

Black Trumpists: Minority Conservatives and Multiracial Whiteness

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Kanye West, one of the most successful and influential hip-hop musicians, made a surprise visit to the White House in October 2018. In the past, West had been known as forthright in criticizing politicians. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, for instance, he railed against George W. Bush who was slow to assist hurricane victims, stating “George Bush doesn’t care about black people.” However, in 2018, wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat, West praised Donald Trump. Discussing African American employment, work force training programs, and sentencing reforms, West hailed Trump as his “brother” and asserted that it was Trump, not Obama, who gave him hope that a Black person could be the U.S. president. Despite Trump’s remarks demonstrating his anti-civil rights attitude and his endorsement of racist conspiracies, the Black rapper supported the president and defended himself from liberal criticism by saying he was a “free thinker.”¹

African Americans favoring Republican politicians was not only astonishing but also disgusting to many others in the Black community. Since the advent of New Deal liberalism in the 1930s, the overwhelming majority of Blacks have corroborated liberalism and voted Democratic in political elections. If some Blacks uphold conservatism and join the GOP, they are frequently taunted as “traitors,” “sellouts,” or “Uncle Toms.” Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote in *The Atlantic* that West sought “a kind of freedom—a white freedom, freedom without consequence, freedom without criticism, freedom to be proud and ignorant.”²

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1. Katie Rogers, “Kanye West’s White House Rant Steals Trump’s Spotlight,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/11/us/politics/kanye-trump-white-house-monologue.html>; Jeet Heer, “Kanye West’s Bastardization of ‘Free Thinkers,’” *New Republic*, May 3, 2018, <https://newrepublic.com/article/148213/kanye-wests-bastardization-free-thinkers>.

2. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “I’m Not Black, I’m Kanye: Kanye West Wants Freedom—White Freedom,” *The Atlantic*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/05/im-not-black-im-kanye/559763/>.

Conventional wisdom holds that Black conservatives who ignore the reality of systemic racism and totally accept whiteness are exceptional, and the term “Black Trumpist” arguably does not make sense to most in American politics.

However, West was not the lone Black supporter of Trump during his presidency. This article examines the emergence of Black Trumpists during the late 2010s and early 2020s, placing them in the long history of Black conservatism in the United States. Blacks supported Trump for several reasons. Some African Americans aligned themselves with him because they expected that a close relationship with the president, as well as the Republican Party, would be significant for improving the economic situation of Black communities. Others turned pro-Trump because they believed in his conspiracy theories and emotional politics, claiming that the Democratic Party was no longer the party for Blacks. Still other Black Trumpists asserted that race was never crucial in contemporary U.S. politics, and took part in extremism like white supremacy. Some Black Trumpists denied the Black Lives Matter movement that took place during the corona pandemic, while others engaged in the Stop the Steal movement after the 2020 presidential election, and even participated in the attack on the U.S. Capitol in January 2021.

Defining Trumpists loosely as those who ardently supported Trump during and after his presidency, this paper explores these small but variant circles of Black Trumpists and analyzes the influence of right-wing Blacks on modern American conservatism. If we are to comprehend Black conservatives, we need to place them in a historical context. This article traces Black dissidents of the civil rights movement over the course of the twentieth century. The Black right emphasizes self-help, asserting that it is not big government and civil rights activism but individual efforts and economic empowerment that save the Black community from poverty and discrimination. With the intellectual tradition of African American conservatism, Black politicians and activists endorsed Trump in the late 2010s and beyond.

However, some initially may wonder if Black Trumpists are really significant in U.S. politics. Indeed, Black conservatives are an isolated group, as other African Americans suppose that antiliberal Blacks betray their own community and therefore never support conservatives. On the other hand, mainstream (or white) conservatives welcome like-minded Blacks partly because these racial minority conservatives are a token of multiracial support, which is important for conservatives to avoid the label of racism. Thus, it is safe to say that conservative Blacks are small in number and influence both within the Black community and the conservative movement. However, right-wing Blacks are historically crucial since they indicate the inclusive nature of modern American conservatism that is largely considered an exclusive political movement. By pointing to conservatives bubbling up from minority groups, this study argues that American conservatism is growing into a multiracial political force rather than a movement of middle-class white males.

I: The Tradition of Black Conservatism

The last thirty years have witnessed burgeoning studies on modern American conservatism, but with the focus on white conservatives, few have paid enough attention to conservatism among minority groups. As Allan Lichtman, for example, surveyed the history of conservatism in the U.S. from the 1920s toward the end of the twentieth century, he concluded that American conservatives pursued a “white Protestant nation.” While investigating diverse antiliberal forces such as business interests, conservative intellectuals, right-wing politicians, white Southerners, anticommunists, the Christian right, and blue-collar workers, among others, Lichtman regarded conservatism primarily as a political movement of white people. Similarly, Lisa McGirr’s study, *Suburban Warriors*, delved into the rise of conservatism in Orange County, California, during the post-World War II period. Whereas McGirr vividly illuminated middle-class suburbanites in Southern California who involved themselves with right-wing grassroots activism, most of the “ordinary men and women” whom she dealt with were whites.³ Moreover, during the Trump years when Trumpism was intimately connected with white supremacy, many journalists described the Trump movement as a coalition of forgotten whites endorsing Trump’s masculine nationalism and strict anti-immigration policies. Analyzing the 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol, Thomas Edsall in the *New York Times* considered the insurrection a “white riot” and Chauncey Devega in *Salon* argued that it was “terrorism against multiracial democracy” caused by white men who regarded themselves as “the core of America.”⁴

On the other hand, several researchers have investigated conservatism among racial minorities. Like many other African Americans, Black conservatives are concerned about hardships that the Black community has faced, but African American liberals and conservatives are starkly different in the way they seek to solve problems. Whereas civil rights activists have called on the federal

3. Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12. See also Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004 [1991]); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

4. Thomas B. Edsall, “White Riot,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/13/opinion/capitol-riot-white-grievance.html>; Chauncey Devega, “After Trump, the Crisis: White America at the Historical Crossroads,” *Salon*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.salon.com/2021/02/01/after-trump-the-crisis-white-america-at-the-historical-crossroads/>.

government to help African Americans overcome economic poverty and racial injustice, Black conservatives oppose big government and maintain that African Americans are able to succeed in American society through educational and economic opportunities.⁵ Additionally, the religious right encourages moral politics among Blacks, stressing family values that encompass traditional gender roles, and igniting antipathy against feminism and gay rights. Black fundamentalists, like white evangelicals and fundamentalists, promote attacks on the values of the Sixties. Furthermore, according to Angela Dillard's research, conservatives have included African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, women, and sexual minorities. Analyzing the transformation of American political ideologies, Dillard argued that "American conservatism can no longer be viewed, and accurately represented, as the exclusive preserve of white, male, and heterosexual persons with comfortable class positions."⁶

Although it is hard to provide a concrete definition for the whole Black conservative movement—a movement that contains a multitude of ideas—some political scientists have identified its basic tenets. Michael Dawson argued that Black conservatism was characterized by "a reliance on self-help, an attack on the state as a set of institutions that retard societal progress in general and black progress in particular, and belief in the anti-discriminatory aspects of markets."⁷ While drawing on ideas from libertarianism, however, Black conservatives are also knitted together by racial identity. Dillard pointed out that Black conservatives' "perspective values race and a cohesive racial identity merely as a pragmatic necessity." In this sense, race is a useful category for "organizing collective self-help initiatives."⁸ In a nutshell, Black conservatives believe in free-market capitalism, individualism, and assimilation, claiming that they can get ahead in a color-blind America. In response to the fact that the Black community is still suffering from destitution, Black conservatives state that Blacks are

5. Angela D. Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Christopher Alan Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts: The Promise and Peril of Black Conservatism, from Booker T. Washington to Condoleezza Rice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008); Leah Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Angela K. Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community: To the Right and Misunderstood* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Peter R. Eisenstadt, ed., *Black Conservatism: Essays in Intellectual and Political History* (New York: Garland Pub, 1999); Daniel R. Bare, *Black Fundamentalists: Conservative Christianity and Racial Identity in the Segregation Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2021).

6. Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now?*, 2.

7. Dawson, *Black Visions*, 26.

8. Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now?*, 31–32.

responsible for their own problems, instead of blaming American racism.

Among the first Black conservatives in modern America was Booker T. Washington at the turn of the twentieth century.⁹ Following emancipation in the Civil War, Washington went on to higher education and founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute for the education of Blacks. Washington emerged as a new Black leader in the post-Reconstruction years and called for cooperation between Blacks and whites in the South. Particularly famous, and also infamous, was his speech at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition. Washington stated in the “Atlanta Compromise” that Blacks and whites could work together toward mutual progress. He noted that African Americans could build a harmonious relationship with whites by “making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.” But he simultaneously acknowledged the racial segregation that white Southerners had established, saying, “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” Later in his speech, Washington also dismissed a civil rights approach by noting, “The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest [*sic*] folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing.” Washington did not oppose big government like modern conservatives, but when he urged Blacks to uplift their communities through the free market and individual efforts, his thoughts echoed modern Black conservatism in the post-civil rights movement.¹⁰

Whereas white Southerners enthusiastically applauded Washington’s Atlanta address, responses from Blacks were ambivalent. W. E. B. Du Bois at first highly acclaimed Washington’s stance immediately after his 1895 speech, writing to Washington, “Let me heartily congratulate you upon your phenomenal success at

9. Some scholars argue that the origins of black conservatism date back to the colonial era. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, free Blacks who were able to acquire education, property, and wealth assimilated and accepted Christianity and the whites’ way of life. Jupiter Hammon was among the first black literary figures in America and his writings emphasized the accommodation and assimilation of Blacks. Though the respect for Western civilization was shared by black conservatives in contemporary America, this article does not apply modern black conservatism as an anti-civil rights ideology to Black assimilationists during the colonial era because their ideological backgrounds were so different. See Byron D’Andra Orey, “The New Black Conservative: Rhetoric or Reality?,” *Perspectives* 9, no. 1 (January 2003): 38–47; Rhett S. Jones, “Black Creole Cultures: The Eighteenth-Century Origins of African American Conservatism,” in *Dimensions of Black Conservatism in the United States: Made in America*, ed. Gayle Tate and Lewis A. Randolph (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 13–31.

10. Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856–1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 218–19. See also Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901–1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community*, 39–41.

Atlanta—it was a word fitly spoken.”¹¹ But a few years later, Du Bois and other Blacks criticized Washington’s economic approach to racial advancement, as the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision established the “separate but equal” doctrine in 1896, and white mobs assailed the Black community in the Atlanta race riot of 1906. Even if freed African Americans achieved economic progress, civil rights activists realized, Blacks could not gain political equality and full integration under the Jim Crow segregation of the South. Du Bois and other activists founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, and then their perspective led to the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s.¹²

From the 1930s to the 1960s, the Black community strongly espoused New Deal liberalism and the Democratic Party. As Black women and men benefited from New Deal programs under the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, they shifted their party loyalty from the “Party of Lincoln” toward the Democratic Party during the 1930s. In the 1936 presidential election, 71 percent of African American voters cast their ballots for Roosevelt. The endorsement was strongly confirmed through the intimate relationship of the civil rights movement with Democratic presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1960s. Only 6 percent of African Americans endorsed Barry Goldwater, the Republican presidential candidate in the 1964 race. Most of the Black community has continuously voted Democratic since the 1970s: 86 percent of Black voters supported George McGovern in 1972; 99 percent backed Barack Obama in 2008.¹³

Over the years, the conservative camp still existed in the Black community. While many Blacks gave their support for a welfare state, discontent with liberalism smoldered among Black intellectuals because they claimed that the expansion of an activist government would result in communism. In the Cold War era, George Schuyler was the voice of Black conservatism who opposed communism as well as a civil rights approach to racial uplift. After briefly joining the Socialist Party in 1922, Schuyler rose to prominence as an anticommunist journalist by the 1930s. Later, he also became active in the John Birch Society, the largest grassroots anticommunist organization in the 1960s. On the other hand, in articles such as “The Negro Art Hokum,” he targeted Blacks’ cultural nationalism by criticizing Black artists who attempted to form a unique African American style. For Schuyler, who believed in assimilation, discussing radical differences in arts and literature was nonsense.¹⁴ Schuyler also blamed Martin Luther King Jr., asserting that the Communist Party manipulated civil rights

11. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, 225.

12. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, 224–26.

13. Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 13, 52; Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community*, 75.

14. Dillard, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner Now?*, 115–17.

activists and that race consciousness was an obstacle to the integration of Blacks. In an article, Schuyler concluded that King did not deserve the Nobel Peace Prize. The *Pittsburg Courier*, which Schuyler was working for, did not publish the article. Schuyler instead found another newspaper to print the column, and the article was reprinted in many conservative newspapers.¹⁵

As the relationship between Schuyler and King indicates, the 1960s was a period when modern Black conservatism began to take shape as an alternative to liberalism. After the construction of New Deal liberalism under the Democratic Party, Black conservatives were minorities within minorities. Yet, throughout the 1950s and 1960s when the civil rights movement fought against racism and promoted legal changes, it also revealed the limitations of its approach. By the late 1960s, the rise of civil rights activism was confronted with white backlash both in the South and North, while the welfare state did not eradicate poverty and discrimination from the Black community. Frustrated with civil rights approaches to integration, a cadre of African Americans gradually countered liberal Democrats, or the “civil rights establishment,” by joining the conservative movement and the Republican Party.

Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, antiliberal Black conservatives figured in American politics. Building on Washington’s philosophy, traditional Black conservatives, such as Schuyler and the Reverend J. H. Jackson, attacked liberals. Libertarians including Shelby Steele, Thomas Sowell, and Anne Wortham emphasized individualism and freedom from group-based racial identity, and disseminated their ideas through conservative platforms like *National Review*, the *Lincoln Project*, and other publications. Also, the tradition of black nationalism emerged as another strand of modern Black conservatism, as Glenn Loury, Walter Williams, and Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam attracted public attention. In addition, some African Americans undermined part of the welfare state. Ward Connerly, a regent of the University of California, denounced affirmative action programs, and in 1995, his proposal to abolish affirmative action in admissions and hiring was passed. As the second African American judge in the Supreme Court, Clarence Thomas influenced many decisions to push American society rightward. When the vast majority of the Black community supported the Democratic Party, it was these African American business people, intellectuals, and politicians that represented the tradition of Black conservatism throughout the twentieth century.¹⁶

15. Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community*, 41; Dillard, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner Now?*, 116.

16. Leah Wright Rigueur analyzed Black Republicans from the 1930s to the 1980s, while Angela Dillard provided an exposition on Black conservatives from the 1970s to the end of the twentieth century. See Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican*; Dillard, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner Now?*, esp. 56–98.

II: Black Trumpists

When Donald Trump appeared on the national stage during the 2016 presidential campaign, a number of conservatives and Republicans initially blamed the candidate for his populist, racist, and sexist language. In January 2016, *National Review*, a major conservative magazine active since the 1950s, published articles against Trump. The editors said that Trump is “a philosophically unmoored political opportunist” and they expected him to divide the Republican Party and the broad conservative ideological consensus “in favor of a free-floating populism.”¹⁷ Indeed, Trump’s criticism of illegal immigrants gained support from many voters. Yet his rhetoric was characterized by a prejudice against Latinos and other people of color, so African Americans and other racial minorities overwhelmingly rejected the Republican candidate at that time.

Meanwhile, several Black men and women backed Trump throughout the presidential race. This support emanated from anti-elitist populism going hand in hand with conspiracy theories, economic opportunities that would be available by working with the president, and other reasons. Although the Black Trumpists were a small group, they received public attention as the national media focused on them and President Trump brought them to the fore as a “symbol” of multiracial support. Despite the differences between conventional conservatism and newly emerging Trumpism, Black Trumpists constructed relations with the Republican president in pursuit of their own ideal society.

Tim Scott, a Republican senator from South Carolina, was among the African American supporters of Trump. In 2016, Scott was the only Black Republican in the U.S. Senate, and the first Black Republican senator from the South since Reconstruction. Born and raised in North Charleston, South Carolina, he spent his childhood in a single-mother family. Scott recollected that his life started to change in high school when the local owner of Chick-fil-A introduced him to business and his teacher planted conservative philosophies in the young Scott. After graduating from a local university, Scott found success in the insurance industry then set off for the political arena as a Black Republican. In 1995, he ran for the Charleston County Council, and later served in the South Carolina House of Representatives, before he was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 2010. Finally, he joined the U.S. Senate in 2013.¹⁸

A Black Republican, Senator Scott was in a strange position when Trump ran for the presidential race. At first, Scott supported Marco Rubio, a senator from

17. “Against Trump,” *National Review*, January 22, 2016, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/01/donald-trump-conservative-movement-menace/>.

18. “About Tim,” U.S. Senator Tim Scott from South Carolina, <https://www.scott.senate.gov/about/biography> (accessed August 10, 2022).

Florida, in the early stages of the Republican primaries, but shortly Scott supported Trump, whereas his Republican colleagues and African Americans criticized the presidential candidate. Although Scott described some of Trump's statements and behaviors as "disgusting," "indefensible," and "racially toxic," the Black Republican also mentioned that "Hillary Clinton and her fellow Democrats were as just bad as Mr. Trump on race matters." Scott remembered Clinton's 1996 speech in which she referred to some young criminals as "superpredators" that many people believed connotated young African American men.¹⁹

After Trump rose to the highest elected office, Senator Scott gradually became vocal about racial issues within the Republican Party. In actuality, he had made efforts to avoid building his political career based on racial identity. As an evangelical, Scott stressed that religion played a critical role in public life, often saying: "I am a Christian who is a conservative—and you may have noticed, I'm black."²⁰ However, he slowly changed his stance on racism in 2015, when a Black man, Walter Scott, was shot dead by a white police officer in North Charleston. In the same year, a white supremacist massacred nine African Americans at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. These murders in South Carolina, as well as many other Black victims around the country, made Scott protest against racism within the Republican Party. In 2017, when white supremacists held the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and clashed with counter-protesters, the disorder resulted in the killing of Heather Heyer, a white woman protesting against the neo-Nazi rally. Then Trump sparked a national controversy by saying that there were "very fine people" on both sides. Scott publicly expressed discontent with the president's comments, and when Trump invited the Black senator to the Oval Office, Scott did not hesitate to discuss racism with the white president.²¹ Likewise, in 2019, when Steve King, the Representative from Iowa, remarked, "[w]hite nationalist, white supremacist, Western civilization—how did that language become offensive?," Scott published an op-ed in which he asserted that "silence is no longer acceptable" because the reticence made the GOP on the defensive in national debates over racism.²²

19. Richard Fausset, "As a Black Republican Senator, Tim Scott Faces a Unique Donald Trump Issue," *New York Times*, October 15, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/us/politics/tim-scott-black-republicans-donald-trump.html>.

20. Catie Edmondson and Nicholas Fandos, "Tim Scott, Once Quiet on Matters of Race, Embraces Key Role on Police Reform," *New York Times*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/us/politics/tim-scott-police-protests.html>.

21. Ben Terris, "The Burden of Tim Scott," *Washington Post Magazine*, August 21, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2020/08/21/how-tim-scott-only-black-gop-senator-navigates-loyalty-trump-vs-calling-him-out/>.

22. Tim Scott, "Why Are Republicans Accused of Racism? Because We're Silent on Things Like This," *Washington Post*, January 11, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/01/11/tim-scott-republicans-can-no-longer-be-silent-bigotry/>.

In spite of Trump's racist language, Scott kept an intimate but complicated relationship with the president. In response to protests against racism, the senator became involved with the legislation of criminal justice and police reforms. Scott's political activities also covered economic policies for poor communities. Scott's advice for Trump ended up as Opportunity Zones, legislation for investment in poor communities as part of the 2017 tax overhaul. He told a newspaper reporter, "What I am trying to do is make the country stronger. And I can do that by working with the president."²³

If Trump's racial prejudice did not seriously harm his relationship with Senator Scott, who aimed for economic empowerment for the Black community, the president's sexism did not matter so much for some Black female supporters. Throughout the 2016 election and his presidency, Trump repeatedly attacked minorities and women. In July 2019, he targeted four Democratic minority congresswomen—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, and Ayanna S. Pressley of Massachusetts—and wrote on Twitter that they should "go back" to their countries, despite the fact that they are all U.S. citizens.²⁴ Several female Blacks, however, sympathized with Trump and even followed his attacks on female Democrats.

As a conservative influencer, Candace Owens increasingly rose to fame among Trumpists as well as far-right groups. With millions of followers on Twitter and Facebook, Owens published messages to fight against liberals and Democrats. In 2017, then known as the YouTuber Red Pill Black, Owens posted a video titled "How to Escape the Democrat Plantation (an easy guide)," in which she likened chattel slaves in the colonial era to African American supporters of Democrats in the present, claiming that these Blacks were mentally enslaved by the Democratic Party. In fact, the rhetoric of the "Democratic plantation" had been used by Black Republicans to criticize the Democratic Party during the 1964 presidential election, but Owens popularized the trope again. For example, Vernon Jones, Georgia state Representative and Black Democrat, used the term "Democratic plantation" in the Republican National Convention of 2020, and then the national media turned more attention to the rhetoric.²⁵

23. Terris, "The Burden of Tim Scott."

24. Katie Rogers and Nicholas Fandos, "Trump Tells Congresswomen to 'Go Back' to the Countries They Came from," *New York Times*, July 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/14/us/politics/trump-twitter-squad-congress.html>.

25. On the "Democratic Plantation," see Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 4; Tyler D. Parry, "How the 'Democratic Plantation' Became One of the Conservatives' Favorite Slurs," *Washington Post*, January 8, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/01/08/how-democratic-plantation-became-one-conservatives-favorite-slurs/>. For other Black conservatives using the trope, see Isaac Stanley-Becker, "Trump's Black Supporters Bring Attacks from the Internet to Convention Prime Time, in Answer to Diverse Democratic Ticket," *Washington Post*, August 26, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/black-trump-supporters-republican-convention/2020/08/25/fadeb30e-e600-11ea-970a-64c73a1c2392_story.html.

Influenced by Owens, Kanye West was temporarily transformed from a critic of Republican politicians toward being a voice of Trumpism. West openly admired Owens and urged other Blacks to be “free thinkers” in order to overcome the “plantation mentality.” Shortly after disappointing many fans, however, West changed his mind and distanced himself from conservatives, tweeting, “My eyes are now wide open and now realize I’ve been used to spread messages I don’t believe in.”²⁶ Still, Owens played a key role in influencing other African Americans. Between 2017 and 2019, she was working as the communications director for Turning Point USA, an organization of conservative women and men on campus. Turning Point USA’s Young Women’s Leadership Summit, for instance, was annually held and sponsored by the National Rifle Association and other right-wing groups, providing female supporters of Trump with opportunities to socialize with like-minded women.²⁷

While organizing female conservatives, Owens harshly attacked women on the left. In June 2018, she tweeted: “The entire premise of #metoo is that women are stupid, weak, and inconsequential.”²⁸ Moreover, Owens’s conspiracy theory was remarkable, especially when she chastised Kamala Harris in the 2020 presidential campaign. After Joe Biden chose Harris as his running mate, Owens claimed that Harris’s Indian heritage nullified her Black identity. Like Trump attacking minority female lawmakers due to their foreign origins, Owens insisted that Harris’s blackness was undermined by her Indian mother. When Owens joined “Tucker Carlson Tonight” on Fox News, she also discussed “the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party” and argued “Democrats should be forced to live with the Kamala they created.” Other female Black Trumpists similarly brought attacks on Harris on the internet, as Lynnette Hardaway and Rochelle Richardson, also known as YouTubers Diamond and Silk, condemned the Black Democrat for marrying a white man and bringing up his children. An article in the *Washington Post* pointed out that these online attacks were part of “trolling, flaming and incivility” that employed misinformation and hate as a critique of liberals. The Black conservatives waged emotional campaigns that had been firmly embedded in the age of Trump.²⁹

Trump himself also attempted to court Black voters with the promise of African Americans’ economic advancement during the 2020 election. In October, the Trump

26. Parry, “How the ‘Democratic Plantation’ Became One of the Conservatives’ Favorite Slurs”; Daniel Victor, “‘I’ve Been Used’: Kanye West Says He’s Taking a Break from Politics. We’ll See,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/31/us/politics/kanye-west-quitting-politics.html>.

27. Astead W. Herndon, “Trumpism Finds a Safe Space at Conservative Women’s Conference,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/17/us/politics/women-conservative-trump.html>.

28. Herndon, “Trumpism Finds a Safe Space.”

29. Stanley-Becker, “Trump’s Black Supporters Bring Attacks”; “Candace Owens: Democrats Should Be Forced to Live with the Kamala They Created,” *Fox News*, June 15, 2022, <https://video.foxnews.com/v/6307750176112#sp=show-clips>.

campaign announced the “Platinum Plan,” a package of governmental programs through which the president would “increase access to capital in Black communities by almost \$500 billion” to offer Blacks three million new jobs for the next four years. Boasting that the administration already initiated investment into African American small businesses through Opportunity Zones, in which Black Republican Senator Scott was engaged, Trump emphasized the historically low level of Black unemployment under his administration. Yet, the truth was that it was the Obama administration that had dramatically lowered Black unemployment after the Great Recession, and Trump just took over a growing economy. Furthermore, the economic plan for Blacks was too little and too late. The Trump administration had already created the Paycheck Protection Program, a business loan program during the corona pandemic, but over 90 percent of Black-owned small businesses that applied for the program were turned down. It was uncertain how the Platinum Plan could seem attractive to African Americans whose communities were suffering from economic disaster as well as COVID.³⁰

On the other hand, the planned economic policy implied a gendered culture shared by Trump and his Black supporters. Upon announcing the Platinum Plan, the Trump administration revealed that the Black rapper Ice Cube advised the president about the program. This was a strange combination given the fact that Ice Cube had launched his 2018 song “Arrest the President,” with a music video illustrating border walls and the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville. The Black hip-hop star explained that he gave some advice to Trump not because he turned conservative, but because he thought “a bipartisan strategy was necessary to achieve racial justice.” But more importantly, relations with Black rappers like Kanye West and Ice Cube were an effective weapon for the Trump campaign to reach out particularly to African American men. Some pundits indicated that Black men were more likely to support Trump than Black women partly due to the manliness Trump represented. Long before the 2020 presidential election, Trump was celebrated in rap music as “a symbol of manly power” accompanying toughness and financial success. Whereas Black Republicans and conservatives supported Trump because of his economic policies such as low taxes, a number of Black supporters, especially those young and male, were attracted by his image as a wealthy and traditionally masculine figure.³¹

30. Mario Parker and Justin Sink, “Trump Tells Black Voters That Democrats Take Them for Granted,” *Washington Post*, September 27, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/on-small-business/trump-tells-black-voters-that-democrats-take-them-for-granted/2020/09/25/6c0e169a-fee4-11ea-b0e4-350e4e60cc91_story.html.

31. Teo Armus, “Ice Cube Once Rapped about Arresting Trump. Now He’s Advising the President on Policy Plans,” *Washington Post*, October 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/10/15/ice-cube-cwba-trump-biden/>; Stephanie Muravchik and Jon A. Shields, “Why Trump Made Gains among Minority Men against Biden,” *Fortune*, November 7, 2020, <https://fortune.com/2020/11/06/trump-support-black-latino-men-rappers/>; Chelsea Janes, “Both Biden and Trump Camps See Young Black Men as Key to Their Chances,” *Washington Post*, October 31, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-trump-young-black-men/2020/10/30/f7cc57b8-1939-11eb-aeec-b93bcc29a01b_story.html.

Throughout the presidential election, pro-Trump African Americans demonstrated multiple aspects of Trumpism. Economic empowerment, misinformation, and masculinity, among other issues, pushed part of the Black community toward the Trump camp. Although Biden won the 2020 presidential race, analysts were surprised to observe that Trump made inroads with racial minorities more successfully than many had imagined. Musa al-Gharbi, a sociologist at Columbia University, analyzed the minority support for Trump from the 2016 presidential race, and he showed that Trump generated enthusiastic responses from not only Blacks but also Latinos and sexual minorities. Suggesting antipathy toward illegal immigrants and racism among minority groups, al-Gharbi wrote that some minorities began to leave the Democratic Party even before Trump, noting: “The Big Tent party has seen losses with Hispanic and Black voters for virtually every midterm and presidential election since 2008.” The commentator Fareed Zakaria also criticized the Democratic Party’s multiculturalism, which “lumps a wide variety of ethnic, racial and religious groups into one ‘minority’ monolith and approaches them from a perspective that does not fit us all.”³² Trump’s racism and sexism accelerated the growth of conservatism among people of color, and then Trumpism finally resulted in mob violence following the election.

III: Multiracial Whiteness

The Trumpists’ aggressive style of politics was not appeased even after Biden won the presidential race. If anything, their acrimony mounted as Trump did not accept the result, asserting that the election was stolen. Under the slogan of “Stop the Steal,” Trump supporters organized a series of rallies across the nation. On November 7, 2020, just four days after the election, over a thousand gathered at the State Capitol in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Wearing MAGA red hats and waving banners, they repeatedly chanted “Stop the steal!” Two months later, on January 6, 2021, a mob of Trump loyalists flocked to the United States Capitol where a joint session of Congress convened to confirm the results of the 2020 presidential election. The first assault on the U.S. Capitol since the burning of the Capitol in 1814 shocked Americans, and many intellectuals regarded it as a

32. Musa al-Gharbi, “The Trump Vote Is Rising among Blacks and Hispanics, Despite the Conventional Wisdom,” *NBC News*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-vote-rising-among-blacks-hispanics-despite-conventional-wisdom-nca1245787>; Musa al-Gharbi, “Election 2016: Demographics ≠ Destiny,” *Musa al-Gharbi* (blog), May 29, 2016, <https://musaalgharbi.com/2016/05/29/2016-donald-trump-race-lose/2/>; Fareed Zakaria, “Once Again, Democrats Have Misunderstood Minorities,” *Washington Post*, November 6, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/once-again-democrats-have-misunderstood-minorities/2020/11/05/6d55d668-1fa6-11eb-ba21-f2f001f0554b_story.html.

“crisis,” an “insurrection,” or “domestic terrorism.”³³

The mob attacking the U.S. Capitol largely consisted of whites, but there were in fact pro-Trump Blacks and Latinos. On the heels of the unrest, Christina Beltrán, a scholar of Latinx Studies at New York University, maintained that the racially diverse Trump followers were tied through multiracial whiteness, which is “the promise that they, too, can lay claim to the politics of aggression, exclusion and domination.” According to Beltrán, multiracial whiteness is less a racial identity than a political color that provides minority conservatives with a sense of belonging and freedom from the politics of diversity. The new whiteness allows Black and Brown Trumpists, who suppose it is racism to pigeonhole a person into a specific racial category, to join white nationalist groups that dehumanize immigrants and other minorities, and the far-right groups in turn attempt to fend off the criticism of racism by including people of color.³⁴

Looking at minority figures in the January 6 attack on the Capitol, we can observe that today’s Black Trumpists emerge from within a multiracial society as they had more diverse racial origins than conservative Blacks in the past. They are of African American, Latino, Arab, and Asian descent, standing in multiple cultural worlds. Yet, instead of belonging to various racial communities, non-white Trumpists either abandon their racial background in pursuit of a colorblind America or utilize race as a political weapon. Considering themselves simply Americans, or, in their own words, “patriots,” multiracial conservatives spoke for extreme groups that are possibly inclusive in race but exclusive in ideology. While sharing tenets with conventional Black conservatives, radicalized Black Trumpists indicate new aspects of minority conservatism.

Ali Alexander is a typical example of multiracial whiteness in contemporary America. Born in Texas as Ali Abdul-Razaq Akbar, he identifies himself as Arab and African American. Alexander not only joined the broad Trump movement but played a key role in it by disseminating fake news and organizing protests. In the 2020 presidential campaign, like other Black conservatives, Alexander questioned Kamala Harris’s blackness due to her Jamaican and Indian origins. He falsely claimed that Harris was “not an American Black” because she came “from Jamaican Slave Owners,” adding he was “so sick of people robbing American Blacks (like myself) of our history.” Immediately after the presidential race, in association with Roger Stone, Alexander became one of the organizers of the

33. See, for example, Charles Homans, “How ‘Stop the Steal’ Captured the American Right,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 19, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/19/magazine/stop-the-steal.html>; Lisa McGirr, “Trump Is the Republican Party’s Past and Its Future,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/13/opinion/gop-trump.html>; Edsall, “White Riot”; Devega, “After Trump, the Crisis.”

34. Cristina Beltrán, “To Understand Trump’s Support, We Must Think in Terms of Multiracial Whiteness,” *Washington Post*, January 15, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/01/15/understand-trumps-support-we-must-think-terms-multiracial-whiteness/>.

“Stop the Steal” rallies and called together protesters through his website and social media. Alexander also assembled the rally in Washington, D.C, on January 6. As a conservative told the House January 6 committee, Stone, Alexander, and Alex Jones of Infowars, a far-right conspiracy theory website, were “the center point for everything” in the rallies.³⁵

Enrique Tarrío is another example of multiracial whiteness. An Afro-Cuban who was raised in Miami, Tarrío is the national chairman of the Proud Boys, a neo-fascist group that has been involved with political violence, including the January 6 riot. Tarrío himself was not at the Capitol when the attack took place because he had been barred from the nation’s capital, accused of burning a Black Lives Matter banner taken from a Black church. But Tarrío and other leaders of the Proud Boys were charged with seditious conspiracy for planning to assault the U.S. Capitol. Tarrío dismissed institutional racism in the United States, claiming that Blacks were responsible for inequality and poverty as they relied on welfare. He also attributed the killing of young Black men by police to hip-hop culture, which “glorifies that lifestyle [...] of selling drugs, shooting up.” Dismissing civil rights activism, the welfare state, and Black culture, Tarrío was steeped in the culture of virility as a leader of the male-chauvinist Proud Boys. Its exclusively male membership and violent activities reflect a fetish for manliness among young male Black Trumpists. David Neiwert, a researcher of the radical right, remarked that many young men of color in the far right “grew up on conservative traditions common in minority communities,” pointing out that the alt right targeted young males with a message of male resentment, an anti-feminist stance, and Ayn Rand’s libertarianism.³⁶

The news media has uncovered other multiracial conservatives who participated in white nationalism despite their racial backgrounds. Elysa Sanchez, a Black Puerto Rican, was at the “Liberty or Death Rally against Left-Wing Violence” in Seattle on August 18, 2018, along with twenty militiamen openly carrying handguns and semi-automatic rifles. Like Tarrío, the Black Puerto Rican claimed, “If black people are committing more murders, more robberies, more

35. Rachele Hampton, “A Movement or a Troll?” *Slate*, July 9, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/07/kamala-harris-not-black-ados-reparations-movement.html>; Hannah Allam and Razzan Nakhlawi, “Black, Brown and Extremist: Across the Far-Right Spectrum, People of Color Play a More Visible Role,” *Washington Post*, May 17, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/minorities-far-right-visible-role/2021/05/16/e7ba8338-a915-11eb-8c1a-56f0cb4ff3b5_story.html; Homans, “How ‘Stop the Steal’ Captured the American Right.”

36. Peter Hermann and Keith L. Alexander, “Proud Boy Leader Barred from District by Judge following His Arrest,” *Washington Post*, January 5, 2021; Arun Gupta, “Why Young Men of Color Are Joining White-Supremacist Groups,” *Daily Beast*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-young-men-of-color-are-joining-white-supremacist-groups>.

thefts, more violent crime, that's why you would see more black men having encounters with the police." Another right-winger called Franky Price attended the rally, who said he was "black and white" with a T-shirt reading "It's okay to be white."³⁷ In the twentieth century, the dichotomy of Black and white was significant even for assimilationists, but we can observe a newly emerging racial consciousness as these minority conservatives attempted to construct an identity as their own political choice.

Conclusion

Ranging from moderate Republicans to extreme nationalists, a variety of Blacks supported Trump during and after his presidency. Black Republicans like Tim Scott kept cordial relations with the president for the economic empowerment of Black communities, while Black activists such as Candace Owens intensified partisan struggles with liberals through conspiracy theories, and multiracial extremists resorted to violence against democracy per se. The tenets among Black conservatives are so diverse that it is hard to define their ideology, yet many of the Black Trumpists believe in individualism. Some argue that individual liberty and efforts were crucial for the uplift of Blacks, and others defy the existence of systemic racism and pursue a colorblind society in which every citizen lives as an individual rather than a member of a racial group. Unlike Democratic African Americans, Black conservatives do not see their fate linked to racial identity. They want freedom from the politics of recognition, and freedom to escape from any group categories.

In this sense, Black Trumpists arguably accept conservative values, including not only individualism but also anti-immigration, masculinity, and whiteness. Alternately, conservatism is also being transformed as racial and ethnic minorities have joined the right wing. This is not a new political phenomenon in the age of Trump, but a historical pattern that conservatism has continuously gone through. Conservatism is a political force that excluded specific groups of people, such as minorities and immigrants, but now continues to include these people as a new element. For instance, Catholics were once under attack from the nativist movement. White Protestants tried to expel Irish and Italian immigrants as "others" from American society during the nineteenth century, and the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s assaulted African Americans and Catholics alike. However, by the 1950s, Catholics became a crucial part of conservatism as many joined McCarthyism in the early Cold War period, and Catholic intellectuals such as William F. Buckley Jr, L. Brent Bozell, and other *National Review* writers constructed conservatism as a political philosophy. Therefore, Catholics played a crucial role in transforming modern American conservatism in the twentieth

37. Gupta, "Why Young Men of Color Are Joining White-Supremacist Groups."

century.³⁸

Likewise, Blacks, Latinos, and other right-wing minorities have recently modified conservatism toward a racially inclusive, but possibly ideologically exclusive, political movement. How will political partisanship take shape in the future, with the white population shrinking and the American population turning more racially and ethnically diverse? Taking minority conservatives into consideration, the downswing of the white population does not necessarily indicate the collapse of conservatism or the decline of the GOP, and minorities will be more significant for understanding why conservatism is so sustainable in U.S. politics.

38. For the roles played by Catholics in the history of American conservatism, see for example, Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Martin A. Trow, *Right-Wing Radicalism and Political Intolerance: A Study of Support for McCarthy in a New England Town* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 91, 119–21, 191–92.