurate, but "isolate yourself from everything" is not a popular message, or for that matter a healthy lifestyle choice. We want to takeover (sic) the culture, to consume it (13)

This section of *The Daily Stormer's* style guide demonstrates a deft rhetorical understanding of ethos and audience. Although the website agrees with the basic ideology of what they deem “hardcore” white nationalism, they recognize that their target audience—young whites who are learning about the ideology for the first time—will not

¹⁹ The guide outlines the main goal of website, noting: “It should be understood first and foremost that the *Daily Stormer* is not a "movement site." It is an outreach site, designed to spread the message of nationalism and anti-Semitism to the masses” (10).

be receptive of a message that deviates too far from the social status quo. Thus, their goal is not to pull members of society from the *mainstream* to the *fringe* but to incorporate their ideas into the social fabric of the United States to the point that their ideology—currently viewed as *fringe*—becomes a dominant and *mainstream* aspect of the national consciousness. The website supports this agenda by instructing their writers on how to separate themselves from what society would categorize as “hardcore,” noting that “most people are not comfortable with material that comes across as vitriolic, raging, non-ironic hatred” (11) In this way, *The Daily Stormer* manages its ethos by presenting itself as benign in comparison to other groups or websites in the same discursive space. The website understands that it is useful to distance themselves from indicators that would work to categorize them as *fringe* or *extremist*. To do this, they employ a rhetorical strategy of humor, or as they call it, “ironic hatred.” Given the site uses some of the most entrenched societal indicators of extremist racism including openly anti-Semitic statements and overt racial slurs, the website works to blur the line between what content is serious and what content is simply a joke. As a guideline, they indicate that “the unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not.” Insinuating that content that would be viewed by a mainstream viewer as *fringe* or *extremist* is only a joke, the site works to persuade an audience that would normally dismiss the site to continue to read the articles for their comedic value. The humor that the website uses relies upon the belief that “pc culture” or liberal ideology, has restricted the open flow of ideas to a regressive level. This idea is commonly advanced and accepted by mainstream media,

particularly mainstream media on the right.²⁰ Drawing upon this concept, *The Daily Stormer* attempts to make their use of anti-Semitism and racial slurs appear to be a humorous attempt at aggravating those on the *mainstream* or *left* side of the political spectrum. Additionally, use of humor specifically targets the prototypes of the category of *fringe* racists, telling their writers that “there should also be a conscious awareness of mocking stereotypes of hateful racists. I usually think of this as self-deprecating humor - I am a racist making fun of stereotype of racists, because I don't take myself super-seriously” (11). The website recognizes that the way *fringe* racism has been categorized relies on simplified and reductive definitions and works to attack those definitions by mocking them as untrue, exaggerated, or absurd. In addition to humor, the website advocates for a strategy of “culture hijacking.” This strategy revolves around the use of popular cultural references to deconstruct the categories used to identify socially unacceptable racism. The style guide advises its authors that “Cultural references and attachment of entertainment culture to Nazi concepts have the psychological purpose of removing it from the void of weirdness that it would naturally exist in, due to the way it has been dealt with by the culture thus far, and making it a part of the reader's world” (12). The website works to provide its readers with *mainstream* connections to *fringe* concepts, thus attempting to blur the line between the socially acceptable and unacceptable through association. Recognizing that particular symbols, words, and ideas have been deemed socially unacceptable and are generally only seen in negative contexts, the website often associates popular culture references to socially unacceptable symbols

²⁰ For some examples, see Gutfield (2017), Ames (2017), Johnson (2016), O'Reilly “Racism and Witch Hunts (2014).

and ideas. Perhaps the most infamous example of this type of culture hijacking is the use of Pepe the Frog.²¹

The Daily Stormer also rhetorically manipulates the categories of *fringe* (or similar) and *mainstream* through the website's own categorization of *fringe* and *extremist*. Because the website is often seen as a prototype of the category *fringe* or *extreme* racism, their discourse, actions, and behavior help to define what should or should not fit into that category, and, by extension, what should or should not be considered mainstream. An example of the website engaging in this type of rhetorical strategy is their Pokémon GO Nazi Challenge. In 2016, the website ran an article that argued that the mobile gaming app Pokémon GO could be used to spread neo-Nazi fliers to children. The game overlays virtual characteristics on the real-world landscape. The vital aspect of this game, at least to the users of *The Daily Stormer*, is that there are set locations in the real world where players congregate while playing. Thus, because the

²¹ Pepe the Frog was a relatively popular meme with benign origin that began, and continues to be, used in racist discourse. The 'hijacking' of the meme and its widespread use in racist discourse eventually led to it being added to the Anti Defamation League's Hate Symbols Database. Interestingly, because the figure was embedded in internet culture outside of its use by racists, the move to add it to the data base, even though the ADL commented that the symbol did not originate as a hate symbol and needed to be viewed as one in context, was widely denounced. The creator of the character noted that it was "completely insane," that Pepe was included in the database as a hate symbol, noting that "the problem with Pepe is that he's been stamped a hate symbol by politicians, hate groups, institutions, the media and, because of them, your mom" (Furie). The initial response to the ADL's move provides an interesting insight into the process of cultural hijacking and how it can work rhetorically. While Pepe's use in racist discourse long preceded the ADL's inclusion of it as a hate symbol the creator argued that the *categorization* of it as a hate symbol is what finally made it a symbol of hate to the masses. Interestingly, the pushback against organizations opposing racism, such as the ADL, is likely part of the intended consequence of cultural hijacking. The belief that recognizing a fringe use of a symbol is that what gives it power creates a situation where those who appreciate the symbols non-racist usage direct their anger at the ADL for categorizing the symbol as related to hate groups rather than upon those who popularized the symbol within racist discourse. In reality, it is much more likely that the symbol becomes viewed as related to racist discourse because of its widespread use in racist discourse rather than its recognition by watchdogs. An example of this is the Arizona State University hand gesture, mimicking a pitchfork, which is also recognized by the ADL as a hate symbol. However, because the symbol is only related to a smaller, regional organization, the Texas Aryan Brotherhood, the symbol is not popularly thought of as related to racism.

game skews toward a younger demographic, it theoretically would allow neo-Nazi's to easily find locations to distribute fliers to children. The flier itself, which was purportedly designed by one of the members of the website, contained overtly racist language and imagery. The flier was plastered with images of swastikas, a depiction of the popular Pokemon character Pikachu as Adolph Hitler, and a meme of Pepe-Trump aiming a rifle. The top of the flier exclaimed in large, bold print "Hey White Boy," in between two swastikas. The text of the flier contained extremely vile and reprehensible racist language, mainly using extreme racial slurs including "burrito rats," "nigger monkeys," "diseased faggots," and "blood-sucking rat Jews" (Anglin, "Pokémon GO Nazi Challenge!"). Outside of the extremist language, the flier followed many typical arguments and assertions of racist discourse including: the white race being under attack, apocalyptic views of a coming race war, hyper sexualization of the black community, and conspiratorial views of the Jewish community. The original article implores readers to print out the flier and head to local Pokémon GO gym locations to hand them out to young children. The article notes that

The Daily Stormer was designed to appeal to teenagers, but I have long thought that we needed to get pre-teens involved in the movement. At that age, you can really brainwash someone easily. Anyone who accepts Nazism at the age of 10 or 11 is going to be a Nazi for life" (Anglin "Pokémon GO Nazi Challenge")

Interestingly, the idea seemed to be controversial even among the website's readers as Andrew Anglin, the website's creator, wrote an explanation of his rhetorical strategy concerning the fliers. One of the primary objections to the flier that Anglin addresses is the fear that the extreme nature of the language and images in the flier would "make people turn against the pro-white movement." Here, Anglin posits that "there is no data to

suggest seeing something hardcore turns people off to something less hardcore that is associated with the same basic political sentiment” and goes further to argue that:

The actual sociological data suggests that the opposite happens: when people hear something so extreme as this, it opens the “Overton Window” in their psyche, and simply by knowing that very extreme right wing people exist, lesser extreme right-wing people become more socially acceptable in their minds (Anglin, “Pokemon 1488 will Bring Happiness to Children”)

The Overton Window is a theory of public policy that comes from the right wing think tank The Mackinac Center. The Overton Window theorizes how public policy shifts by outlining a window of policies that are “politically acceptable, meaning officeholders believe they can support the policies and survive the next election” (Lehman). This window moves, expands or contracts on any given issue depending on the social climate of a given population. With this flier, Anglin is arguing for a social/ideological, rather than political, understanding of the Overton Window. By creating content that pushes the boundaries of what is considered *extreme* or *fringe*, Anglin hopes that ideas and language that were previously seen as *extreme* or *fringe* will move closer to the *mainstream* in the public eye. Thus, the absurdity of the flier—the targeting of children with Hitler themed Pokémon and the incessant use of overt racial slurs—is, at least in some aspects, a conscious rhetorical effort to provide cover (or create it) for discourse that conveys white supremacist ideology in more socially accepted manners.

Although the use of categorization can be useful in the short term, the long-term use of broad categorization is detrimental to anti-racist efforts. The use of categories which create reductive and simplified descriptions of racists groups, people, and ideology creates a space of rhetorical cleavage that allows racist rhetors to delegitimize anti-racists arguments against them. Instead of anchoring discussion and analysis of racism in a

categorical approach, I argue that a focus on discourse and rhetoric serves anti-racist efforts more effectively.

Moving Away from the Categorical Approach

To shift away from a categorical approach of identifying and countering racism and racist ideology, a new paradigm is necessary. As I have outlined above, the main problem with the categorical approach is the simplification and reduction of information that would allow the populous to identify and counter racist ideology as it is continually reformulated. Identifying racism as discourse, particularly through its rhetorical strategies, would decentralize the categorical approach and encourage the population to identify racism via the processes it is propagated rather than its existence within a person or group. However, to perceive racism as a discourse and a rhetoric, it is vital to understand the complex nature of discourse, the history of racism in the United States, and the core rhetorical strategies which operate to perpetuate racism. In an effort to resist racist ideologies taking hold, it is crucial that the population engage in this work; as educators, it is imperative that we work to facilitate this process.

The first step in constructing this new paradigm is through an examination of how the concept of racism is currently understood. Particularly amongst the general public, racism is often presumed to operate as a binary, personal characteristic. The perception that individuals neatly fit into a category of *racist* or *not racist* is problematic because it positions racism as a feeling or personal characteristic rather than a system of oppression. This often causes anti-racist efforts to become focused on discrediting the individual by categorizing them as *racist* rather than focusing on why their words or actions work to defend, maintain, or create racist systems of oppression. Understanding racism as a

political system, rather than a feeling or personal characteristic, enables the ability to understand racism as a phenomenon that is constructed by, and helps construct, the political, social, and economic frameworks of the country. Charles Mills argues that racism is “a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties” (3). Mills’ definition of racism is vital to understanding racism as a discourse because it outlines how racism is not simply perpetuated by individual prejudice, but is a system that has developed in conjunction with the development of the nation’s political, social, and economic structures. Recognizing individual racism as a product of a larger political system of oppression, rather than the core problem, helps to focus anti-racist work on deconstructing systemic racism rather than battling individual prejudice.

To understand racism as a discourse, a nuanced understanding of the concept of discourse is needed. Here, I draw upon a definition of discourse primarily used in the field of discourse analysis that posits that discourse can “be understood as a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as ‘texts’, that belong to specific semiotic types, that is genres.” (Wodak, 66). This definition of discourse encompasses a wider variety of communication methods (symbols, images, written texts, spoken texts) than the colloquial definition and notes that discourse can be viewed as collections of interrelated communicative acts that operate within and create social and historical contexts. The use of a more nuanced definition of discourse is significant because it allows one to

understand racist discourse as diverse in medium and complex in its interaction with historical and contemporary social mores. Forming a popular understanding of racist discourse as common, rather than exceptional, requires that the general population understands discourse as a complex interaction of various communicative media, both past and present, that can operate differently on local, national, or global levels. This is necessary because the operation of racism, as a political system, is not static but highly contextual; it operates in different ways based on varied contexts. An understanding of the rhetorical discourse of racism requires a critical awareness of the context that racist discourse and actions are couched. Furthermore, as Ferber argues, racist discourse not only maintains and supports the ideology of racism but is the primary method through which white race and racism are created. Ferber notes that she reads racist discourse not as “descriptive,” but “as one that actively *constructs* race” (11). Ferber understands the importance of discourse to racist organizations, noting that her study of the white supremacist movement reads racist discourse as “actively producing the differences that it seeks to exploit” (11). It is this perception of discourse that permits a popular understanding of race as an intricate system that is “constantly being written and read” (11). Because race itself, and racism in particular, is socially constructed and constantly in flux, the means by which racist ideology is constantly in flux.

Given that racist discourse is highly contextual and constantly being reinvented, a deep knowledge of the history of race in the United States is integral in the fight against racism. To understand how particular words, ideas, and arguments can be oppressive, one must understand the history of racism: how it was constructed, implemented, and upheld. This history, I contend, must have focus on rhetoric. Without engagement with the

rhetorical strategies used create particular institutions one runs the risk of educating a population to know, for example, *that* slavery existed in the United States, but does not comprehend *how* it came to be supported or accepted.

A strong understanding of history is especially important in the study of overtly racist discourse and groups. Too often the study of racist discourse, especially discourse that is considered overt or particularly repugnant, is overlooked or fetishized in the academy.²² In the general population, this problem is much more acute. In the mainstream media, racist discourse is often only *identified* as racist rather than *analyzed* concerning why it exists or what the goal of its use is. While the nation's school system lightly covers the arguments against slavery and segregation, rarely, if ever, are the arguments that supported those frameworks covered.²³ Arguments supporting ideas that our society finds morally repugnant are often difficult, even traumatic, to confront in a comprehensive manner. However, engaging with, and learning to counter, the arguments of racist discourse is indispensable in anti-racist work, and must become a focus in both our educational system and our mass media if we wish to produce citizens who continually resist racist ideologies. As Mills argues, "the point is not to endorse this deficient consciousness and these repugnant ideals but, by recognizing their past and current influence and power and identifying their sources, to correct for them" (92). Furthermore, while overtly racist discourse is often challenging to engage with, it can

²² By "fetishized," I am referring to the common practice of focusing studies of racist groups based on their most violent or extremist actions and words.

²³ See: Brown, Anthony L. and Keffrelyn D. Brown, "Strange Fruit Indeed: Interrogating Contemporary Textbook Representations of Racial Violence Toward African Americans" *Teachers College Record*. 112.1 (2010): 31-67.

operate as a useful tool in understanding how racism is perpetuated in more subtle manners. Because overtly racist discourse is often an exaggerated example of the same foundational arguments of subtler racist discourse, it can be a useful way to illuminate the ways in which racism pervades the language, people, and institutions often considered benign.

A nuanced comprehension of discourse and an extensive knowledge of the history of race is necessary in conceptualizing racist discourse because racist ideology is adapted to all forms of communicative media and to all societal contexts. In his definition of racist discourse, Goldberg notes the contextual nature of racism, arguing that the logic of racist discourse is “related to and intersecting with economic, political, legal, and cultural considerations.” However, Goldberg asserts that despite the intersectional nature of racism, racist discourse exists with “assumptions, concerns, projects and goals that can properly be identified as their own” (*Racist Culture* 27).

Goldberg argues that racist discourse can be understood best through an examination of the “preconceptual grounds” of racist discourse, or the “underlying factors that directly generate the discursive field” (*Racist Culture* 300). The preconceptual grounds of racist discourse, according to Goldberg, are “classification and order, value and hierarchy; differentiation and identity, discrimination and identification; exclusion and domination, subjection and subjugation; entitlement and restriction, and in a general way, violence and violation” (*Racist Culture* 301). Of these preconceptual elements of racist discourse, Goldberg identifies “differential exclusion” as the most fundamental element of racist discourse because “as the most basic propositional content of racist desires, dispositions, beliefs, hypotheses, and expressions (including acts, laws,

and institutions), racial exclusion motivates the entire superstructure of racist discourse” (*Racist Culture* 304). In a more general sense, Goldberg argues that “the discourse of racism “justifies” the exclusion of others by denying or ignoring their respective claims. It encourages active interference in establishing what the excluded, the disenfranchised, and the restricted are entitled to and can properly expect” (“The Social Formation” 307). While not all discourse that uses these preconceptual elements are racist, the framework provides an excellent starting point for identifying and analyzing discourse that is racist. Goldberg’s definition of racist discourse is broad and flexible because precisely because he is attempting to avoid strict classification (which he outlines as a preconceptual notion of racist discourse). The changeable and contextual nature of racism undermines attempts at a clear categorization of what is, and is not, racist. However, the preconceptual elements of racist discourse, particularly the use of differential exclusion, act as a basic guideline to begin to identify if discourse is perpetuating racist ideology.

While Goldberg and others’ research has worked to conceptualize a general theory of racist discourse, his work analyzes racism largely through linguistic, sociological, philosophical, and historical lenses than it does through a rhetorical lens. However, Goldberg argues that understanding the rhetorical strategies used in racist discourse imperative if we are to understand how the racist ideologies are spread throughout the country. An elucidation of the rhetoric of racist discourse, Goldberg asserts, can help to explain “how agents have readily taken up racist discourse and resorted to racist expression” (*Racist Culture*, 56). While Goldberg argues that conceptualizing racism as a discourse can help to understand the impetus of change in racist discourse over time, I argue that a focus on the fundamental rhetorical strategies of

racist discourse will not only help map the fluidity of racist discourse, but will help the population identify racist discourse as it continues to change. After World War II, the societal perception of racist ideology became increasingly negative and after the Civil Rights Movement began to be treated as unacceptable.²⁴ This shift in societal acceptance, from a society that openly embraced a racist ideology to one which abhorred it, created a necessity for advocates of racist ideology to package their ideas to be societally acceptable. Thus, the contemporary dissemination of racist ideology is deeply tied to rhetoric and exists in a cyclical process where rhetors cloak racist ideology in acceptable ways until they are widely identified as racist and then begin the process again.

²⁴ As I have noted previously, this perception of racist ideology as unacceptable relies on a relatively narrow understanding of racism. This understanding often focuses on laws which are directly racist or personal views of non-whites as inferior.

CHAPTER 3

“THE GRIEVANCE INDUSTRY”: RHETORICALLY CONSTRUCTING A RACIAL WORLDVIEW IN *THE O'REILLY FACTOR*

*“There are entire media
operations that exist solely to
promote ideology; obviously a bad
situation that is getting worse.”*
-Bill O'Reilly

Before leaving Fox News amid a sexual harassment scandal in 2017, Bill O'Reilly was the leading figure in cable news for almost his entire twenty-year tenure. Even amid the scandal that led to his firing, O'Reilly's audience for *The O'Reilly Factor* was “as large the average audience of each host in CNN's primetime lineup...combined” (Thompson). In terms of audience share, lasting appeal, and name recognition, O'Reilly's show *The O'Reilly Factor* was the epitome of mainstream conservative discourse.²⁵ Although the opening tagline professed that the show was a “no spin zone,” *The O'Reilly Factor* has been identified as a locus for mainstream conservative talking points and ideological construction (Norton 320). Despite its position as a mainstay of conservative discourse, the show has often been criticized for its comments on race, particularly those that involve overt racist insults or slurs.²⁶ However, while O'Reilly has been repeatedly

²⁵ While *The O'Reilly Factor* is organized around the persona of its host, it is important to recognize that the program is developed and produced by a team of people. Therefore, this chapter refrains from focusing on O'Reilly as the sole rhetor and instead uses the terms ‘the show’ and *The O'Reilly Factor* to represent the fact that the rhetorical constructions of the show are created by a large group of rhetors.

²⁶ O'Reilly has been criticized repeatedly for his language concerning issues of race. Some notable examples include criticism for insulting Maxine Waters (Deb 2017), for his comment on “well fed slaves,” (Victor 2016), for his comments on black youth (Wemple 2016), for his comments on the restaurant Sylvia's in Harlem (Associated Press 2007), and for using the term “wetback,” (Carr 2003).

chastised for his views on race, discussion of racial issues remained a common focus on *The O'Reilly Factor*, especially during the years of 2012 to 2015, when protests surrounding the killings of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, among others, were prevalent in the national media. Despite his enormous popularity and centrality to conservative ideology, academic studies of *The O'Reilly Factor* rhetorical strategy are relatively limited. Among academic articles, there are two main publications which seek to analyze the communicative technique of *The O'Reilly Factor*.

In their 2007 article "Villains, Victims and the Virtuous in Bill O'Reilly's "No-Spin Zone"" Mike Conway, Maria Elizabeth Grabe, and Kevin Grieves analyze O'Reilly's Talking Point Memos using the Institute for Propaganda Analysis' seven devices of propaganda from the 1937 book *The Fine Art of Propaganda*. While the study is relatively narrow in scope, focusing on the comparison between *The O'Reilly Factor* and Charles Coughlin, it does outline some rhetorical tactics used by *The O'Reilly Factor*, notably its use of name calling, fear, and construction of groups based on moral binaries. The authors conclude that the show "emerged as a bolder and less nuanced user of the propaganda devices" (215).

Matthew Norton's 2011 piece "A Structural Hermeneutics of "The O'Reilly Factor" provides a broader, but less data driven analysis of *The O'Reilly Factor*. Drawing from the entirety of the program instead of only the Talking Point Memo segment, the article focuses its analysis on the show's use of "the O'Reilly persona, the deep meaning structure of the show, interpretation dramas, and rhetorical techniques" (321). The section

on rhetorical techniques covers the elenchus, metonymy, affective appeals, catch phrases, and thematic patterns of *The O'Reilly Factor's* Talking Point Memo section.

While these two articles provide convincing arguments that analyze *The O'Reilly Factor's* rhetorical strategy in a broad fashion, neither of the articles analyze the show's rhetoric concerning race. This is not entirely surprising, especially considering neither of the articles draw upon content from the show later than 2009, and most of the content analyzed comes from the years 2004 and 2005, well before the upswing in media coverage concerning race spurred in part by the election of the nation's first black president.

This chapter analyzes the rhetorical strategy that *The O'Reilly Factor* employs when speaking about race and racism. Drawing primarily from the theories of Kenneth Burke and Patricia Roberts-Miller to frame the analysis, this chapter argues that the show presents its audience with a racial worldview that discredits liberal arguments about race, identifies personal responsibility as the primary reason minority groups suffer, and scapegoats racial activists and protestors. This worldview, which exemplifies a post-racism ideology, or what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls "New Racism," works to delegitimize and silence racial activism and protest. The chapter argues that *The O'Reilly Factor's* discourse concerning race demonstrates the use of a rhetorical strategy that is fundamental to racist argument about racism in the United States. Specifically, the use of projection to create a scapegoat group, or outgroup, can be found in racial discourse across time and political ideology.

To complete this analysis, the chapter primarily examines the Talking Point Memo (TMP) segment of *The O'Reilly Factor* from 2011 through 2015. The Talking

Point Memo segment is generally two to three minutes in length and consists of O'Reilly reading a short monologue while short quotes, or talking points, are displayed in the corner of the screen. While the segment is not representative of the show as a whole, it does present the show's most overt persuasive element; TPMs tell the audience specifically and plainly how they should interpret an issue without any outside perspective, commentary, or reporting. In addition to TPMs, the chapter analyzes the discourse of several media sources which are considered outside *mainstream* discourse. Focusing specifically on Breitbart News, the recently popularized news outlet connected to the alt-right, and *The Daily Stormer*, currently one of the most popular websites espousing neo-Nazi discourse, the chapter demonstrates that the rhetorical strategy present in *The O'Reilly Factor's* discourse is utilized by rhetors with a wide range of conservative ideologies.

The O'Reilly Factor's Racial Worldview

In his celebrated essay examining the rhetoric of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Kenneth Burke analyzes many of the rhetorical tactics that make up Hitler's persuasive strategy.²⁷ The essay is striking, in part, because of Burke's assertion that Hitler's rhetoric, which helped spawn a world war and some of the worst atrocities in history, employed relatively simplistic tactics of persuasion. Perhaps the most overarching aspect of Hitler's

²⁷ The use of Burke's study of Hitler in this chapter is not intended to compare O'Reilly with Hitler in terms of his intent, behavior, or actions. What is vital in Burke's study of Hitler is his explanations of the simple, if not foundational, ways Hitler used rhetorical strategy to his advantage. I do not argue that *The O'Reilly Factor's* rhetoric is a precursor for an attempt at world domination or mass genocide of an ethnic or racial minority. Instead, I argue that parts of the rhetorical strategy that *The O'Reilly Factor* employs are longstanding, foundational persuasive tactics which have been used by other rhetors throughout history to justify or perpetuate the oppression of minority groups.

rhetorical strategy, according to Burke, is his ability to fashion a convincing worldview for his audience. Burke argues that Hitler, “provided a “worldview” for people who had previously seen the world as but piecemeal” (218). Burke believes Hitler’s worldview was persuasive in part because of the economic, political, and social dysfunction that was present in Germany after WWI, noting that the absence of a unifying ‘plan’ allowed Hitler to implement a worldview that was successful because the population was “psychologically ready for a rationale, *any* rationale, if it but offer them some specious “universal” explanations” (218). Although the social, political, and economic landscape of the contemporary United States is a far cry from early 20th century Germany, I contend that the creation of a comprehensive or “universal” worldview is still rhetorically viable. While Burke posited that the absence of a rival worldview was a vehicle for Hitler’s rhetorical strategy, it can be argued that the opposite is true in the United States. Instead of a worldview that works to unify the entirety of an audience, political rhetors in the United States often utilize the factional nature of the political landscape, particularly concerning issues of race, to construct a worldview that unites a singular faction. In the United States, disputes over race and racism have a longstanding history of creating factional politics. Two of the most significant internal conflicts in the history of the United States, the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement, were heavily influenced by factionalism that revolved around ideological constructions about race. Thus, *The O’Reilly Factor*’s racial worldview is likely not fashioned to persuade the entirety of the political spectrum but simply the largely conservative leaning audience which routinely tunes in to the program.

The O’Reilly Factor’s racial worldview is constructed through four basic assertions:

1. Minority communities have a harder time succeeding in the United States.²⁸
2. Systemic (or institutional) racism was corrected through legal means and therefore does not explain the discrepancy.
3. Minority communities have a harder time being successful because they do not have the personal responsibility that is necessary to succeed in the United States.
4. People who argue that institutionalized racism creates continued oppression enable minority communities to eschew hard work and personal responsibility in favor of entitlements.

This logic creates a closed loop to explain the continued existence of racial inequality in the United States while disavowing the idea that racism is the root cause of such inequality. To create a simplified, universal answer for an extremely complicated question, the show eliminates race as a contributing factor, instead placing the onus almost entirely on personal responsibility. For *The O'Reilly Factor*, the American capitalist system works in a way that everyone has a chance to succeed, no matter the circumstances. Utilizing survival bias to its advantage, *The O'Reilly Factor's* racial worldview sees the state of minority communities not as a symptom of racial oppression, but a symptom of people who lack personal responsibility and the drive to succeed in the United States.²⁹

²⁸ While O'Reilly does occasionally speak to minority groups outside of the black community, he primarily discusses race and racism in the United States along a black/white racial binary. Discussions of other minority groups, although they deal with issues of race and racism, are framed by O'Reilly through other means, particularly immigration and terrorism.

²⁹ *The O'Reilly Factor* commonly uses cherry picked examples of people who overcame obstacles as evidence that anyone can succeed in the United States. In "Economic Justice," O'Reilly uses his own life experience to make this point. However, *The O'Reilly Factor* often uses members of the black community

It is important to note that the assertions outlined above do not necessarily proceed in a particular order in the TPMs. Instead, *The O'Reilly Factor* frames these arguments into commonly used themes so that the audience becomes familiar with the entirety of the argument even if it is not detailed in whole. In his essay on the hermeneutics of the *O'Reilly Factor*, Norton describes the use of themes in the show as its “deep meaning” structure. The deep meaning structure operates as a series of “binary cultural structures” that connect the various issues that the show discusses “to the deeper, morally laden themes and tensions comprising the show’s enduring preoccupations” (325). For example, Norton identifies some of these structures as American vs. anti-American, rational vs. ridiculous, facts vs political spin (326). When arguing about race, *The O'Reilly Factor* typically draws upon deep meaning structures like personal responsibility vs. entitlement, traditional vs progressive (or left), facts vs. political spin, rational vs. ridiculous, American vs. un/anti-American. By positioning arguments, groups, or people on the negative side of one of these binaries, the signals to his audience how they should feel about any given subject.

Projection and Rhetoric

The rhetorical structure of *The O'Reilly Factor*'s racial worldview is underscored by the use of projection. Projection (or ‘defensive’ projection) has long been discussed in psychological theory. It is perhaps most famously theorized by Sigmund Freud in his work in psychoanalysis at the beginning of the twentieth century. The basic premise of projection is a “process of perceiving one’s undesirable qualities in others as a way to

to make this point. See “Why Some Black Americans,” and “President Obama and Race,” for examples of the program using Samuel L. Jackson and President Obama in this fashion.

protect one's self-image" (Govorun, Fuegen, Payne 781). More specifically, Baumeister, Newman, and Duff argue that defensive projection is a result of "people's efforts to defend their self-concepts against threatening implications" which "lead[s] them to perceive others as having traits they wish to deny in themselves" (997). This basic psychological theory provides the foundation for rhetorical theories of projection

The idea of projection in rhetorical studies is perhaps most well-known through the work of Kenneth Burke. In "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle," Burke outlines what he calls a "unification device," or a series of rhetorical features which serve to persuade Hitler's audience of his claims. Burke describes one of these features as a "projection device," and defines it as "the "curative" process that comes with the ability to hand over one's ills to a scapegoat, thereby getting purification by disassociation...hence, if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel, or "cause," outside the self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an enemy within (202-203). Burke's description of rhetorical projection follows the work of Freud in describing the way in which a rhetor might defend, or purify, themselves through the act of projection onto an enemy. Although Burke tied this rhetorical theory to the scapegoating of Jewish people in post WWI Germany, it has been used by scholars to describe the rhetorical strategies of racist discourse in the United States.

In her book, *Fanatical Schemes: Proslavery Rhetoric and the Tragedy of Consensus*, Patricia Roberts-Miller studies proslavery rhetoric from 1830 leading up to the Civil War. Roberts-Miller argues, among other things, that proslavery rhetoric used a strategy of projection which scapegoated abolitionists and worked to silence criticism of slavery. Expanding upon Burke's theories, Roberts-Miller specifically ties projection to

rhetoric through the term “cunning projection.” Roberts-Miller uses the term cunning projection to “emphasize the rhetorical and political power that comes from this move: the most cunning politicians are not necessarily self-conscious about their strategies (and, in fact, one of the most cunning moves is to persuade one’s self first) but seem capable of intuitive and unconscious cleverness” (37). In this definition, the focus on intent is decreased in favor of rhetorical potential; as Roberts-Miller argues, a rhetor’s words can be framed persuasively despite their intent.³⁰ In addition to Burke’s notion that projection has the psychological benefit of purification, Roberts-Miller argues that it also has a rhetorical and political function in that it “rationalizes the bad behavior of the rhetor, in that it makes the aggressive behavior seem, at worst, defensive” (39). For slave owners, the rationalization that slave traders were the problem made their actions seem less egregious. For *The O’Reilly Factor*, this often materializes in the proposition that the left creates racial inequality and division by highlighting systemic racism while actively perpetuating racial oppression by denying or justifying its existence.

To make its worldview convincing, *The O’Reilly Factor* works to provide arguments for each of the four assertions outlined above. Of the four, the first is the least treated, with the show generally fwdstating that the black community faces obstacles. Rarely does *The O’Reilly Factor* linger on the specific problems that the community faces but sticks to generalized statements like “there is no question that African-

³⁰ Roberts-Miller argues that “whether Hitler *really* believed that invading Poland was a course of action forced on him by France and Britain is a question for psychoanalysts; but a rhetorician can say that it was a tremendously cunning way to frame the policy” (37). This chapter follows Roberts-Miller’s logic concerning O’Reilly; the focus of this paper is on the persuasive capacity of O’Reilly’s discourse, not his intent or understanding of racism. Whether he truly believes that systemic racism does not exist or that personal responsibility is the reason for inequality is outside the purview of this study.

Americans have a much harder time succeeding in our society than whites do” (The Truth about White Privilege). In fact, the show appears to consider the assertion that racial inequality exists as undeniable, noting that “the cold truth is African Americans have it harder than other ethnic groups in the USA. That's a fact, and anyone who denies it isn't living in the real world” (“Why Some Black Americans”). The other three assertions, however, are given more attention. The second assertion, that systemic racism is not a factor in continued racial inequality, sets up the logical framework for the following assertions. If the audience believes that systemic racism continues to have an impact on the lives of black Americans, the claims that black Americans are responsible for inequality and that racial activists create racial division lose credibility with the audience. Continuing this pattern, if an audience believes that personal responsibility is not a significant factor in continued racial inequality, the idea that racial activists push black Americans to favor entitlement over personal responsibility does not follow. While the assertions that create *The O'Reilly Factor's* worldview do not necessarily have to be argued chronologically, each helps to bolster one another to create a veneer of logical continuity. With this in mind, the remainder of the chapter analyzes how the program's discourse attempts to persuade his audience that assertions two, three, and four are valid.

Delegitimization of Systemic Racism

The delegitimization of systemic racism in the TMP segment is *The O'Reilly Factor's* first step in constructing a racial worldview for his audience. For later rhetorical moves to operate, the audience must first believe (or at least understand) the program's view of the U.S. racial landscape. The main point of contention for *The O'Reilly Factor* is the existence of systemic or institutionalized racism.

According to Joe Feagin, systemic racism “encompasses a broad range of white-racist dimensions: the racist ideology, attitudes, emotions, habits, actions, and institutions of whites in this society” and is “a material, social, and ideological reality that is well-embedded in major U.S. institutions” (*Systemic Racism 2*). Scholars have demonstrated that the philosophical, political, legal, social, and economic foundations of the United States are profoundly influenced by ideologies of racism. These foundations created legal precedence, social mores, and institutional obstacles which continue to negatively affect the lives of Americans of color despite efforts to eliminate de jure racism in the United States.³¹ However, the evidence provided by scholars is rarely considered in *The O’Reilly Factor’s* construction of the racial landscape. Instead, the program insists that while there are individuals who are personally bigoted or racist, there exists no institutionalized or systemic racism within the contemporary United States. The show also rails against ideas which are part and parcel of systemic racism, including the idea of white privilege, which it believes is an erroneous concept. Its stance, for the most part, follows the discourse of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls “New Racism,” a concept which breaks contemporary racism in five parts emphasizing the “covert nature of racial discourse...the avoidance of racial terminology... the invisibility of most mechanisms to reproduce racial inequality...the incorporation of “safe minorities”...[and] the rearticulation of some

³¹ While an exhaustive list of the scholarly work that examines these topics is impractical in this footnote, the following are some selections of scholarly work in each topic. For an analysis of race and the philosophical and political foundations of the United States, see Allen (1994), Feagin (2013), Mills (1997, 1998), Olson (2004), Omi and Winant (1986) and Roediger (1999). For a discussion of colorblind, “post-race” or post-civil rights movement racist discourse, see Bonilla-Silva (2010), Ward (2011), and Winant (2004). For treatises on the how legacies of racism continue to oppress people of color see Alexander (2012), Lipsitz (2006), and Massey and Denton (1993).

racial practices characteristic of the Jim Crow period” (“New Racism”, 272). *The O’Reilly Factor* contends in TMPs that racism is solely defined by personal prejudice and that institutional racism does not exist. In doing so, the show attempts to keep invisible the ways in which racial inequality is perpetuated in American society. While it offers no real evidence as to why these longstanding academic theories should not be believed, the program’s rhetoric works to delegitimize the ideas of systemic racism and white privilege for his audience through repetition and through the reductive explanation of concepts.

The first, and perhaps most simplistic, way in which *The O’Reilly Factor* works to delegitimize the ideas of systemic racism and white supremacy is through repetition. Burke notes that the rhetoric outlined in *Mein Kampf* and implemented in Nazi Germany demonstrated “to a very disturbing degree, the power of endless repetition” (“Battle” 217). When analyzing pro-slavery rhetoric in the lead up to the civil war, Roberts-Miller, drawing heavily from Burke, goes further to argue that “repetition *is* persuasion” (*Fanatical Schemes* 213). Repetition in the TMP segment is used to relay the idea that the only type of racism which exists in America is personal bigotry and that systemic racism, in any manifestation, does not exist. Throughout the TPMs observed in this dissertation, the show repeats statements which overtly signal its beliefs:

Talking points does not believe in white privilege (“The Truth about White Privilege”).

Want more truth? This is not a country that promotes white supremacy. Bigoted people are everywhere and come in all colors. But there is no systemic effort to keep black people down in America (“The Baltimore Rioting”).

And the excuse that slavery, Jim Crow and other historical injustices should now define how black citizens are treated is insane” (“Demonizing America”)³²

³² The quotes presented here are not exhaustive of *The O’Reilly Factor*’s repeated statements that systemic racism does not exist. For other examples, see: “Racist America,” “The Age of Anger,” “A Bad Day for

These repeated claims help to create the foundation for the racial worldview that *The O'Reilly Factor* presents to its audience. Many of these claims are simply assertions without evidence or broad generalizations which do not disprove theories of systemic racism in an academic sense.

This repetition also carries subtle, yet significant, rhetorical moves. For example, the language that *The O'Reilly Factor* often uses to describe these theories is largely pejorative; the show characterizes the idea that systemic racism still affects black Americans or that systemic racism should be taken into account in policy considerations as “insane,” or as “propaganda,” or as a “lie.”³³ Conway, et al. distinguish this rhetorical tactic as “name calling,” that operates by “giving a person or idea a bad label to make the audience reject them without examining the evidence” (203). The tactic, which Conway et al. describe as “the backbone of [*The O'Reilly Factor*’s] communication strategy,” combined with repetition, can condition an audience to automatically associate particular ideas with negative connotations. This is particularly true for complex concepts like systemic racism, which to understand fully, require a relatively large amount of theoretical and historical contextual knowledge. Instead of a nuanced and detailed explanation of the concept, *The O'Reilly Factor* repeatedly presents its audience with short, reductive, and negatively charged definitions of systemic racism. Over time, this

America,” “Ebola and Race,” “Vicious Racial Politics,” “Mistreating Black Americans,” “Race and Corruption,” “Analyzing the Charleston,” “The Left’s Secret,” “Race Relations,” “Violent Crime,” “Running from the Truth,”

³³ For instances of framing systemic racism as insane, see “Demonizing America”, as propaganda, see “The Baltimore Rioting,” “White Suppression”, “Nancy Pelosi,” as a lie, see “White Suppression.”

presentation can convince the audience to view systemic racism as an insane, propagandistic lie, rather than a concept that has been intensively studied by scholars for over a century.

The repetitive statements made by *The O'Reilly Factor* are often part of its explanation of theories of racism to his audience. By providing vague, inaccurate, or exaggerated explanations of racial theory, the program undercuts the validity of the theories for its audience. Although it never quotes academic theory itself, the show does provide definitions of what many academics would describe as systemic racism. The concept of systemic racism, as noted above, is a broad concept which outlines embedded racism. Academic explorations of systemic racism analyze how the legal, economic, social, and political avenues through which racism became ingrained into institutions of the United States continue to affect the lives of Americans of color. In fairness to *The O'Reilly Factor*, the academic study of racism has developed many, often overlapping, theories of racism in the United States. Systemic racism, institutional racism, and structural racism are all used in various ways in academe. Furthermore, these concepts rely on a large amount of contextual knowledge to be fully understood, leading them to be simplified in reductive ways when used in popular media. However, *The O'Reilly Factor's* description of these types of theories (as it generally pools them together) is overly reductive, if not occasionally counterfactual.

The O'Reilly Factor often defines the concepts of white supremacy and white privilege within the framework of his racial worldview. These explanations help to cement the show's views of the racial landscape of the United States while simultaneously discrediting theories which provide contradictory views. *The O'Reilly*

Factor's discussions of white supremacy and white privilege attempt to diminish the rhetorical capital of the concepts.

Rhetorical capital is a concept, derivative of the concept of ethos, that describes the persuasive characteristics of an entity. Piki Ish-Shalom defines rhetorical capital as “an attribute generated by features, some internal to an entity, some external to it, and most (though not all) relational, constituting sets of relations that serve as persuasive assets – persuasive assets that come alive not by themselves, but in the hands of able rhetors” (283-4). Thus, the rhetorical capital of a text would include the content of the text itself as well as the relationship the audience has with the text. For example, a religious text could be considered persuasive not only because the text itself provides convincing advice, but also because its audience holds it as sacred, and therefore imbues it with persuasive assets that go beyond the words contained within.

By defining rhetorical terms in a literal or non-academic sense, rather than by the academic or theoretical context used by racial activists, commentators, or academics that it is engaging in discourse with, *The O'Reilly Factor* undermines the rhetorical capital of the concept of white supremacy and white privilege.

The term white supremacy often causes confusion, especially when used by academics in the media because the academic and non-academic definitions are relatively disparate. White supremacy commonly defined as the belief that white people are naturally superior to people with other skin colors. While white supremacy was a commonly accepted principle by many Americans well into World War II, contemporary usage of the term generally focuses on small, extremist racist groups, or those who

openly argue that whites are superior to other races.³⁴ The academic usage, on the other hand, commonly defines white supremacy as systemic racism. For example, Charles Mills defines white supremacy as “a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties” (*The Racial Contract* 3). Although the two definitions are connected, particularly in the fact that the belief in supremacy of the white race often led to the implementation of systems of oppression, the difference between the two definitions, particularly in contemporary discourse, often leads to confusion. *The O’Reilly Factor’s* interactions with academics on the program often highlights how this confusion can be used to persuasive ends. Speaking about Dylann Roof, the show plays a clip from Marc Lamont Hill, a professor who teaches at Temple University:

MARC LAMONT HILL, CNN POLITICAL CONTRIBUOTR: “The problem is, we can’t eliminate these types of incidents if we don’t get at the source of the problem, and the source isn’t individual crazy people. The source of this is white supremacy.”

After the clip is played, the show responds:

White supremacy, good grief! That's like saying the Black Panthers are sweeping across America inciting violent acts. I'm sure all of you see white supremacists walking around your town nearly every day. (“Analyzing the Charleston”)

The O’Reilly Factor uses the difference in definition to mock Hill’s assertion, arguing that Hill believes many Americans actively believe that white people are superior to people of color. The show ties this not only to an ideological belief but to the definition of white supremacy as relating to organized racist groups. The outcome of this type of

³⁴ For more on the use of white supremacy, particularly in the political campaigns leading up the WWII, see Ward (2011).

rhetorical move is twofold. First, *The O'Reilly Factor* avoids having to discuss a more moderate and nuanced argument about how ideological foundations of racism can lead to oppression or violence against people of color. Second, *The O'Reilly Factor* mocks the use of the term white supremacy, signaling to its audience that the use of this term is “lunacy” and that it “makes a mockery out of serious people trying to bridge the gap of understanding between black and white Americans” (“Analyzing the Charleston”). By replacing the definition of white supremacy used by Hill, *The O'Reilly Factor* undermines its rhetorical capital by taking the argument out of its proper context and then exaggerating that Hill believes that most Americans believe in white supremacist ideology.³⁵ In a TPM several days later, the strategy is continued, using the same quote from Hill and again asserting that “there is no organized effort to harm black people by white people” (“Demonizing America”).

The process of undermining the rhetorical capital of popular words and phrases of academics and activists can also be seen in *The O'Reilly Factor*'s treatment of white privilege. The rhetorical capital of the concept of white privilege has exploded in the last decade, increasingly so in the last few years due to the term's popularity on social media. However, the concept has been discussed in various texts since at least the early 20th century. Perhaps the most famous precursor to the term white privilege is W.E.B Dubois explanation of the concept of “public and psychological wages” in which he described that white workers, although they received low monetary wages, were:

³⁵ It should be noted that in his manifesto, Roof claims that the Council of Conservative Citizens influenced his ideology. The Council of Conservative Citizens is one of the oldest organized racist groups, formerly the White Citizens' Council, created in 1954 in response to the Brown v. Board ruling. So, while Hill may not have been speaking of organized racism in his definition of white supremacy, it appears that it did work to influence the actions of Roof.

Given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent on their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness (700)

While Du Bois treatment of “public and psychological wages” helped to inform the concept of white privilege, the term itself was popularized by Peggy McIntosh in a 1988 essay, which describes white privilege as an “invisible knapsack” that contained all the everyday assets that white people benefit from due to their race. The essay, which was short, easily digestible, and included a list of forty-six assets of white privilege, has been cited widely and used by educators throughout the country. This mass acceptance of the essay by academics led, eventually, to the term becoming a recognizable concept in mainstream discourse used to argue about the ways in which racism exists in the contemporary United States. In his TMP’s, *The O’Reilly Factor* commonly undermines the concept of white privilege. The Talking Points Memo “The Truth About White Privilege,” opens:

Last night on The Factor, Megyn Kelly and I debated the concept of white privilege, whereby some believe that if you are Caucasian, you have inherent advantages in America. Talking Points does not believe in white privilege. However, there is no question that African-Americans have a much harder time succeeding in our society than whites do.

The O’Reilly Factor’s treatment of white privilege seems to be a direct contradiction of itself; it disavows the idea of white privilege and in the next sentence notes that black Americans are disadvantaged. On its face, this type of contradiction appears like it would only work against the persuasive intentions of the rhetor. However, if one considers that the show’s goal here is not to disprove that black Americans are at a disadvantage, but to change the explanation of *why* they are at a disadvantage, the contradiction makes more

sense. White privilege seeks to explain the multitude of white advantages (and therefore black disadvantages) that are present within the U.S. by situating whites as both the creators and beneficiaries of the dominant social, political, and economic systems in the United States. By providing simplistic alternative explanations of the struggles of the black community in the United States, *The O'Reilly Factor's* rhetoric delegitimizes the core premise of white privilege to his audience.

A Focus on Personal Responsibility

In discrediting systemic racism as the reason black Americans face inequality, *The O'Reilly Factor* creates a space to provide his own explanation for inequality. The program argues that the reason that black Americans face conditions of inequality is because they do not have the personal responsibility necessary to be successful in the United States social, political, and economic system. Over the course of the TMPs, *The O'Reilly Factor's* definition of personal responsibility, particularly in the black community, is characterized by obtaining education, not having children out of wedlock, and conforming to social mores. *The O'Reilly Factor's* idea of personal responsibility fits with the ideal of the American Dream; if one works hard enough, no matter their place in society, they can succeed in the United States. In a similar manner to its definitions of academic terms, *The O'Reilly Factor's* racial worldview takes a complex question (for example, why do black students have lower graduation rates) and provides a simplistic answer so that his audience can justify the presence of inequality within the country. While many academics see low education rates, high out of wedlock rates, and social exclusion as symptoms of systemic racism, *The O'Reilly Factor* argues that these issues

are due to personal characteristics which make people unable to succeed in the American capitalist system.³⁶

The O'Reilly Factor relies on the repetition of statistics to underscore the problem of personal responsibility but does not seek to understand why these issues exist. For example, the program uses out of wedlock birth rates to contend that “the collapse of the American family” is the main reason for inequality among black Americans. From 2011-2015, *The O'Reilly Factor* notes a statistic for black out of wedlock births thirteen times, exclaiming at one point that “You might be tired of hearing that 72 percent of black babies are born out of wedlock. I know I'm tired of hearing it.” *The O'Reilly Factor* then leads its audience to a conclusion based on these statistics, arguing “that is what is driving poor economics in the black community. Stability equals prosperity and in many black precincts, there's chaos in the streets, in the schools, in the homes” (“Liberal Dissatisfaction”). The important logical jump to note in this case is the show’s conclusion that out of wedlock births are the reason for conditions of poverty in black communities.³⁷ The show provides no evidence that ties out of wedlock birth rate to the economic prosperity of a community but instead simply states that this is the case. In fact, *The O'Reilly Factor* notes that “the root of poverty, crime, and despair in America is the collapse of the traditional family” (“Are You Your Brother’s”). The focus on the collapse

³⁶ For *The O'Reilly Factor* applying this framework to black Americans, see “President Obama and the Race Problem,” for application to immigrant populations (particularly through the southern border), see “How the Left Wants to Handle.”

³⁷ It is also important to note that *The O'Reilly Factor* never addresses this statistic with any nuance or context. He does not mention that out of wedlock birthrates have continually declined or that the statistic does not reflect families that are not married yet provide a stable atmosphere for their children. For more on this subject, see Ta-Nehisi Coates’ series of articles for *The Atlantic* analyzing the use of this statistic to stigmatize black Americans: “The Math on Black Out of Wedlock Births,” “Even More on Out of Wedlock Births,” and “Understanding Out-of-Wedlock Births in Black America.”

of the traditional family as the root of all problems in *The O'Reilly Factor's* racial worldview eliminates the necessity for the audience to investigate other possible reasons to explain the issues existence. By misidentifying the root cause, the program allows its audience to justify unequal conditions for the victims of systemic racism without having to face more complicated and complex root causes. Additionally, focusing on personal responsibility allows the victims to become part of the scapegoat group as it infers that they are partially or fully responsible for the inequitable conditions they face. Roberts-Miller argues that scapegoating “enables a community to promulgate a politically useful narrative of cause and effect. It is politically useful because it is much simpler—this bad situation has been caused entirely by bad people; killing them will solve it” (*Fanatical Schemes*, 38). While it has been argued that the literal killing of a scapegoat in the form of lynching has been used in the past in the projection of the ills of racism, the symbolic killing, or removal, of a people, behavior, or ideology can serve the same function.³⁸ In this case, the focusing on personal responsibility while simultaneously ignoring factors of systemic racism can be seen as an ideological projection; *The O'Reilly Factor* scapegoats the black community for creating racial inequality through their personal behavior while rejecting that centuries of white oppressive actions have nothing to do current racial inequality.

In addition to simple repetition of statistics, *O'Reilly Factor* also attempts to prove that black Americans' personal behavior is the source of inequality by comparing

³⁸ For lynching as scapegoating, see Patterson, Orlando. *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*. Washington D.C.: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1998.

their situation to that of other races. In “The Truth About White Privilege,” the program begins its analysis with “here are the facts” and uses statistics on high school dropout rate and single parent homes to argue that the financial inequity between races is due to the personal choices of black Americans.³⁹

To frame this explanation, *The O’Reilly Factor* posits the Asian community as a model minority and uses them as a foil to argue that the obstacles that the black community faces are a consequence of their own social behavior. The rhetorical strategy of using Asian Americans as a “model minority” by which to compare, and thereby attack, the black community has longstanding roots. During the mid-1960s, a time in which the black community was advocating against legalized racial oppression, articles praising Japanese and Chinese Americans became popular. Stacy Lee argues that newspaper articles and publications like the *Moynihan Report* framed the black community’s inequitable position as a result of family values. Lee notes that the model minority device is a hegemonic device which affirms that the ideology of the American Dream applies to minority populations and “maintains the dominance of whites in the racial hierarchy by diverting attention away from racial inequalities and by setting standards for how minorities should behave” (Lee 6). *The O’Reilly Factor* attempts to sidestep the most glaring critique of his rhetoric—that a comparison of the racial situations of Asian and black populations in the U.S. is at best reductive—by noting that:

³⁹ O’Reilly introduces his own argument as “the facts” after noting that he does not “believe” in white privilege. While subtle, the juxtaposition of these words frames O’Reilly’s argument as something that is indisputable while white privilege is simply a belief. This framing seeks to dismiss the vast corpus of research that has been conducted and published concerning white privilege while simultaneously insinuating that the concept of white privilege is less than fact. This linguistic maneuvering helps to legitimize O’Reilly’s view of the racial landscape.

One caveat: the Asian-American experience has historically not been nearly as tough as the African-American experience. Slavery is unique and it has harmed black Americans to a degree that is still being felt today. But in order to succeed in a competitive society, every American has to overcome the obstacles they face (“The Truth About White Privilege”)

This statement rings similar to contradiction noted earlier in the text. While it appears to be a concession, it instead argues that systemic racism, while it exists, does not explain the current situation of the black community. *The O’Reilly Factor* offers its audience an alternative explanation through the ideology of the American Dream or ‘bootstraps’ narrative, implying that the black community has simply not tried hard enough to “overcome the obstacles they face.”

The concept of personal responsibility helps establish *The O’Reilly Factor’s* worldview by providing an alternate explanation for contemporary racial inequality while simultaneously scapegoating minority communities as the cause of inequality. Scapegoating of the black community for racism is certainly not a new phenomenon; it has been used by slavers, segregationists, and countless others throughout the history of the United States. This long history of oppression and scapegoating of black Americans makes its continued use more effective, for as Tsesis argues, “whether a group is especially susceptible to harsh treatment in a particular community depends on whether it has ever been systematically persecuted there” (83). While the black community is particularly vulnerable to scapegoating, *The O’Reilly Factor’s* construction of the outgroup extends far beyond racial lines. Instead, the show fashions a large and stratified outgroup based on ideology which it dubs the “grievance industry.”

The Grievance Industry

One of the more basic aspects of the rhetoric of projection is the creation of a scapegoat, or common enemy that a group can rally against. Burke calls this process Hitler's "devil-function," referring to strategy in the Middle Ages of using Satan as a unifying enemy. While Satan is a singular figure, a rhetorical scapegoat does not have to be one person; in fact, the strategy of scapegoating a group allows the rhetor the ability to place multiple and varied enemies into a single category. As Burke notes, Hitler outlined this practice some depth in *Mein Kampf*:

As a whole, and at all times, the efficiency of the truly national leader consists primarily in preventing the division of the attention of a people and always in concentrating it on a single enemy...It is part of the genius of a great leader to make adversaries of different fields appear as always belonging to one category only, because to weak and unstable characters the knowledge that there are various enemies will lead only too easily to incipient doubts as to their own cause (qtd. in "Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle," 193)

The above passage outlines the rhetorical process of pooling as many adversaries into a single entity, or scapegoat. By rhetorically reducing the number of people who object to the ideology of the speaker, the audience is more likely to view their ideology as legitimate because "fewer" people have objections to it. Hitler drew upon this rhetorical strategy in his scapegoating of the Jewish population and in his insistence that virtually all his (and therefore Germany's) enemies had Jewish connections.

Scholars, especially those who discuss hate speech and conservative rhetoric, often discuss this type of group scapegoating by using the terms "ingroup" and "outgroup." Concerning what he calls "misethnicity," Alexander Tsesis defines ingroup as "the dominant social group that enjoys privileges on account of its mutual, salient features," while outgroup is defined as "a social vulnerable group toward which many

ingroup subjects feel hostility, aversion, or ill-will on account of the objects' race or ethnicity" (83). Although Tsesis' definitions center around race and ethnicity, the rhetorical creation of an ingroup/outgroup can draw upon any real, or perceived, difference.

The O'Reilly Factor's construction of the outgroup does not rely on a racial or religious category entirely but instead focuses on ideology. In contemporary U.S. rhetorical discourse, the most broad category of ideological distinction is *left* and *right*. While these ideological distinctions are well known to the general public, they are hardly static; there is a constant contestation over what ideals and characteristics should be used to define these broad categorical distinctions. For example, *The O'Reilly Factor* uses the terms *left*, *left-wing*, *far-left*, *uber-left*, *fanatical left-wing individual*, *organized far-left fanatics*, among others to describe opponents. These larger ideological categories are then used in tandem with more specific categories *The O'Reilly Factor* uses when speaking about targeted issues. When speaking about race, the show often connects categories it uses to describe advocates for racial justice to the larger category of the ideological left. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the categories ('far-left' might be defined in disparate ways by different individuals) allows *The O'Reilly Factor* to fashion ideological characteristics for each category. Thus, the program consolidates a vast amount of people into an ideologically constructed scapegoat group that offers a reductive representation of those included. Additionally, by giving these categories pejorative connotations, *The O'Reilly Factor's* naming system itself becomes an attack. Roberts-Miller argues that deprecatory names tied to an outgroup are often "defined through negation" or "a position other than the rhetor's." Defining a name in such a way creates a situation where

use of a name itself becomes a weapon that can “be disastrously and effectively applied with little actual argument” (*Fanatical Schemes* 23). Over time, the continued negative definitions that *The O’Reilly Factor* applies to groups like the “far-left,” “the grievance industry,” “racial agitator,” “racial hustler,” give these names the rhetorical power to disparage an individual or group without having to argue why they should be viewed in such a manner.

The creation of an outgroup is heavily tied to a construction of ethos. In order for a scapegoat to be effective, people must be grouped together and be portrayed as having specific negative attributes, particularly those attributes which the ingroup wishes to reject exist within themselves. Thus, the construction of the character of a scapegoat group is central in the process of rhetorical projection.

The primary ‘ill’ which *The O’Reilly Factor* attempts to imprint upon the scapegoat is racial division. The underlying theme of much of the program’s discussion of race is that racial division occurs not because of widespread prejudicial behavior or a legacy of systemic racism, but because professors, activists, and analysts manufacture or exaggerate instances of racial oppression. Roberts-Miller argues that “by making some group synecdochic for behavior that is actually systemic, people can fantasize that controlling that group’s behavior (or exterminating them) will end the problem” (*Fanatical Schemes* 228). By forging a group that can be blamed for a systemic problem (racism) *The O’Reilly Factor* alleviates any blame for implementation, maintenance, or perpetuation of the problem, either in a personal sense or through a sense of national identity.

The O'Reilly Factor undercuts the validity of racial activism through the construction of the entity which it calls the “grievance industry.” Building off his basic viewpoint that systemic racism does not exist, the show argues that there exists an “industry” of people who benefit financially, politically, or socially by manufacturing the idea that systemic racism (as well as other social justice issues) is a problem in the contemporary United States.

One of the earliest uses of the word grievance in the data set helps to explain the way *The O'Reilly Factor* views race in the United States, both historically and contemporarily. In a 2012 TMP which argues that President Obama is a “reluctant capitalist” and a “social justice anti-capitalist,” the show declared that “Mr. Obama allows historical grievances, things like slavery, bad treatment for native Americans, U.S. exploitation of third world countries to shape his economic thinking” (“The Real Barack Obama”). The use of the word “historical grievance” seems to be an effort to undercut the severity of the atrocities described, instead portraying them as complaints which have been long since redressed. Furthermore, by noting that Obama has ‘let’ these affect his thinking, the show insinuates that it is negative or wrong to continue to consider such events in current policy. Thus, *The O'Reilly Factor*'s use of the word grievance helps to establish his racial worldview that historical injustice and oppression no longer affect citizens of color in the United States.

The idea of the “grievance industry” follows this same racial worldview but adds that individuals and groups push the theory of systemic racism not because they believe it to be true but because they benefit financially, socially, or politically from society accepting it as true. In this way, the show attacks the character of those who advocate for

racial equality by portraying them as dishonest and selfish. For example, *The O'Reilly Factor* notes:

What the grievance industry does want is to divide the country along racial lines because that's good for business" ("Running From the Truth")

The grievance industry is in it for the money and power" ("The Issue").

According to *The O'Reilly Factor*, the advocacy of a particular racial ideology, in this case the belief in racism as systemic, divides the country based on race. These statements are prime examples of projection; the program's rhetoric, using largely specious logic, operates to undermine the work of academics, activists, and advocates who fight against racism while simultaneously providing content for his show which has provided O'Reilly and Fox News enormous wealth and social power.

The primary way in which *The O'Reilly Factor* depicts the character of the outgroup is by arguing that their arguments are at best insincere and at worst actively deceitful. However, the show also characterizes the outgroup by painting them as organized, aggressive, and anti-American.

Organization

The O'Reilly Factor attempts to undermine the ethos of the outgroup by arguing that they are professionally organized. This tactic is most often used when speaking of demonstrators or protestors. The 'grievance industry' moniker is much more persuasive when applied to newscasters, pundits, professors, and others who have jobs which are directly related to social commentary and activism. For protestors, however, this moniker makes less sense as protestors are generally voluntary, unpaid participants. The show often works to undercut this view of protestors by arguing that they are part of

professional protest organizations. In a TMP addressing protests of the grand jury decision of the Eric Garner killing, the show relates to its audience that:

“The demonstrations you are seeing are not spontaneous dissent from regular folks. Rather, they are well-planned disruptions from professional anti-establishment provocateurs” (“Who is Organizing”)

The above statement works rhetorically to create separation between the audience or “the folks,” and those engaging in racial protests.⁴⁰ To create this separation, *The O’Reilly Factor* employs several rhetorical tactics. First, the protests are described as “not spontaneous,” and “well-planned” inferring that the protests are not a reaction to legitimate concerns but that they are planned in advance to push a particular agenda rather than respond to a specific event. Second, the show identifies protestors as not “regular folks” but professionals. Finally, the show describes the protesters as “anti-establishment provocateurs.” This description insinuates that the protests are not only organized by professionals, but the goal of the protest is not to address events of racial oppression but to create chaos in general. *The O’Reilly Factor* expands upon this argument in the next lines:

That's important to understand because it is the American system that is being attacked by these people, not the sagas of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Unfortunately, the deaths of those two men are being used by the far left to foment unrest (“Who is Organizing”)

In *The O’Reilly Factor*’s view, the protestors are not only paid professionals but are actively being used as a way to create protest for personal gain or to simply disrupt the social fabric of the United States.

⁴⁰ Norton (2011) argues that the “folks” are part of the deep meaning structure of the show and “are constructed as an imagined right of center populace of ordinary people trying to live their lives despite interference and meddling of governmental elites, media elites, and other, usually liberal, elites” (326).

The portrayal of organization around an ideology or social movement as a negative attribute demonstrates the use of projection clearly. While Fox News does not directly fund social activism, it is a perfect example of an institution which is professionally organized and funded to advocate for a particular political ideology. While this characteristic is evident, the show characterizes itself and O'Reilly as non-partisan. Although the ingroup and the outgroup share similar attributes, the outgroup behavior is demonized while the ingroup behavior is justified or ignored, helping to create further separation between in the ingroup and outgroup.

Aggression

Another way in which *The O'Reilly Factor* undermines the character of the scapegoated group is by arguing that racial activists use race as a weaponized form of aggression. This strategy works in tandem with the program's notion that systemic racism does not exist and that the grievance industry manufactures racial division for profit. The strategy works to construct the ethos of both parties. It presents the scapegoat group as aggressive and untrustworthy while portraying the ingroup as the victim in rhetorical exchanges about race. The general notion that race is being used as a weapon is found throughout *The O'Reilly Factor*'s discourse on race:

“the promise of collective social justice dominates, and you will be dismissed as unworthy or even be branded a bigot if you get in the way of that promise” (“The Supreme Court Rules”)

“And these folks are ruthless. If you go up against them, the push back will be intense and the liberal media will be on their side” (“The Grievance Industry Takes”)

These examples push the idea that the ideology of the outgroup is the standard for the weaponization of race. This type of framing further solidifies the worldview that the

show continually constructs for its audience but adds a new twist; it argues that the outgroup wishes to impose its ideology through force and coercion, not simply the spread of ideas. *The O'Reilly Factor* also works to undermine the credibility of the type of argumentation that the outgroup engages in by asserting that “he will call you a racist if you cite the statistics” (“What the Ferguson”). Implied in this statement is the notion that criticism of the ingroup by the outgroup is unfounded and incorrect. For example, the show’s claim that citing statistics that seem to be harmful to the outgroup ideology will result in a claim of racism ignores the possibility that statistics can (and often are) be used to perpetuate racist ideologies. Perhaps the most notable example of this concerning the issue of race is the infamous book *The Bell Curve*, which used misplaced, misinterpreted, and biased statistics and statistical imagery to argue for eugenic ideals (Grey 305). *The O'Reilly Factor* positions its use of statistics as unassailable, thereby insinuating that the use of the term racist (by some unknown, mysterious group) is a weaponized falsehood. While working to undermine the credibility of the outgroup, this statement also works to undermine the rhetorical capital of the term ‘racist’ by arguing that it is often used as an attack against a solid, logical position. *The O'Reilly Factor* also uses various monikers to describe the outgroup as dangerous or violent. In one Talking Point Memo, the show dubs college protesters “witch hunters” noting, “This is dangerous and the witch hunters are running wild” (“The New Witch Hunters”). The comparison draws upon a well-known phenomenon that is synonymous with the act of overzealous persecution for imaginary crimes. By naming college protesters, particularly protesters concerned with issues of race, as witch hunters, the program indicates that they are engaging in violence over an imaginary or ill-conceived reason. To bolster its claim that the issue is imaginary,

the show uses the example of James Ramsey, who came under fire for hosting a party where all the attendees dressed as Mexican stereotypes complete with fake mustaches, maracas, and sombreros. In the Talking Point Memo he states “Well at the University of Louisville, wearing a Mexican sombrero on Halloween is insensitive.” He goes on to argue, “So I guess next time I see somebody wearing an Aran Island sweater, I can say that is racially insensitive to the Irish” (“The New Witch Hunters”). The reductive way in which *The O’Reilly Factor* relays the story is indicative of its rhetorical posturing as it only gives enough information for his audience to judge the event as an over-reach. Excluded is the information about the event which might indicate that the outcry over the event was justified. In *The O’Reilly Factor’s* framing, the imaginary crime which the ‘witch hunters’ are persecuting people for is racial insensitivity, which, according to the show, is “being used as a hammer.” The reductive description of the event allows O’Reilly’s assertions, namely that claims of racial insensitivity are unfounded, to be accepted more readily by his audience. Building off this logic, the show attempts to connect the event with other, more innocuous, scenarios arguing that “If I am a college kid and I ask another student to turn down the rap music, I could be racially insensitive” (“The New Witch Hunters”). That the logic of this statement is faulty doesn’t necessarily matter in a persuasive sense. *The O’Reilly Factor’s* presentation of the outgroup as attacking over “ridiculous” claims sets the foundation for its hypothetical situation to be persuasive: if one can convince the audience that the outgroup has committed illogical attacks in the past, it is much easier to convince the audience that another illogical, albeit hypothetical, attack could occur. This type of illogical extrapolation is strategic because it

gives seemingly legitimate reasons for the show's audience to fear, and therefore push back against, the perceived weaponization of claims of racial insensitivity.

While *The O'Reilly Factor* uses specific examples to forward its arguments, it also works to delegitimize the discourse of the outgroup as a whole through more generalized statements:

“The far left making a living out of demonizing people with whom it disagrees” (“Is President Obama”)

“race hustlers and the grievance industry have intimidated the so-called “conversation,” turning any valid criticism of African-American culture into charges of racial bias” (“President Obama”)

These statements carry a more generalized, but perhaps more insidious, message about the outgroup. Instead of implying that the attacks are focused on particular discursive strategies like the use of statistics, the last two sentences imply that the outgroup's only goal when engaging in racial discourse is to attack their opposition. The final quotation demonstrates this idea, particularly through the use of quotation marks around the word conversation. The quotation around this word is strategic in that *The O'Reilly Factor* attacks use of the word by racial activists and scholars as inauthentic.⁴¹ Even more, it works to invalidate the discourse which racial advocates engage in by arguing that the only reason racial advocates want to have a conversation is that they profit from attacking those who participate. The general nature of these statements is significant because they apply not to specific statements, tactics, or rhetorical strategies, but to the entire outgroup and its ideology. Thus, an audience that proscribes to this logic might invalidate the

⁴¹ In another TPM, O'Reilly argues that “when you hear a pundit or politician saying we should have a quote, “conversation” about race, that means you are in for a sea of bloviating which will likely lead nowhere” (President Obama)

discourse of the entire group or ideology rather than a specific statement or tactic.

Ultimately, this mentality works to silence the scapegoated group, especially for *The O'Reilly Factor*'s audience, as the scapegoat group's discourse is seen as inherently unreliable due to its source.

Anti-American

Building off the theme that the outgroup is aggressive, another way in which *The O'Reilly Factor* demonizes the outgroup is by claiming that they wish to destroy the United States. The program's worldview concerning race is significant here; his argument that systemic racism does not exist works into his portrayal of the United States as morally exceptional. *The O'Reilly Factor* often describes the nation as noble, noting this belief in several Talking Point Memos:

I believe the USA is basically a noble nation" ("Nacy Pelosi Going").

From the beginning one of my major themes has been the basic nobility of this country. That separates me from some on the left who think the U.S. is an exploitative place where the fix is in against the poor and working classes" ("America and Syria")

While the program's assertion that the United States is a noble nation extends to issues beyond strictly race, such as foreign policy, it is central to his understanding of the legacy of racism in the country. While *The O'Reilly Factor* notes on several occasions that people of color (in particular black Americans) have it harder than others, the belief in the "basic nobility" of the United States allows it to argue that the opportunity that U.S. citizens have counterbalances any historical oppression that may have an effect on marginalized communities. In this kind of argument, the nuance of the situation is lost. Instead of presenting the country to his viewers as an incredibly large, complicated, and

often conflicting social construction, *The O'Reilly Factor* presents its viewers with a stark narrative of American exceptionalism that diminishes any wrongs committed within country by promoting that which it has done right. Concerning the issue of race and racism, this rhetorical strategy generally works to diminish the obstacles that people of color have and continue to face by promoting the idea of the American Dream. For example, in response to the Eric Garner case, which it condemned as a poor ruling, *The O'Reilly Factor* notes:

Again, African Americans have it much tougher than whites. It's true, some cops don't like blacks. It's true, historical injustice has affected the black experience in America. But this country now offers a pathway to success, and while injustice must be dealt with, the message of opportunity and America's basic nobility should be on the backside of every one of those "I can't breathe" tee shirts. ("Why Some Black Americans")

By agreeing that there are obstacles and historical oppression for the black community but arguing that those obstacles are now overcome due to a "pathway" to success, the show provides a reductive narrative that understates the severity of systemic racism and its effect on the black community. The construction of the viewpoint that the United States is basically noble and has righted its racially oppressive past provides a foundation for *The O'Reilly Factor* to undercut the ethos of those who argue that racial oppression still pervades the country. Expanding from the view that the United States is noble and the view that systemic racism does not exist, the program connects the ideological stance that systemic racism exists and continues to affect non-whites as anti-American. The language that *The O'Reilly Factor* uses to make this connection ranges from subtle to overt.

In one Memo regarding Dylann Roof, the show argues that “there are those who will condemn America as being a violent place where racial animus is the rule, not the exception (“A Bad Day”). By arguing that Roof is an exception, and not the rule, the show works to distance the idea that the legacy of racism in the United States played a role in Roof’s decision to murder the members of a historic black church. Instead, the show argues the Charleston massacre happened due to the legal constraints of the country and Roof’s mental health:

we live in a free country where crazy people are allowed to roam free until they do something heinous. Everybody who knew Dylann Roof understood he was an unstable racist individual. But you can’t do anything to a person like that until he or she commits a crime (“Analyzing the Charleston”)

This type of rhetoric attempts to minimize the influence of right wing or racist rhetoric on Roof and those like him. Earlier in the TMP, the program responds to the claim that racist, and conservative, rhetoric influenced Roof by sarcastically arguing, “right-wing rhetoric ... that's the ticket, that's what's causing all of these mass murders. Never mind that far-left rhetoric is far more hateful these days than what the hard right puts out” (Analyzing the Charleston”). The casual dismissal of the argument through sarcasm indicates to the audience that the argument is absurd. Instead of providing a counter argument, the program instead frames the argument in terms of ingroup and outgroup dynamics; the argument isn’t proven incorrect, but instead is argued to be a problem for the outgroup and not the ingroup.⁴² Implied in the program’s dismissal is that the

⁴² Interestingly, the argument that rhetoric in public discourse can influence individuals, particularly those who end up committing violence, is not foreign to *The O’Reilly Factor*. A little over a week before the Charleston Memos, the show argued that anti-police rhetoric was fueling negative behavior toward officers, noting that:

But with television news demonizing police officers, the law enforcement contract is starting to break down. Talking Points sees big trouble on the horizon, trouble that is being fueled by a

argument is only presented to attack the United States as racist country. While this construction of the outgroup as anti-American is relatively subtle, other instances are more concrete. For example, in response to the argument that the Charleston massacre was in part perpetuated by the historical and contemporary presence of white supremacy ideology in the United States, the show describes commentators and activists as “anti-American race-baiters” who “spew their invective with glee” (“Demonizing America”). The clear distinction is that if a rhetor argues that the country is still dealing with issues of racism on a national level, then that rhetor is anti-American. This type of rhetorical move is used throughout *The O’Reilly Factor’s* commentary on race. In a Memo discussing the use of the term ‘white suppression,’ the show notes, “the anti-American zealots are trying to convince people that we have an unjust society” (“White Suppression”). In a similar vein, when discussing the history of slavery, the program argues that slavery was abhorrent but that “Millions of ... Americans were killed or wounded to end slavery during the Civil War. So the anti-American loons who disparage the entire country to this day are misguided as well (“The Cliven Bundy”). Another example comes from the show’s commentary on those protesting the George Zimmerman verdict:

Now for the truth behind the reaction. There are two groups of people exploiting the Zimmerman verdict. The first are folks who simply hate America... So, the

hysterical media. Anti-police zealots are given wide latitude to spew their hatred and irresponsible ravings. That kind of rhetoric sinks in (“The War on Cops”)

In another Memo about three months prior the Charleston Memos, the show argued that rhetoric can directly influence violent people, noting “As we saw here in New York City, inflammatory rhetoric can get police officers killed. You may remember...two New York City officers...were shot dead in their car by a deranged man apparently set off by anti-police rhetoric” (“Killing the Cops”). To me, this demonstrates a type of projection on *The O’Reilly Factor’s* part because it shows that it is willing to engage an argument---namely that rhetoric can be an influential factor in violence---but is highly critical of the outgroup when they put forth a similar argument.

anti-American folks are using the acquittal of George Zimmerman to vent their hatred. "Talking Points" believes that's dishonest. America in general had nothing to do with the death of Trayvon Martin. It was a calamity, not a product of policy. But you can't convince the radical left of that because they don't want to be convinced ("Reaction to the Acquittal")

The common denominator in these statements is that they are in response to a person or group who argues that systemic racism exists in the United States. The assertion that the outgroup is anti-American works to demolish its credibility. This process works doubly in that as the outgroup's credibility is damaged in the eyes of the audience, they will be less likely to be persuaded by the outgroup's arguments. In this way, both the credibility of the outgroup itself and the argument that systemic racism exists in the United States is diminished. While the logic is circular (the outgroup is anti-American because they believe in systemic racism and the argument that systemic racism exists is defunct because it is espoused by the anti-American outgroup) it is nonetheless persuasive to an audience that has been continually conditioned, over time, to believe the basic premises which this circular logic relies upon.

Beyond the Mainstream

While *The O'Reilly Factor* provides a benchmark for contemporary *mainstream* conservative discourse on race, the rhetorical strategy and tactics the show employs are not unique to the *mainstream*. The rhetorical tactics that *The O'Reilly Factor* draws upon can be found in almost all contemporary conservative discourse concerning racism. That these strategies encompass the entirety of the conservative spectrum is not altogether surprising given their legacy in the United States. As Roberts-Miller has demonstrated, these rhetorical strategies were incredibly influential during a period in which the nation's debate over race and racism was at its most heated and factionalized. While the

Civil War put an end to the debate over the legality of slavery in the United States, the discursive impasse that was created by the rhetoric of proslavery advocates before the war was not necessarily addressed. Instead, these rhetorical strategies were, and continue to be, modified to serve in arguments opposing the expansion of civil rights for black Americans.

To explore the fundamental nature of the rhetorical strategies used in *The O'Reilly Factor's* TMPs, I look to conservative discourse from *Breitbart News* and *The Daily Stormer*. Both sources are considered to be outside *mainstream* conservative discourse. Founded in 2007, *Breitbart News* has seemingly defied categorization; it has been dubbed far-right, alt-right, and ethno-nationalist, to name only a few. However, the site has become increasingly popular, eventually bursting into mainstream news media during the 2016 presidential election cycle. *The Daily Stormer*, on the other hand, is almost unanimously considered an extremist neo-Nazi group. Situated on what many call the *fringe*, the website has also received a boost in popularity in recent years, drawing in more visitors than the longtime staple of racist discourse *Stormfront*. The purpose of these comparisons is not to argue that *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Breitbart*, and *The Daily Stormer* argue for the same ideology or behave in the same fashion. These comparisons demonstrate the widespread use of rhetorical strategy concerning race *despite* their more obvious differences.

The construction of the outgroup proceeds in a similar manner on many *Brietbart* articles as it does in in *The O'Reilly Factor's* discourse. While the language does have some differences, the effort to create a racial worldview that discounts systemic racism, argues that inequality is cause of personal responsibility, and that there exists a group of

people that profit off promoting the concept of systemic racism, is discernable in articles during the same 2011-2015 period.

The delegitimization of systemic racism on Breitbart operates by repeatedly denying and mocking its existence in an effort to undermine the rhetorical capital of the concept. In speaking about the Department of Justice investigations in Ferguson, one article asserts that the investigations continued only so that the narrative of Ferguson would “fit the delusions of an Attorney General who thinks we have made no progress since the era of Malcolm X” (Pollak). Through the vast exaggeration of the Attorney General’s beliefs about racism, the article attempts to connect a ridiculous claim—that society has not progressed since the 1960s—to the more moderate and acceptable concept of systemic racism. Additionally, the use of the word ‘delusions,’ infers that the concept itself is irrational and goes against available evidence. Elsewhere, *Breitbart* articles argue in similar fashion. In reference to protests against a grand jury declining to indict Darren Wilson one article argues, “They live in the evidence-free world of the political left, which maintains that America remains deeply racist, that every white cop is Bull Connor, and that every black man shot by police is a Selma marcher” (Shapiro, ‘Ferguson Verdict’). While it might be argued that the language used in the Breitbart article is more aggressive (particularly within the titles), the rhetorical strategy of undermining the concept of systemic racism is virtually identical to *The O’Reilly Factor*’s. This trend stays constant even when examining overtly racist discourse. For example, *The Daily Stormer*, argues: “Alleging that a massive conspiracy existed simply to hurt Black people is so ridiculous and goofy that it should obviously be dismissed out of hand by all normal people.” The article, using a unique call to ethos, continues “I mean, I am a racist. I talk

to a lot of racists. Never in my life have I ever had personal contact with someone who had a desire to hurt Black people because they like to see them suffer. The concept just doesn't make any logical sense." (Anglin, "Eric Holder") Again, the rhetor uses language that undermines the credibility of systemic racism by arguing that the concept is fabricated and insane. The author draws on his own credibility as a prominent racist to undermine the idea that systemic racism is not factual, arguing that if he doesn't know about it, then it cannot possibly exist. Both *Breitbart* and *The Daily Stormer*, like *The O'Reilly Factor*, focus on racism as individual action rather than a systemic trend.

Discourse outside the mainstream also attributes personal responsibility to inequality. In response to unrest in Baltimore during the Freddie Gray trial, one *Breitbart* article asserts that "Until there is a culture change in Baltimore, the sad but brutal truth is the city cannot be saved" (Nolte, "Baltimore is Nothing"). Elsewhere, *Breitbart* authors are more specific, citing virtually identical characteristics as *The O'Reilly Factor* when speaking of 'culture':

Absent fathers, a culture of casual crime, disdain for education – all of these are "broader challenges" in our nation...Feelings cannot be cured, unless a licensed psychotherapist is on hand. And Obama is not America's psychotherapist. Only behavior can be cured. (Shapiro, "Obama on Ferguson")

Like *The O'Reilly Factor*, shifting the focus from a systemic problem to a personal problem helps the author both discredit the concept of systemic racism while simultaneously placing black Americans in the outgroup. Again, the language used by *Breitbart* is generally more overtly damning; here black people have a "disdain" for education rather than simply not getting an education. Unsurprisingly, the rhetoric on websites espousing neo-Nazi discourse and other overtly racist media sources concerning

personal responsibility goes well beyond mere inference that black people are responsible for inequality. In this discursive community, it is treated more as an established fact that black people lack personal responsibility:

Can you not see? It is the White Man's sole fault that the Negro is more likely to get shot, be morbidly obese, lazy, borderline retarded, and completely unable to follow basic medical advice. (Cicero)⁴³

While the language here is much more overtly inflammatory, the foundation of the rhetorical strategy stays the same by focusing on the perceived personal ills of the black community while discounting the idea that racism plays any part in conditions of inequality of oppression.

The assertion that advocates of systemic racism cause racial division and encourage a lack of personal responsibility is also present outside mainstream outlets. In a similar fashion as *The O'Reilly Factor*, the creation of the scapegoat group on *Breitbart* functions ideologically, focusing on the "left," the "democrats," or "the media." *Breitbart* argues that the left, or democrats, are purposefully hurting minority communities, arguing that:

Sadly, this stunning and unnecessary increase in crime is all part of the Left's plan. You paralyze the cops with persecution, justify riots and looting, and by extension empower the criminals. The result is city-wide chaos, despair, and hopelessness. The result is victims desperate for someone to blame and even more dependent on a central government (Nolte, "Ferguson Effect")

This article goes beyond the assertion that advocating that systemic racism exists influences the black community to argue that it is a conspiratorial plan to keep the left in power while destroying the black community. Another article includes the media that *The*

⁴³ *The Daily Stormer* often publishes articles under pseudonyms. 'Marcus Cicero' writes articles on several sites including the *Daily Stormer* and *InfoStormer*. It is unlikely that the famous Roman Orator opines on multiple neo-Nazi publications.

O'Reilly Factor so often scapegoats, noting that “racial polarization” is “a tool of the political and media elite to sell papers, raise cash, and drive votes” (Shapiro, “Ferguson Verdict”). The outgroup construction on Breitbart is almost indecipherable from *The O'Reilly Factor*'s outside of the more conspiratorial tone. The construction on *The Daily Stormer* generally follows the same outgroup construction with one major deviation. As it is a website that draws upon neo-Nazi ideology, the primary group that is scapegoated is the Jewish community. As I have noted elsewhere neo-Nazi and white supremacist discursive communities often rely on the construction of a global Jewish conspiracy as a unification device for all members.⁴⁴ However, although the site scapegoats Jews above all others, they still fall into similar patterns when constructing the outgroup concerning racial issues. Articles like “Jew Media Shifts Focus From Michael Brown to Eric Garner to Continue Stirring-Up Blacks,” argue that focusing on the Garner case “shows the insane double standard of the Jew media. They only excessively cover these specific cases just so they can stir up the Black population against Whites” (Lee).⁴⁵ For neo-Nazi's, the Jewish community is the all-encompassing scapegoat, but the *left* and the media are included under this umbrella via the conspiratorial ideal that Jews control all other groups, particularly the media. Thus, the idea that the racial divide is being perpetuated by the outgroup for profit (or, in some cases, the destruction of the white race) is still a prominent characteristic in the discourse on *The Daily Stormer*.

⁴⁴ See Ladenburg, Kenneth. “Memory and the Rhetoric of White Supremacy” (Master's Thesis, Arizona State University, 2013) 35-56.

⁴⁵ This article was rehosted on *Dailystromer* from the *Daily Slave*. However, the link to the original article is now disconnected.

The discursive styles of these media outlets are not identical, nor would one expect them to be. However, each of these outlets draws upon the creation of a racial worldview through projection as a rhetorical strategy when discussing racism. While more research is necessary to understand the variance and similarities found across ideologically differing news sources, it appears that the construction of a racial worldview through projection is a fundamental rhetorical strategy that is utilized both within and outside mainstream conservative discourse.

Conclusion

The power of the rhetorical strategy outline above does not necessarily come from the words of a single text. The arguments themselves are generally easily invalidated by those who study race. The persuasive power, instead, emanates from the strategy's ability to limit open discussion and debate over the topic of racism. In concluding that rhetoric played the most important role in the outbreak of the Civil War, Roberts-Miller notes that "instead of opening up options" the rhetoric of proslavery advocates "served to shut them down" (236). The strategies that *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Breitbart*, and *The Daily Stormer* utilize, if accepted by an audience, break down the ability for opposing ideas to have any persuasive power. The repeated claims that systemic racism is an irrational falsehood and that those who espouse it do so for nefarious purposes focuses the debate on the ethos of the opposition rather than upon the oppositions' arguments. If an audience views an entire ideology and those who follow it as negative, or even downright dangerous, their willingness (or ability) to engage in fruitful debate about the topic is severely constrained.

The ability to get audiences to accept a worldview that is lacking evidence and largely relies on logical fallacies lies in the history of racism in the United States. The

rhetorical strategy that *The O'Reilly Factor* draws upon is hardly novel; it has been used repeatedly in the United States since it was implemented by proslavery advocates. The originality of the argument, however, is immaterial to its persuasive effect. As Roberts-Miller notes, a rhetor “rarely creates the unification device, but relies on a preexisting and culturally powerful set of in-groups and out-groups” (*Fanatical Schemes* 111). The history of the United States and racism provides an extremely powerful set of in-groups and out-groups that, while not staying entirely static, have existed in the United States for hundreds of years. The fact that the rhetorical strategies of proslavery rhetors can be so easily applied to contemporary discourse about race only strengthens this assertion.

As Americans, learning from our rhetorical history is vital to the stability of our nation. The legacy of racism in the United States owes its perniciousness to our inability to recognize and reject rhetorical strategies that seek to avoid productive debate. Relying on rhetorical strategies that limit open and rigorous discussion will only make the deeply seated issues of our country become more difficult to solve.

CHAPTER 4

SLEIGHT OF ARGUMENT: STASIS DIFFUSION IN RACIST DISCOURSE

The desire for national unity, in the present state of the world, is genuine and admirable. But this unity, if attained on a deceptive basis, by emotional trickeries that shift our criticism from the accurate locus of our trouble, is no unity at all. For, even if we are among those who happen to be “Aryans,” we solve no problems even for ourselves by such solutions, since the factors pressing toward calamity remain”
-Kenneth Burke

On August 14th, 2016, Colin Kaepernick began a protest by not standing for the national anthem. The protest went unnoticed for two games before news outlets began reporting on it August 27th, 2016. In an interview with NFL.com, Kaepernick gave a brief reasoning for his actions, explaining, “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder” (Wyche). Coverage of Kaepernick’s protest quickly saturated the news media. His explanation that the protest was a commentary on racial oppression in the United States made his actions controversial, particularly among a socially conservative audience. While Kaepernick’s protests were lauded by some fans and commentators, many fans reacted negatively, even going so far as to burn Kaepernick jerseys and post videos of the act online (Boren). However, perhaps the most popular response to Kaepernick’s protest came in the form of an August 29th, 2018 viral video posted on Facebook by Tomi Lahren. Lahren hosted a show called *Tomi on The Blaze*, a conservative leaning news network founded by Glen Beck in 2010. Her show was most known for a segment called “Final Thoughts,” which consisted of short, energetic, and often aggressive rants about contemporary political

issues.⁴⁶ In three days, the show's three-and-a-half-minute response to Kaepernick's protest garnered nearly fifty-three million views on Facebook alone and continued to climb to well over sixty-five million views over the next several weeks (Hendrickson). Subsequent uploads of the video on other platforms, including *Youtube*, had gathered millions of views as well. The video, given its widespread popularity and the fact that it was a retort to a protest of racial oppression and police brutality, provides an opportunity to analyze how the rhetorical strategies in the video make racist claims and arguments appeal to a broad audience in the United States.

Upon first viewing, the rhetorical appeal of the video is not apparent. The video's claims are presented in a rant-like format and are highly unorganized and off-topic, which seems unusual considering its professional production. However, a closer study of the video reveals that the chaotic nature of the claims within the video serves the rhetorical purpose of diffusing the stasis. Stasis diffusion is a rhetorical tactic wherein a rhetor responds to an argument by forwarding a series of claims that, while tangentially related in topic, each shift the stasis away from the argument's original stasis. Stasis diffusion is rhetorically effective as a diversionary tactic; if a rhetor cannot, or does not want to, address the specific claims within an opposing argument, stasis diffusion allows them to distract the audience and opposing rhetor by offering claims that appear relevant to the argument but instead move the argument in different directions. Stasis diffusion is rhetorically effective in two ways. One, if an audience does not focus on the issue of the

⁴⁶ Although Lahren is the mouthpiece for the discourse analyzed in this chapter, it is important to note that she is not the sole originator of her rhetoric; it is a combined effort of everyone who worked on the project. For this reason, while it is perhaps more efficient to phrase arguments as Lahren's, the remainder of the chapter will refer to the discourse as a product of a show rather than a person.

argument, stasis diffusion can appear to some as the rhetor providing a series of adequate responses to the original argument. Second, because the responses in stasis diffusion are tangentially related to the original topic and may be accepted as rebuttals by the audience, those engaged in the argument often feel the need to respond to each of the opposing rhetor's claims, thereby distracting them from their original arguments.

This chapter explores the how stasis diffusion is employed in historical and contemporary racist discourse. Through an examination of texts surrounding the lynching of Emmett Till and *The Blaze*'s video responding to the Kaepernick kneeling protests, this chapter argues that stasis diffusion is a fundamental rhetorical strategy of racist discourse.

First, I provide a brief outline of the concepts of stasis in classical rhetoric and stasis shifting as outlined in Patricia Roberts-Miller's *Fanatical Schemes*. Drawing from classical stasis doctrine and the concept of stasis shifting, I introduce the concept of stasis diffusion and demonstrate its rhetorical function on both micro and macro scales. Second, I argue that stasis diffusion is a fundamental rhetorical strategy in U.S. racist discourse and analyze its use in racist discourse by proslavery and segregationist rhetors. Third, I provide an in-depth rhetorical analysis of the use of stasis diffusion concerning the 2016 protests of Colin Kaepernick. Specifically, I explicate how the show *Tomi*, a conservative online video show, employs stasis diffusion in its viral response to Kaepernick's protest.

The Doctrine of Stasis

The stasis of an argument is most commonly defined as the precise issue in contest; that is, the point at which those engaged in an argument disagree. Drawn from the root *sta*, "to stand," rhetorical scholars often describe the stasis as the point at which

two rhetors make their stand in argumentative sense (Dieter, 347). While the doctrine of stasis is usually attributed to Hermagoras, who systematized the doctrine, the idea was present in earlier Greek work, particularly that of Aristotle. Dieter argues that the idea of stasis can be identified in Aristotle's works on physics, noting that for Aristotle, stasis is

the event which must necessarily occur in-between opposite movements of one subject on a straight line as well as in-between contrary movements of a subject on a line deflected at an angle more than 90 degrees. It is immobility, or station, which disrupts continuity, divides motion into two movements, and separates the two from one another; it is both an end and a beginning of motion, both a stop and a start, the turning, or the transitional standing at the movement of reversal of movement (350)

Among other examples, Dieter draws upon the image of a pendulum, where the stasis is the exact moment where the weight is not moving in either direction; it is the fleeting moment of change. In rhetorical studies, this moment of change is significant because it helps to define the argument itself; the issue that is under contention must first be understood before the process of argumentation can take place. The establishment of stasis creates an understanding of the central issue at stake and allows rhetors to properly prepare a rhetorical strategy in accordance with the stasis.

Due to its importance in argument, ancient Greek rhetoricians created a framework to determine the stasis of an argument. Ray Nadeau and George Kennedy's work on the construction of stasis doctrine outline this framework as a series of questions that work to determine the crux of an argument. Nadeau notes that Hermagoras separates stasis into four categories: conjecture, definition, quality, and objection. For these categories, Nadeau paraphrases questions used to help determine the stasis: "Is there a problem? What is the essence of the problem? How serious is the problem from the standpoint of its non-essential attributes and attendant circumstances? Should there be

any formal action on the problem (and if so, should it be undertaken by this particular agency?)” (53-54). These questions provided a systematic way to establish the stasis of a particular argument, allowing it to move forward with all sides in agreement as to what the issue at stake concerned. Kennedy notes that the first three questions can be modeled simplistically as such: *conjecture* “You did; I didn’t”, *definition* “you did; but it wasn’t theft”, *quality* “you did; but I had to” (308). Extending Kennedy’s example, *objection* might be modeled “you did; but this is not the proper forum to address it.” While in ancient courts arguments often could not proceed until there was an agreed upon stasis, in everyday argumentation, the stasis of an argument often is not static, or agreed upon, but dynamic and contested by the rhetors engaged in argumentation.

In *Fanatical Schemes*, Roberts-Miller demonstrates the use of what she calls “stasis shifting.” Roberts-Miller relies on a straightforward definition of stasis, noting that stasis is “the hinge of an argument—the place that two (or more) positions disagree” (240). Stasis shifting is the rhetorical process of moving the “hinge” of the argument from one position to another. While she notes that this process can be helpful for those engaged in an argument—to move the point of argument to a more fruitful position when both sides refuse to argue—it is commonly used by one rhetor in an argument as a strategy of distraction; shifting the stasis allows a rhetor to avoid addressing a point for which they have weak arguments or a point that they do not want their audience to consider. Roberts-Miller argues that stasis shifting was an often-used strategy by proslavery rhetors in the antebellum United States. One example of such a stasis shift is involved in proslavery efforts to argue that the Bible supported the practice of slavery. Because abolitionists had strong arguments that the practices of American slavery

including “failing to recognize slave marriages, breaking up of slave families, sexual exploitation of slaves, violence against and mutilation of slaves, kidnapping of free African Americans, [and] denying access to scripture,” were not supported in the Bible, proslavery rhetors attempted to shift the stasis by “moving the discussion away from the specific practice of slavery to slavery in the abstract” (139). By arguing that “scripture did not condemn slavery in the most abstract form (one human owning another),” proslavery rhetors attempted to distract their audience from the fact that the practices of Southern slavery explicitly went against the teachings of the Bible by directing their audience toward a reductive argument that supported their ideals (142).

Stasis Diffusion

While stasis shifting is helpful in modeling rhetorical strategy of racist discourse, its scope is often limited to demonstrating a singular shift from one stasis to another. However, it is common for rhetors to respond to an argument or statement through a series of responses which all shift the stasis. To account for this strategy, I extend Roberts-Miller’s idea of stasis shifting to a broader concept which I call stasis diffusion. Stasis diffusion is a rhetorical strategy where a rhetor responds to an argument or statement through a series of tangential, but related, arguments which ‘diffuse’ the stasis of the argument. The rhetorical effect of stasis diffusion, like stasis shifting, is to distract the opposing rhetor and/or audience from the original argument by shifting the argument to a stasis that is either easier to argue or has nothing to do with the original argument.

Extending Dieter’s explication of stasis doctrine through Aristotle’s treatises on physics, it can be helpful to understand stasis diffusion through a simple physics-based

analogy.⁴⁷ If we understand an argument as a concentrated beam of light, and the stasis as an entity that disrupts this beam of light, a better understanding of stasis diffusion is possible. Figure 1 provides a simple diagram of how a ‘good faith’ argument might move forward:

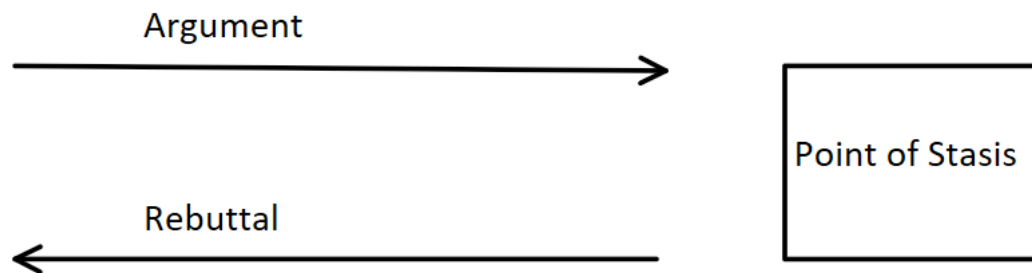


Figure 1. Basic Argument

The original argument or statement is put forward by rhetor A. If rhetor B does not agree with rhetor A’s assertion they provide a rebuttal. The point of disagreement between the two rhetors is marked as the point of stasis. If rhetor A takes issue with rhetor B’s rebuttal, a new point of stasis is created and the argument can continue forth until there is an agreement on the issue or the rhetors decide to discontinue the argument. If one applied this model to a physics analogy, the argument itself would be a beam of light and the stasis the reflective surface. The establishment of the stasis, then, is the establishment of the angle at which the reflective surface rests in relation to the beam of light.

Depending on the angle at which the mirror is placed, the argument can move in various

⁴⁷ My goal in drawing upon a physics-based analogy is twofold. First, it creates a connection between early definitions of stasis that are rooted in classical rhetorical scholarship. Second, it provides a more easily digestible explanation of stasis theory that is easier to understand by audiences outside the field of rhetoric. The analogy I use is intended to be surface level and aid in understanding of a rhetorical concept. It does not claim to explicate any concept of physics.

directions. In this analogy, a rebuttal that genuinely addresses the original argument would be represented by a reflective surface that is at little to no angle (for Kennedy, this might be modeled as “he did; he did not”). However, as responses to the original argument are more and more tangential, the angle of the reflective surface shifts.

Graphically, a shift in the stasis might be represented thusly:

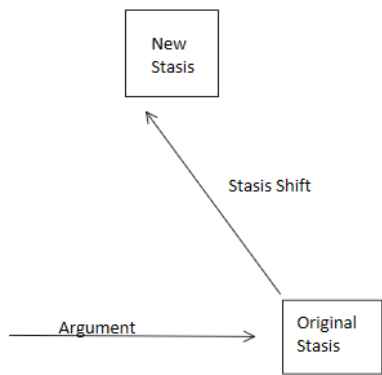


Figure 2. Stasis Shifting

In stasis diffusion, the responding rhetor provides many responses, all which serve to shift the stasis (sometimes dramatically) to change the argument. If we apply stasis diffusion to the physics analogy, the reflective surface is altered to a multifaced surface (for example, a shattered mirror) so that the single beam of light is diffused in multiple directions. As demonstrated in Figure 3, this diffusion works to create a different stasis for each tangential response to the original argument:

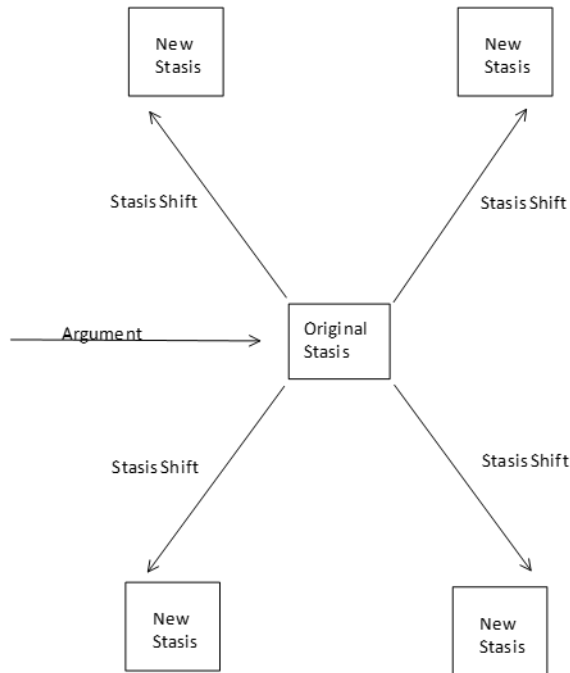


Figure 3. Stasis Diffusion

The creation of these multiple stasis works rhetorically in several ways. In the most simplistic sense, stasis diffusion can distract the audience from the original argument by overwhelming them via the sheer number of responses. This tactic has the potential to move an argument forward without any engagement with the original argument. If an audience does not pay close attention to the responses, this method can help a rhetor appear to be responding to an argument without doing so. This strategy also runs the risk of a keen audience recognizing that the responses do not address the original argument, thereby limiting the persuasive potential of the strategy. To mitigate this, the responses that create a stasis diffusion are often tangentially related to the original argument. The closer related that each of the responses is to the original argument, the more likely the

audience is to accept that they are directly addressing the original argument. Furthermore, by forwarding arguments which are tangentially related, it is more likely that each of the responses will draw a response, thus distancing the argument from its original stasis. If a rhetor attempts to ignore the tangential statements and focus on their original argument, they run the risk of the tangential arguments/statements influencing the audience. On the other hand, if a rhetor engages each stasis shift, they run the risk that the original argument, or the entire issue, will be ignored or forgotten by the audience. Figure 4 demonstrates this process:

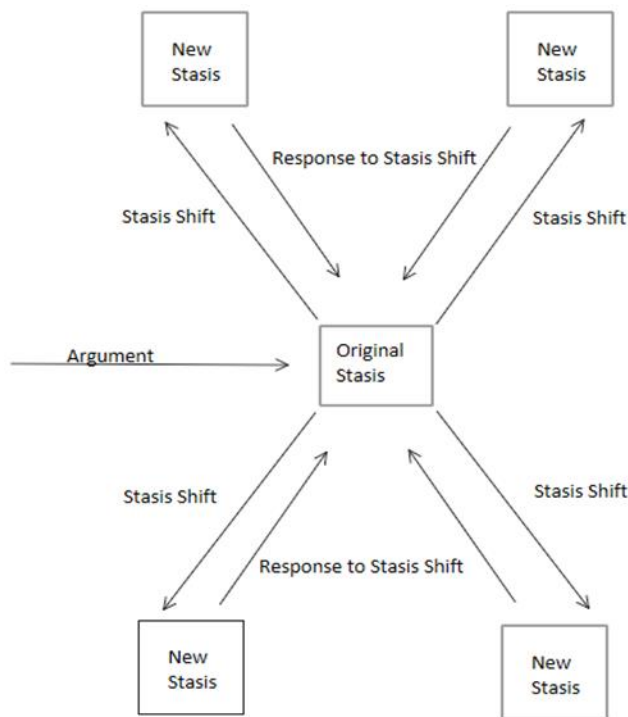


Figure 4. Responding to Stasis Diffusion

Even if a rhetor successfully rebuts each stasis shift, the original stasis is often still left unaddressed. In essence, stasis diffusion can be understood as a war of attrition; it

attempts to distract the opposing rhetor, the audience, or both, long enough for the argument to end or the original stasis to be forgotten.

Stasis diffusion can operate on both micro and macro levels. On a micro level, stasis diffusion can be utilized by an individual rhetor as an effort to distract other rhetors, and/or the audience, from the original stasis. On a macro level, stasis diffusion works in a similar manner as on the micro level but often centers on a body of argument rather than a singular argument and can involve many rhetors. While the rhetors involved in stasis diffusion on a macro scale might be conscious of this rhetorical strategy, stasis diffusion does not necessarily need to be a deliberate act; it can occur as a result of many unconnected rhetors shifting the stasis of a particular body of argument.

Stasis Diffusion in Racist Discourse

The use of stasis diffusion can also be seen in the racist rhetoric used in support of Jim Crow and segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. One example of the use of stasis diffusion on the micro level can be seen in the discourse surrounding the 1954 lynching of Emmett Till in Mississippi. The murder of fourteen-year-old Till sent shockwaves across the nation causing an increased national focus on the civil rights movement and racial activism.

On September 8th, 1955, Tom Ethridge, a columnist for the *Jackson Daily News* wrote an article in his “Mississippi Notebook” column subtitled “NAACP Witch Doctors.”⁴⁸ The article was a response to the NAACP’s statements on the Till murders and attempted to diffuse the stasis of the NAACP’s discourse concerning Till by portraying the organization as uncivilized, violent, self-serving, and un-American. While

⁴⁸ The article was later republished in the October 1955 issue of *The Citizens’ Council*.

it is unclear if Ethridge is responding to a specific NAACP text, or to all of the NAACP texts and actions, it is likely that Ethridge was responding to two NAACP statements, the first being the NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins comment on September 1st which argued the complicity of Mississippians in the murder:⁴⁹

it would appear from this lynching that the State of Mississippi has decided to maintain white supremacy by murdering children. The killers of the boy felt free to lynch him because there is in the entire state no restraining influence of decency, not in the state capital, among the daily newspapers, the clergy, not any segment of the so-called better citizens (qtd. in Tyson, 126)

The second statement was a press release from the organization on the same day described the murder, quoted Wilkinson, and noted that the NAACP had reached out to the Governor of Mississippi, the U.S. Attorney General, and the President of the United States (“Press Release”). The second statement, which mirrored many of the arguments from the September 1 release, implored the intervention of the federal government to end the “state of jungle fury” in Mississippi (McMillen, 218, Houck and Grindy, 54)

A direct response to the NAACP’s statement might be expected to counter the two main assertions: that Mississippi maintains white supremacy through the murder of children and that these murders are facilitated by the complicity of Mississippi state citizens and institutions. However, instead of addressing the statements directly, Ethridge works to diffuse the stasis through a series of attacks on the NAACP itself. 50

⁴⁹ It is likely that the article is responding to this statement as it was commonly reprinted in the south and according to Houck and Grindy the NAACP did not release many official statements on the matter: “Save for Wilkins’s initial statement and several calls for possible federal involvement, the NAACP and its affiliates were keeping a very low profile” (45).

⁵⁰ Houck and Grindy argue that Ethridge’s article was constructed in response to the NAACP’s “jungle fury” comment. This connection does not, in my mind, represent a direct response to the NAACP’s argument. Instead, it

The main theme of the article is drawn from common racist stereotypes of the black community as uncivilized, animalistic, and violent. Ethridge argues that the NAACP statements implicating Mississippi in practices of white supremacy are proof that the organization has “reverted to ancient tribal instincts.” The author then constructs a narrative from “African jungles long ago” that imparts that “cunning witch doctors” would respond to the killing of one of their tribe’s members by inciting “his emotional followers to anger.” The narrative goes on to argue that the witch doctor would display the body of their fallen member to encourage the tribe to “punish the entire tribe of those who did this dreadful thing.” By constructing an extremely thinly veiled narrative that mirrored the Till case, Ethridge shifts the stasis away from the lynching and white Mississippians complicity in it to an argument that speculates the motives of the NAACP. Instead of the stasis resting on the question of “are the citizens of Mississippi complicit in the lynching of Till?”, the stasis shifts to “what are the motives of the NAACP’s statements?” In the remainder of the article, Ethridge shifts the stasis several more times by speculating on the NAACP’s motives for asserting that Mississippi is complicit in white supremacist practices. The most prominent of the motives Ethridge argues is that the NAACP is attempting to incite violence. While the witch doctor narrative is set in the past, Ethridge notes that “yet our nation has just heard almost identical utterances in the violent statements from the NAACP’s headquarters in New York City. True, these outbursts did not urge bloodshed, but the leaders must have been aware that it might easily result from this angry outburst.”⁵¹ Although Ethridge’s statement is contradicts

⁵¹ By “this angry outburst” Ethridge means the statements from Wilkins. Ethridge’s framing of Wilkins’ words as an “angry outburst” is an attempt to undermine the ethos of the NAACP. It plays into the stereotypical framing of the NAACP as violent savages.

itself (one wonders how the statements are “violent” and yet do not condone violence⁵²) it relies on the use of stereotype to convince its audience that although the statements do not directly condone violence, they should be viewed as violent because of black people’s natural proclivity for violence.

Ethridge draws upon his witch doctor narrative in arguing that the NAACP is taking advantage of Till’s death. Noting that “trouble was [the witch doctor’s] business and he thrived on it,” Ethridge works to set up a ‘historical’ precedent for his depiction of Till’s funeral as a “carefully-staged Congo circus...where the youngster's last rites were used as an occasion to collect funds for promoting further racial strife and perhaps fatten the wallets of agitators.” The open-casket funeral, and subsequent publication of the images of Till’s brutalized body caused an emotional furor that resonated with people around the nation. By arguing that the funeral and viewing of the body was a “constructed” plan devised by the NAACP for self-serving benefit, Ethridge attempts to shift the focus away from Till’s body itself, a body that, through the physical violence perpetrated on it, had become a powerful argument against Mississippi’s culture of white supremacy.

By connecting the NAACP with fictionalized tenets African tribalism, Ethridge frames the NAACP’s statements as un-American. Noting that the organization has

⁵² In *Fanatical Schemes*, Roberts-Miller notes that contradiction in arguments is common in an authoritarian culture that favors loyalty to a faction over loyalty to factual evidence. She asserts that “loyalty is not demonstrated through something easy to do, so loyalty in thought is demonstrated through the rather difficult task of believing what is obviously absurd” (221). Much of the segregationist rhetoric that came out of groups like the Citizens’ Councils demonstrates that this rhetorical strategy did not die with the ending of slavery, but was utilized in segregationist discourse. I would argue that the rhetorical concepts of authoritarianism that Roberts-Miller highlights are not simply tied to the authoritarian nature of slavery, but are embedded in the authoritarian nature of white supremacy, which has, and continues to, impact the United States.

“unsuccessfully tried to replace American concepts of justice with those of the African Congo in centuries past,” the article argues that the idea that the Mississippi citizenry was complicit in the lynching of Till is a “curiously un-American theory.” Ethridge shifts the stasis from a questioning of the citizens of Mississippi to a questioning of the ideal of justice itself. This treatment of justice is enabled through the establishment of difference. Framing the NAACP as an outsider, arguing through foreign ideals, supports Ethridge’s assertion that their understanding of justice is fundamentally different than that of Americans. If the NAACP’s understanding of justice is fundamentally un-American, claims Ethridge, then is their indictment of Mississippian invalid? By refocusing the stasis on the black community’s claim to definitions of American justice, Ethridge steers his audience away from having to consider the claims of the NAACP.

By focusing on the NAACP rather than the statements that they made, Ethridge diffused the powerful indictments of the organization’s statements by directing the audience to a series of arguments that undermined the NAACP’s credibility. Instead of centering his rhetorical strategy on proving that the statements were false, Ethridge instead offered a plethora of reasons for his audience to not even consider the merit of the statements reasoning. While the article’s use of stasis diffusion was unlikely to be persuasive outside of a sympathetic audience, the mitigation of the opposition’s arguments creates a type of insulation against outside arguments for their audience, thus helping to preserve the racial status quo.

While the Ethridge article demonstrates stasis diffusion in a micro sense—that of a single text—the study of how the entirety of the Mississippi press reported on the case can illuminate the operation of stasis diffusion on a larger scale. According to Houck and

Grindy, the Mississippi news corps resented the comments of the NAACP so much that many of the newspapers shifted their focus away from the facts of the case and towards an attack on the “outside interference.” However, the reporting of outside interference, outside the original statements of the NAACP, was “largely hyperbolic,” and centered around false reports of NAACP conspiracy concerning the case and of black people streaming into Mississippi to destroy the state (46). Newspapers around the state continually published editorials that sought to defend the racial atmosphere in Mississippi through various stasis shifts including: questioning the NAACP’s use of the word lynching, examples of racial violence in Mississippi being punished (48), conspiracy theories that the NAACP encouraged Till to cause trouble (49), conspiracy theories that the NAACP was using Till’s death for profit (51), and stories of a white girl saving the life of a black woman (55). The newspapers response to the NAACP’s comment, while often not actually addressing the comments or trial themselves, worked to diffuse the stasis of argument surrounding the Till case. As these arguments began to dominate printed discourse of the state, the public opinion of the case shifted from a call for justice for the murders to a call for justice concerning the maligned reputation of the state and its citizens. Indeed, Houck and Grindy argue that as the days passed from the NAACP’s statement, “justice...was increasingly linked to an acquittal rather than a conviction, especially on the charge of murder” (46). While it would be reductive to attribute the outcome of the trial wholly to stasis diffusion, it is clear that the phenomenon was present in the responses to the NAACP.

Tomi and Stasis Diffusion

One can look at Kaepernick's protest and explanation as an argumentative statement that asserts three main things. First, in the United States, people of color experience oppression. Second, police brutality is not punished or controlled in an adequate manner. Third, the United States flag should not be respected because of the previous two assertions.⁵³ Although Kaepernick expanded upon his explanation the following day, it is unclear whether the show's response was made with the knowledge of these statements, as it only included his original statement in its response.⁵⁴ The show's three-minute response to Kaepernick's protest, on a micro level, is an example of stasis diffusion. The video response is loaded with retorts to Kaepernick's original statement but very few are direct rebuttals of Kaepernick's statements. In order to address how stasis diffusion proceeds in the show's statement, it is first necessary to examine the individual arguments in the video.

If one divides the show's arguments into categories based on stasis, two things become apparent. One, the arguments do not follow a single stasis but rely instead on a series of stasis shifting moves. Second, the stases of the show's arguments are not necessarily responses to Kaepernick's statements but often are generalized responses that

⁵³ It can be extrapolated that Kaepernick is implying that the flag's symbolic message is not being fulfilled and therefore does not deserve the respect it is given, however, this is not explicitly outlined in Kaepernick's original statement. Kaepernick does note this argument the following day in an expanded media interview.

⁵⁴ On August 28th, 2016, Kaepernick held an extended question and answer session with the media to further explain his protest. Kaepernick noted that his protest was "to bring awareness and make people realize what's really going on in this country. There are a lot of things that are going on that are unjust, people aren't being held accountable for...this country stands for freedom, liberty, and justice for all. And it's not happening for all right now." He also noted that the protest was not anti-military or based on personal oppression (although he had experienced it in the past). For the full interview, see Kawakami, 2016.

target common anti-racist argument or address a generalized community of color.⁵⁵

Does Colin Kaepernick have the credibility to protest racial oppression?

Many of the show's arguments attempt to shift the stasis away from questions of racial oppression and police brutality to Kaepernick himself. These arguments often rely on ad hominem attacks on Kaepernick's character, his motivations for protesting, and his athletic ability. The show intersperses pejorative descriptions of Kaepernick throughout its commentary. Among these, Kaepernick is condescendingly referred to as "bud" and "buddy," noting that his protest and statement are "mouth diarrhea," and comments to Kaepernick "if you want to sit down, now's the time, on the bench, because you suck." These types of the disparaging and, frankly, childish arguments perform a very simplistic task; they shift the stasis away from a serious conversation about race and police brutality and refocus it on the character of the original speaker. These types of comments can be effective given that public opinion Kaepernick is more polarized due to his involvement with the NFL, an institution that foments pride, bias, and factional loyalty toward a particular team and its players. For this reason, it is likely that an audience of football fans are more likely to enjoy the show's, for lack of a better word, shit talking concerning Kaepernick. Interestingly, the rhetorical purpose of talking shit works the same in the

⁵⁵ Because stasis is a shifting category that is often contested by all parties in an argument (either explicitly or though stasis shifting) there is generally many ways to describe what the stasis of an argument might be. The nature of contemporary media, in which rhetors often argue without ever speaking directly to the opposing parties, makes the establishment of a stasis even more complicated. While I have framed Kaepernick and the show's statements as in conversation, the fact that the argument is one sided (with Kaepernick addressing a generalized audience and the show directly addressing Kaepernick) makes the stasis of the argument largely hypothetical. Thus, I have relied on rhetorical readings of each of the rhetors arguments and their logical conclusions to construct the stasis which each rhetor appears to hinge their arguments upon. I have constructed the stases in the form of a question that the show's arguments bring into the conversation.

video's discourse as it does on the field in that it serves to distract opponents from the game—or, in the show's case, the original argument—by producing an emotional response and defense of one's character. More generally, the comments work to persuade the audience that Kaepernick is not a credible speaker concerning racial oppression. This becomes more apparent when looking at other examples of the show's attacks on Kaepernick, including describing him as a “whiney, self-indulgent, attention seeking crybaby,” and asserts that Kaepernick only “want[s] to make a political statement.” These comments are more insidious than simple insult as their intention is to argue that Kaepernick does not care about the issue at hand, racial oppression but is simply using the issue in a selfish attempt to get attention and accolades for himself. Like the above examples, the show's statements shift the stasis from an argument about racial oppression, police brutality, and respect for the flag to an argument about Kaepernick's character and his motivations for protesting.

What does the United States Flag represent?

The show frames its arguments as responses to Kaepernick's protest and statement; however, the show's arguments are tangential arguments which seek to shift the stasis, thereby distracting the audience from considering the validity of Kaepernick's claims. In its first ‘direct’ response to Kaepernick, the show asserts:

See, the national anthem and our flag, they are not symbols of black America, white America, brown America, or purple America for that matter. There are patriots of every race that have fought and died for this country and we honor the flag and sing the anthem as a reminder.

While the show's statement does have to do with race, respect, the flag, and the national anthem, it does not actually address anything that Kaepernick mentions in his statement.

Instead, the show shifts the stasis by making a colorblind appeal to equality that contests the validity and appropriateness of Kaepernick's color-conscious one. It does so by framing the argument through what Bonilla-Silva calls "abstract liberalism," or the practice of "using ideas associated with political liberalism...in an *abstract* manner to explain racial matters" (*Racism Without Racists* 28). While academics have demonstrated how the concept of colorblindness can be harmful in an effort to move towards racial equality, the fact that it was once promoted as a positive liberal concept provides cover for rhetors who use it to dismantle anti-racist arguments. Because the concept was established as a concept of liberalism and racial equality, audiences often view its invocation as racially progressive, even when it is being used to argue against anti-racist efforts. The show's statement makes a strawman of Kaepernick's statement by framing his as one of racial exclusion. By noting that the flag and anthem do not represent a particular race but instead all races, the show's comments are presented as racially liberal arguments in response to a statement framed as racially exclusive. Kaepernick's statement does not argue that *any race* should be privileged over another but only that he won't respect a symbol that represents a country where racial oppression is perpetuated. This understanding is troubled, if not all together lost on the audience, however, by the show's efforts to diffuse the stasis.

The show's argument also shifts the stasis to an argument that centers around respect of the military rather than respect of a particular symbol and practice. This particular shift of the stasis, which taps into a generalized sense of patriotism and respect that many in the U.S. hold for members of the military, frames Kaepernick's argument as anti-military rather than anti-racist or anti-police brutality. The assumption of the show's

argument is that the only, or at least most important, thing that the flag represents is the United States military. While the anthem and the flag are certainly associated with the military, they are certainly not solely representative of that institution. This stasis shift is aided by the simplicity and wide acceptance of the show's second assertion, that "there are patriots of every race that have fought and died for this country." By connecting a largely irrefutable and factual assertion to her second assertion "and we honor the flag and sing the anthem as a reminder," the show attempts to distract the audience from the argument that people honor the flag and sing the anthem for many reasons, not exclusively out of respect for the military. The show returns to this argument to close out the video, adding in a personal appeal to emotion: "I've got loved ones overseas right now fighting for your right to sit on a bench." Shifting to the military after describing the military as racially egalitarian allows the show to avoid discussing race all together because it creates a hierarchy for social grievance: respect for the military trumps any protest as the military protects the right to protest itself.

Should people who protest the conditions in America stay in the country?

The show's arguments often draw upon, or work to create, a sense of factional patriotism and nationalism. As I have demonstrated above, this often materializes as unconditional deference to the United States military.⁵⁶ However, the show also appeals to a more general feeling of nationalism in her response to Kaepernick, exclaiming:

⁵⁶ The show's rhetoric concerning the military follows a post-9/11 social and rhetorical trend that worked to silence critique of military action by shifting the stasis away from the decisions the government and military made and on to support for the troops themselves. This phenomenon was extremely strong in the lead-up and first years of Operation Iraqi Freedom, often vocalized by the slogan "support the troops." The show's rhetoric expands upon this concept by conflating individual troops, or veterans, with the entirety of the country. For the show, anything that has a connection to the military is off-limits for criticism or protest. For more on post-9/11 rhetoric concerning the military, see Roger Stahl's "Why We "Support the Troops": Rhetorical Evolutions (2009).

And Colin, if this country disgusts you so much, leave. I guarantee there are thousands and thousands of people around the world that would gladly take your spot. Because those that don't live under this flag are banging on the door to get in, not get out, remember that.

The pattern of creating a strawman of Kaepernick's protest continues in this statement. In both his actions and his statement, there is little evidence that Kaepernick is expressing 'disgust' concerning the country as a whole. Rather, it is relatively clear that he objects to the specific practices of oppression and police brutality. The show's move to describe Kaepernick's protest and statement as "disgust" for America has the rhetorical purpose of framing racial protest as denigration of the nation as a whole. Combined with the show's argument that Kaepernick should leave the country if it disgusts him, the show implies that those who criticize the country should relinquish their citizenship. Through this logic, the show makes the thinly veiled argument that one qualification of citizenship in the United States is the tacit acceptance of the racial status quo.⁵⁷

The show structures the situation as a binary: stay in the country and abide the racial status quo or leave. This logical assessment seeks to curtail the rhetorical options of the subject—here Kaepernick—by ignoring the obvious logical alternative of working to change what one finds negative about the country.

The second half of the show's statement concerning immigration can be considered rhetorically useful in several ways. First, it supports nationalistic sentiments concerning the country by describing it as exclusive and desirable. Secondly, it frames

⁵⁷ I have previously written about the connection between anti-racist protest and denials of citizenship. The rhetorical argument that protecting, tacitly or otherwise, the racial status quo is a qualification of citizenship was used frequently in the hate mail directed at Dr. Lee Bebout in 2015. The framing of the country as "white" is more apparent in these emails, one of which noted "please get out of this White country" (Ladenburg, "Race Traitors and Sapphires" 2015). Lahren makes a similar argument, but buries the premise under a façade of nationalism and patriotism.

Kaepernick as inconsequential to the nation as a citizen, or, by extension, that those who do not accept the racial status quo can be replaced by those who will. Finally, the statement works to appeal to the emotions of the show's audience, many who consume media which paints immigration as something that should be feared. The show's imagery of immigrants "banging on the door to get in" draws upon negative views of immigration so often presented in conservative media.⁵⁸

Should someone who is wealthy talk about oppression?

The show's arguments often work to accomplish two goals. First, they attempt to install a perception within the audience that racial oppression is overstated (and often exploited) in the United States. Secondly, they make an effort to narrow the 'acceptable' means of protest using Kaepernick as a stand in for communities of color. The show's discussion of Kaepernick's wealth advances both goals, arguing that the protest is a way for Kaepernick to "bitch and moan about...[his] perceived oppression while making nineteen million dollars a year to throw a ball." While the show doesn't overtly argue that racial oppression doesn't exist, it uses Kaepernick's status as a wealthy man to argue that *he* does not experience oppression. In the previous chapter I demonstrated how the idea that racial oppression is an unfounded perception, not a reality, is used in mainstream racial discourse, particularly by Bill O'Reilly. This idea is forwarded by the show, arguing that Kaepernick is protesting "perceived" as opposed to actual oppression. The show's line of reasoning that his wealth keeps him from experiencing actual oppression

⁵⁸ For how Fox News coverage shapes views on immigration see: Gil De Zúñiga, Correa, and Valenzuela (2012).

shifts the stasis from the general to the personal. This move conflates the ideas of racial oppression by pivoting from the question ‘Do people of color experience oppression?’ to a question of ‘Do wealthy people of color experience oppression?’ While these concepts certainly intersect, the show’s argument suggests that wealthy persons are shielded from racial oppression by their wealth. The suggestion that racial oppression does not affect wealthy persons of color works to define racial oppression in terms of monetary power and ignores the multitude of ways that racism impacts the lives of people of color. Furthermore, this line of reasoning relies on the acceptance that those who have not experienced oppression, or a certain level of oppression, are not capable of speaking about oppression with credibility. Again, this argument operates as a gatekeeping mechanism for ‘acceptable’ racial protest and works to narrow the amount of people who can argue against racial oppression.

Should someone who is half white talk about racial oppression?

The show attempts to shift the stasis on to the validity of Kaepernick’s protest by focusing his race. It distinguishes Kaepernick, whose mother was white and father black, as “half white” while later in the video notes that Barack Obama, despite having a black father and white mother, is described as “black.” Demonstrating the malleability of the social construction of race, the show frames the race of Kaepernick and Obama differently when it is rhetorically useful. When seeking to undermine Kaepernick’s ability to speak about issues concerning the black community, the show labels Kaepernick as half white, placing emphasis on his whiteness to undermine his credibility to speak about black issues. In the case of Barack Obama, the show places emphasis on him as a black man when describing what she argues as his failures to help the black

community.

Are white people in the United States Racist?

The show shifts the stasis away from a focus on the oppression of people of color by refocusing the argument on the question of white racism. Drawing upon Kaepernick's personal past, she attempts to argue that the actions of a select few white people is evidence that white people in the U.S are not racist:

And Colin, how dare you sit there and blame white people for the problems of minority communities?...Didn't two white parents adopt you after yours weren't willing to raise you? For a racist and horrible country filled with racists and horrible white people, that's really something, isn't it?

The stasis shift here hinges on an extremely weak premise: that a single family adopting a single child of color is evidence that people in the United States are not racist. The argument, despite its clearly flawed logic (one white family's actions are hardly representative of all whites' actions), successfully shifts the stasis by refocusing it on personal white racism rather than a general accusation of oppression. To do this, the show mischaracterizes Kaepernick's assertion that people of color experience oppression by asserting that he is calling the United States, "a racist and horrible country filled with racist and horrible white people." This mischaracterization frames Kaepernick's protest as a personal indictment of white prejudice. It insinuates that Kaepernick's argument is that each individual white person in the United States is a racist. By establishing this absurd notion, the show can easily counter the argument by offering a single anecdote: one that has the ancillary benefit of framing Kaepernick as ungrateful to his own family.

Should someone protest racial oppression without fighting oppression in other ways?

Another tangent that the show uses to diffuse the stasis is by constructing a gatekeeping mechanism that insists that protest should only be used by those who have fought racial oppression in other manners. Like her arguments about a protestors wealth and race, this tactic seeks to define, and limit, which racial protesters are acceptable or credible. In addition to its uses a gatekeeping tactic for protestors, the argument also works to undermine the act of protest itself, arguing that

Is our country perfect? No. But what have you done to make it better? What's your contribution? Sitting there like a fool? What's selfish is you, buddy. And what's your message to black kids, to people of color? That their biggest contribution to justice and self-fulfillment is to parade around with a chip on their shoulder like a victim?

The show's argument is rooted in an ad hominem attack on Kaepernick that suggests that he is insincere about fighting racial oppression and police brutality. The show's questioning of how Kaepernick has helped the country undermines the validity of protest as a constructive action. The framing of racial protest as foolish and selfish works to undermine a major rhetorical vehicle of anti-racist activists by implying that actions which call attention to racism should be viewed as negative. This assertion is highlighted by the end of her argument, which frames Kaepernick's benign racial protest as provocative ("parading around"), aggressive ("with a chip on their shoulder") and exaggerated ("like a victim").

Who caused racial oppression?

In many of the show's arguments, Kaepernick seems to act as a stand-in for the entirety of the black community. This aspect of the show's rhetoric was noticed by John Hendrickson who noted that "Lahren positions her tirade as though its directed at Kaepernick, but she is undoubtedly speaking to "Black People," some imaginary

monolithic entity without individual thought or opinion.” Hendrickson is clear that the audience of the show’s rant isn’t black people themselves but argues that within the video “the dozens of things that Angry White People wish they could say to Black People are said out loud...hidden beneath the veil of a 1-to-1 address to a specific public figure.” Hendrickson’s analysis is on point; while the show feigns its audience is a black person, or the black community at large, the appeal of the video is that it gives voice to arguments that the white audience wishes it could say to black people. The ability of the video to publicly state arguments that are held by whites but are generally not openly stated is part of the reason it is rhetorically effective. Leslie Houts Picca and Joe R. Feagin’s frontstage/backstage concept can help explain this dynamic. Picca and Feagin define the “frontstage” as any multiracial space whites occupy and the “backstage” as any space occupied only by whites. This separation of spaces works to perpetuate racism because whites “frequently present themselves as innocent of racism in the frontstage, indeed as “colorblind,” even as they clearly show their racist framing of the world in their backstage comments, emotions, and actions” (19). The arguments in the video have long been used to uphold the racial status quo. These basic arguments have been continually revised to fit with the social politics of any given time. In this case, as Hendrickson notes, the arguments have been reformulated to include Kaepernick, but instead represent a general attack on racial protest. Thus, the video uses Kaepernick and his protest as a stand in for the black community itself, and permits arguments generally only used in the backstage to be used on the frontstage. Kaepernick and his protests are used as a way to introduce racist arguments about the black community as a whole while appearing to only target a single individual, thereby sidestepping accusations of racism.

An example of the show moving from a specific attack on Kaepernick to a general attack on the black community can be seen in some of the video's closing arguments:

Please tell me how you are oppressed. Is it because the black unemployment rate is double what it is for whites? Or the homicide rate, or the dropout rate, or the percentage of the minority communities on food stamps? Well, we have had a black president for almost eight years now, maybe he failed you. We also have a black woman in charge of the justice department, maybe she failed you too. Or maybe it's the liberals, your saviors, which have run your communities into the ground. Where does the buck stop? When will the those in black communities take a step back and take some responsi-damn-bility for the problems in black communities? Because it seems to me that blaming white people for all of your problems might make you the racist.

These arguments shift the stasis away from an argument that systemic racism exists within the United States to the argument that the black community is responsible for their own oppression. The show's argument is an example of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls "cultural racism," or the idea that oppression in the black community is rooted in black culture itself. The use of cultural racism is a staple of racist discourse. In *Blaming the Victim*, cultural racism is explained as a strategy to shift the stasis, noting that "by focusing our attention on the Negro family as the apparent *cause* of racial inequality, our eye is diverted. Racism, discrimination, segregation, and the powerlessness of the ghetto are subtly, but thoroughly, downgraded in importance" (Ryan, 5).

Macro Stasis Diffusion as a Model for American Racist Discourse

Thus far, the chapter has largely focused on stasis diffusion in a micro sense: a single rhetor employing stasis diffusion to discuss a relatively narrow issue. Although the media reaction to the lynching of Till demonstrates how stasis diffusion operates with multiple rhetors, the concept of stasis diffusion can be useful in modeling racist discourse on a much larger and theoretical scale. Mills argues that white supremacist ideology

constructs a cognitive outlook where “officially sanctioned reality is divergent from actual reality” (*The Racial Contract* 18). In other words, Mills argues that the system of white supremacy convinces those within it to view the world in a way which helps to reinforce the system of white supremacy itself. According to Mills, this worldview produces “the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made” (*The Racial Contract* 18). The ways in which this worldview was, and continues to be, constructed are varied and complex. However, extending macro stasis diffusion across a historical timeline provides a way of understanding one vehicle by which this worldview is constructed and perpetuated. To understand how stasis diffusion could contribute to this worldview—what Mills calls an “epistemology of ignorance” (*The Racial Contract* 18)—it is vital to appreciate just the abundance of rhetorical strategies used in racist discourse.

This dissertation began as an attempt to map the rhetorical strategies used in racist discourse across time in the United States. Quickly, I realized that this exercise would be virtually impossible in a dissertation.⁵⁹ Mapping of all of the rhetorical strategies used to maintain and perpetuate racist ideology in the United States was a project for a career, or several careers. The sheer amount of arguments, even when grouped together by larger rhetorical categories, was staggering. Apart from the sheer volume of rhetorical strategies, the rhetorical variations of each rhetorical strategy and the complex nature through which each rhetorical strategy intersects with others makes the process even

⁵⁹ This revelation is not unique. Teun A. Van Dijk said of his book *Elite Discourse and Racism*, “the writing of this book has been an arduous enterprise if not, at times, an impossible task. The complexity of the theoretical framework, the vast historical literature on the many forms of elite racism...presented more than the usual challenge of scholarly research” (x). It is worth noting that Van Dijk was studying only a subsection of racist discourse.

more complex and convoluted. An examination of the subsection of racist discourse that many scholars call scientific racism helps to illuminate the volume and complexity of argumentation in racist discourse. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, scientific framing was a major factor in constructing the concept of race as it provided a framework that focused on categories of difference. However, scientific argument was as a rhetorical vehicle to generate specific instances of racial difference as well. The use of scientific justification for racism and the creation of otherness was used by Europeans from the beginning of sustained contact with people of Africa, particularly through comparisons to primates (Jordan 28-31). As slavery came to America, the idea that black people were, or related to, animals took hold in the justifications of slavery. The physical actions and discourse of slavers treated slaves as animals or cattle, despite popular arguments at the time that black people possessed souls (Jordan 232-233). Tsesis notes “slave traders treated them like animals, herding and buying them in open markets. Slaves were regarded in predominately physical terms” (36). The belief that people of color were not human, or at least not *fully* human, was cemented into social consciousness through these practices. As the argument that people of color were fundamentally and biologically different from whites was popularized, other scientific arguments were employed to demonstrate difference between people of color and whites. Scientific based racist arguments have included studies in phrenology, eugenics, IQ and intelligence studies, genetic based behavior, among many other variants. These pseudo-scientific studies have been used to argue that communities of color are biologically predisposed certain characteristics including violence, low intelligence, incivility, and hyper-sexuality. Despite continual advances in scientific understanding that have demonstrated the

assertions of scientific racists to be erroneous, scientific racism has weathered the test of time in the United States. The early to mid-twentieth century saw a notable resurgence in scientific racism, including intelligence testing, theories of eugenics, and theories of social Darwinism. Contemporary racist discourse is no exception; arguments advancing scientific racism were popularized in the 1990s largely through Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve*. As Justin D. García notes, books drawing upon arguments of scientific racism has gained notoriety every five or ten years since the publication of *The Bell Curve* (1994). One of the most recent examples is *A Troublesome Inheritance* by Nicholas Wade. Wade, a former editor for the journal *Nature* and writer for the New York Times, uses his credibility as a journalist in scientific fields to make specious arguments about intelligence, aggression, and race. The book's mere publication, by Penguin no less, demonstrates the rhetorical capital that scientific racism still holds in the United States.⁶⁰ This simplistic overview of the many argumentative variants of scientific racism is far from exhaustive but demonstrates the sheer volume of argument that has been employed in a single category of racist discourse. Adding that scientific racism is a single category in a large group of categories, the enormous scale of rhetorical strategy used in racist discourse becomes visible.

When examining the history of scientific racism, it becomes clear that the underlying stasis has changed very little. The arguments of scientific racism all revolve

⁶⁰ The book was thoroughly discredited in scientific fields. A letter cosigned by over 140 scientists in the field noted, in part, that the book "juxtaposes an incomplete and inaccurate account of our research on human genetic differences with speculation that recent natural selection has led to worldwide differences in I.Q. test results, political institutions and economic development. We reject Wade's implication that our findings substantiate his guesswork. They do not" (Coop, et al) The almost universal condemnation of the book by raises the questions about the editorial process by Penguin.

around the question of difference and its social implication. Specifically, scientific racism asserts that race denotes scientific human difference and thereby justifies inequitable treatment. However, from the mid-16th century to present day, arguments of scientific racism have worked to diffuse and thus distract from this basic stasis by introducing arguments that are continually more complex and tangential. By diffusing the stasis, these arguments work to obscure the original stasis that focuses on humanity and equality. If this original stasis was more legible in arguments concerning race and racism, general audiences might be less willing to support ideas that argue for the diminished humanity or equality of American citizens.

Arguments that non-white people were not human gave way to more nuanced arguments that non-white people were human but not as human as white people. These arguments gave way to arguments that non-white people were as human as whites but possessed physical characteristics as a group that naturally created inequality. By continually introducing more specific and tangential arguments, scientific racism can forward the same racist arguments without the audience recognizing that they are drawing from a long history of racist argumentation perpetuating human difference. The fact that scientific racism is only one rhetorical vehicle used in argumentation about race and racism in the United States is further evidence that stasis diffusion is a key element in the construction of the epistemology of ignorance outlined by Mills. As the debate over race and racism continues in the country, arguments which diffuse the stasis continue to be introduced to the national consciousness. Over time, the knowledge needed to understand the context of racist argumentation grows larger and larger, adding to the difficulty of eliminating racial ignorance. Combined with a public education

system that adequately introduces complex concepts of rhetoric or racism, Mills' epistemology of ignorance continually reinforces itself through the process of stasis diffusion.

Stasis Diffusion as a Fundamental Rhetorical Strategy

This chapter has explicated the operation of stasis diffusion as an individual strategy, a group strategy, and as a model for how white Americans understand and talk about race and racism. *Tomi's* response to Colin Kaepernick's protests demonstrates stasis diffusion as a rhetorical tactic used by a single rhetor to undermine the argument of an opposing rhetor. It is perhaps easiest to detect and understand the use of stasis diffusion when used by an individual rhetor in an argument or statement. Furthermore, countering the use of stasis diffusion as a rhetorical strategy is easiest in this form because it only primarily requires an opposing rhetor and/or audience to recognize and note that the strategy is being used. However, as I have noted above, stasis diffusion can be used macro-discursively by a series of different rhetors. This type of stasis diffusion is harder to identify because it might be constructed through several rhetors using a single stasis shift, rather than a single rhetor diffusing the stasis all at once. Indeed, the case of local media covering the lynching of Emmett Till helps to illuminate the power of macro stasis diffusion. The coalescence of many different rhetors diffusion the stasis adds a perception of credibility; because independent sources (or seemingly independent) all offer distracting argumentation, it is easier for an audience to believe that a particular stasis is not worth addressing. Countering this type of stasis diffusion can be extremely difficult, particularly when groups of rhetors work in concert to diffuse the stasis. Media conglomerates often accomplish this (consciously or not) through the use of repetitive

talking points. The use of talking points across a wide variety of shows on a network—or networks in a conglomerate—can work to legitimize arguments that shift or diffuse the stasis.⁶¹ As I demonstrated in the previous chapter through an examination of *The O'Reilly Factor*, Breitbart News, and The Daily Stormer, these talking points are often used by a large variety of media outlets. Countering macro stasis diffusion requires a rhetor to be aware of, and successfully analyze, a wider range of argumentation from multiple rhetors. Furthermore, it requires a rhetor to be able convey to an audience the connections between each opposing stasis shift and how, when combined, they work to diffuse the stasis of an argument. Obviously, this process necessitates that is able to conceptualize a meta-argument of this sort, trusts the rhetor's synthesis of opposing arguments, and is willing to listen to an argument that deviates from the issue to tackle the issue of bad faith argumentation. These factors, among others, make macro stasis diffusion of this sort highly effective and difficult to address. When individual and macro stasis diffusion are employed concerning a single issue over they can diffuse the stasis to an extent that an audience may not be willing—or able—to recognize the basic stasis of an argument. In the United States, stasis diffusion has made discourse concerning race and racism so convoluted that much of the population is unwilling or unable to recognize arguments which shift or diffuse, even when they are using those arguments themselves. The work necessary to counter this type of stasis diffusion, one which are helped to construct an epistemology of ignorance concerning racism, is herculean in scope. Not only are the difficulties encountered in smaller instances of macro stasis present, but they

⁶¹ In 2018, it was uncovered that media conglomerate Sinclair was directing many of their television news stations to push particular talking points and read mandatory statements to their audience.

are compounded by the fact that hundreds of years of stasis diffusion have worked to obfuscate and distract from the core stasis of arguments concerning racism. In a single argument, this type of stasis diffusion is seemingly impossible to counter. In essence, working to illuminate the original stasis of the argument takes constant and consistent pedagogical practice from educators and fellow citizens alike. The education of the populace of the rhetorical strategy of stasis diffusion itself, the historical context of race in the United States, and the major ways in which stasis diffusion has been used is critical in countering this deeply embedded system of racist discourse. The first part of this process, rhetorical education, is made more difficult by the fact that often audiences in the United States consume and accept bad faith argumentation either unknowingly or willingly. Many of the strategies of racist discourse which I have explicated in this dissertation purposefully argue in bad faith and are successful in doing so. This raises an important question: if audiences in the United States are unwilling or unable to adhere to good faith argumentation or a belief in deliberative democracy, how does one counter racist discourse that invokes bad faith argument?

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: ARGUMENTS OF GOOD FAITH, DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY, AND RACIST DISCOURSE

The debate over the ethical use of rhetoric has been a part of the discipline of rhetoric since its inception. In *Gorgias*, Plato famously decried rhetoric as “a practice, not of a craftsman, but of a guessing, brave soul, naturally clever at approaching people” noting that the sum of these things was rhetoric, or “flattery” (31). In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke asserted that “all of the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness...are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement” (419) Locke is particularly pessimistic concerning the pervasiveness of rhetoric within the population, noting that:

only I cannot but observe how little the preservation and improvement of truth and knowledge is the care and concern of mankind; since the arts of fallacy are endowed and preferred. It is evident how much men love to deceive and be deceived, since rhetoric, that powerful instrument of error and deceit, has its established professors, is publicly taught, and has always been had in great reputation (419)

Plato and Locke’s sentiment that rhetoric, at its core, is a practice in deception reverberates in contemporary perceptions of the discipline. Indeed, the term is often used to as a pejorative to describe discourse, particularly with the adjective ‘empty’ preceding its use. This negative conception of the word is supported institutionally as well; both the Merriam-Webster and Oxford dictionaries provide at least one definition of rhetoric in the negative.⁶² That rhetoric is often viewed as a negative is no surprise given the history

⁶² Merriam-Webster’s 2b definition of rhetoric is “a type or mode of language or speech; *also* : insincere or grandiloquent language.” Oxford’s (US) 1.1 definition is “Language designed to have a persuasive or impressive effect on its audience, but often regarded as lacking in sincerity or meaningful content.” Interestingly, Oxford’s British and World English definition places rhetoric in the pejorative in both of its

of critique from celebrated philosophers and rhetoricians and given that rhetoric has been utilized by notorious leaders to perpetuate abhorrent crimes. Perhaps the most infamous example of this is the use of language by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party in their genocidal campaign during WWII. The chapters of this dissertation demonstrate that the use of rhetoric in pursuit of nefarious goals is an ongoing and pernicious practice. The terms “bad faith” and “good faith” rhetoric are terms which attempt to demarcate between rhetoric that is ill-intentioned “flattery” or a fallacious “instrument of error and deceit” and rhetoric which is sincere and void of a willingness to deceive or be unfair. While the colloquial use of these terms might be helpful for a general audience in learning about rhetorical ethics, the definition of the terms become problematic when placed under scrutiny. The most glaring problem with demarcating between “good faith” and “bad faith” rhetoric is that, to a certain extent, it involves an understanding of the intent of the rhetor. While one can use text to identify if a rhetor is misleading an audience, it is much more difficult, perhaps impossible, to use text to prove that a rhetor *intended* to mislead their audience. Chapter Two briefly discussed the topic of intent, noting Roberts-Miller’s argument that the intent of an argument is impossible to know, and therefore should be backgrounded in favor of the analysis of rhetorical potential. In other words, it is perhaps unimportant to rhetoricians if a rhetor believes that they are making an argument in good faith or not because the persuasive effect is the same. The more pertinent question for rhetoricians is if the audience believes that the rhetor is making an argument in good faith and/or if the audience holds good faith argumentation

definitions, noting in the primary definition “especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques”

as important in discourse.⁶³ The debate (and public perception) over what is, or is not, good faith rhetoric is significant, in part, because it sanctions what rhetorical strategies rhetors can effectively use in societal interaction. Given that the political arena has long made copious use of rhetorical strategy, it is perhaps not surprising that the debate over the use of rhetoric in society and governance which Plato began in *Gorgias* still continues in contemporary discourse.

In her essay “Democracy, Demagoguery, and Critical Rhetoric,” Roberts-Miller argues that “the basic principle of democracy is that the ability of the general public to make appropriate decisions depends to a large degree on the quality of public discourse” (459). In this argument, Robert-Miller describes quality public discourse as based in good faith argumentation. The theory of a system of public discourse based in good faith argumentation, applied to a practice of governance, is called deliberative democracy. According to Stephen Elstub and Peter McLaverty, deliberative democracy theory can be described as promoting that, “political decision-making should be talk-centric rather than vote-centric” and that “rather than merely constituting the aggregation of individual preferences, collective decisions should emerge from public reasoned discussion and debate” (1). One of the major issues with the concept of deliberative democracy is its practical implementation and acceptance given the existence of bad faith actors; it is difficult to envision a system to ensure society wide good faith argumentation without

⁶³ As I discussed in Chapter One, intent is often used in racist discourse as a way to sidestep or avoid criticism for racist words or actions. As Jane H. Hill argues, the process of defending racist utterances as “gaffes” where “the speaker is defended as “not a racist,” but someone who has uttered racist words without having racist beliefs or intentions” allows the use of racist discourse due to the common belief (part of what Hill calls the “Folk Theory of Racism”) that racism resides only in personal thoughts and beliefs.

implementing authoritarian governance. In essence, true deliberative democracy can only work if the participants, or rhetors, are willing to engage in good faith argumentation.

Much of this dissertation has been a project in diagnosis of racist rhetoric—the project illuminates and analyzes some of the central ways in which racist discourse utilizes bad faith rhetoric or works to undermine good faith rhetoric (or how anti-racist practices stray from good faith rhetoric). A valid criticism of the project—particularly if one frames it as a project to further anti-racist efforts in the United States—is that it assumes that the population values good faith rhetoric and that deliberative democracy would lead to the population enacting anti-racist policy. Upon introspection, it is reasonable to understand the bias that led me to construct a project that was based on these assumptions. As a rhetorician, I understand and appreciate the value of rhetoric, particularly rhetoric that operates in good faith. As a scholar that researches and supports anti-racist efforts, I feel that pursuing racial equality in the United States is a moral imperative. The current climate of the United States demonstrates the naivete of these assumptions. Over the past several years, bad faith rhetoric concerning race and racism seems to be more readily accepted and published in the media and government.⁶⁴ Given

⁶⁴ The timing of the dissertation also plays into these assumptions. The project began in early 2016, before Donald Trump was elected President and the acceptance of overtly racist, bad faith rhetoric, was used by those in the highest positions of government on a regular basis. Openly racist discourse also became more common on popular news programs. For example, on January 18th, 2018, the Fox News program *Tucker Carlson Tonight* hosted a guest that argued, “In Arizona, a majority of the grade school children now are Hispanic. That means Arizona’s future is as an Hispanic society. That means, in effect, the border has moved north,” to which Carlson responded, “It’s at the very least bewildering for people who grew up here, and that’s real. I don’t think you have to be animated by hate or anything to say, ya know, maybe I should have some say on how my country evolves.” The interaction was also tweeted by Fox News’ twitter account. This type of argument follows the strategy in Chapter One of manipulating category to minimize racist remarks. The first statement by the guest directly argued that Hispanic people are not American. The response attempts to disconnect this racist argument from the idea of ‘hate.’ This plays into the conception of racism being a personal characteristic and works to situate the open statement as political or patriotic rather than openly and directly racist.

the recent acceptance of racist ideology, I am doubtful that even through deliberation the country would decide to enact any serious anti-racist policy. However, while the analysis in this dissertation may not be immediately rhetorically viable to a broad audience in contemporary society, the analysis can function pedagogically as a tool to reinforce the value of good faith argumentation and deliberative democracy in the citizenry.

I mentioned earlier in the dissertation that one of vital functions of freedom of speech protections is its capacity as a pedagogical tool. Freedom of speech protections encourages those who support dangerous ideologies to speak openly about their beliefs. Through the refutation of these dangerous ideologies, society is able to affirm the ideological convictions of the nation. Furthermore, by allowing dangerous ideologies to be argued for in the open, it is easier to identify how the rhetorical strategies used in support of these ideologies shift over time. Seen through a pedagogical lens, freedom of speech protections provides a way to track the shifting rhetorical strategies used to support harmful ideologies and provides a way teach younger generations societal mores via discursive refutation. Viewing freedom of speech protections not as inherently good based on their philosophical characteristics but as a tool that can be wielded in both positive and negative manners places the onus on each citizen to develop a skillful understanding of its use. I argue that rhetoric should be viewed in a similar fashion—neither inherently good or bad based on its philosophical foundations—but as a tool which can be utilized for both positive and negative ends. Like social mores and ideologies within the country, the ways in discourse is valued and accepted are social constructions. Bad faith rhetoric is only successful when the general population either understands and accepts (either actively or tacitly through inaction against it) bad faith

rhetoric as a viable tactic or does not have the knowledge to police bad faith argumentation when it is used in discourse. Therefore, a widespread and continued education in rhetoric could provide a pathway for society to develop the ability to identify and reject bad faith rhetoric. However, addressing the rhetoric of racist discourse in the United States requires attention to the ways in which racism is entrenched into society.

In Chapter Three, I noted that because racism is a political system that is deeply entrenched into the fabric of American society and because stasis diffusion has created a multitude of distracting arguments, many white American cannot see or understand the ways in which racism is created and maintained. I theorize that this lack of racial knowledge—or “epistemology of ignorance”—as Mills calls it, contributes to white Americans acceptance of bad faith rhetoric. Roberts-Miller argues that in decision making “the human possibility of making a decision always involves the equally human possibility of making a mistake—it is the opportunity and responsibility of freedom. That possibility is, as Fromm argued, so frightening for many people that they look for a way to escape freedom itself” (“Demagoguery”, 465-466). The willingness to give up freedom as an exchange for less responsibility, according to Roberts-Miller, is central in explaining the appeal of demagoguery. I speculate that for many Americans, their lack of knowledge concerning the history of race and racism, and the prospect of the immense work it would take to obtain that knowledge, drives them toward the simplistic and comforting logic of racist discourse. In *Nobody Knows My Name*, James Baldwin once opined:

Human freedom is a complex, difficult—and private—thing. If we can liken life, for a moment, to a furnace, then freedom is the fire which burns away illusion. Any honest examination of the national life proves how far we are from the

standard of human freedom with which we began. The recovery of this standard demands of everyone who loves this country a hard look at himself, for the greatest achievements must begin somewhere, and they always begin with the person. If we are not capable of this examination, we may yet become one of the most distinguished and monumental failures in the history of nations. (208)

Together, Roberts-Miller and Baldwin's conceptions of freedom outline the arduous path that white Americans must choose to confront the system of white supremacy that is entrenched within the nation. Each individual must turn from the simplistic, yet erroneous, arguments of racist discourse and be willing to accept the mistakes they (and other in the country) have made in decisions concerning race.

In answering its main research question—How does discourse concerning race and racism operate rhetorically to affect the ways in which race and racism are understood, maintained, and perpetuated within the society of the United States?—this dissertation points to a possible pathway to help American society engage in the type of examination that Baldwin argues is so desperately needed to confront the problem of racism.

Chapter one investigates a major issue with the way racism is often portrayed, or fought against, in contemporary society. The use of generalized category to identify and analyze racism as attributable to personal or group characteristics creates short-term and long-term problems that exacerbate the epistemology of ignorance. In the short term, the chapter demonstrates the rhetorical weaknesses with the use of category as an anti-racist tactic. The long-term effect is perhaps more pertinent when considering the reasons Americans commonly accept, or refuse to refute, racist discourse. Over time the constant focus on placing people and groups within categories that signify their level of moral repugnance to society conditions the populace to recognize the simple signifiers of

inclusion in the category rather than understand complex reasons why a particular ideology is harmful or how discursive strategies by which it is spread. While the population may hold a virtual consensus that the *category* of racist or white supremacy is bad, they are unable to recognize the ideologies that these categorize represent outside a series of narrow signifiers like racial slurs, swastikas, or Klan imagery. Thus, the population loses the ability to identify and argue against racist ideology and discourse, making it even more difficult for them to have confidence taking on, as Robert-Miller calls it, “the responsibility of freedom.” The chapters proposed shift away from the use of simplistic category is one of the first major steps in providing the educational framework necessary for the population to identify and understand the fundamental ways in which racist ideology and discourse is perpetuated. In doing so, the population will be more adept at recognizing racist ideology in when it is presented in new and varied ways. However, the implementation of this shift away the use of categorization requires a more complete comprehension of the fundamental strategies of racist discourse. Furthermore, it is necessary that the elucidation of these strategies is accessible and easily understood by a general audience. This is the goal of the second and third chapters of this dissertation. They represent a step towards a more complete comprehension of the fundamental strategies used in racist discourse. The chapters are constructed deliberately to provide the information necessary to understand the fundamental nature of each strategy; each chapter explains the rhetorical function of the strategy, its use historical discourse, its use in contemporary discourse, and its use by rhetors that represent *mainstream* and *non-mainstream* categories. Additionally, the chapters are written prose that is accessible to an audience outside the field of rhetoric and, when possible, outside academia. The

rhetorical strategies studied in the second and third chapters also demonstrate how racist discourse advocates and defends racist ideology. The second chapter outlines one of the fundamental ways in which racist ideology is presented and advocated directly to an audience. The construction of a racial worldview through projection on *The O'Reilly Factor* demonstrates one of the ways that rhetoric operates as a vehicle to inculcate racist ideology in the audience. Van Dijk argues that “language and discourse, which...also influence how we acquire, learn or change ideologies” (Ideology and Discourse, 9) *The O'Reilly Factor's* rhetorical strategy is an illustration of one of the ways in which racist ideology is taught to an audience. The third chapter, on the other hand, focuses on a strategy that is generally used as a defense of racist ideology as a rebuttal of anti-racist argument. The strategy of stasis diffusion operates to defend racist ideology from arguments against it. Stasis diffusion works to distract or obfuscate the argument of an opposing rhetor through a series of stasis shifts. Through this obfuscation, the audience is insulated from any arguments that might operate to challenge racist ideology.

If we understand the current social climate as one that is deficient in the study of rhetoric and firmly entrenched in a political system of white supremacy, this dissertation can be seen as a pedagogical tool in the effort to educate the population in a general use of rhetoric, the specific rhetorical strategies of racist discourse, and the historical context that is needed to understand the fallacious nature of racist argumentation. Through its use as a pedagogical tool, the project also works to reinforce the value of good faith rhetoric by explicating the flawed use of bad faith rhetoric in racist discourse.

Avenues for Continued Research

This dissertation has expounded upon the rhetorical and philosophical reasons for a shift away from the use of categorization and has illuminated two foundational rhetorical strategies used in racist discourse. To close, the project identifies some avenues for continued research or extension of the arguments and ideas contained in this dissertation.

One of the more pressing issues in the study of racist discourse is how to disseminate academic research, particularly academic studies of racist discourse, to a general population. While I have outlined above that the analysis contained in this dissertation might not be persuasive to contemporary audiences as a direct argument, it can operate as a tool for educating the population about the importance of rhetoric, good faith argument, and the rhetorical strategies that are somewhat ubiquitous in racist discourse in the United States. Perhaps the most conspicuous route for the implementation of this dissertation's findings is in the classroom. The majority of the arguments contained in this project are relatively accessible for students in upper division rhetoric and race classrooms. Chapter Three is perhaps the most accessible to a wide range of students. The concept of stasis diffusion is applicable to the rhetoric of racist discourse, but in many rhetorical applications, particularly in political discourse. Although the classroom is an excellent space to make use of this projects research, it fails to reach a larger and more generalized audience.

One possible avenue for the deployment of research on the rhetoric of racism to a far-reaching audience is through watchdog groups. In the opening chapter, I critiqued watchdog groups for their focus on categorization of groups and people rather than a

focus on discourse. However, a push to have these groups include academic studies on racist discourse along with their primary focus on tracking and profiling the racist movement would provide useful and necessary context for watchdog's current research. The Southern Poverty Law Center, one of the most recognizable watchdog groups concerning racist movements in the United States, would benefit from the incorporation of the research outlined in this dissertation. Although the research and legal work that the center provides is invaluable in anti-racist work, some of the websites features rely too heavily on the simple identification of racist groups and people. For example, the SPLC's "hate map," one of the better-known features on their website, relies largely on relatively broad and historical information about a category of that each group belongs to. Currently, clicking one of the over one hundred groups labeled as "Neo-Nazi" leads one to a page on information about the groups in this classification. However, the page only provides a 141-word description of the category "Neo-Nazi," none of which is specific to the ways in which these particular groups attempt to perpetuate their ideologies. Despite the map's importance in identifying the *where* racist groups operate it fails to provide its users with easily accessible information on *how* these groups attempt to spread their ideologies. The SPLC's website could benefit by shifting their hate map away from generalized categorization of groups by location and basic ideology and towards a more specific look into the rhetorical practices used by the group in question. By doing so, the SPLC could provide their users with an understanding of what groups are around them, what ideologies they maintain, and an understanding of how they attempt to spread those ideologies. The implementation of rhetorical analysis by watchdog groups would directly benefit the group's audience as well as help to shift the national focus concerning racist

groups from a focus on categorical identification to discourse based education. In addition to the implementation of the research and analysis contained in this project it is important to outline how the research in the project could be extended in the future.

In a general sense, the research produced in this dissertation could be extended and strengthened through more extensive mapping of the ways in which the rhetorical strategies of racist discourse are used historically and by rhetors who inhabit various places on the political spectrum. One of the main goals of this project was the demonstration of the use of fundamental rhetorical strategies in racist discourse; however, the case studies provided favored depth, in terms of detail, within a small sample of studies over breadth in considering a large number of examples. A project which favored breadth would be useful in mapping out the specific ways in which the fundamental rhetorical strategies outlined in this dissertation have been used, by whom, and how their application has changed or shifted over time. Understanding the temporal and political patterns of use of these strategies would be vital in understanding the evolution of rhetoric in racist discourse in the United States. In addition to providing breadth to the fundamental strategies already outlined in the dissertation, it is important for future research to elucidate other fundamental strategies of racist discourse. A possible avenue for study could be to delve into the use of scientific argument as a cover for racist ideology. While Chapter Three briefly outlined some of the ways in which scientific racist has been used throughout the history of the United States, it does not investigate the rhetorical strategies that undergird arguments of scientific racism. As one of the oldest justifications for racial oppression, there is significant opportunity for continued research concerning the rhetorical use of scientific racism. Outside of a generalized extension of

the project as a whole, the concepts within the particular chapters open interesting possibilities for continued research.

In Chapter One, the concept of categorization is applied to the ways in which we discuss racism in the United States, focusing specifically on how categorization of racist groups and people is rhetorically vulnerable as an anti-racist strategy. The chapter briefly discusses the use of categorization in the construction of race and racism both in the world and specifically in the United States but does not dive deeply into a discussion of why the use of categorization to construct race was, and continues to be, harmful. A worthwhile research project might investigate how the use of categorization in anti-racist argument could inadvertently apply similar oppressive frameworks to anti-racist work that were constructed in the project of white supremacy. While this extension might stray from a firmly rhetorical focus, a study on the ethical implications of categorization in anti-racist strategy would be useful to both rhetorical studies and anti-racist research in general.

The concept of stasis diffusion outlined in Chapter Three is also rife with possibilities for continued research. In particular, a study of how stasis diffusion operates through different mediums could provide interesting insights in how stasis diffusion has evolved over time due to the advent of new technology and a more connected citizenry. The two mediums studied in this project concerning stasis diffusion are newspaper and video. Other mediums like everyday speech, radio, and the internet might demonstrate specialized use of the rhetorical strategy of stasis diffusion. The internet is a particularly rich site for research of stasis diffusion. Given the widespread migration of racist movements to the web, an analysis of the ways in which stasis diffusion in racist

discourse shifted after the advent of the internet would shine light on how the internet influenced the rhetorical strategies of racist discourse. Outside the study of racist discourse, stasis diffusion could provide a model for how issues and ideas are diluted due to the sheer amount of information (both accurate and inaccurate) that is available to the audience. The ability of the audience to only access information they agree with could amplify the rhetorical effectiveness of macro stasis diffusion.

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