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MAKE AMERICA KILL AGAIN: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DONALD
TRUMP'S NECROPOLITICAL REPRESENTATIONS THROUGH CONJUNCTURAL
USE OF TWITTER DURING HIS PRESIDENCY

ZACH THORNHILL

88 Pages

The presidency of Donald Trump set the stage for new forms of rhetoric that shaped national perceptions of different groups. Operating in different conjunctural moments, Trump used his Twitter account as a weapon to repetitively vilify different racial identities. Through negative representations of Black Lives Matter protestors and immigrants, Trump created a culture of incivility and hatred. Using these negative representations, Trump created necropolitical conditions that justified violence in the United States. This thesis will be a critical discourse analysis that examines how Trump was able to create the culture of incivility during his presidency.

KEYWORDS: conjuncture, necropolitics, representations, rhetoric, nationalism

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ZACH THORNHILL

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MASTER OF SCIENCE

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2022

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Z.T.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump's presidency was one of the most polarizing events in recent history. However, the issues that arose were not limited to the four years of his term. Mass deportations of Haitians, continued use of detention facilities, and racial injustice continue to pervade the daily lives of immigrants and American citizens (Shear et al., 2021; Smith, 2021). In order to understand what prompted these atrocities, one need only look to Trump's rhetoric during his presidency. Expanding use of social media and inflammatory rhetoric made for a scene unlike anything many had ever seen. Trump made attacks against nearly every identity group that did not align with his own. While he still used typical forms of rhetoric like speeches, State of the Union Addresses, and press releases, Trump took to Twitter like a man with a mission. Gitelman (2021) explains that Trump will be remembered as the "Twitter President." Trump was not simply using Twitter to explain the happenings of the White House. Rather, Twitter became Trump's personal weapon to attack his opposition, protestors, and anyone else who stood in the way of his vision for the United States. Trump even went so far as to threaten violence in response to the protests in May of 2020. It is from this point that this project emerges. Trump not only overused his Twitter account – he weaponized it.

During Trump's presidency, violence and incivility became much more visible. According to the FBI, there were 29,962 hate crimes during Trump's term. This was a massive increase from the 23,790 of Obama's second term (FBI, 2021). Not only did the numbers increase, but so did the rate of publicity. Cases like the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, shootings by Kyle Rittenhouse, the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, and the January 6th insurrection were all manifestations of Trump's rhetoric. Trump continually encouraged his supporters to engage in violent acts that justified his supporters to take action. Using Twitter as his main vehicle, Trump was able to reach an audience of almost 90 million followers at the push of a

button. Miles (2014) explains that the office of the presidency can use the bully pulpit to set political agendas. Therefore, Trump could use negative representations to advocate for his preferred ideologies to his grand audience. His rhetoric was inflammatory enough that even while he was still the president, Twitter deactivated his profile. The climate of hatred and incivility Trump's account fostered went beyond cyberspace to impact people in real time, which prompted Twitter to remove him (Godwin, 2021).

Seeing the violence that stemmed from Trump's tweets made me reflect on my own social location. While growing up, I faced minimal exposure to many of the atrocities that people face daily. I am a white, heterosexual, cisgender male whose family was upper middle class. I never faced racism, heterosexism, or financial instability. However, I began participating in competitive debate as a freshman in high school. I was exposed to several things I never experienced before through research for different topics. This was exaggerated when I began coaching high schoolers while I was completing my bachelor's degree. Not only was I teaching people about positions related to poverty and gender, but my students also wanted to make arguments based on their identities as women or queer individuals. I began to have difficult conversations with them about how they relate to the rest of the world. I heard about sexual harassment in the community, rapes, parents kicking their kids out of the house, and so much more. On several occasions I would sit in my room and cry thinking about how there was so little I could do for them. However, they inspired me to begin writing about institutionalized violence.

I began coaching students to advocate positions based on their identities and how the U.S. treats them. I watched as several of them cried reading personal narratives and stories about their experiences in debate. Often, I wondered if presenting these arguments was appropriate or if it was dangerous. However, one debater showed me that it was all worth it. Her name was Britton

Teply, and she approached me because she wanted to read a narrative about sexism and anti-queerness in debate. She worked diligently, telling me she wanted to change the way gender was seen in our community. Britton began reading the position at the district tournament where the top three debaters qualify for the national tournament. She began the tournament reading several positions based on women's rights and biopower. However, she went into her final round telling me she was going to read the narrative she had prepared regarding sexism and anti-queerness. If she won, she would qualify for nationals. Not only did Britton win, but the judges voted unanimously in favor of her. After receiving the text saying she won, I bawled. This debater, a sophomore, went on to become the first competitor from our school to compete in elimination rounds of the national tournament. Seeing Britton use her own experiences to show ways to improve institutional structures made me want to work harder to protect her, other members of her community, and other communities as well.

While Britton was able to do great things for the debate community, she has not reached the point where she can challenge political structures of power. However, she did motivate me to try and inspire change. My undergraduate experiences were shaped by an election that placed Donald Trump in the White House. Trump acted in a way that was different than presidents before him. He did not hide his attacks against his opposition. Rather, he often doubled down and refused to apologize. His abrasive nature created a rhetorical crisis for the presidency. Everything that operated outside of his personal ideology was directly articulated, by him, as an enemy. Trump used scapegoats and fear to motivate and solidify his base (Young, 2018). However, these actions did not inspire unity among the nation. Rather, Trump's rhetoric did just the opposite; it inspired populism and division.

Trump's presidency occurred during moments of increased American polarization. Pew (2016a) reported that "for the first time in surveys dating to 1992, majorities in both parties express not just unfavorable but *very* unfavorable views of the other party" (para. 1). In short, many Americans were angry at those that fell on opposite sides of the aisle. After taking office, Trump did not encourage unity. Rather, he embraced the political acrimony in America. Dimock and Gramlich (2021) explains that "Trump's status as a political outsider, his outspoken nature and his willingness to upend past customs and expectations of presidential behavior made him a constant focus of public attention, as well as a source of deep partisan divisions" (para. 6). Trump's administration seemed to have no intentions of resolving American polarization. Instead, Trump and his cronies perpetuated partisanship.

In a nation that is falling more and more along polarized lines, it is crucial to understand specific issues that propagated this divide, one of which was actually about division: border security. Trump campaigned on and pushed for legislation to hinder immigration from across the southern border. In his campaign announcement speech, Trump expressed the need for tighter borders. Further, he referred to Mexican immigrants as drug dealers and rapists (Trump, 2015). While these claims are based on a generalized falsehood, they resonated with nationalist Americans who resented immigrants. Trump explained how Mexico was "not sending you" while addressing members of his audience, indicating that immigrants were incomparable to the law-abiding high-quality people like "you," his supporters. His messages supported the red-blooded Americans of the heartland while drawing lines in the sand for anyone outside the country. The rhetoric he used on the campaign trail only continued after he was elected. Cisneros (2017) explains that "with Donald Trump's victory, a particularly virulent and nativist strain of racist discourse and ideology has received official sanction through the symbolic and

institutional power of the presidency” (p. 519). It is important to understand ideology before moving forward. Ideologies are various value structures that determine individual beliefs (Althusser, 2008). Individually, ideologies are not positive or negative. However, they can be appropriated for beneficial or nefarious purposes. From the position of the presidency, Trump was able to act on his words. Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and detention centers became state-sponsored operations to reject the immigrant Other attempting to move into the United States. Further, Trump’s elimination of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) only further entrenched the anti-immigrant operations of his administration by preventing citizenship for children. While the Supreme Court eventually held him accountable and forced DACA’s reinstatement, the messages had already been released, and they were clear: The president and his administration were anti-immigrant, and immigrants were not safe here. These actions should have come as no surprise to anyone who was paying attention. Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric during his campaign and administration is what justified the actual policy actions he took. Rather than shying away from policies, Trump actively pursued anti-immigrant legislation throughout his presidency.

Trump did not only use immigration as an opportunity to otherize individuals. I remember sitting at my desk at work one day reading news headlines and seeing one with which I have become far too familiar. An unarmed black man was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis. I continued to read, clenching my fists, as I watched the footage of a public servant murdering someone in the street as the unarmed citizen begged for help. I was furious to say the least. Fourteen days earlier I earned my bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. Most of my work throughout those four years looked at corruption of court systems and police departments. I worked in prisons, teaching the incarcerated during that time. I wanted to help those who had

been punished by overtly cruel systems. But, after watching that footage of Derek Chauvin's knee on the back of George Floyd's neck, I was broken. I was encouraged seeing the Black Lives Matter protests and marches that wanted justice for Floyd's death. However, the script soon flipped as Trump turned to Twitter and attacked the protestors, calling them thugs and threatening violence against them (Trump, 2020d). Rather than using the moment as an opportunity to inspire compassion and justice, Trump placed targets on the backs of protestors.

American polarization became evident at this point. Some civilians took matters into their own hands to protect buildings and property. One of these civilians was Kyle Rittenhouse who killed two protestors and wounded another in Kenosha, Wisconsin (Bosman, 2021). Rittenhouse was only seventeen years old at the time. However, Trump once again refused to associate blame with Rittenhouse. There was not even a mention of it on his Twitter account. Considering how Trump's rhetoric fired up right-wing responses to the protests, one would assume he would try to backtrack in some way. However, in true Trump fashion, he continued his unapologetic persona (Wolf, 2018). Regardless of party affiliation, support for one group or another, bloodshed should be considered intolerable. However, in Trump's case it not only seemed acceptable, but was encouraged. Trump even threatened to use the National Guard to restore "peace" against the largely non-violent protestors (Trump, 2020e). In reality, this threat most likely would result in further bloodshed and violence. This was the trend of Trump's response to Black Lives Matter protests. Rather than work for unity and justice, Trump used threats and fear to perpetuate racial division in the U.S.

Trump's presidency was shaped by multiple moments when he could act. Immigration and BLM protests were prime opportunities for Trump to advocate for justice. However, using Twitter as his weapon, he unleashed repeated messages of subordination. He condemned the

actions of those who were working for better futures. Immigrants were forced out of the country. Protestors were threatened with military presence after enduring para-military police officers in riot gear and minuteman wannabes. This escalatory rhetoric was used to justify actual violence from several members of Trump's base. As such, throughout this thesis, I will be critically examining Trump's tweets to explore how he weaponized Twitter to justify violence against different groups. Operating from his position of power, Trump's rhetoric encouraged his followers to model their elected leader.

This thesis aims to explain how Trump used the presidency as a springboard to label different groups as enemies. Specifically, I will be analyzing how Trump used Twitter to vilify BLM protestors and immigrants. Further, I will be examining how violence against these groups became justified as Trump fostered a climate of incivility. My goal is to explain how Trump used Twitter as a channel to justify state-based violence. Hopefully, it will inspire people like Britton to interrogate the structures of power that justify violence against them.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Presidential rhetoric has been studied by several scholars (e. g., Beasley, 2009; Kirk, 2018; Shogan, 2006; Stuckey, 2010; Zarefsky, 2004). Trump’s rhetoric alone has been studied continuously since he began on his campaign for the presidency. State-based violence – or Necropolitics – has not been studied extensively; but it has been recently used to extrapolate about racial and gendered discrimination in the United States. However, scholars have failed to deduce how Trump’s incivility on Twitter allowed him to illicit necropolitical power over different populations. Most literature points to the material impacts that necropolitical power justifies (Arias, 2017; Arthur & Woods, 2013; Mbembe, 2019). However, minimal work has shown how discursive displays of power have encouraged violence on an epistemological level. Spivak (1999) explains that epistemic violence is when an Other is stripped of its subjectivity. Subjectivity can be understood through Althusser’s notion of interpellation. Althusser (2008) explains that “ideology. . . ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals. . . or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects. . . by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing” (p. 48, emphasis in original). Individuals become objects based on the ideologies that are prescribed to them which constitute an identity. Charland (1987) continues this idea with their explanation of constitutive rhetoric. Constitutive rhetoric occurs when ideology – in the Althusserian tradition – articulates the identities of “subjects” vis-à-vis other subjects based on their relative social position of power. The process of acknowledging and referencing subjectivity in this manner can justify physical violence against the Other. However, first, there must be epistemic barriers drawn through constitutive rhetoric between individuals and groups deemed as an Other. It is important to note that this violence

occurs when rhetoric is used by individuals occupying positions of power, such as the presidency.

Presidential Rhetoric

Personally, my interpretation of presidential rhetoric deals with how the president addresses the public. Typically, this happens in a series of stages. First, candidates establish their platforms and positions as presidential candidates. After winning the election, presidents will have new forms of rhetoric that display the positions of their administration. The methods by which this happened changed during the Trump presidency. Trump's rhetoric was vastly different from those before him. Most of his rhetoric was demagogic, which is the use of scapegoating and fear from an authoritarian intended to mark the Other as inferior or as a threat, or both (Roberts-Miller, 2019). Therefore, each of these concepts will be discussed in detail.

Candidate Rhetoric

Presidential candidates often come under scrutiny for each word they use on the campaign trail. Medhurst (2005) articulates the rhetoric of candidates is often what makes the difference in election outcomes. Candidates say things that attract voters to their ideas and turn out voters. There are four functions in presidential rhetoric that candidates use. These functions include "issue framing and definition, agenda setting, character construction, and emotional resonance" (Medhurst, p. 24). Candidates do not directly address these functions, but rather construct them through speeches, debates, and other campaign activities that build the political identity of each candidate. Recently, the Republican Party has used underlying messages of racism to fire up their bases of white middle-class voters (López, 2015). This rhetoric is an example of dog-whistle politics. Essentially, rhetors code their messages in a way that is not immediately seen as racist. However, the underpinnings of the messages often directly target

non-white people. White middle-class voters then attach themselves to these messages because they believe it promotes more power for themselves, or the messages resonate with them on some level. Candidates continue to spread these messages through debates. During campaign debates, candidates typically do not clash with each other, but rather attempt to present themselves as presidential (Drury, 2018). It is crucial for a presidential candidate to appear in these debates as someone who saddles the responsibilities of the presidency while also advocating for policies and values of voters. Absent this appearance, voters are not likely to support a candidate.

The 2020 election offered new insight into how voters hold candidates responsible for their actions. Four years of Trump, brash debates, the COVID-19 pandemic, and countless attack ads set up an interesting election between Trump and Joe Biden. Holling and Moon (2021) argue that Trump's continuous use of hate speech was crucial to his removal from office because it offered an opportunity to provide repercussions for Trump's actions. Further, Scacco and Coe (2021) explain that expanded influence from social media, Congress, and the public ensured accountability from Trump. Essentially, Twitter's ability to delete tweets, impeachments from Congress, and individuals turning out to vote were all checks on Trump's abuse of the presidency leading up to, and immediately following, the 2020 election (Scacco & Coe, 2021). Using these checks, different people and institutions arguably held Trump accountable for his actions during his term.

Rhetoric of the Presidency

Presidential rhetoric has been studied for decades. Zarefsky (2014) explains that "scholars are concerned with the uniqueness of exemplary vases as well as with recurrent patterns" (p. 225). The goal is to understand that patterns in communication exist, but do not

necessarily offer the capability to predict anything. Further, presidential rhetoric is often characterized as an area that has a piece of rhetoric and an effect. Zarefsky further analyzes these concepts by saying they “are often understood too narrowly: ‘presidential rhetoric’ as public speeches and ‘effect’ as quantitatively measurable changes in indices of people’s attitudes or beliefs” (p. 226). His argument claims that this understanding is far too constricted to be able to explain anything useful, and there are too many variables involved to simplify presidential rhetoric’s scope this far. Rhetorical transaction, Zarefsky argues, happens in three ways: between messages and the audience, between the rhetor and the text, and between the text and the critic. The relationship between text and critic is the foundation of rhetorical criticism and allows for extrapolation of meaning based on any given text.

There is also the institution of the presidency to consider. Shogan (2006) argues that presidential rhetoric has substantial interplay with moral rhetoric. Often, presidents will fulfill their moral roles as policymakers through their rhetoric (Shogan, 2006). Therefore, the way that presidents posture themselves in relation to events and other individuals is crucial to analyze. Further, the executive models the moral codes by which the rest of the country should abide (Shogan, 2006). However, the presidency operates within its own site of privilege. Stuckey (2010) explains:

The American presidency is a site of political, social, and economic privilege. This fact is hardly remarkable but it is important, for it means that our understanding of power--what it means, how it is exercised, how it is understood--has been inflected by upper class, straight, white male expectations and practices. (p. 40)

This site of privilege is crucial to understanding the operations of the presidency. Power is centralized in the position of the presidency using different ideologies. Whiteness, patriarchy,

and heteronormativity, for example, are common features of the presidency. Therefore, any analysis of presidential rhetoric necessitates analysis of how power is used. However, Beasley (2009) explains political rhetoric is constantly evolving. Therefore, examining the new ways presidents use rhetoric is crucial to understanding how they persuade their audiences.

While the presidency functions as a rhetorical institution, presidential rhetoric is somewhat different (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990; Jamieson, 1988). Each president typically focuses on what is necessary to affect public agendas and opinion (Ceaser et al., 1981; Cohen, 1995; Stuckey, 2010). Usually, presidents will take actions to gain approval from the public. Lacking approval, presidents can lose elections, alienate their bases, or reduce the likelihood of their legislation passing (Edwards, 1989; Stuckey et al., (2008). Therefore, presidents are often tasked with doing what their base wants in order to secure victory and accomplish their legacy. Legislation, wars, and scandals are always attributed to the presidents that start them, not the presidency itself (Botsdorff, 1994; Kiewe, 1994).

Trumpism

Rhetorical analyses of Donald Trump have been conducted on two levels: rhetoric of his campaign and rhetoric used during his administration. Trump's rise to power was fueled by various rhetorical tropes that established him as an outsider. Further, Stuckey (2017) explains that it was Trump's position from outside the political sphere that made him such an attractive candidate. His rhetoric was able to further draw partisan lines in our political system. This only contributed to more division as voters reflected on the U.S. and "who among its citizens are most welcomed and valued" (Stuckey, p. 670). Trump used the slogan "Make America Great Again" to portray his mission for the country. The slogan urged voters to support him even when he was connected to "white nationalism, gender bias, and other antidemocratic elements" (Stuckey, p.

685). Many found themselves willing to accommodate these issues to vote for a candidate they believed would serve their own political interests.

Trump's vision can be seen through his advertisements that were used leading up to the 2016 election. Montgomery (2019) explains how these ads followed similar tropes as horror movies. Trump's ads "consistently evoked the classic horror frame to create distinct, otherized monsters and provide methods for slaying such ghouls, thus repeatedly attempting to instill audience efficacy through epideictic self-praise" (Montgomery, p. 283). Trump demonized his opposition saying they were part of "the swamp." Further, he propped himself up as a hero who could "drain the swamp" and end the staleness surrounding American politics. While ads were used regularly, Trump also consistently used Twitter as a campaign strategy. Zompetti (2019) and Jamieson and Taussig (2017) conducted analyses of Trump's tweets leading up to the 2016 election and found several trends associated with Trump's strategies while campaigning on Twitter. Specifically, Trump used strategies of bashing the media, deflecting and denying, playing the victim, using slogans to bash the system, demeaning other countries to put America first, otherizing to pump up the base, using personal attacks against Clinton, and explicit overtures toward the base (Zompetti, 2019). Not all of these strategies were isolated to the campaign. However, they were crucial to create fear in voters and motivate support. Instilling fear in the American public, Trump was successful in his climb to power and was able to cement himself as a leader. Further, Jamieson and Taussig found that Trump's use of Twitter "disrupted political and discourse norms" (p. 649). Trump's rhetoric via Twitter was inflammatory and aggressive which was different than anything seen in previous administrations.

When Donald Trump entered the White House, he reshaped the presidency. Rather than using empirical examples of other presidents, Trump's presidency was "shaped largely by what

presidents had not done” (Abbott, 2019, p. 151). Trump’s election became a rallying moment for the Right because the GOP saw it as an opportunity to reclaim power after eight years of Obama (Wilber, 2017). The circumstances culminated in greater divide and polarization of American politics (Wilber, 2017). Additionally, the responses and reactions to the Trump administration has led to more postmodern understandings of truth. Wilber (2017) explains the postmodernist conception of knowledge by claiming:

[Postmodernists] most definitely and strongly believed that it is universally true that there is no universal truth. They believed all knowledge is context-bound except for *that* knowledge, which is always and everywhere trans-contextually true. They believed all knowledge is interpretive, except for theirs, which is solidly given and accurately describes conditions everywhere. (p. 7-8)

Using post-modern interpretations of truth allows for a richer understanding of the polarization that Trump’s presidency promoted. Some individuals have an understanding that truth is not a universal concept. However, their truth must be true, but others can be interpreted. An example of this can be seen when Kellyanne Conway referred to a series of Sean Spicer’s remarks as “alternative facts” (Wilbur, 2017). For most people, facts should be seen as concrete truth claims. However, in a post-truth world, facts can be seen as true or false depending on their context and audience, or political ideology. This promotes competition, or at least division, between groups over what should be considered the truth.

Rhetoric of Trump’s administration was comparable to his campaign but had its own individual tropes. Young (2018) explains that Trump was a master at scapegoating the problems Americans felt to policy issues he had like immigration. While important, this scapegoating only encouraged populism. Populism stresses difference between in-groups and out-groups while also

expressing states of emergency, often with a connection to economic frustration (Young, 2018). Trump keyed in on these areas whenever anyone spoke out against his practices. His vilification of immigrants, protestors, and the Left only fueled the fire he stoked. Kelly (2020) notes that Trump vilified the left to create feelings of *ressentiment* in his followers. Kelly claims that, “although Trump boasts about his victories, he must constantly unsettle his audience’s sense of contentment. He must present himself as hamstrung, foiled and powerless so that resentment may transform into a wellspring of intense frustration directed at Trump’s opponents” (p. 13). As long as Trump could disguise himself as weakened by actions of the Left, his base would retaliate against them. This would allow his administration to continue to operate unabated because of the necessity to react to actions of those on the Left. This is further articulated through Trump’s representations of the Right as powerless even with a majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate (Kelly). While playing the victim, Trump and the Right were able to maintain their power and justify the use of other actions against the Left and their supporters.

Trump’s relationship to whiteness becomes clearer when compared with the rhetoric of the Ku Klux Klan. Sanchez (2018) explains that both Trump and the KKK communicate using rhetorical versatility to support a climate of white supremacy. Sanchez explains this rhetorical versatility as “a term signifying the way polysomic language can be used for different audiences while creating subtext via textual winks” (p. 45). Essentially, people speak in ways where racism is not immediately apparent. An example would be discussing American heritage. This has often been coded to express the need for people to return to the past and prop up whiteness as superior. All of this happened despite the progress that seemed to occur during the Obama administration. McHendry (2018) explains, “as the euphoria of Obama-era fantasies of a post-racial America crashed, Americans watched images of white supremacists marching in the streets, many in open

embrace of Nazi symbols and ideology” (p. 3). These individuals felt emboldened because of Trump’s racist discourse which was sanctioned by his election (Cisneros, 2017). Given this open embrace of white supremacy from Trump’s base, there is a need to analyze how it was weaponized against different populations.

One of the common tropes of Trump’s presidency was the repetitive attacks on different groups. Rowland (2021) explains that during the campaigns, “Trump focused more heavily on the threat posed by immigration or terrorism” (p. 35). He would consistently demonize different groups to justify his own legislation that would make immigration more difficult. Further, Trump would position the United States as under imminent threats from predominantly Muslim countries. Trump’s rhetoric presented threats posed to Americans by “the complete cast of villains” (Rowland, p. 35). Most of these attacks were against immigrants, Muslims, and black Americans. Trump promised to restore law and order to the United States. Rowland (2021) continues to explain that “Trump’s nationalist message was designed to arouse his core audience’s fear of Islamic terrorism, job losses as a result of bad trade deals, and crime committed by undocumented immigrants and Black Americans” (p. 36). Assigning blame for the conditions in the U.S. to identity groups justified future legislation and rhetoric that encouraged violence against these groups. Rowland also argues that “Trump’s goal at presidential rallies was to create fear and anger to energize his supporters and to distract them from policy failures, ongoing investigations, and his own outrageous conduct” (p. 112). Fear was a powerful motivator for Trump’s followers which made his negative representations of the Other more impactful.

Demagogues

Demagoguery continues to generate more discussion about how Americans consume information. Roberts-Miller (2005) explains that demagogues will influence the public with “complete indifference to the truth” (p. 460). Mercieca (2020) notes that demagogues use six strategies to encourage populism and division. Three of these strategies are used to unify the base. These strategies include *argumentum ad populum*, American exceptionalism, and *paralipsis*. *Argumentum ad populum* refers to strategies used to praise supporters as knowledgeable and intelligent (Mercieca). Utilizing this technique, supporters feel valued and emboldened in their ideals. American exceptionalism stresses “America’s unique status among other nations in the world” (Mercieca, p. 15-16). Stressing this uniqueness, policies become justified because they protect domestic interests and promote the idea that America is special. *Paralipsis* is a technique used to create rumors about the opposition and build rapport with supporters (Mercieca). It also consists of saying something by not saying it, such as when Trump said during his first debate against Hillary, “I’m very happy that I was able to hold back on the indiscretions with respect to Bill Clinton ... because I have a lot of respect for Chelsea Clinton, and I just didn’t want to say what I was going to say” (qtd. In Krieg, 2016, para 5). Supporters then feel like they are involved in viewing the rhetors background which creates unity in the group.

Trump also used strategies to divide. These strategies included argument *ad hominem*, argument *ad baculum*, and reification. *Ad hominem* attacks go after individuals as opposed to arguments by attacking their character (Mercieca, 2020). These attacks implicate the image of others, decreasing their support. Argument *ad baculum* shifts the focus away from the arguments by using threats of force (Mercieca). These threats prevent individuals from speaking out against

demagogues and perpetuate subjugation. Finally, reification, or the objectification of a target person or group, signals “that a demagogue’s designated enemies are unworthy of fair treatment” (Mercieca, p. 19). This allows violence and the commodification of bodies since the Other is perceived as inferior. Mercieca (2020) further elaborates on the problems of reification by explaining:

The demagogue who uses the technique of reification places himself or herself above the people who are designated as “objects.” Demagogues use objects as a means to an end (or treat the objects as if they have no value at all). Demagogues seek to control people as objects, denying people their own free will and autonomy. Demagogues deny the value of individual people by treating them as objects that can be exchanged easily for other people who are also treated as objects. Demagogues violate bodies and deny the experiences and opinions of people. (p. 19)

Allowing demagoguery to persist only permits violence and conflict between groups. The foundations of demagoguery rest on the need for an “us” and a “them.” Whenever these groups exist, conflict is inevitable, especially when politicians stress their differences and encourage divide.

Social Media Rhetoric

Rhetoric of Twitter

In recent years, social media platforms have begun to replace news outlets and interpersonal communication as the electorate’s primary source of information. Specifically, Twitter offers a medium for account holders to communicate messages with a limited number of characters to a group of followers. Ott (2016) explains there are three characteristics of Twitter that must always be recognized. First, “Twitter demands simplicity” (Ott, p. 60). Twitter’s

character limit prevents complex messages from being used. It is impossible to explain all the analysis necessary for specific points with only 280 characters. Therefore, shorter phrases and witty banter are the staples of the Twittersphere. Second, Ott explains “Twitter promotes impulsivity” (p. 61). There is minimal effort associated with sending a tweet. Most users will have the app on their phone and are able to send messages on a whim. Lacking a significant barrier of effort to post a tweet, users will often publish tweets that can be hateful or problematic. Thirdly, Ott states “Twitter fosters incivility” (p. 62). The informal and depersonalized nature of Twitter leads users to present “unfiltered” opinions and claims. These three elements culminate in a social media platform that encourages quick jabs at people and groups.

Twitter has also come under fire recently for allowing hate speech to persist on the platform. Waseem and Hovy (2016) explain significant difficulties persist in identifying hate speech on Twitter because there is not a specific definition of hate speech. Rather, hate speech is often used as a term of art to reference verbal attacks against different individuals or groups based on stereotypes of their identities (Banks, 2010; Howard, 2019; Warner & Hirschberg, 2012). However, without a concise definition in which all can agree, it becomes impossible to regulate. Thus, most research surrounding hate speech and social media has only looked at methods of identifying hate speech online rather than the implications of its use (Banks, 2010; Warner & Hirschberg, 2012; Waseem & Hovy, 2016). Further, there are concerns surrounding free speech and preventing constitutional violations for Twitter’s users. As a result, when Donald Trump’s personal Twitter account was banned from the platform, it appeared that Twitter was finally taking a position against hate speech while also limiting their protections of free speech. While at first glance this may seem unconstitutional, Twitter is not a government entity. This

means there is no guaranteed protection from censorship from their platform, especially if a user violates the company's terms of use (Hanna, 2021).

Trump's Twitter Rhetoric

Recent technological advances and the spread of social media have increased the use of Twitter for presidents. The account @POTUS has been passed between different presidents since the Obama administration. However, Trump operated slightly differently. Most of his tweets came from his personal account – @realDonaldTrump. From here, he shared his own personal thoughts and attacked different countries, individuals, and institutions. Kuś (2020) argues that the limit on characters that can be used for each tweet prompted the increased use of certain phrases. Trump was famous for his sound bite style slogans. “Make America Great Again” and “drain the swamp” are prime examples of this. Both phrases became imbued with meanings related to the ideologies Trump supported. This was crucial given the character limit of Twitter. Using slogans and phrases, Trump was able to connect ideologies to his tweets. Further, these slogans did not require many characters. Thus, Trump could use more characters to advance attacks or make other fallacious claims in his tweets. These interactions constitute what Bratslavsky, Carpenter, and Zompetti (2019) refer to as an “infrastructure of incivility” (p. 597). They define this concept as “an assemblage of structures and discursive mechanisms that contribute to a devaluation of normative democratic discourses” (Bratslavsky et al., p. 597). Essentially, because of the mundane and non-political nature of Twitter, Trump was able to bash different people because the medium of Twitter was not seen as “real.” Twitter exists as a site outside of formal political space which allowed Trump to antagonize his opponents and relish in the spectacle he created.

Further, Trump would use emotional appeals to engage his followers (Ross & Rivers, 2020). While other techniques were used, Trump's use of fear appeals was a hallmark of his Twitter account. This was clear with his push for increased border security. As mentioned previously, the comparisons between immigrants and criminals were plentiful. These appeals create fear in the audience and urge action. This was how Trump attempted to generate support for his restrictive policies at the border and abroad. He would also prey on racial prejudices the public held. Specifically, Trump's Twitter account would "promote messages originating with white supremacists, including the false claim that the large majority of white homicide victims in the United States in recent years were killed by blacks" (Abramowitz, 2017, p. 206). Spreading false information only encouraged further populism with what Abramowitz refers to as "racial resentment" (203). Essentially, racial resentment includes feelings of hostility toward black people. However, it is different from racism because racism is a hatred of the racial Other. Conversely, racial resentment is a fear of the racial Other (Abramowitz). Ingram (2017) continues this argument claiming that Twitter allowed Trump "to state untruths with impunity, knowing that his tweets will be widely redistributed by his followers and the media" (para. 15) Creating fear in his predominately white base, Trump created a necessity to vote for him. The necessity was constructed because without Trump, the base would be in danger from a racialized Other.

Trump's use of Twitter can also be seen while he was campaigning. His unfiltered tweets led to some labeling his campaign as "fear-based, populist, and negative" (Ross & Caldwell, 2019, p. 15). Trump's masterful use of 280 characters led to significant support from his base who were tired of the "business as usual" approach to politics. However, a further result of Trump's aggressive stances on Twitter has been the expansion of the Alt-Right and white

supremacy (Stolee & Caton, 2018, p. 151). Different groups felt emboldened by their president taking definitive positions against protests, immigrants, and other politicians. The result was increased violence and backlash including the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville.

Necropolitics

Necropolitics is often applied to U.S. immigration policy because of the otherization that happens at the border. Mbembe (2003) defines necropolitics as “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (p. 39). In other words, life is stripped from an Other to maintain security of the powerful. Stripping life is not synonymous with killing people. Rather, it is about taking away the quality of life which can result in eventual death. Immigration policies are often aimed at excluding bodies and relegating them for death. Specifically, this can be seen with the deployment of detention facilities that house undocumented immigrants and children (Arias, 2017). Individuals forced into these institutions are taken away from families and marked as the Other. When an Other is created, this allows for necropolitics to persist because some bodies are deemed as irredeemable, relegating them for death, or at the very least, exclusion (Mbembe). However, the necropolitical system of immigration does not start and end with detention centers. Mbembe (2019) articulates that the existence of the border itself extends necropolitical power over foreign populations. Specifically, borders are used “as the primitive form of keeping at bay enemies, intruders, and strangers” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 3). These demarcations of land exist to exclude bodies from spaces. Using territory and drawing sovereignty-based lines between groups, states can mark individuals as worthy of death because they are unworthy of entry into spaces. Further, the way we police these borders is a form of necropolitical power. Holling (2011) explains that the Minuteman Project was a manifestation of the otherization that was created at the border. Specifically, the program was used to remove

illegal immigrants in Arizona. The program resulted in white individuals feeling superiority over immigrants (Holling). When policies are issued that create feelings of superiority for different groups, the end result is violence against the other, inferior groups.

While the examples described above deal with immigration, black people in the United States are also subject to forms of necropolitical power. McPhail (1994) explains that language has been used to subjugate black folks in the United States since the country's inception. Specifically, militant rhetoric has been used to subjugate blacks and present them as a security threat. When threats are constructed, that only makes it easier to elicit necropolitical power over populations.

Threadcraft (2017) argues that race and gender are used as justifications to illicit necropolitical power over populations. Specifically, they explain that:

black women are subjected to disproportionate sexual assault, community violence, and public sexual aggression. They are disproportionately targeted for long-acting contraceptives and child removal policies. Power, specifically white power, intersects with the black female body to produce its preferred forms of racialized feminine embodiment—the assaulted and terrorized body, yes—but when held in comparison to how power intersects with the black male body far more rarely does it produce a dead black female body. (p. 555-556)

Threadcraft's central argument is that death cannot be the exclusive way we evaluate necropolitics. Rather, necropolitics operates to indicate disposability of a group. For example, black men are often killed to protect hegemony. The United States military exemplified this when they had various different all-black regiments that were forced to fight on the front lines such as the 9th and 10th Cavalry, or the 24th and 25th Infantry (Bryan, n.d.) However, black

women often face alternative forms of disposability aimed at their identities, such as the increased infant and maternal mortality rates (Taylor et al., 2019).

Black Lives Matter

Ever since the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) began in 2013 following the murder of Trayvon Martin, scholars have followed its developments. Isom et al. (2021) express how actions taken against movements like BLM are a result of white fragility. They explain that “socially dominant groups, in the face of increasing power of subordinate others, perceive threat to their dominant status and will enact various forms of control or engage in certain behaviors to maintain their power and privilege” (Isom et al., p. 2). As a result of white fragility, white elites feel the necessity to exercise forms of control. Given the inherent ideology of whiteness in the presidency, this means there is a need for the executive to subjugate those that would rise against it. Therefore, BLM faced significant backlash from Trump. Further, BLM has been mainly concerned with police brutality and does not sufficiently address other issues such as “mass incarceration, unemployment and underemployment, housing challenges, generational and wealth inequality, educational inequality, environmental racism, and disparities in health and longevity” (Dávila, 2017, p. 763). All of these issues could be solved by government programs. However, the state, and specifically the executive, continues to subjugate black folks in the United States. While corporations, systemic oppression, and several other institutions perpetuate power differences in the U.S., the president is considered a role model for the rest of the country. If they conduct offensive or problematic actions, those actions become justified for everyone else since they are legitimized by the executive. Therefore, oppression that comes from the office of the president can be modelled by the other institutions that commit violence against different groups.

Immigration

The issue of immigration is often loaded with underlying meanings and competitive discourse. Chávez (2012) explains how border security is instilled with tension between being tolerant and tough. Both are needed from the point of view of security. However, the result has been an increasingly militarized border that is designed to keep people out rather than welcome them. Additionally, the way immigrants are portrayed often contributes to negative stigmas surrounding them. Cisneros (2008) explains how terms like “illegal,” “pollutant,” “infestation,” and others are used as metaphors to otherize immigrants who are fleeing persecution and violence in their home countries. These metaphors dehumanize immigrants and portray them as a “biological invasion or contamination” coming to the U.S. (Cisneros, p. 572). As a result, people in the U.S. backlash against immigration, making the issue a partisan one as opposed to a humanitarian one. One of the main reasons for this is that immigrants represent the border (Ono, 2012). This implies that representations of the Other are used to differentiate between citizens and immigrants. Citizens are seen as better than immigrants because the border is not attached to them. Since borders act as sites of exclusion, when immigrants come into the U.S. having the border attached to them, they continue to be excluded within the country as well. Further, Zatz and Smith (2012) illustrate how policies that promote legal immigration have an opposite effect from what is depicted. The irony is that “laws and policies enacted in response to the faulty fears that immigrants are dangerous contribute to their victimization” (Zatz & Smith, p. 147). Immigrants become fearful of law enforcement because they may be deemed as illegal, deported, or labeled as criminal. This creates a cycle that encourages the villainization of immigration. Negative frames are used when discussing immigration in almost half of presidential speeches given on immigration (Arthur & Woods, 2013). These frames are used to display immigrants as

criminals, terrorists, or economic threats. If these representations persist, there will always be power differences between immigrants and non-immigrants in the U.S.

Conclusion

While there are plenty of discussions concerning presidential rhetoric and its contextualization in the Trump administration, minimal work has occurred in the context of how Trump was able to create forms of necropolitical control over different populations. Further, Trump's tweets offer a medium that is crucial given the strategies he used during his presidency. Trump became the "Twitter President" indicating that his tweets would be the best texts to research (Gitelman, 2021). Moreover, studies of the Twittersphere can provide insight into *why* Trump was able to create such divide between different groups. Specifically, this thesis will use Trump's responses to the Black Lives Matter protests and immigration to display how his tweets created necropolitical violence and control over disenfranchised populations.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

While literature is plentiful on how Trump used Twitter to create a new form of presidential discourse, minimal research has evaluated the way he used Twitter to communicate power differences. My goal is to extrapolate on how Trump's weaponization of the social media platform justified material violence against different groups. To complete this analysis, I will be conducting a critical discourse analysis of Trump's tweets. I will then analyze how these tweets used different representations to illicit necropolitical power over different populations. Further, I will be analyzing the temporal elements of Trump's tweets. Various conjunctural moments set a scene for Trump to act. His responses during these moments only fueled further abuses of power from the administration. Using this combination of strategies to analyze Trump's tweets will open opportunities to uncover the way that violence becomes justified and condoned by political operatives.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) ventures to explain how power is used and reproduced through communication (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2001). CDA uses three properties to explain power; "it is relational, it is dialectical, and it is transdisciplinary" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 3). The term relational is used to indicate that there is not a focus on individuals, but rather on social relations (Fairclough, 2013). Group dynamics are more important than individual relations in CDA because groups generally generate social and cultural power whereas individuals typically do not – or when they do, it is generally when they operate within a larger group. Trump is an exception because he had the power of the presidency behind him. He used that power to act *on behalf* of groups. Without an analysis of groups, power is unable to be effectively analyzed. Thus, CDA often analyzes the methods groups use to interact with each

other in order to effectively explain power dynamics. The dialectical property of CDA implies that the objects in discussion have an oppositional relationship (Fairclough, 2013). Dialectical properties of CDA imply a recognition of problems combined with advocacy of how to change them – in essence, it is the relationship between crisis and potential solutions (Fairclough, 2017). This can be seen in multiple ways but is often related to the power differential between groups. Finally, the transdisciplinary nature of CDA denotes that it “cuts across traditional boundaries between disciplines” to include other areas like politics and linguistics (Fairclough, p. 4). Hence, CDA attempts to explain how these different fields intersect to display power relations between groups.

CDA can be especially useful when doing an analysis of social media. Albert and Salam (2013) explain how CDA is useful for social media because:

in the case of CDA where power imbalances exist among social actors and language and communication can be used for coercion, control, discrimination and victimization.

Social media can be conceptualized as an emerging frontier where new forms of social relations develop at the intersection of human collective communicative acts and information technology. (p. 1)

Social media has created spaces where communication is easily disseminated. Specifically, communicating power has become extremely easy. Using Twitter as an example, the number of followers, virality of tweets, or verified accounts can communicate power discrepancies to an audience. Additionally, the messages that are used through social media can communicate power differences. Bratslavsky et al. (2020) explain this happens because Twitter and other social media outlets are mediated by spectacle. Spectacle can be understood as the rhetorical creation of over-the-top events that build community (Bratslavsky et al., 2020; Procter, 1990). Bratslavsky

et al. (2020) explain that Twitter represents the culmination of politics and entertainment into a singular spectacle. Therefore, users on Twitter, such as Trump, create images that are meant to be informative and exciting to attract followers. When these messages draw a following, they begin to “reproduce hegemonic domination over how we relate to one another and to the broader political economic structures” (Bratslavsky et al., p. 11). Hegemonic domination creates new forms of oppression and otherization for populations outside positions of power. Therefore, I will be analyzing Trump’s use of Twitter to create divide between groups and establish power hierarchies in discourses related to race.

Representations

Studying representations is one of the tools used by scholars to conduct cultural analysis. Dominant ideologies can be supported through representations which use language, signs, and symbols to create portrayals of groups and perpetuate ideologies throughout culture (Hall, 2013). People or objects are portrayed in a way that creates an underlying meaning that can empower the hegemonic ideology as well as create an “Other” that is seen as subordinate to the hegemon. Stereotypes can then emerge and create power differentials between groups (Hall, 2013). These stereotypes can expand power disparities as they become more widely understood. Power will be explained further in the next section that explains necropolitics. However, the essential meaning of power is the capability to subjugate others. Representations that support ideologies are especially dangerous because they can become the way people see different individuals (Hall, 2013). Rather than seeing reality, individuals begin to see only the representation that has been framed by the hegemony which can lead to ostracization, exploitation, and oppression. Hegemonic portrayals become even more effective when they come from positions of authority. Authority can make individuals feel they are more qualified to speak on an issue, which can

prompt the public to accept messages (Callais, 2010). When a message comes from a point of authority, it can be more salient than if it came from a different source. However, authority is typically determined by hegemony, which means those salient messages serve the hegemonic ideology.

Necropolitics in Action

Power can be interpreted in many ways, but one way is through necropolitics. Necropolitics is an expansion of Foucault's biopower. Foucault, Davidson, and Burchell (2008) explain that biopower refers to the capacity for a State to create forms of control over populations. While similar, necropolitical power "refers and appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 16). Necropolitics is based on using violence to maintain power and control. States of exception and emergency prompt people in power to create an enemy that their subjects will rally against. Necropolitics achieves this by dividing people into groups. These groups are often created based on race, gender, or religion. When lines between groups are drawn, it becomes easier to establish an enemy and use power over them (Mbembe, 2019). People in power often create this enemy to cement themselves in their positions. After doing so, it becomes easier to turn groups against each other because the elimination of enemy out-groups would increase the security of in-groups (Mbembe, 2019).

Ivie (2005) explains there is a need for states to create "Others." National identity is created and "defined in opposition to threatening Others" (Ivie, p. 11). When those in power create a notion of an Other that is threatening, those who are threatened often perceive a collective identity among themselves. Kornfeld (1995) furthers this argument, explaining that groups are determined based on different characteristics of their identity, and narratives construct what that identity means in a larger context. After being used repetitively, the representations

associated with that group “attain the indisputability of myth” (Kornfeld, p. 287). Using narratives that position one group above another creates a greater sense of intergroup conflict requiring the subjugation of its enemies. Thus, violence becomes not only justified, but necessary to retain the features of the dominant group’s identity.

Conjuncture

Conjuncture is complicated and has been defined in several ways. However, Grossberg (2018) explains the task of a conjunctural analysis is:

to treat the conjuncture as a multidimensional concept providing the conditions of possibility of the ground on which a war of positions [sic] is waged, and an organic crisis takes shape, or where the chaos of uncertainty is itself appropriated as a political strategy. It is here at the intersection of the various historical, political, economic and affective dimensions of lived reality that conjunctural specificity is constituted and defined. In other words, the conjuncture makes possible the war of positions, although the conjunctural conditions are unlikely to correspond directly with the war of positions. It is at the level of the conjuncture that the question of an organic crisis has to be raised, and it is at this level that one begins to find expressions of the tectonic struggles over the nature and destiny of a society. (pp. 156-157)

Hegemons are constantly competing with differing ideologies to maintain power. Conjunctural moments, then, contain specific contexts which create opportunities for action. Organic crises then spur new moments that exist in the context of the conjuncture which dictate individuals’ responses. These organic crises are different than necropolitics’ fictional crises. Conjunctural crises are naturally occurring events. However, fictional crises are those created by people in power to vilify groups by insinuating they are at fault for problems. After these organic crises

arise, actors can use rhetoric to further wars of position, in the Gramscian (1971) sense. Mayo (2005) explains that a war of position “involves social organization and the development of cultural predominance” (pg. 66). These wars of position are when hegemons, as well as those resisting hegemons, use signifying codes to influence individuals to continue following them or cement their own power. These codes create positive images of hegemons and negative images of rival ideologies. Zompetti (1997) further explains that the purpose of a war of position is to begin “the effort to collapse the power base of the existing order” (p. 78). The war of position does not mobilize action. Rather, it draws followers and creates the conditions necessary to engage against power structures.

Using conjunctural analysis, then, requires identification of an organic crisis. An event must have taken place that creates conditions for action. After this, rhetoric of individuals who are involved in the conjuncture can be analyzed to see how power is weaponized or used for improvement in different instances. When a war of position begins, it is crucial to understand the connotations of that war of position. If an actor raises a base to commit acts of violence, then the conjunctural moment has been used as a springboard for weaponized rhetoric.

Process of Analysis

Trump’s tweets offer a crucial text for analysis for how he wielded the power of the presidency. Most of his direct communication came from his fingertips to reach the public. Trump displayed his power through threats and posturing via his Twitter account. While speeches and other messages can be useful to analyze, no other president has ever used Twitter quite like number 45. However, not all of Trump’s tweets will be useful for this analysis. Thus, I will only be evaluating the tweets that fit in the timeframe of different organic (conjunctural) crises during his administration. The murder of George Floyd opened spaces for protest across

the country. Trump's responses to these protests will thus be analyzed. He first tweeted about the incident on May 27th of 2020. His Twitter feed obsessed over the issue for several days as protests erupted across the nation. For purposes of this paper, I will analyze 15 tweets from May 27th until May 31st of 2020. These dates bookend most of Trump's references to Floyd and the protests. Further, Trump pushed for a massive overhaul to the U.S. immigration system. While he campaigned on the issue, he began his push for concrete legislation in 2018. Trump used inflammatory rhetoric to support his harsher reforms for immigration from May 4th, 2018, until October 20th, 2020. I will analyze 13 tweets that are reflective of Trump's push for new legislation. Since Trump's Twitter account has been deactivated, I will utilize the *Trump Twitter Archive* to locate the tweets that will be used.

This project is premised on analyzing how power is displayed and used over different populations. Therefore, a rhetorical analysis is key to uncovering answers. Critical discourse analysis uncovers the way power is communicated to others. In the area of social media, it will be especially useful given the communal aspects of Twitter's platform. Further, analyzing the way Trump uses representations of the Other will be crucial to determining how necropolitical power will be used over different populations. Necropolitics and conjuncture also mutually reinforce each other. Both rely on cultural, emergent crises. While necropolitics uses artificial crises to justify creating out groups, conjuncture relies on organic crises. However, when an organic crisis occurs, rhetors can use it as an opportunity to fabricate other problems. Therefore, conjunctural moments can open opportunities for rhetors to use representations of the Other to justify violence. Analysis of different conjunctural moments and demarcations of the Other will display the way Trump used the presidency to justify violence against disenfranchised identity groups.

Conclusion

Rhetorical analyses typically function to uncover hidden meanings within texts. CDA offers a means to do this by analyzing the dialectical elements of communication. Typically, dialectical properties communicate power differences, which can be coded through negative representations of the other. These negative representations can then be used to create new forms of necropolitical power over different groups. When violence is not only an acceptable means of using power, but legitimized through the state, power will never be disseminated equally. Moreover, representations and necropolitics are a response that can be used following conjunctural moments. In these crucial moments, rhetors and politicians often have options of how to respond. Typically, rhetors will try to rally their bases and begin mobilizing against opposition. Representations and necropolitics offer a means of mobilization against enemies to reconfigure power relationships between groups. Therefore, the combination of methods selected for this project can be useful in uncovering where power differences stemmed from during the Trump administration.

Trump's tweets communicate a plethora of meanings that are geared to otherize and vilify different populations. Understanding the way this vilification and otherization are justified is key to deconstruct discriminatory uses of power. Absent this understanding, demagogues will continue to abuse different groups to maintain power. Understanding that Trump used these means of power is important. However, Trump's presidency was not a one-off event. Uncovering how he abused power can reveal how future presidents and other politicians will do the same. Given the increasing use of Twitter from politicians, it is necessary to see how power is communicated through the platform. More paramount is recognizing how groups are otherized through the platform.

Throughout this analysis, I venture to uncover how Trump used Twitter to vilify different groups by using necropolitical power. Protests in response to George Floyd's murder triggered a massive response from Trump. He criticized protestors, politicians, and other groups repeatedly. Using incendiary rhetoric, Trump positioned himself on moral high ground during the protests. He was able to do so by vilifying everyone who stood against him. However, Trump did not only use protests to otherize different groups. Trump's responses to immigration from the South led to new perspectives on what it meant to be an immigrant. His tweets regularly considered immigration a criminal act. Throughout this analysis, I will use Trump's tweets to uncover the various ways he used the power of the executive to oppress and justify violence in reaction to protests and immigration from the southern border.

CHAPTER IV: BLACK LIVES MATTER

The manner in which Trump used Twitter during his administration provided an opportunity for increased scrutiny. In response to the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, Trump began to use Twitter to make quick, pointed attacks at the protestors as well as several politicians while the protests were happening. Most of Trump's tweets were used to separate the "good" police officers from the "bad" protestors. While these representations had been used previously, Trump continued deploying them for nefarious reasons. Several different representations were used to frame this dichotomy. However, the stark differences between positive and negative representations demonstrate Trump's construction of in and out groups. Acting during the conjunctural moment of George Floyd's murder, Trump was able to encourage greater division which led to an even greater impact from his uses of necropolitical power. As a result of Trump's justification of violence toward protestors and the Black Lives Matter movement writ large, real physical violence could manifest in racialized hate crimes and violence across the country.

Establishing the Conjuncture

As was mentioned in the prior chapter, conjunctural moments are moments when an organic crisis provides opportunity for individuals in power to act to address the cultural crisis. Leaders will typically use conjunctural moments to rally followers and emphasize their ideologies. By using these conjunctural moments and encouraging followers, Trump was able to elicit a violent and divisive response. Many Americans embraced conservative populist responses in the wake of some of these moments. These moments happened within the context of extreme polarization in the United States, making them even more effective (Pew, 2016a; Dimock & Gramlich, 2021). One of the most obvious examples of Trump responding to conjuncture could be seen in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd.

Police violence is not an isolated event. Unfortunately, misconduct and violent interactions with police officers is a seemingly common occurrence. In 2019, there were over a thousand incidents when police officers killed another person (Police Violence US Subnational Collaborators, 2021). Police officers killing unarmed black men draws extensive media attention as well. In 2019 alone, 13 unarmed black men were shot by police (Stellino, 2020). This number is only those who were killed in shootings. Figures relating to the number of unarmed black men who were killed by officers through other means are impossible to find because of reporting issues. While each of these instances of violence were tragedies, it was George Floyd's murder in 2020 that spurred massive protests for racial justice in America.

On May 25, 2020, Derek Chauvin of the Minneapolis Police Department killed George Floyd, an unarmed black man suspected of committing a non-violent crime, by kneeling on the back of his neck. Video of the altercation circulated through social media platforms, and people began to protest racial inequality and police brutality. These protests were carried out nationwide, but the focal point was in Minneapolis where protestors marched in the streets, burned buildings, and clamored for justice. The Minneapolis protests prompted local law enforcement to fire tear gas and rubber bullets into crowds of demonstrators (Taylor, 2020).

Floyd's murder was a conjunctural moment. As a result of new forms of media like Facebook and Twitter, the video quickly spread to millions of viewers. Lines were drawn based on ideology. There were those who marched and protested for racial equality in opposition to those who refused to hear their message. As a result, conflict persisted, and violence became widespread across the country. Trump would eventually demonize the protests by exclaiming on Twitter that the protests were "acts of domestic terror" (Trump, 2020a). Using language that labeled the protests as terrorist, Trump discouraged further protests. Further, Trump initiated a

war of position that would attract more followers to his ideology. This would eventually manifest in paramilitary vigilantes attempting to defend property and counter racial protests (e.g., the counter actions by folks like Rittenhouse in Kenosha, WI). These efforts were used to subjugate those protesting for racial equality.

Representations from Twitter

Throughout his administration, Donald Trump used Twitter to access the public, or at least to create the perception that the public had access to him since he rarely responded to members of the public who engaged his tweets. He would regularly release new information and comments either by exaggerating his positions or by attacking his opposition. Following the murder of George Floyd, Trump released several tweets using different representations of groups. He would use positive representations of law enforcement and those working to prevent the protests. More common, however, were his negative representations of the protestors.

Trump began his discourse around Floyd's murder by claiming there would be an investigation into the "very sad and tragic death in Minnesota of George Floyd" (Trump, 2020b). This was Trump's first comment regarding Floyd's murder. Immediately, Trump appeared to be stating the correct, appropriate message, as presidents typically say – and are expected to say – such things during or immediately following a national tragedy (Campbell & Jamieson, 2017). However, following this tweet there was no other information about an investigation. Instead, Trump began attacking the protestors and the political leaders where protests were happening. Trump explained that he could not

stand back & watch this happen to a great American City, Minneapolis. A total lack of leadership. Either the very weak Radical Left Mayor, Jacob Frey, get his act together and

bring the City under control, or I will send in the National Guard & get the job done right.
(Trump, 2020c)

Trump attached “very weak” and “Radical Left” labels to Frey, which represented the mayor’s ineffectiveness to govern. Also, by using the threat of the National Guard, Trump insinuated – and threatened – that he would send in military forces to violently engage the protestors.

Trump continued to attack the protestors and their actions, claiming “These THUGS are dishonoring the memory of George Floyd, and I won’t let that happen” (Trump, 2020d). Calling attention to the word “THUGS” by capitalizing each letter, Trump fostered racial division. Smiley and Fakunle (2016) explain that the word “thug” has “become the platform to dismiss Black life as less valuable and perpetuates a negative and criminal connotation” (p. 350). While the word has been used in different contexts and has been directed at different races as well, “thug” is often used as a representation of dangerous individuals and has recently been racialized as a code word for a violent black person (Block, 2015). There is an imbued meaning of criminality in the word as well. Trump’s use of the word is intentional as it provides new justifications for a violent response. Campbell (2016) notes that there is a “dominant media representation of black people as pathological criminals, a representation that goes largely unchallenged in the journalism industry and affects both racial attitudes and public policy decisions” (p. 11). Trump’s use of racialized phrases to justify violence is the manifestation of criminal representations used to influence policy decisions. Continuing the tweet, Trump threatened the protestors claiming, “when the looting starts the shooting starts” (Trump, 2020d). Trump’s claims seemingly appear on-face as if they were just trying to stop damage and loss of property. However, he used coded messages to suggest that he would be activating military forces to conduct racially motivated violence.

Trump continued his publicity stunt in response to the protests by explaining how he activated the national guard and by stating, “George Floyd will not have died in vain” (Trump, 2020e). Claiming that actions from protestors would result in Floyd dying in vain is ironic given that the protests were a result of Floyd’s murder. However, representing the protests in this way takes away credibility of the movement and the protests writ large by trivializing their purpose. Therefore, Trump’s tweets were geared toward using violence and the National Guard to prevent Floyd from dying in vain. This also positively represents Trump by portraying him as a savior as he supplants the protests. As a result, violence was justified because of the message that Trump was creating; he constructed a discursive problem only to offer a militarized solution.

Trump continued his attempt to validate his violent responses to the protests after people were killed by tweeting, “looting leads to shooting” (Trump, 2020f). Claiming that protestors are looters gave Trump a way to justify his administration’s violent response. Looting has a negative connotation associated with criminality and is often race-based especially given its use and evolved meaning following Hurricane Katrina (Johnson Dolan & Sonnett, 2011). Therefore, Trump’s continued use of “looting” as a representation of the protests was a way to continue justifying his escalatory tactics. This escalation supports Campbell’s (2016) point from above that policy is often reflective of racial representations of the Other. Trump then tried to shift his message from encouraging violence to avoiding it within the same tweet by saying, “I don’t want this to happen.” Attempting to say that violence was not his goal while still justifying the use of deadly force in response to protestors was a way for Trump to represent himself positively while contrasting himself with the “violent” representations of the protests that, according to him, warrant their elimination. This instance of *paralipsis* would allow Trump to deflect blame for any harm to which protestors would be exposed.

While most of the previous tweets were directed across the country, Trump also made several tweets about what was happening right in front of him. A large protest happened in Washington D.C., where Secret Service agents were involved. Trump continued using a dichotomy of representations to separate the good and the bad. He released a series of tweets beginning by stating, “Great job last night at the White House by the U.S. @SecretService. They were not only totally professional, but very cool” (Trump, 2020g). Trump’s congratulatory and admiring comments associate the Secret Service with positive characteristics – that is, the “good” ingroup. Trump continued by explaining he “was inside, watched every move, and couldn’t have felt more safe.” Associating his own safety with the response from agents once again attributes a positive representation to the agents in D.C., which was summed up by Trump’s claim that “they were very cool & very professional” (2020j). While these comments were all positive, they were attached to a series of attacks on the protestors with fairly graphic explanations of violence the agents were using against the seemingly menacing protestors. Hall (1985) argues “systems of representation are the systems of meaning through which we represent the world to ourselves and one another” (p. 103). Creating a dichotomy of good and bad representations, Trump was able to express a need for law and order because the locations where protests were happening saw increased levels of violence. Further, he explained that the Secret Service and other agencies were efficient at preventing violence, thereby justifying their deployment.

Most of Trump’s rhetoric was used to display how things could have been worse. For instance, in the tweets where Trump congratulated the Secret Service, he was also threatening future protestors. His comments began by belittling the concerns of protestors by saying the Secret Service “let the ‘protestors’ scream & rant as much as they wanted” (Trump, 2020g). The first issue with this statement is Trump’s use of “protestors” in quotes. This implies that the

individuals marching for racial justice are illegitimate, as if they are only technically “protestors” instead of actual, legitimate activists. Further, Trump insinuates the actions from the protestors are nothing more than just screaming and ranting. However, Trump does not discuss any of the messages articulated by the protestors. Rather, he dismisses their actions without granting any legitimacy to their concerns. Thus, Trump effectively silences the cries of the protestors for racial justice. Trump also claimed that if protestors became “too frisky or out of line” the Secret Service “would quickly come down on them, hard – didn’t know what hit them” (2020h). These justifications for violence were used to explain what happened during the protests. However, Trump also explained that no one breached the fence, but if they had they would be “greeted with the most vicious dogs, and most ominous weapons” (2020i). He went on to explain “that’s when people would have been really badly hurt, at least. Many Secret Service agents just waiting for action” (Trump, 2020i). Continuing to use threats, Trump maintained his justification of violent responses through his use of negative representations.

Following this string of tweets, Trump continued attacking the D.C. protestors by claiming “they were just there to cause trouble” (2020k). Trump shifted the narrative around what protestors were trying to do. George Floyd was killed via an act of police brutality that was unwarranted. Rather than engage in the dialogue surrounding police violence, he continued using negative representations to delegitimize the protestors who were legitimately and legally calling into question improper law enforcement behavior. Hall (2020) explains how this is the goal of representations. Hall argues that “representation *is* an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged among members of a community” (Hall, p. 1). Trump’s representation of the protests as “trouble” produces a new meaning that can be used by Americans to view protestors’ actions as negative and dangerous. Additionally, he antagonized

protestors and completely reframed the narrative. After shifting the conversation from police brutality to “causing trouble,” Trump continued justifying his violent responses to protestors. This is further seen when Trump explained that those in Minneapolis needed to “arrest the bad ones” (Trump, 2020l). Never, in any of his tweets, did Trump explain what a “bad” protestor is, which suggests he lumped all protestors together as a perceived nefarious outgroup. He condemned violent protestors without providing any explanation of what constitutes violence or how severe the violence was. Trump painted all protestors as violent regardless of the form of protest in which they engaged. In fact, 93% of protests were peaceful and nondestructive (Mansoor, 2020). However, the indication from Trump’s tweets seemed to be that anyone protesting for racial equality should be considered a “bad” protestor. Absent an explanation of how protestors should engage, Trump’s tweets continue to insinuate that anyone speaking out against racial inequality does so in a way that will have negative consequences. Gauging by his other tweets, those negative consequences would involve violence from the National Guard or the Secret Service.

Minneapolis saw the majority of the protests after Floyd’s murder. People traveled to the city trying to display solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. However, Trump continued to vilify those going to Minneapolis. He tweeted that it was “ANTIFA and the Radical Left” (Trump, 2020m). Apparently, the idea that black people should be respected is a “radical” idea. However, most of Trump’s base sees comparisons with ANTIFA and the “Radical Left” as dangerous, even though white supremacist groups were more threatening to individual security (Goldman et al., 2021). Both ANTIFA and the “Radical Left” are associated with negative connotations that trigger a fearful response from his base. Trump also articulated that “crossing state lines to incite violence is a FEDERAL CRIME!” (Trump, 2020n). Implying that anyone

traveling to Minneapolis was only interested in violence once again vilified any attempt at racial justice. In this way, Trump created a narrative where anyone not involved in the protests is in danger. Representing those marching as dangerous necessitates a show of force to prevent any collateral damage to those not participating. Trump explained that the result would be “using the unlimited power of our military and many arrests” (2020n). Shifting the narrative from a peaceful protest to one where violence is imminent validated his use of threats and implementation of military force. These claims also supported Trump’s claim to be the “president of law and order” (Trump, 2020, para. 2). The messages resemble Nixon’s use of “law and order” to justify his attacks on racial protestors in 1968 (Bagley, 2020). Using phrases such as “law and order” frames Trump’s responses as positive and presidential even if the result is violence so long as the reactions are used to achieve the desirable end goal of stability.

Trump followed his claims of violent protestors moving across state lines with his statement that “80% of the RIOTERS in Minneapolis last night were from OUT OF STATE” (2020o). He failed to cite how this could ever be known. Additionally, he no longer referred to the individuals as protestors. Instead, he referred to them as “RIOTERS” in all caps. There are vastly different connotations between “protestors” and “rioters” (Coburn, 2020). Protestors typically act in civic engagement, marches, and peaceful demonstrations. Rioters, on the other hand, commit acts of violence and civil disobedience. Typically, rioters also require a response that will restore order. This means that Trump would once again be justified in using violence to respond to the protests. Trump continued providing negative representations of the protests by claiming protestors “are harming businesses (especially African American small businesses), homes, and the community of good, hardworking Minneapolis residents who want peace, equality, and to provide for their families” (Trump, 2020o). Making these statements distracts

from the core issue, which is the mission of promoting racial equality, especially in the area of police brutality. Claiming that Black owned businesses were harmed shifted the focus from a concentrated and honest conversation about police brutality. Instead, it continued to present protestors with a negative representation. So long as there is danger, individuals will be dissuaded from the movement while also calling for a violent response to provide safety.

Necropolitics

Trump's rhetoric on Twitter responding to the BLM protests was necropolitical. We should recall that necropolitics requires an emergency and fictional enemy (Mbembe, 2019). Groups must also be separated from each other, and there must be a clear explanation of who the "Other" is. Typically, Others will pose a threat to hegemonies. Hegemonies will construct fictional enemies while implying there is urgency to act (Mbembe, 2019). Insinuating that there is a crisis and threat to security motivates populations to act. Once the Other is established and a need for security is shown, violence becomes acceptable to maintain hegemonic power. Mbembe (2003) argues that perceiving an Other "as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security" is foundational to necropolitics (p. 18). Therefore, citizens and state resources can be mobilized to supplant the threat because they are emboldened by the idea that they are taking righteous actions. Trump's continual representation of the "dangerous protestor" necessitates or, at the very least, justifies their elimination.

Trump's rhetoric used different representations to separate his "good" actors from the "bad" actors. Establishing this divide made it easier to establish an enemy. It also made it easier to set the political agenda with his rhetoric (Miles, 2014). Trump exclusively used positive representations for the Secret Service, law enforcement in general, and himself. Additionally, he

spoke positively about the National Guard's capacity to subjugate protestors. However, Trump never spoke positively about the protestors. Rather, he consistently deflected from the message of racial equality to a characterization that protestors were violent and damaging to communities. In turn, Trump's rhetoric sanctioned state-based violence through his discourse. Trump simply vilified the protestors and attached dangerous representations to them. While the protestors may not have posed a direct threat to hegemon themselves, they did pose a threat to hegemonic ideologies. Racism and police brutality were common. Inogeno (2020) explains that between 2015 and 2019 "black victims in the United States were killed at three times the rate of white individuals, prompting researchers to declare police brutality as a 'public health emergency.'" Further, the number of hate crimes dramatically increased under the Trump administration (FBI, 2021). The state has no interest in changing policies that permit racism because "the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 17). Challenging the ideologies that encourage racialized hate crimes and racialized violence jeopardize a loss of power for the Trump administration as well as those who were part of his base.

While it cannot be proven, there are multiple reasons why Trump and others in his administration would target race to sustain power. Data collected for the 2016 election illustrated that 83% of black voters were registered as Democrats (Pew, 2016b). Delegitimizing the humanity of these people could advantage the Republican Party with which 54% of white people identify (Pew, 2016b). They could also be uncomfortable with the change in culture the protests encouraged. Trump's presidency was shaped by policies and rhetoric that explicitly justified and supported white supremacy (Collins, 2020). If these protests were to continue unabated, the foundations of Trump's presidency might crumble.

Protests in Minneapolis and D.C. were categorized as violent riots by Trump. For common individuals who were not paying attention or who simply watched the framed videos broadcast by Fox News would naturally feel threatened. Absent any context for the protests, people would see burning buildings and a president who was calling for shootings to confront the “riots” (Trump, 2020d). The perception of danger justified an increased use of violent reactions to eradicate the Other. Therefore, the National Guard, Secret Service, and other police forces could justifiably use tear gas, rubber bullets, batons, and riot gear to dissuade protestors.

While agencies were the primary ones who carried out violent acts, they were not alone. Rather, Trump’s rhetoric and the climate it fostered legitimized and activated individual citizens to take up arms. The McCloskeys, a couple in St. Louis, brandished firearms at peaceful protestors walking through their neighborhood. Kyle Rittenhouse traveled across state lines as a minor to try and act as security for the protests occurring in southern Wisconsin. He was not alone as several paramilitary militia members lined the streets in Kenosha. Rittenhouse ended up killing two people and wounding another with his assault rifle. While Rittenhouse was found not guilty in a trial, the McCloskeys both pled guilty to misdemeanor weapons charges (Associated Press, 2022). These were only the instances that attracted media attention. However, given the number of hate crimes in 2020 was higher than all three years prior during Trump’s administration, it is easy to see how Trump’s rhetoric emboldened individuals to take violent actions in response to the increased call for racial equality.

Knowing that these people felt encouraged to take violent action in response to protestors is upsetting. However, Trump’s rhetoric necessitated violent responses to maintain the hegemonic power structures. He set an example by deploying his militarized forces to respond to the protests. Setting an example that protestors needed a violent response, Trump created a

climate that labeled violence as not only acceptable, but necessary to maintain safety for anyone around. Further, Trump could use safety as a justification to encourage the hegemonic order to be maintained.

Conclusion

George Floyd's murder was a tragedy that prompted a greater discourse around police brutality and race. This organic crisis led to a multitude of possibilities for racial justice. However, Donald Trump spearheaded a rhetorical attack on those who showed any disdain for the system that had killed so many. Separating the "good" actors from the "bad," Trump created the conditions necessary to use violence. His explanations were typically that he wanted to restore peace and safety, or "law and order." However, the dichotomy of representations he used to describe protestors and law enforcement only emboldened citizens to act and defend against the potential violence. The culture of violence following Floyd's murder emphasized Trump's aim to maintain hegemonic ideologies and prevent racial equality. Additionally, it resulted in a greater death toll and more instability.

CHAPTER V: IMMIGRATION

Trump's use of necropolitics was not isolated to BLM protests. He also targeted immigrants during his administration. When Trump first announced he would be running for president in 2015, he levied major attacks against contemporary immigration issues. He rebuked Mexico while also referencing his intent to "build a great, great wall on our southern border" (Trump, 2015). After his election, Trump continued to use "border security" as an all-encompassing term to justify abusive policies against immigrants. However, Trump did not just obsess over immigration during his own election. With the election cycles for other major campaign races, Trump used harsh immigration and border security rhetoric to justify those candidates for office. Candidates like Mark Amodei in Nevada, Michelle Fischbach in Minnesota, and Jim Bognet in Pennsylvania all received endorsement tweets from Trump (Trump, 2020r, Trump, 2020s, Trump, 2020t). Each of these candidates used rhetoric and endorsed policies that contributed to the climate that Trump was trying to create. While Trump was able to occupy the executive office, clinching more anti-immigration people in Congress would allow him to pass legislation for heightened border security as opposed to the executive orders he was using during his administration. Legislation cements policy longevity, especially since future presidents can replace executive orders with their own relatively easily, which was exemplified by Biden's elimination of several Trump executive orders (Holpuch, 2021). Moreover, Trump used conjunctural moments to justify his early position for border security. However, it was his continued use of negative representations that legitimized his necropolitical policies while in office.

Embracing the Conjuncture

Categorizing a conjunctural moment for Trump with immigration is more difficult than the historical positioning of BLM. Trump entered the presidential race at an interesting moment regarding immigration. While Barack Obama passed several pro-immigration policies like the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) initiative and the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Legal Permanent Residents (DAPA) program, he also instituted several strict immigration policies toward the end of his administration. In 2015, Obama deported a significant number of Central American families (Starr, 2015). He was also the “harshest enforcer of immigration laws in American history, deporting more illegal immigrants than any previous administration” (Nowratesh, 2017). Obama was also responsible for ending the “wet feet, dry feet” policy for Cuban immigrants (Nowratesh, 2017). These actions sparked outrage from immigration advocates which prompted Hillary Clinton to take a more relaxed position toward immigration (Starr, 2015). Therefore, immigration became one of the central issues to the 2016 election.

Throughout his campaign, Trump employed abrasive rhetoric toward immigrants. Trump’s campaign announcement speech engaged the conjunctural moment by discussing immigration at the southern border. He listed several shortcomings of the Obama administration before asking: “When do we beat Mexico?” (Trump, 2015). By challenging Mexico with its influx of immigrants, Trump furthers a war of position, establishing cultural predominance (Gramsci, 1971). Trump plays on nationalist ideologies that resonate with many of his supporters to promote a positive image of himself and his policy goals. Lieven (2016) argues that Trump’s form of nationalism was different than Clinton’s. While Clinton relied on maintaining American superiority on a global scale, Trump stressed the superiority of white Americans (Lieven, 2016).

Continuing to play on nationalist ideologies, Trump claims Mexico is “laughing at us at the border, at our stupidity” (2015). The notion that the U.S. is not only failing to maintain border security, but that Mexico is also ridiculing American immigration policy just increases nationalist sentiment. If non-white outsiders, like those in Mexico, insult American policies, then Trump could inspire new followers who hold similar ideologies that he promotes. Individuals who desire safe borders and increased security became more engaged by the idea that Trump wanted to take action on immigration. In this way, Trump’s emphasis encouraged individuals to vote for him through principles of nationalism (Lieven, 2016).

Trump’s description of current politicians and attacks on “illegal immigration” added fuel to the fire of the conjunctural moment of the 2016 presidential election, allowing him to strengthen his anti-foreigner attitude and policies. Obama-era policies shaped the context of immigration into the U.S. at the time. These policies were criticized several times by Trump in his speeches to fuel his nationalist base. He expressed a series of problems while presenting himself, symbolically, as the solution. Two groups were competing for dominance, and both were attempting to draw supporters. One group supported the nationalist ideologies Trump touted during his campaign speech. The second group endorsed a safer path to citizenship in the United States. Trump’s supporters clung to the rhetoric he used, which legitimized his election and set the groundwork for the policies he would later enact (Altman, 2016). His nationalist message facilitated a climate conducive to his use of anti-immigration policies and rhetoric in favor of safe borders and a secure nation. Rowland (2021) explains that:

The rhetoric of nationalist populism that Trump along with his followers and many imitators on the right used has risked magnifying the problem of racial hatred and more broadly undermining norms of behavior and rhetoric essential in a humane liberal

democracy. One result is that Trump’s rhetoric, much of it based in “overt bigotry,” “normalized ... racism.” (p. 175)

Nationalism was the tool Trump needed to encourage a racist base of voters while also changing the norms of what was acceptable for presidents to say or do.

Trump’s comments galvanized white nationalist voters who turned out in droves to support Trump’s “calls for walling off the southern border and barring Muslim immigration” (Altman, 2016). These followers subscribed to Trump’s nationalist ideologies. However, Trump’s overt claim that immigrants were criminals only entrenched their ideals further. Thus, Trump was able to successfully advance a war of position, or mobilize followers in preparation for action when the time is opportune. Attracting more followers, Trump’s positions and future policies became justified. If the immigrants coming in are dangerous, then there would be a necessity for a violent response. Trump’s announcement speech laid the foundations for his Twitter rhetoric that he would employ during his presidency. The negative representations that began during the announcement speech would continue during his presidency to continue the justification of violent nationalist policies.

Representations from Twitter

Trump’s use of negative representations toward immigrants was similar, but not identical, to the representations used for the BLM protestors. Trump regularly used criminal and subhuman representations while talking about immigrants. Terms like “savage” and “gang members” permeated his rhetoric (Trump, 2018b). He would also stress the safety of Americans and posture different dangers that immigrants posed. His rhetoric also did not encourage violent actions from the public. However, his rhetoric expressed a necessity for state-based violence against immigrants.

Trump began an increased push for legislation responding to an influx in immigration in 2018. He commented that “Our Southern Border is under siege. Congress must act now to change our weak and ineffective immigration laws. Must build a Wall. Mexico, which has a massive crime problem, is doing little to help” (Trump, 2018a). Classifying the border as “under siege” implies that immigrants are taking military actions or provoking war. The military metaphor serves to weaponize the immigration discourse. Graham (2010) explains that,

the contemporary right's conflation of terrorism and immigration that simple acts of migration are now often being deemed little more than acts of warfare. This discursive shift has been termed the 'weaponization' of migration⁵ - shifting the emphasis from moral obligations to offer hospitality and asylum towards criminalizing or dehumanizing migrants as weapons against purportedly homogeneous and ethno-nationalist bases of national power. (p. xx)

Thus, the military metaphor necessitates action from those in power to prevent danger to citizens. As Deer (2007) writes, "the pervasive metaphorization of war blurs the boundaries between military and civilian, combatant and noncombatant, state and war machine, wartime and peacetime" (p. 1). Blurring the lines between “combatant” and “noncombatant” also smudges the lines between dangerous and not dangerous. Thus, Trump can justify violence in the name of protecting civilians from a militarist threat. Further, Trump insinuates that Mexico “has a massive crime problem.” Trump’s comment associates anyone coming from Mexico with criminality. Hall (2013) notes that when these comments come from positions of power, they can encourage stereotypes. Once these stereotypes are accepted and adopted by the public, the reality of what it means to be an immigrant shifts. People only see the stereotype and not the individual

(Hall, 2013). Therefore, Trump's representation of immigrants as criminals encouraged the classification of illegal/ undocumented non-white immigrants as criminals.

Trump also used the criminal representations to infringe on the perception of congressional Democrats. He claimed that "Democrats and liberals in Congress want to disarm law-abiding Americans at the same time they are releasing dangerous criminal aliens and savage gang members onto our streets" (Trump, 2018b). In 2018, Trump and congressional Republicans tried to attach immigration reform to the Continuing Resolution that was drafted to keep core federal government offices open during the budget shutdown. Trump released a tweet saying, "We are going to demand Congress secure the border in the upcoming CR. Illegal immigration must end" (2018c). While Trump and others commonly used this language, the use of the word "illegal" to address immigration immediately attaches criminal connotations to immigrants. Mehan (1997) argues that using "illegal" to categorize immigrants implies they are "outside of society" (p. 258). These classifications continue to recreate an image of immigrants as enemies. As enemies, immigrants can be targeted by Trump for policy action to secure the border.

Trump would also use negative representations to refer to Democratic policies. When referring to the Democrats who wanted to ease the restrictions on immigration, Trump released an accusatory tweet about how "the Democrats [are] wanting very unsafe Open Borders" (Trump, 2019b). What is important to note here is that Trump is implying that open borders would be unsafe. Fear of danger can encourage people to justify restrictive policies and practices (Witte, 1992). Considering borders themselves are sites of exclusion, vilifying open borders enables that exclusion to persist (Neocleous, 2003). While there is no mention of what would make the borders unsafe, however, Trump's previous rhetoric indicates that crime and economic

impacts are what would make open borders unsafe. Demonizing the policies of the Democrats leaves Republican policies as the only alternative for promoting the safety of Americans.

Trump also made several attacks on those who would visit the border to see facilities and conditions in which immigrants were forced to live. After a group of Democrats visited the border, Trump tweeted:

Senator Chuck Schumer has finally gone to the Southern Border with some Democrat Senators. This is a GREAT thing! Nearby, he missed a large group of Illegal Immigrants trying to enter the USA illegally. They wildly rushed Border Patrol. Some Agents were badly injured. (2019c)

There are a few key things to note here. First, Trump makes multiple comments again portraying immigrants as illegal, which continues the representation of criminality. Trump also continues the “savage” representation of immigrants by claiming the group “wildly rushed Border Patrol.” As mentioned previously, the terms “savage” and “wild” are often considered synonymous. Both terms indicate a lack of human characteristics, which means there is less need for a humane response to address them. Further, Trump claims that some agents were injured during the altercation. Implying that immigrants are violent despite how they were fleeing persecution and violence themselves continues to inspire fear in Trump’s followers. Thus, the detention facilities would be considered necessary to subjugate and cage those who would “harm” Americans.

Following the visit by Schumer and other Democrats, multiple stories emerged that discussed the vile conditions of the detention centers. However, Trump tried to save face by releasing a tweet claiming that:

Friday’s tour showed vividly, to politicians and the media, how well run and clean the children’s detention centers are. Great reviews! Failing @nytimes story was FAKE! The

adult single men areas were clean but crowded – also loaded up with a big percentage of criminals. (2019d)

Trump fails to acknowledge the lack of medical supplies and care, those who committed suicide while in custody, and lack of personal hygiene (Human Rights Watch, 2020b). Trump does acknowledge the overcrowding of cells but justifies it by saying that a large percentage are criminals. He continues to use criminality as a justification to dehumanize immigrants. His rhetoric only recreates what it means to be an “illegal immigrant.” “Illegal” has become a new moniker of what it means to be an immigrant. Even if immigrants come legally, seeking asylum status or visas in general, they are seen as illegal because Trump has constructed characteristics of criminality in them.

Trump juxtaposes the “law-abiding American” with the “dangerous criminal aliens” and “savage gang members” to create division between the two groups. Trump also attaches the issue of the Second Amendment to his tweet in order to attract even more attention from, typically conservative, gun owners. Additionally, Trump uses multiple representations to address immigrants. First, he refers to them as “dangerous.” Once again, this associates fear with immigrants that requires protective measures to ensure safety for citizens. Second, Trump refers to immigrants as “criminals.” This representation was used systematically to reorient the way Americans saw immigrants. Rather than taking immigrants on a case-by-case basis, Trump associated criminality with all of them. Third, Trump used the term “alien” to refer to immigrants. Catalano (2013) explains that the connotation of the term “alien” applies a non-human element to immigrants. Mehan (1997) furthers this argument, expressing that alien “invokes images of foreign, repulsive, threatening, even extra-terrestrial beings” (p. 258). Thus, immigrants are no longer people and can be categorized differently. Trump also categorizes

immigrants as “savage,” which has a connotation of primal inferiority. Douthwaite (1994) claims that savagery is often associated with subhuman and unintelligent characteristics. By using these references to address immigrants, Trump was able to separate the “safe” citizen from the “dangerous” immigrant.

In 2019, Trump continued using the threat of illegal immigration, framing it through a lens of cost for American taxpayers. The conjuncture that began during the 2016 presidential election was extended by Trump’s persistent rhetoric demonizing immigration. Trump released a tweet stating, “Illegal Immigration costs the USA over 300 Billion Dollars a year” (Trump, 2019a). Making arguments about the cost of immigration can be effective to the electorate because tax dollars fund the legislation. However, Trump fails to note how those funds are spent. Valverde (2018) explains the claim is only half true. There are too many variables that are associated with the claim to accurately prove the financial cost of immigration. Most of this loss comes from wage suppression. However, the number is more likely between 43 and 279 billion (Valverde, 2018). Using an exaggerated number without any explanation of how different variables like age, education, and other factors relating to wage suppression can levy increased support for anti-immigration policies. And, of course, immigrants pay taxes and contribute to the economy that offsets any economic drain from them (Collins, 2010). Insinuating Americans are losing money because of immigrants creates a fiscal motivation – and fear of economic loss – for Trump’s policies.

Trump would also use Twitter in his attempt to cover up the way he used negative representations of immigrants. In 2018, Trump hosted a roundtable with several California lawmakers and made a statement about immigration: “We have people coming into the country — or trying to come in, we're stopping a lot of them — but we're taking people out of the

country, you wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals” (Neuman, 2018). This comment resulted in significant backlash that prompted Trump to defend himself. In his response tweet, Trump claimed, “Fake News Media had me calling Immigrants, or Illegal Immigrants, ‘Animals.’ Wrong! They were begrudgingly forced to withdraw their stories. I referred to MS 13 Gang Members as ‘Animals,’ a big difference - and so true” (2018d). There are several issues with this claim. First, there is absolutely no mention of MS-13 in the original comment. Therefore, it would be impossible to predict that Trump was discussing MS-13 from an outside perspective. However, even if Trump was referring to MS-13 gang members as “animals,” he regularly compared anyone immigrating to criminals or gang members (Trump, 2018b; Trump 2018e). Referring to anyone as an animal dehumanizes the individual. Animalistic representations also make any form of violence more tolerable because violence would be administered to a non-human. Therefore, Trump’s use of “animals” when referring to immigrants made the violent policies more palatable for many American citizens.

Trump’s categorization of immigrants as criminals is seen again when he commented how “Crippling loopholes in our laws have enabled MS-13 gang members and other criminals to infiltrate our communities” (Trump, 2018e). Trump makes a singular statement to refer to MS-13 gang members *and* other criminals. Reflecting on the previous tweet, this implies that even those who are not members of MS-13 gang members are also associated with criminality. Furthermore, it appears that Trump uses MS-13 as a ruse to continue his anti-immigrant rhetoric. Trump also insinuates dangerous immigrants are “infiltrating our communities.” This comment poses a threat to citizens because gangs and criminals can be dangerous and damage neighborhoods. Martinez et al. (2020) explain that constructing narratives of criminality reinscribes immigrant identities as nothing more than criminals. All other characteristics of immigrants are sacrificed to allow the

criminal representation to persist. Thus, the public would likely accept new policies that would prevent those individuals from infiltrating communities.

While Trump's rhetoric was always abrasive, Trump doubled down during the COVID-19 pandemic. After the pandemic took hold, Trump barred immigrants from entering the country by explaining that, "in light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens, I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States" (Trump, 2020p). Trump fails to mention COVID-19 as the "invisible enemy" in his tweet. Therefore, immigrants are associated with the invisible enemy because the response to the "invisible enemy" is to suspend immigration. Trump also implies that immigrants are a threat to American jobs. Trump chose to articulate the financial impacts to increased immigration would be worse than any health risk associated with the pandemic. Trump maintained the narrative that immigrants were an economic threat to American citizens while downplaying COVID-19. Therefore, from the beginning of his candidacy, Trump instilled in Americans that immigrants should be feared.

Trump continued his attacks on immigrants by exploring the justification for why he should bar those coming into the U.S. from the south. He stated,

I will be signing my Executive Order prohibiting immigration into our Country today. In the meantime, even without this order, our Southern Border, aided substantially by the 170 miles of new Border Wall & 27,000 Mexican soldiers, is very tight - including for human trafficking. (Trump, 2020q)

Trump was able to enact aggressive legislation under the guise of health risks. He also continued to tout the new programs that were enacted to reaffirm the border itself. Increasing the size of the wall and increasing military forces at the border affirms a simple idea – immigrants do not

belong here. However, Trump justifies this claim by using human trafficking as the reason for increased security. The entirety of the tweet fails to mention any health reason for increased security. Rather, Trump uses the opportunity that the pandemic provided to enact his harshest form of immigration restrictions.

Necropolitics

Trump used different representations for immigrants than he used for BLM protestors. While the representations of protestors were geared toward preventing danger and *threatening* violence, representations of immigrants were focused on labeling immigrants as a criminal threat and *justifying* violence. The representations of protestors encouraged citizens to take actions to prevent continued violence, whereas Trump's representations of immigrants encouraged state-based solutions. These representations justified policies and institutions of violence because the border is portrayed as an exclusion zone. Namely, the rhetoric Trump used supported the border itself and any policy that would limit access to immigration status.

Trump continually used the economy and criminality as reasons why immigration needed to be reduced. However, these actions only reaffirmed the border itself. In order for a border to exist, that border must be enforced and policed (Neocleous, 2003). Borders indicate territorial boundaries between states. There are those inside the border who are deemed "good" and those outside the border who are deemed "bad" (Neocleous, 2003). Thus, any legitimization of borders is also a justification for violence. However, Trump's rhetoric and negative representations not only reaffirm the physical border. They also create new epistemic borders based on the American perception of immigrants. The persistent representation of American citizens as "safe" contrasted by the subhuman representations of immigrants Trump used, reshaped the way some Americans think about immigration. We should recall that necropolitics emphasizes a need to eliminate a

threat in order to maintain security (Mbembe, 2003). When Trump argues for increased control of the border and demonizes those trying to enter, he creates a dichotomy of the “law abiding citizen” and the “illegal immigrant” that must be eliminated.

These justifications do not solely create the conditions for violence and a dichotomy between groups. Ratcheting up the strength of the border also encourages several negative ideologies. Washington (2019) argues that borders themselves are tools that encourage settler colonialism, capitalism, and white nationalism. Mainly, this is because borders have encouraged globalization which prioritizes capital over the needs of people (Giroux, 2005). Further, creating borders is founded on a settler-colonial logic of discovery that necessitates owning land as opposed to coexisting with the world (Washington, 2019). Each of these ideologies were part of Trump’s political platform, but they were also necropolitical. Settler colonialism is defined by Veracini (2010) as “a specific mode of domination where a community of exogenous settlers permanently displace to a new locale, eliminate or displace indigenous populations and sovereignties, and constitute an autonomous political body” (p. 1). This form of domination justifies homicide and genocide which Haerting (2006) refers to as “a racialized and racializing process rooted within the necropolitics of colonialism” (p. 9). Encouraging increased border security also increased feelings of nationalism rooted in capitalism and settler colonialism. Mbembe (2019) argues that borders themselves also encourage necropolitical power over foreign populations because they are “the primitive form of keeping at bay enemies, intruders, and strangers” (p. 3). Simply justifying the border would feed Trump’s necropolitical project. However, Trump’s actions went further to not just increase border security. Rather, Trump also attacked anyone who would make immigration easier. He also used his platform to rally support for several politicians who would be tough on immigration.

Trump's comments also dehumanized immigrants. His representations of immigrants as "animals" "aliens" or "criminals" served to strip humanity away from those fleeing persecution and violence of their own. Once an individual is separated from humanity, they become easier to kill (Mbembe, 2003). Therefore, policies for detention centers and Migrant Protection Protocols would be justified because they eliminate an enemy. Using resources provided by the state allows for sovereignty to determine whether a group continues to exist (Mbembe, 2003). As a result, the state has the sovereign power to determine who and what is acceptable. They can eliminate anything they deem a threat to American ideals. Foucault (2001) explains how the reasoning behind this starts at the state level because "the powers of modern society are exercised through, on the basis of, and by virtue of, this very heterogeneity between a public right of sovereignty and a polymorphous disciplinary mechanism" (Foucault, 2001, p. 74) Foucault explains how the sovereign power functions with its subservient populace as a relation of domination, even to the ultimate zero point for power, which is when the sovereign legitimates itself with the authority to regulate state-based violence – the "right to *take* life or *let* live" (Foucault, 1990, p. 136) – including the termination of life of its citizens (Philp, 1983). Immigrants bring new cultures and ideologies when they cross borders. Using rhetoric that vilifies these actions cements nationalist ideologies and legitimizes continued dehumanization and use of new forms of violence against groups.

Trump's rhetoric was not exclusively used to justify state-based violence. It also condoned violence and hatred from citizens who explicitly identified as supporters of Trump's ideology. Reyes (2019) explains that "anti-immigrant domestic terrorists have begun calling themselves border militias, holding unarmed people at gunpoint and feeling so emboldened that they post videos of their activities on social media" (para. 1). While far-right militias are not

new, they mobilized in new ways after feeling emboldened by Trump's rhetoric. Reyes (2019) continues by claiming Trump's "rhetoric encourages groups like the United Constitutional Patriots to trample on the legal and human rights of immigrants" (para. 12). However, Latinx communities are not the only immigrants that have endured hate from citizens. Rather, anti-Muslim sentiment also grew during Trump's administration. The number of anti-Muslim hate groups tripled following Trump's election, largely due to the incendiary rhetoric he used (Beckett, 2017). Trump's rhetoric manifested in white nationalist violence conducted by citizens and condoned by the state. Given the prevalence and resurgence of racial hatred, analyzing Trump's presidency and the rhetoric he chose to use is critical to understanding the power used by authoritarians and demagogues.

Conclusion

Trump's rhetoric reshaped the way that immigrants were treated. Obama-era policies forced Hillary Clinton to adopt less restrictive immigration policies as part of her platform. However, it created an opportunity for Trump to use increased border security as the main point of his agenda. Using Twitter, Trump was able to disseminate an image of immigrants as criminal and dangerous. Therefore, Americans accepted the policies that were put in place to dehumanize immigrants. These policies operated to restructure the border as a zone of exclusion. Further, they eliminated anyone that was deemed unworthy or dangerous. Some people died while in custody; however, those who did not die were relegated for death after being forced into detention centers that lacked human necessities. Thus, Trump endorsed a culture of white nationalism in the United States.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Donald Trump's presidency was riddled with dangerous rhetoric. However, there was a method to everything he said. Trump wanted to increase the effectiveness of his ideologies. White supremacy, nationalism, and other hegemonic ideologies were the basis for his policy rhetoric. Trump used his rhetoric to encourage violence by both individuals and state-based sources through the weaponization of different oppressive ideologies. Trump's rhetoric did not only justify extreme right-wing violence, but it also fostered a climate of incivility that produced racialized hate crimes. White nationalists felt emboldened by Trump's rhetoric which only led to more hatred and bigotry (Altman, 2016). Using Twitter as a megaphone, Trump was able to reach an audience of tens of millions, spreading his hate-filled speech to anyone who checked their phone.

Each presidency offers opportunities for action. However, each president does not act in similar ways. Trump's presidency saw several conjunctural moments. While these could have been chances to sow ideas of unity and peace, Trump emboldened traits of white supremacy and nationalism. Responding to George Floyd's murder and the Democrats' relaxed immigration platform, Trump only worked to support his followers and the racist ideals of many in his base. Activating these groups drew more attention and greater followings, which successfully solidified Trump's war of position. However, it was Trump's continued use of vilifying rhetoric that allowed violence to persist. Furthermore, even if Trump's rhetoric is not directly responsible for the violent outbursts by his supporters, his language fostered a climate of hatred, and his failure to denounce the concomitant bigotry – while he was the so-called “leader of the free world” – demonstrates his active complicity in necropolitical violence (Ketels, 1996).

Trump's use of Twitter changes the way we understand presidential address. Using Twitter as his channel of choice to address the public means that presidential rhetoric and social media rhetoric become intertwined. We should recall Shogan's (2006) argument that presidents will fulfill their moral roles as policymakers through their rhetoric. However, when this is combined with Ott's (2016) claim that Twitter fosters simplicity, impulsivity, and incivility, Trump's moral role was to justify violence. Further, presidential rhetoric becomes more uncivil when Twitter is the regular means of addressing the public (Bratslavsky et al. 2019). Since incivility is inherent to Twitter, applying that incivility to presidential address implies that the moral goal of that presidency *is* incivility.

Trump's rhetoric was dangerous for many reasons. However, one of the most dangerous parts of his rhetoric was the way he characterized those outside his ideologies. When addressing protestors, Trump classified them as rioters who threatened lives and property. Immigrants were represented as criminals and dangerous. Using these classifications, Trump was able to mobilize militant actions against his opposition. However, not all of those that responded were actually soldiers. Several, such as Kyle Rittenhouse, were inspired civilians acting to protect properties. This is where my thesis expands the understanding of necropolitics.

Mbembe (2003) contextualizes necropolitics exclusively as state actions. The state enforces its own sovereignty by acting to establish disposability of different groups. While Trump used negative representations to demonize immigrants, his rhetoric pertaining to protestors was quite different. While Trump encouraged his own state agents regarding their violent actions, he condemned the actions of protestors but said nothing of the paramilitary groups that went to "protect property." Trump made the comment, "crossing state lines to incite violence is a FEDERAL CRIME!" (2020n). However, when people like Rittenhouse and others

crossed state lines to subjugate the protestors, he made no comments. There was also never any other comment about any right-wing groups crossing state borders to commit violence. The Unite the Right rally drew attention from people crossing state borders as well. However, the tweet condemning interstate travel was released when protestors called for racial justice. In essence, Trump legitimized interstate travel for those who supported his extremist ideology. However, if people were traveling across state borders to argue against his ideology, they were guilty of federal crimes. Trump was able to weaponize state resources against immigrants through the use of detention centers, mass deportations, and Migrant Protection Protocols. However, it was the silent endorsement of white nationalist groups that expanded the violence of necropolitics.

Each of the representations explored in this thesis contribute to a new understanding of necropolitics. Necropolitics is not just state actions as Mbembe (2019) argues. Rather, rhetoric can also be used to create necropolitical violence instigated by states as well as proxies of the state. Using many negative representations on Twitter, it appears that Trump condoned citizens acting on behalf of the state. Moreover, there are justifications provided for the state to use violence against “enemy” groups. However, Trump is not the only one who uses necropolitical rhetoric. Several on the Right such as Marjorie Taylor Greene, Matt Gaetz, and Ted Cruz will use necropolitical rhetoric to separate groups and justify violence against them. Therefore, necropolitics is a field that can be explored more to discover how and why political leaders choose to use weaponized rhetoric that targets specific Otherized groups.

Trump’s rhetoric was not always explicit. Mercieca (2020) explains that Trump was a master of *paralipsis*, or saying something while not saying it. Trump did not explicitly tell people to engage in violence. Whether explicit or not, people like Rittenhouse, the McCloskeys,

and several others functioned as surrogates for the state. In Rowland's (2021) terms, Trump's rhetoric "activates" citizens to act on their dogmatic, ideological beliefs. They served as proxies for the government that did not require the use of new resources or funds to cultivate cultures of incivility. Therefore, Trump's use of necropolitics created a system where if the government is unable to, or cannot, control things like protests or immigration, they will encourage citizens to act on the government's behalf. Thus, Trump's form of necropolitics manifested in a new system where it is not exclusively state resources that need to be used as Mbembe (2003) explained. Rather, proxies can act on behalf of a necropolitical government to conduct violent deeds.

My analysis in this thesis allows for a new understanding of rhetoric. Rhetoric allows for people to convey power and supremacy. However, it also offers an opportunity to do so in a negative way. Critical discourse analysis has typically been understood as how groups interact to communicate power differences (Fairclough, 2013) However, I argue that individuals can also act on behalf of groups to convey power. Trump's repetitive use of negative representations without support allowed for violent practices. However, what is more concerning is how Trump's representations were adopted with little to no evidence supporting his claims. Rhetoric becomes more influential when it confirms the biases that people hold. When people use supremacist rhetoric, if it aligns with the beliefs of an audience, then that rhetoric will be more effective. Trump's base proved this by not only becoming indoctrinated by his rhetoric, but also by taking actions and engaging in violence themselves.

My thesis also changes the understanding of presidential rhetoric compared to the rhetoric of the presidency. Trump's rhetoric conveyed his own agendas and policy initiatives. He used negative representations to antagonize immigrants and vilify those who advocated for police reform. However, using the office of the presidency allowed him to use the bully pulpit to

convey his message without substantial effort (Miles, 2014). Trump was also able to use the white masculine underpinnings of the presidency to advance his own agenda (Stuckey, 2010). The legacy of Trump's presidential rhetoric can be shown through the lens of the white nationalist ideologies he promoted. However, the new understandings we have of rhetoric of the presidency involve how the presidency can be weaponized. Using the resources and influence that are inherent to the presidency, presidents are capable of conducting sanctioned forms of violence against our citizens and Others within our nation's borders.

While my thesis did not go into detail about what happened on January 6th, the use of necropolitical rhetoric contributed to the insurrection. Trump consistently used rhetoric that emboldened white supremacists, vilified his enemies, and encouraged violence based on racial characteristics. His rhetoric created a climate of incivility that was nothing less than a fuse running to the powder keg that was the insurrection. When Trump continued to condone and justify violence with his Twitter account and other rhetoric, it was a motivating force for his supporters to brazenly march on the Capitol (Cineas, 2021). The conditions for violence were set by Trump's consistent invocation of distrust of the opposition. Rowland (2021) explains that Twitter "enabled Trump to extend the rally atmosphere beyond time and place to an actual event" (p. 118). Doing so, Trump was able to continue his divisive rhetoric throughout his administration and further relish in the spectacle. Mercieca (2020) also explains that Trump's original campaign occurred "within a crisis of public trust in which the very viability of democracy was at risk" (p. 203). Trump preyed on those desiring honest politicians. However, he used his position to encourage violence while silencing anyone who would oppose him.

We should also have a new understanding of how social media is used by those in power. Politicians can use social media to express opinions and portray them as facts. Trump used

Twitter to provide multiple attacks on people while providing minimal, if any, evidence to support his points. Stuckey (2010) argues that the presidency is a site of privilege that “has been inflected by upper class, straight, white male expectations and practices” (p. 40). Trump upheld this characterization by encouraging nationalism with his Twitter account. However, using Twitter, Trump was able to access a vast audience from his phone. He did not have to only make a speech or have a press release. Therefore, problematic expectations and practices, like those that Stuckey mentions, were disseminated into American discourse much easier.

My thesis clearly does not cover all of the ways Trump engaged in necropolitics. There are several other groups, namely religious minorities, that Trump maligned. I also only used Trump’s tweets as texts to examine. Studies could also be conducted about his speeches, debates, or campaign advertisements. There is a plethora of opportunities to analyze Trump’s rhetoric as necropolitical. Further, there can be analysis of those who condone necropolitics. There were several people who did not necessarily encourage, but also did not speak out against Trump’s abrasive rhetoric. Analyzing those people and the role silence played in Trump’s rise to power could be critical to breaking down the complicity that allows violence to continue.

My thesis also has limitations that should be addressed. The entirety of my analysis centers around tweets. I did not analyze speeches or any of the arguments that Trump made in debates. Also, my analysis only evaluated Trump’s representations pertaining to Black Lives Matter and immigration. Finally, I chose to use necropolitics and representations to guide my thesis. Other theoretical techniques could have been applied to Trump such as framing, critical cultural studies, or social identity theory. However, I chose to analyze my content in a way that allowed me to explain how Trump commodified power during his administration, and with his Twitter account.

Understanding how Trump used Twitter to encourage violence is crucial to preventing these issues from happening again. While Trump is not the president anymore, other candidates hold similar ideologies that embolden them to engage in violence. My analysis is only the start of a larger project to deconstruct the rhetoric of those in positions of power. Noticing how negative representations are weaponized against disenfranchised groups is necessary to prevent demagogues from claiming power. Further, this understanding can delegitimize the rhetoric of anyone who would alienate a group or individuals based on their identity.

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