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“SAVAGES,” “ANIMALS,” AND “CRIMINALS”: CAPITALISM, RACIAL THREAT
AND THE U.S LONG WAR ON IMMIGRATION

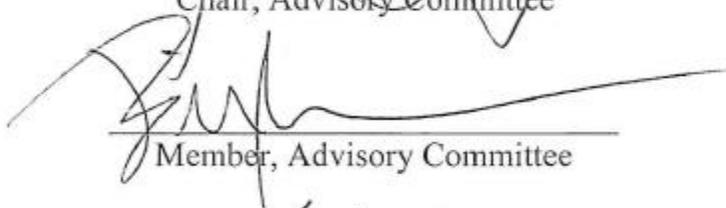
BY

ROSSANA DIAZ ASTETE

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Date: 11/7/2019

“SAVAGES,” “ANIMALS,” AND “CRIMINALS”: CAPITALISM, RACIAL THREAT
AND THE U.S LONG WAR ON IMMIGRATION

BY

ROSSANA DIAZ ASTETE

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Eastern Kentucky University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

2019

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DEDICATION

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”

Galatians 5:14

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Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to each and every man, woman and child that is or has been at some point in their life, an immigrant. You are not an 'other'.

You are not a 'burden'. You are not a 'threat'. You are me and I am you. We all belong to each other.

ABSTRACT

From mass shootings targeting specific ethnic, racial and religious communities to detention centers for immigrant children, it is imperative to ask of such violent contemporary phenomena: "how did we get here? How is this possible in a place like the United States?" The purpose of this study is to begin to address such questions by analyzing the historical legacy of dehumanizing narratives towards immigrants, and by querying how that history may shape and inform contemporary manifestations, illustrated by the rhetoric stemming from the Trump administration. Examining examples of such rhetoric through ethnographic content analysis of President Trump's speeches and social media posts, this study ultimately finds that the president relies on the same dehumanizing tropes and myths regarding non-white people-groups, particularly immigrants, that have long-circulated in the United States. This dehumanization is instrumental to several purposes, including leading to increased profit for the companies that contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the provision of political scapegoats in times of crisis; and the upholding of symbolic power to a white majority. This last purpose can be seen in the various historical attempts by elites to curate a white-majority nation for the sake of power in numbers and is part of a broader (white) nationalistic approach by the administration. Adding to the established literature, this thesis also proposes that such racialization within capitalism is a way of safeguarding those considered to be in power from the dehumanizing labor necessary to capitalism. Non-whites, and eventually poor whites, are pushed to those places of dehumanizing labor within society, in order for the whole system to survive. Although the purposes this

dehumanization serve might seem to be at odds with each other at times, the push for the survival of the socioeconomic system triumphs over its internal contradictions.

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I. Introduction

Initially, the focus and purpose of this study was to be a warning against the dangers of the systematic use of dehumanizing rhetoric towards specific people groups, particularly when delivered from the office of the President of the United States of America. As of August 3rd of 2019, the work presented in this thesis became tragically dated. Only a few weeks before, Donald Trump, 45th President of the United States, grinned at the suggestion of shooting immigrants at the border in order to “stop them from invading” the nation. In one of his never-ending campaign rallies in Florida, Trump asked the following question to the cheering crowd, "How do you stop these people?" to which an attendee replied, "Shoot them!"; Trump paused and smirked, answering that "only in the pan-handle you can get away with something like that." Trump showed no condemnation regarding the attitude nor an effort to caution against such violent approaches. Three months later, Patrick Crusius conducted one of the deadliest mass-shooting in the U.S. this year (Hesel and Rosenblatt, 2019), opening fire at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas in a predominately Latino area, killing 22 people and injuring 24 more. When investigators inquired on the motive, Crusius claimed that “he wanted to shoot as many Mexicans as possible” (Attanasio and Weber, 2019). Just two months after the shooting, in early October 2019, national media revealed that Trump had discussed a variety of violent measures for the border that until that point had never been made public, including shooting people in the legs, constructing a moat with alligators or making sure the top of the wall had spikes that would ‘pierce human flesh’ (Attanasio, Bleiberg and Weber, 2019).

News outlets have portrayed what they define as the "border crisis." News of migrant families being separated, resulting in Child Detention Centers (O'Leary, 2019), outraged some of the population while others read in fear about the supposed 'hordes of migrants rushing towards the border'(Du Cann, 2018).

Now, more than ever, it seems imperative to ask the questions that have been populating the consciousness of many, "how did we get here?" "How is this possible in a place like the U.S.?" The answer is, unfortunately, a bit more anticipated than what many people would like to believe. For years the United States has sustained and pushed, for its convenience, the image of the "dangerous foreigner" onto almost anyone and everyone considered to be a threat to the status quo of the nation. The notion that Child Detention Centers are considered "un-American" presents a narrow perspective that misses the broader issues of systematic racialization for profit, in a nation built on this very phenomenon.

In "The Holocaust Analogy," Zoé Samudzi (2018) warns us against the reductionist aspects of isolated comparisons between Trump's rhetoric and the propaganda of the Nazi regime. Urging us to examine both the phenomenon at hand and the "foundational aspect of American racism" that lays pervasive underneath the surface of modern-day America,

If children like Yanela [the crying little migrant girl famously featured in the *New York Times* front page (Garcia and Holson, 2018)] are only visible through the attempt to imagine our own children being stolen and our own families being ripped apart, we become able to pretend that routine dehumanization is not a familiar and foundational aspect of American racism, which then becomes invisible. Because white racialized seeing is largely trained to focus on a single issue at a time, it sees and protests detained Central American migrant children while failing to see and protest against the quotidian practice of holding non-white children in juvenile detention (para. 12).

Samudzi examines the need for an analysis that goes beyond the immediate spectacle of undeniable cruelty. The issue at hand is more significant than just the crises of today, it is part of the broader historical process of dehumanization and control to maintain a specific type of social order. There is also the problem of the creation and reproduction of governments or institutions that stand to benefit from such malicious gains.

For Dr. Aviva Chomsky (2018), the current administrations' obsession with immigration goes beyond a matter of outrageous racism. Although undeniably embedded in the fabric of this country, white supremacy and its elicited white anxiety are not ends in themselves but a few of the means utilized to achieve the real objective at hand: economic and political capital and the ongoing need to maintain racial capitalist social order. Furthermore, the most interesting question to ask here is, who benefits from all of this? For Chomsky, the answer is rather clear; there is both an economic gain and a symbolic gain, that stems from the utility of dehumanization and otherization. Economically, the increasing vulnerability among immigrants positions them as extremely exploitable for potential employers and mechanisms of incarceration and control, with both of these sectors (private and public) acquiring a massive utility from this situation. The symbolic gain can easily be translated into eventual economic gain as well, fomenting a "sense of national insecurity [that] makes the population as a whole more amenable to authoritarianism and a growing police state" (p. xxiv). Greater control provides greater potential for economic gain. Chomsky later analyzes the historical roots that drive this anti-migratory rhetoric and those that benefit from them.

Television and media spectacle is a simple example of the branches of a much larger tree of dehumanizing rhetoric. Currently there are two visible parts of said tree, the tree trunk, the dehumanizing rhetoric coming from the official administration of the government; and the branches; the controversial policies approved within the administration, the exacerbation of public racial discrimination, the collective support of border wall initiatives, and racially motivated mass shootings. The roots, although hidden, are not much different than the rest of it. The historical dehumanization of people groups, particularly those considered as non-white, are precisely the solid roots of this phenomenon.

The repetition of certain tropes and myths regarding these groups is what sustains and feeds the tree of targeted dehumanization, all of this, growing strong in the soil of white supremacy through the push for whiteness as the preferred American identity. The tree metaphor helps us understand the interconnectedness of the different factors involved in a situation like the one we are currently facing today. Following the groundwork laid by Chomsky, this thesis attempts to first, provide a historical examination of the production of racial difference and threat, discussing those who benefit from the rhetoric. Second, this thesis examines examples of said rhetoric through select quotes from the campaign trail of then-candidate Donald Trump, paying closer attention to the discourse that collapses immigrant and “terrorist” into one category of racialized threat. Perhaps the warning comes a little too late now, but it is essential to look at this discourse at the early stages (the campaign trail). Here is where we will hopefully be able to identify the reproduction of the same set of common myths regarding immigrants and those typified as ‘racialized others’ throughout U.S history. These myths construct a deliberate narrative

of systematic otherization with the purposes of exploitation and expropriation of cheap labor in order to accrue an elitist national wealth. Immigration is portrayed as a threat to the U.S' ingrained nationalistic way of thinking, purporting one racialized perspective and attempting to make it the dominant narrative in regards to immigration.

This thesis will address the different aspects of this metaphorical 'tree'. Chapter one will discuss the soil, the fertile ground in which dehumanizing rhetoric towards racialized others grows. In order to do this systematically, it will be based on the analysis of Erika Wilson's "The Legal Foundations of White Supremacy".

Chapter Two will turn to the historical dehumanization of people groups, recognizing particularly the birth of certain tropes and myths regarding the nature and danger of those considered "non-white." Chapter three will address current manifestations of the model: the dehumanizing rhetoric stemming from the Trump administration, summarized in the words and policies of Donald Trump, finding within his words the same old tropes and myths regarding non-white people groups, particularly immigrants. Time and time again, immigrants are used as political scapegoats, through a rhetoric used to instigate division and secure power dynamics. This rhetoric, if unchallenged, fosters a society of increased totalitarian and authoritarian forces, under all forms of social control.

Methods

The first portion of this study is a historical examination of four specific people groups in the United States that have been framed as "racial others" at different points in history, such as indigenous and immigrant populations. The experiences of these people groups are utilized to illustrate the foundations of white supremacy in U.S legislation and

society (Chapter 1) and its eventual reproduction throughout history for the sake of power and control (Chapter 2).

The second part (Chapter 3) is an ethnographic content analysis that traces this racialization of social others to current times. Specifically, we will be placing the focus on immigrants as the population of choice for dehumanization and exclusion in modern American society. Chapter 3 examines some of the most iconic quotes of Donald Trump on immigrants and people of color, primarily from the 2015-2016 presidential campaign trail. I chose to focus on the political discourse of Donald Trump as an attempt to signal towards the earliest hints of the current partisan situation. From all of Trump's campaign speeches, I selected instances in which Trump referred to immigrants either directly or indirectly. Through the analysis of historical precedent presented in Chapter 2 and the pertinent literature review on the matter, I was able to recognize and code specific themes within the immigrant narrative in United States history and later identify them embedded within the speeches Donald Trump delivered in the campaign trail.

II. White Supremacy: Means to an End

"The oft-repeated phrase 'this is a country of immigrants' ...[...]...refers to European Immigrants. Only by a large stretch of the imagination could Native Americans, or enslaved Africans be included in the category 'immigrants.' U.S immigration and naturalization policy was one piece of a national political structure and identity aimed deliberately at creating and preserving, a white country. The legacies of this history are very much with us still today"

Aviva Chomsky (Chomsky, 2017,p.75)

In the previously mentioned illustration of dehumanization in U.S history, the soil in which this 'dehumanization tree' grows is clearly fertilized by the white supremacy found in many aspects of our current U.S society. In "The Legal Foundations of White Supremacy," Erika Wilson (2018) distinguishes three specific pillars on which U.S law has built and sustained white supremacy throughout history. The first pillar is the historical construction of race as a valid social distinction, which established a racial hierarchy still embedded in U.S society. Eventually, the validity of this perceived difference based on racial categories was deeply questioned. Slavery's abolition, the end of segregation and the push for educational integration are some of the most iconic representations of this historic struggle for racial equality in the U.S. The surviving pushback to these efforts was the creation of a race-conscious legislation that would distribute "resources in a way that favored those raced as white over everyone else" (p.4). Wilson recognizes these set of laws as the second pillar of white supremacy in U.S legislation. The third and final pillar is what the author defines as a system of "color blind" laws that eventually turns into a "post-racial" society, as the ultimate sustainer of racial disparity in the United States. These three pillars are built upon each other to legitimize and sustain the oppression of those considered non-white. In order to better

illustrate these three stages, this thesis will review some examples of particular cases of people groups racialized as non-white throughout U.S history, primarily through the codification of their skin as "brown" or "black."

The Construction of Race

The construction of race as a concept not only creates a division among people, but it places them within a hierarchy as well. Aided by the negative beliefs and myths that perpetually accompany 'social others', the racial hierarchy takes form and facilitates the consolidation of systematic oppressive treatment. In "Anti-Muslim Prejudice and the Psychic Use of the Ethnic Other", Caro Hollander (2019) addresses the problem of prejudice behind the exercise of white supremacy. Hollander cites Neil Altman's findings on the correlation between whiteness and the capacity of successful self-governance and freedom. For Altman "white identity is infused with the fantasy of mastery and freedom" and for that reason "such omnipotence is a pathology requiring the psychic use of an ethnic other as the repository for the disavowed and project human experiences of constraint, vulnerability, and lack. White control over access to autonomy and freedom is a privilege that each immigrant group has had to fight its way into, some more successful than others" (p.76).

Historically speaking, indigenous populations living in what eventually became the United States, were the first people group of many to suffer under the lethal consequences of systematic dehumanization by being framed as dangerous social others. These new meanings created around the concepts of "racial others" were mostly based on religion and supported by the physical and cultural differences externally exhibited by the indigenous populations,

For the colonizers, the Indians were not only monstrous, pagan cannibals; they were also in league with the Devil. Just as more and more thinkers were beginning to discuss the idea of a 'universal humanity' (in the form of a universal human nature, morality, law, or a combination of all of these and more) which might include the Indians, so at the very same time ways were found to discuss the Indians' fundamental inhumanity. The accusation of 'Devil-worshipping' was one such way, easily and quickly used as a direct mechanism for the subjugation of indigenous peoples (Neocleous, 2016, p.226).

To argue against the religious argument of good vs evil was futile at the time. The best way to antagonize and justify greater dominance and consequential subjugation was precisely to stand on this argument as long as possible.

The perceived difference through skin tone, language, and overall culture furthered this idea of dangerous difference that somehow, needed to be controlled. Wilson (2018) concludes "To conceptualize race as biological suggests that group differences are deeply embedded in nature and highly determinative of group character" (p.5).

As formal education began to consolidate as a discipline, the history of the United States began to develop from a vastly Anglo-Saxon viewpoint, by exalting the bravery and courage of the colonists, portraying the struggle between them and the indigenous populations as a symmetrical battle. Little is discussed about the actual difference in technology or the abuses perpetrated even after the ceasefire (Yacovone, 2018). The brutality with which the colonists treated and crushed indigenous populations occupying the territories before them was never truly addressed. It was only until a few decades ago where the need for accurate historical representation arose, calling proper attention and accountability towards the historical American Indian genocide (Ostler, 2015).

From early on, the racial component attributed to citizenship is undeniable. In 1790 the benefit was strictly limited to free white men. Although Indigenous groups far

preceded the arrival of the “white man” to the U.S continent, the Anglo-Saxon European colonists made no allowances for those considered outside the in-group. They were attempting to build a settler society with an invasive mentality. The goal was never to coexist, but to coerce and dominate. Proof of this attempt is that, in 1819 Congress effectively passes the Civilian Act for assimilation, as the government "provided U.S Government funds to subsidize Protestant missionary educators in order to convert Native Americans to Christianity." During these systematic attempts for dominance, Indigenous populations offered organized resistance. This resistance proved to be effective on a few occasions (Little Bighorn, Fetterman, Grattan), but eventually the technology and the threat of foreign invaders (both human and biological) overpowered the Indian Nations. The Indian Removal Act in 1830 consolidated this dominance through the forced removal of Indians east of the Mississippi river. Thirty-four years later, the U.S army massacred 300 Cheyenne Indians in the Sand Creek massacre. These episodes of colonial settler violence are just a few flashpoints in what came to be known as the Indian Wars. The inhumanity with which American Indians were treated was far from over. With discourses of "civilization" and "assimilation" (Berger, 2008, p.593) the Indigenous groups living in the U.S territory were effectively reduced and erased from the social landscape of the new country that was being built.

Through these few examples, we can observe and understand the detrimental consequences suffered by specific people groups, in the face of dehumanization through racialization and fear. Another people group infamously framed as a "dangerous other" was the African American population inhabiting the U.S. While experiencing a similar otherization by the white elites of the time, the dehumanization of African Americans in

the U.S seemed to be a response to a further economic need. This infamous relationship between them and the very foundation of the United States is a rupture that carries on today. Even though white supremacy has affected every other people group not considered "Anglo-Saxon-white" as illustrated in this project, no other people group has suffered such systematic dehumanization for profit and expropriation of labor and body like those individuals brought from African regions. The construction of race in the context of the United States was championed and pushed forward for this very purpose, codifying African individuals as indentured laborers that would eventually become slaves (Gardiner, 2009). From the moment of their capture, Africans were not considered people, at least not at the same level that white European individuals were. An excellent example of these value differential in society is the 3/5ths clause of 1787, which declares that, for demographic purposes, a black slave would be counted as 3/5ths of a white free man (Simba, 2014). Although not explicitly stated, to count one people group over another as unequal, particularly for representation purposes is nothing but telling. Due to the lack of representation racist arguments of inferiority and superiority comfortably nested and grew. Slavery as an institution was based on the perceived inferiority of individuals of African descent, in comparison to Anglo-Saxon Europeans, and was mobilized by the profit and benefit that the subjugation of the former to the latter would ensure. It was perceived that "with the guidance of the white man," African Slaves would help develop the country financially, while they received the wage of merely existing under the tutelage of such gracious masters, who in turn would teach them the ways of civilization. However, in order to ensure constant domination, the "condition" of the

Black individual was never one to be "healed" or "resolved" from but an innate sin they committed with their skin tone, their physical features, their "race."

WEB Dubois (1965) famously coined the concept of "wage of whiteness", referring to the set of advantages and privileges that white people have in society, beyond similarities of class. Racism is not an arbitrary random phenomenon, but an ideological tool carried for centuries with the purposes of oppression and control. On the sociological "beginnings" of racism in the United States, Chang (2012) cites the hypothesis presented by historical Geographer Cole Harris:

The polyglot assemblage of Euro-Americans, Canadians, and Anglos united by a shared sense of dislocation and uncertainty regarding their new environment, responded to the dizzying heterogeneity and flux by 'reconceptualizing themselves; fixing on their whiteness, intensifying their racism' and 'abstracting their ethnicity.' 'Whiteness' Harris argues, 'became the first and most essential marker of social responsibility. From this idea of race followed a number of boundary operations intent on affixing spaces for insiders and outsiders'. This project of creating a monolithic white racial identity was part of an effort to impose stable categories of difference, bringing ethnoracial order to culturally plural societies (p.2).

Although slightly different treatment of color and status, Spanish and English colonies both alike treated a non-white individual as a 'second-class member' of society (Gonzalez, 2001,p.20).

In "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy," Martinot and Sexton (2003) referred to the continuous and omnipresent aspect of whiteness within U.S history, as a principle consistently repeated and exercised throughout time,

What are wholly and essentially immanent are the structures of racist reason that produce practices without motive. 'Police procedures' become pure form because they are at once both self-defined and subordinated to the implicit prerogatives of this political culture. They empty the law of any content that could be called justice, substituting murderousness, and impunity. The 'social procedures' that burgeon in the wake of this engineering also become pure form, emptying social

exchange as the condition of white social cohesion. It flattens all ideals of political life to a Manichean structure that it depicts as *whiteness versus evil* (Emphasis added p.176-177).

Eventually, the meanings attributed to skin tones gain dangerous legitimacy when accompanied by powerful dehumanizing ideas built on cultural rhetoric that borrows primarily from universal ideas of good versus evil. If we position self and our identified community, in this case, white America, on the “good” side of this dichotomy then any non-white other is considered “evil” by default.

Race-Conscious Legislation

Although concepts like ‘property rights’ were not an established norm within the social order of native communities, colonists arriving to U.S shores found no problem in subjecting indigenous inhabitants to sets of rules and regulations of this nature from the beginning. Through the Doctrine of Discovery, it became quite easy to extend a legacy of appropriation among the European settlers. “European, Christian visitors arrived on new lands, they automatically gained sovereignty and property rights of the lands if the indigenous inhabitants of that land were non-European and non-Christian” (Wilson, 2018, p.7). Indigenous people groups were immediately disqualified from being land-owners, as their skin tone and perceived different culture disqualified them from participating as equals within the U.S social order. From the beginnings of what many people would call “American History,” Indigenous Americans have been defined as outsiders in their own homeland. Eventually, what fragile identity and existence that remained within the U.S territory would be continuously eroded through increasingly excluding legislations.

It is precisely this exclusion that would eventually place Native Americans in a similar position of vulnerability, along with other primarily immigrant people groups.

By 1871, the Indian Appropriation Act was passed “dissolving the status of Indian tribes as nations”(Wilson, 2018, p.7). The allowances made by the U.S government to slaughter buffalo as a means to eliminating one of the primary sources of food for the Plains Indians, while taking over territory, forcefully pushed the remaining groups out of the way and into a complete loss of their territory. The 1887 Dawes Act finished the job by dissolving tribal lands, favoring white settlers while prohibiting communal land ownership, a staple among indigenous tribes (NADP, 2006). That same year, the Supreme Court decided in favor of the Anglo Corporation, Maxwell Company, “allocating millions of acres of Mexican and Indian land in New Mexico”(Adams, Bell and Griffin, 2007,p.3H-3). After 125 years of struggle, the only tribes still standing were the ones called "the Civilized Tribes" (Cherokee, Chocktaw, Seminole Creek and Chickasaw), tribes that had to make severe compromises in order to stay alive.

By 1924 the Indian population in the United States was so irrelevant regarding their political and social power, that in an attempt to appease the general discontent of the treatment they had received for years, the Indian Citizenship Act was signed. All Native Americans were granted U.S Citizenship, and ten years later, with the Indian Reorganization Act, 2 million acres of land were restored to tribal ownership. However, this came with a price as by 1954, the implementation of said act led to the legal dismantling of 61 tribal nations within the United States (Adams et al, 2007). By then, Native Americans were effectively no longer a threat to the established Anglo-Saxon regime.

In 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, allowing any white man to capture a Black-American and accuse them of being a fugitive slave “solely on the sworn statement of a white person, with no right to challenge in court”(Adams et al, 2007,p.3H-2). Enslaved people had no rights over their bodies, their lives, their families, and their time. Due process was never expected in the trial of a slave, neither was the benefit of the doubt under any accusation by a white man or woman. As W.E.B. Dubois (1965) writes, the wage of whiteness is clearly beyond a financial advantage, but a symbolic capital that is socially constructed, withheld and reproduced. Much like suggesting open borders amid today's immigration debate, suggesting the abolition of slavery at the time was considered treason to the United States because going against slavery was considered going against the country in itself.¹ In 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued during the third year of the civil war, in this "all persons held as slaves --- within the rebellious states--- are henceforward shall be free" (Adams et al, 2007,p.3H-2). This only applied to those states that had seceded from the Union, excluding certain parts of the Confederacy already taken by the north and some border states. The promise of freedom, once again, carried some notable fine print. African Americans were free to fight for the white man, but not free to be one of them. As a way of controlling and regulating the social landscape post abolition, some of the Southern Legislatures adopted the Black codes defined in the words of one Alabama planter as: “stringent police laws to govern

¹ In 1859-White Abolitionist John Brown leads a raid on Harper's Ferry arsenal to get weapons for arming slaves to resist slavery. Most of his men were killed, and he was tried for treason and hanged. Tried for treason because at the time going against slavery was going against the United States.

the Negroes—this is a blessing—” he continues “for they must be controlled in some way or white people cannot live among them” (Alexander, 2010, p.28).

In 1866, the first Civil Rights Act was passed, but quickly in 1875, Congresses backtracked, protecting "individual freedoms" claiming that "federal government cannot regulate behavior of private individuals in matters of race relations." Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896 and the constant struggle for equality and freedom during the twentieth century undressed the reality of what being black in the United States truly was and is still today. The perceived and constructed racial difference between Black Americans and White Americans was and still is, used as a weapon of control and power. From slavery, until the last remaining piece of formal separatist legislation with Loving v. Virginia, the unforgivable sin of blackness continues until this very day.

Accepting African Migrants under Refugee relief acts seems to be two-folded as well, as one hand provides small scale solution to a bigger problem, while at the same time maintaining these paternalistic power dynamics of "savages" being “saved” from their savagery and civilized into the white man’s world. Once again, the interventionism and exploitation of the United States create these vulnerable populations that in attempts to flee from the perils of broken economies and social systems, seek to reach a more fertile land. Knowingly or unknowingly looking to inhabit the land of one of the main culprits in their calamity.

A final aspect of race-conscious legislation that is vastly related to the concept of citizenship is the way immigration has been framed in the United States. This topic will be discussed in-depth in Chapter two, through the discussion of two more people groups

in the U.S codified as non-white and dangerous: Latino people groups and Middle Eastern people groups.

Colorblind and Post Racial Society

The third legal pillar of white supremacy that Wilson (2018) identifies is the construction of a colorblind and post-racial society as a response to the Civil Rights Act. According to the author, the law eventually shifted to a "colorblind liberal individualism" that reduced race as a "benign classification based on phenotype" (p.11). By simply denying the years of exclusion and segregation, along with the refusal to adjust an already heavily racist status-quo, a legal colorblind structure advances the brokenness of a system that refuses to heal. In the same way, post-racialism rests on the premise that issues of race and injustice have already been "solved," and there is no longer a need to discuss and seek better ways of constructing society. Both of these shifts, the emphasis on liberal individualism and the call to deny a racial problem, are still discourses heavily reproduced by specific agents of media, political representatives, and opinion leaders.

The first example of this lingering segregation can be found by looking at the recent history of the housing policy in the United States. Homeownership is one of the markers of financial establishment within American Society, so it comes as no shock that one of the most significant disparities among people in the U.S is precisely owning property. This serves as the final result of a series of discriminatory measures geared towards people of color, at multiple levels: racialized wage gap, bank, and housing loan difficulties, and continuous redlining districts. Although the housing market favorably changed since the era of legal discrimination, in the last decade and a half, there has been an alarming trend to turn back to old patterns. According to the rates presented by Urban

Institute Researchers, Michelle Singletary (2018) for the Washington Post: "From 2000 to 2015, that gain was more than erased as forces within and beyond the housing market aligned to reduce the black homeownership rate to 41.2 percent", by 2015 "black homeownership rate was virtually unchanged since 1968" (Singletary, 2018). The many obstacles to own property, the silent segregation of entire neighborhoods and mandatory school districts, are some of the factors that keep a racial and economic class of individuals stuck on the same historical disadvantages.

Additionally, failure to provide consistent and fair opportunities for education advancement can also play a part in the perpetuation of inequality. In *Ghosts of Jim Crow*, Michael Higginbotham (2015) quotes Richard Kahlenberg, "black and Hispanic students...were eight times as likely as white students to be stuck in high poverty elementary schools (those with more than 75% of students from low income families) and fifteen times as likely to be in high poverty middle and high schools" (p.184). The problem of unequal educational opportunities not only reproduces the racial poverty cycle but it makes it even harder to break it. Although, there has been some efforts to 'level the playing field', their scope is narrow. Policies and measures have yet to address more substantial necessary changes that could truly make an impact in impoverished school districts, which are predominantly populated by poor whites and people of color. Higginbotham continues to urge for foundational changes but recognizes the problem in a legislative apparatus that refuses to take responsibility on the matter (p.185).

As previously mentioned, a racialized wage gap will also be a deciding factor in pushing certain people groups into positions of economic vulnerability, under others (Higginbotham, 2015, p.202). Subjecting specific populations to harsher measures and

terms within the banking system and isolating them from the consumerist process entirely, effectively pushes them to the margins, hoping for these people groups to fail within society. Their failure finally grants them a sense of ‘utility’ for the socioeconomic system as they enter into the criminal justice system to be further exploited. In *The New Jim Crow*, author Michelle Alexander (2010) dedicates an entire book to the definition and description of a post-racial society highly segregated into social castes. According to Alexander, the criminal justice system is the new segregating tool and the ultimate creator of a lower social caste, on which a capitalist society builds its exploitation.

Barack Obama’s election in 2008 presented the illusion of a post-racial United States. But as previously established, the challenges were far from over. In fact, part of what is being discussed in this thesis is deeply connected to the backlash experienced after Obama’s presidency. On the subject, Jeremy Nesoff (2017) asserts:

The idea that we achieved a post-racial society with the first black president was a heavy weight for any one person to hold. The challenges and constraints that came with this notion are a reminder that there is a long road ahead to resolve our racial tensions....[...]... We can come to recognize the way to achieve this is not through one person alone, but through a collective reckoning. As a nation we must face our past-and present- racial tensions before we can create an inclusive future for everyone (para. 6).

III. Racialized Others and Danger: Constructing the Myth

“Whites were part of the community of ‘men’ by virtue of being here. Blacks were excluded from the community of ‘men’ by virtue of having been enslaved by white people. Arguments about the rights of citizens and ‘aliens’ today reflect many of the same ideas. Immigrants may be physically present—as African Americans were—but they are excluded from the community that is accorded rights. Rights are reserved for the portion of the population defined as ‘citizens’”

(Chomsky, 2017, p.82)

In the first chapter, we have been able to recognize and discuss the legal foundations behind white supremacy in the United States. However, this white supremacy is not the end goal of U.S society, but merely the means to an end for a greater objective-- the systematic otherization of certain people groups for the sake of control and prevalence of a racial capitalist social order. Several authors have proposed that this notion is better understood from the assumption of a racialization of capitalism, or racial capitalism.

For Nancy Leong (2013), racial capitalism is “the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person—is a longstanding, common and deeply problematic practice” (p.2153). Leong asserts that racial capitalism is better understood through the exploitation and expropriation of white individuals and white institutions over non-white individuals through an extended period of time. She uses examples of affirmative action and diversity initiatives as symbols and illustrations of tokenism for the sake of economic profit. Another definition of racial capitalism is the one found in Gargi Bhattacharyya’s (2018) work, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism*. In his book, the author defines the phenomenon of racialization of capitalism through different historical moments, while constantly adhering specifically to a framework of labor and the social organization that surrounds it. For Bhattacharyya, racial capitalism “is a process by which capitalist formations create by default the edge-populations that serve

as the other and limit of the working class...[...]... Capitalism can affect the racial, political, and socioeconomic makeup of spaces.. This is done in a variety of ways from expelling some populations while containing others and adapting to local conditions to take a variety of mixed forms” (p.6). Here is where these ideas of containing, excluding and expelling populations are materialized through the experiences of those racialized as non-white. The ultimate goal is to dehumanize populations and their labor in order to pursue their exploitation.

Another fundamental voice on this subject, is the late political theorist, Cedric Robinson. Professor Robin Kelley (2017) discusses Robinson’s definition of racial capitalism arguing that for Robinson, capitalism emerges from the feudal order “in the cultural soil of a western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism” (para.5). This emergence is an act of survival from the same old order to the new system now dependent on the predominant illnesses of an increasingly violent world that sees profit and social control in genocide and slavery. Capitalism stands as the result of a full permeation of racialism within western feudal society.

The first European proletarians were racial subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma, Slavs etc.) and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism and slavery within Europe. Indeed Robinsons suggested that racialization within Europe was very much a colonial process involving invasion, settlement, expropriation and racial hierarchy...[...]... capitalism was not the great modernizer giving birth to the European proletariat as a universal subject and the tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate to exaggerate regional subcultural and dialectical differences into ‘racial ones (para. 5).

Once again, the malleability of the concept of race is crucial. As the people racialized through history changes, the idea of one dominant ethnic majority stays the same.

Although the concept of ‘whiteness’ might vary, time and time again the ethnic majority

seems to resemble some version of this idea of ‘whiteness’ rooted in Anglo-Saxon heritage. Furthermore, Robinson traced this idea of racism back to medieval Europe and the rise of a system in which the fabrication and repetition of negative narratives towards specific individuals was utilized to sustain a deeply hierarchical society. These narratives had distinct racial origins to separate those considered ‘noble’ from the rest of the working population. Eventually the expansion of slavery allowed for this social order (and the narratives sustaining it) to go beyond national and continental boundaries (Thomas, 2013). Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007), a prominent scholar on critical geography and follower of Robinson’s teachings, expands on the concept of ‘group-differentiated vulnerability’ as the process in which these dehumanized people groups are pushed into a path of premature death or racism. Adhering to Robinson’s definition of racial capitalism, Wilson Gilmore’s *Golden Gulag*, frames the case of prison expansion in California as yet another ‘fix’ to remedy the crises of land and labor, another tangible example of the utilization of vulnerable populations to provide economic and racial scapegoats in times of crisis (Petitjean, 2018).

This dehumanization is not confined only to skin color, but extended to the notion of otherness grounded in a constructed idea of difference based on culture and ethnicity. This expansion is made possible by the consolidation of particular sets of beliefs and ideas about certain people groups that are established and reinforced throughout history. Essentially, those that were problematic to ‘otherize’ based on the debatable nature of said difference (the historical fluidity of ‘whiteness’) are otherized through other ways, like the empowering and creation of contrasting narratives of danger. So when the skin difference is not enough, their otherness is exalted and played up by creating and

reinforcing narratives of danger. Upon analyzing the selected quotes from Donald Trump's campaign trail, we are able to recognize the recurrent people that he racializes as "dangerous."

In Trump's speeches, he consistently talks about the problem and culpability of immigrants racialized as Latinos in U.S society, and the perceived danger that immigrants in general impose upon citizens. He also has a history of evoking perceived terrorist threats from Middle Eastern states and their correspondent citizens. Because of this particular antagonizing of specific groups, in this chapter, we will briefly address the historical misconceptions of Latinos and people from Middle Eastern regions in reference to the public political discourse in the U.S

As previously stated this work will address the historical aspects of dehumanization in the United States, exclusively connected to the myths and tropes attached to the idea of non-whiteness. As we move forward on our attempts to understand the salient dehumanizing rhetoric of today's U.S, it is necessary to continue the historical analysis of the treatment of those considered non-white within U.S society. Noting the significance of any attempts to understand what is currently happening in western society, Bhattacharyya (2018) urges us to look at the importance of the role of "racist expropriation or categorization in remaking populations in the service of capital" (p.27) and for such purposes "there must be consideration of what has gone before and the continuing impact of what has gone before" (p.27).

For the reasons previously established, in the following chapter we will turn to a brief historical overview of two specific people-groups in the United States whose dehumanization has been strongly attached to a rhetoric of fear and danger. First, we will

briefly discuss the historical experience of Latino people groups in the U.S and how their perceived threat came to be framed mostly, but not exclusively, as an economic one. And second, we will look at the rhetoric of danger behind the supposed threat that Middle Eastern people groups represent. Through strict and exclusionary policies regarding immigration, the illusion of ‘threat control’ is better achieved, appeasing the generalized fear that the rhetoric elicits in the general population.

Latino groups have been historically defined mostly as economic threats, as opposed to Middle Eastern individuals, who are generally seen and understood through rhetoric and media as threats of violence and mortal danger (Lee, 2005). US policy and practice has historically homogenized these diverse groups of immigrants and been deeply antagonistic to them. In the following sections we will look at the specific negative narratives attached to each people-group and then we will turn to the common argument of the conflation of immigration and danger.

Latino Immigrants - Immigrants as Economic and Political Culprits

During the formative years of the United States, there was a constant influx of individuals coming into the country. Some were brought by force, others enticed with the idea of a new beginning. Unlike those racialized as white, all these non-white people groups did not have the chance to become a citizen by any means. They were considered workers but not immigrants, a fundamental distinction to understand when discussing the problem of race and citizenship in the United States.

A Harvest of Empire

In his book, *Harvest of Empire*, Journalist Juan Gonzalez (2011) presents an informative overview of the historical origins of Latino migration into the United States.

Gonzalez utilizes the most representative Central American countries and reflects on their recent history in order to understand their migratory processes to the United States.

Through a compilation of compelling historic testimonies, Gonzalez crafts the argument of moral and historical responsibility in response to immigration, alluding to the history of political interventionism the U.S has in most of the countries from which the majority of Latino immigrants come. Towards the end of Getzels' documentary (2012) based on Gonzalez's book, the author reflects:

The harvest of the empire is that all the people of the former colonial nations are coming to the metropolis, they are coming to the very countries that used to dominate them. The reality is that those advanced countries need their labor because those older countries that fought in World War II, and produced huge baby boomers generations, are now growing old and they are going to need somebody to work in their country to maintain their baby boomer population and those workers will inevitably come from Asia, Africa and Latin America

In order to better understand the patterns of Latino Immigration to the United States, it is important to consider the historical relationships between the United States and its neighboring countries in the south while considering the complex factors of economic expansion, labor relationships, and U.S foreign policy.

For decades now, the United States government has participated in numerous efforts to repress and control Central and South American nations in order to safeguard its own economic and political interests. The examples of U.S interventionism among South American countries are vast and numerous. The topic of U.S interventionism alone has spawned extensive academic work on the matter (Carothers, 1993; Chomsky, 2015; Klein, 2007; Kolko, 1988). Through the School of the Americas (SOA)², the U.S has

² The School of the Americas (SOA) refers to the military training facility located in the Panama Canal Zone in 1946. Initially intended to serve as a supplement to other training programs with basic courses on infantry and cavalry. Soon thereafter [the Cuban revolution], courses focused squarely on combatting

funded and trained thousands of individuals who would later commit the most aberrant atrocities supporting savage dictatorships that displaced, tortured, and killed thousands. The most emblematic cases occurred in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, among many others. Historically speaking, these interventionist efforts were framed as attempts to fight the “spread” of communism in Central and South America. Eventually, these efforts would prove to be quite versatile as the level of political control affirmed and advanced economic dependencies as well.

In *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein (2007) provides an interesting example of this systematic interventionism, framed as a doctrine of control. By taking advantage of political or natural disastrous conditions, the United States often inserts its power and dominance in foreign economies with the sole purpose of economic profit and the assertion of political power as a form of imperial dominance. In her book *They take our jobs!*, Dr. Chomsky refers to this neocolonial relationship of dominance and power as one of indirect governance, and as the United States exerts political/economic control over those territories, “this vast network of American [military] bases on every continent except Antarctica actually constitutes a new form of empire’—an empire of bases” (p.126). It is in this particular neocolonial relationship of imperial expansionism where we can identify important contributing factors in the movement of large portions of a country’s population. Ultimately, beyond the personal narratives behind the force to migrate, there’s a consistent pattern of displacement due to economic, political and social

Marxism in Latin America. Its courses included counterinsurgency and psychological operations, with an operational emphasis. Many of its graduates later became implicated in human rights abuses in their home countries (Weeks, 2015)

reasons that act as the “push” factor for migration. The “pull” for many immigrants lays in the distributed narratives regarding the United States as a land of opportunity and wealth. A narrative sustained and pushed forward by the entertainment industry that purposely also permeates the cultural markets of the nations in discussion as well (p.126).

Labor, Race and Citizenship

As previously stated, Latino immigrants in the United States hail from several different countries. As of the last Pew Research Study report, Mexicans (both foreign born or domestic) comprise the largest population of Latinos in the United States (35,758,000), followed by Puerto Ricans (5,371,000) and then Salvadorans (2,174,000) (Flores, 2017). As for many other people groups entering the United States, labor has historically been at the root of it all. In a wildly capitalist society, access to cheap, effective and uncomplaining labor was an ideal model of development for the United States, particularly at the forefront of the losses of war. Yet, the relationship between the U.S and Mexico dates decades before the first labor agreements were even conceived. Author Natalia Molina (2014), refers to this relationship through the lens of two racial scripts, indigeneity and whiteness. “The war and the ideology of Manifest Destiny that justified it, highlighted Mexicans’ inferior racial position due to their indigenous roots” (p.24). Through the systemic construction of a racial hierarchy, it is possible to maintain the white Anglo-Saxon individual as a perceived superior better equipped to sit at the top of the social hierarchy. Any other individual considered non-white, particularly those of indigenous origin, was once again perceived as inferior and in need of dominance and if possible, salvation.

The case of Mexican individuals in the United States has been quite particular through time. As a people group, they have experienced a back-and-forth of acceptance and rejection, depending on the historical moment of the nation, and the possible gains behind their “legalization” and “illegalization” as citizens of the U.S. Throughout history, when labor has been needed, Mexican immigrants have been received with open arms (Mize, 2006) yet once they have fulfilled their economic purpose, the U.S relies on their transient nature for them to go back home or simply resorts to their deportation (Hernandez, 2018). This deportation is utilized as a means to racially restore the U.S population since Mexican immigrants have mostly been considered “unfit” to partake in what is defined as the “American way of life”. This concept is traditionally understood as white and Anglo-Saxon in its very essence.

Although the U.S has never had completely open borders, the limit with Mexico was mostly permeable as needed. Flows of workers could cross back and forth as they were not considered a threat to the white American establishment. Mexicans were said to be “birds of passage”, here to work and do what was needed, but when it was over, they were to go back to their place (Molina, 2014, p.29). During War World II the need for workers was such that no immigration legislation considered Mexicans as a people group to be excluded. This was not a matter of empathy, but an economically calculated move by the government and the States of the south in which the economy relied heavily on the cheap labor of migrant workers. It was only in 1964 with the abolition of the Bracero program and the 1965 Hart-Celler Act when Mexican individuals were finally included within immigration restrictions, through the national quota act. It is at this point in history that Mexicans were first considered “immigrants” where before, they were simply framed

as temporary workers. This did not stop migration through the Mexican-U.S. border, it simply gave it a different name (Chomsky, 2014). It is at this point in history, with the 1965 Immigration Act, that unauthorized border crossing became illegal in itself. This is where the criminalization of immigrants begins to take force, culminating in what we see today in society.

The Profits of Illegality

This creation of the “illegal” concept now conferred upon undocumented or unauthorized immigrants serves different purposes. For those workers still being recruited to come and work in the agricultural field, criminalization didn’t make much of a difference. They would still come through a long and hard trip, work long and extraneous hours, and get a low-wage for their efforts. Perhaps, the wage would be even smaller and the conditions harsher, yet, they would still show up to do the job. For those transporting them and hiring however, the gain was tremendous. Without the Bracero program, workers were now exposed and vulnerable under employers that were not subjected to any type of accountability. The temporary workers were now unprotected and at the mercy of their employers. It is no longer necessary to assure humane living conditions, healthcare access, or even livable wages. By criminalizing “illegals” (and not those that hire them) it is much more profitable to hire undocumented workers than attempt to hire any domestic worker willing to do the job.

Although applicable to them, the vulnerable position in which undocumented workers find themselves, regularly keeps them from truly partaking from the dividends of most labor rights. The vulnerability of the undocumented individual is comparable perhaps to that of the criminalized individual. Chomsky once again draws the parallel

with the concept of “legal disability” that Michelle Alexander (2010) covers in her book, *The New Jim Crow*, claiming that the attributes or conditions applied to criminalized people are the same as those racialized as illegal: “They can’t vote, they can’t serve on juries, they aren’t eligible for public benefits, they are legally prohibited from working” (Chomsky, 2014). Looking a bit back in history, Molina (2014) draws a similar parallel between early Mexican labor in the U.S and slavery:

The emphasis on comparing Mexican labor to slavery reminds us that there is always something at stake when racializing a group. Slavery was a political economic system designed to extract the greatest profits for whites. Regarding blacks as racially inferior helped whites justify using them as slaves. The low-wage labor Mexicans engaged in the Southwest was in no way comparable to slavery; the thread that runs through both political economies, however, once again places an emphasis on the profits for those at the top of the power structure while disregarding those doing the labor (p.29).

In order to safeguard the Anglo-Saxon root of American lifestyle and the white supremacy attached to capitalism in itself, it was important to know how to purge undesirables from the U.S while still being able to exploit them at will. Hence, the creation of illegality within migratory categories. Gradually it was no longer accepted to discriminate based on the color of someone’s skin, yet, it was still possible to attach criminality to skin tone and perceive ‘cultural difference’ and eventually discriminate on that basis.

Through this criminalization, the myths of violence and danger begin to take form. The “illegal immigrant” is no longer simply a racial other, but a dangerous racial other that functions outside the law. In 2010, then ICE Director John Morton circulated a document to all field office directors, field agents and chief counsel. This document is informally called the “Morton Memo”. It aimed to portray a message of ‘leniency based

on discretion’ on the immigration legislation of the time, but ended up being a vague message on discretion and enforcement plagued with very problematic language (Navarrete, 2011). “The language emphasizes vague threats, risks, and dangers that immigrants might pose; intertwines immigration law with criminal law; and specifies categories of immigration violations that are defined as ‘egregious’ such as ‘illegal re-entry’ and engaging in ‘immigration fraud’” (Chomsky, 2017, p.xvi-xvii). Fanned further by the media and public discourse, the negative mythology of an evil, lazy, and criminal immigrant persona consolidates the profile of a new danger to our nation.

Here lays the final and most important function of the criminalization of the Latino immigrant, beyond the economically exploitable persona: the undocumented immigrant is the ultimate scapegoat. Economic crises are quickly pinpointed to the “influx of illegals taking American jobs”(Danner, 2019) and violence, instability, and perception of insecurity can be attributed to those “moving outside the law” to get American benefits and exploit the system.

The Latino Threat

The notion of a perceived cultural invasion by Latin American individuals, particularly those coming from Mexico, who undermine the supposed fragile identity of the U.S. has been dubbed *The Latino Threat*. In his book by the same name, author Leo Chavez (2013) cites several right-wing alarmists, including Samuel P. Huntington, that fully embodied this ideology of danger and imminent threat. Huntington, for example, asserts that “The invasion of over 1 million Mexican civilians is a comparable threat [as 1 million Mexican soldiers] to American societal security, and Americans should react against it with comparable vigor. Mexican immigration looms as a unique and disturbing

challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity and potentially to our future as a country” (Chavez, 2013, p.22). By reinforcing and reproducing constantly a narrative of “invasion”, the figure of the Mexican or Latino immigrant (here lumped all together) becomes a dangerous enemy that not only needs to be feared but excluded and eradicated from the society that has already been built.

One of the most effective ways of furthering these myths is utilizing the number of people of color (particularly Latinos) incarcerated as a way of “proving the point” of their criminality. The reality is that the rate at which these people groups are incarcerated vastly surpasses the rate of white-American incarceration as a result of specific immigration and criminal justice policies and practices that constantly target Latino populations as a threat (Chavez, 2013, p.22). In the essay “Latinos y el Nuevo Jim Crow”, Juan Cartagena (2017) speaks of the junctions between the racialized society that Michelle Alexander (2010) describes in *The New Jim Crow*, and the applicability to the same parameters to the Latino population. Although Alexander speaks primarily on the systematic criminalization of African Americans today as a direct legacy of slavery as an institution, Cartagena claims to find the common ground between the racial struggle of African Americans and Latinos in the United States. Instead of coming from a legacy of slavery in itself, the systematic exclusion and discrimination of the Latino stems from a legacy of racial domination, colonialism, and imperialism steeped in Latin American history (Alexander and Cartagena, 2017).

Although the historical origins of this discrimination is different, the core of its distinction still lays in the preservation of a white supremacist dominance in society. “Afrolatinos had to live in the segregationist world of Jim Crow like the rest of the

blacks, whether it was within the military service, public spaces, sports leagues, schools or the job field” (Alexander and Cartagena, 2017, p.17). This co-existence extends to this day, and through the systematic criminalization of Afrolatinos in the justice system. Latinos, by living and sharing spaces with those racialized as “black”, are subjected to the same profiling policies while driving, walking, or simply existing (Fagan, Braga, Brunson and Pattavina, 2016). This deferential treatment is reflected in the rate populations of color are incarcerated: 1 in every 245 white American is in prison, as opposed to 1 in every 96 Latinos and 1 in every 41 African American (Alexander and Cartagena, 2017, p.22). Similarly, for Latinos, skin is viewed as an accusatory factor, a cause for possible danger, and a call for immediate attention from the policing forces of society.

Immigration and Criminality

As previously mentioned, one of the most frequently utilized arguments against immigration is the perceived directly proportional relationship between immigration and criminality (Palloni and Hagan, 1999). Although the lack of connection between criminality and legal status (Mears, 2002) has been proven time and time again, most conservative voices insist in making these claims as a banner of security and safety (Hayworth and Eule, 2014; Miles, 2019; Trump, 2019a; Watson, 2019). Consistently, experts and studies from different parts of the political spectrum have confirmed that there is no direct correlation between legal status and criminal activity. In fact, if there is any effect, it goes in the opposite direction. First generation migrants are less likely to commit criminal offenses than their U.S-born descendants.

The systematic victimization of Latino immigrants (primarily undocumented) contributes to the cycle of their criminalization. Here we can see the importance in maintaining and promoting these narratives of danger and fear upon these non-white bodies. In the case of those individuals of Latino origin, their body in itself represents a fault when existing beyond a certain border. By criminalizing these individuals simply by existing in a particular space, they are conflated with any other criminalized individual. They are not only exploited through their incarceration, but simultaneously they suffer the expropriation of their own labor by partaking in the unregulated labor market. Lastly, once this vulnerable population has been dehumanized and labeled as dangerous they are framed as the culprits of the faults of a capitalist society. Contemporary negative rhetoric towards and about Latino immigrants is the result of an ongoing and racialized historical fabrication of difference that serves political and economic agendas of those in power at different historical moments.

Middle Eastern Immigrants - Immigrants as Terrorists

"I've only lived in a period where Islamophobia, anti-Muslim rhetoric, is always present, everywhere I go...[...]...Whether that be the eighth grade, being called a terrorist for the first time, or whether that be the shooting a few days ago." - Nayab Khan. 22-year-old student at the University of Pennsylvania (Fadel, 2019).

Behind the creation of an effective political enemy, there is usually a powerful rhetoric sustaining it. In the United States, religion has proven to be one of the most effective pillars to the advancement of specific political narratives. By positioning Christianity as the moral norm and the absolute truth within a society, any other type of belief that does not espouse the same tradition is immediately accused as an attack to the fundamental aspects of society. As an example of this, people-groups from Middle-

Eastern regions were immediately categorized as ‘exotic’ and ‘fundamentally different’ based in the historical antagonism between Christianity and Islam. This narrative is only effective as long as people-groups are all indistinguishably lumped together. After this over-generalization is completed, the trope of the dangerous “religious other” can be applied liberally to anybody and everybody coming from those specific regions.

A fundamental work to understand this systematic otherization of those in and around the Middle East, is the book by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. In his work, Said discusses the large western imaginary regarding those nations and territories considered as “the East”. Here, purposely overgeneralized, the “East” is not one particular region, but a conglomerate of every nation in the Middle Eastern region and surroundings that did not share a common Anglo-Saxon ancestry. The lack of this common “Anglo-Saxon” quality has deemed certain people groups and regions to be considered vastly different and even dangerous. An “other” region supposed to be so fundamentally different in culture, religion and appearance, that the only way to face this difference is to subjugate it as inferior in an attempt of control, using a specific lens of understanding. Said called this lens, Orientalism. Orientalism is a consciously developed process of information, motivated on a narrative that obeys particular interests of control. As opposed to the labor racialization that those individuals coming from Central and South America suffered, individuals hailing from Middle Eastern Regions were racialized as others through their cultural and religious differences. They were people perceived to be different not only in appearance, but in law, values and world view. This was another effective way of fueling the divide between “us vs. them” (Hollander, 2010, p.76).

The Battle between Good vs. Evil

In relation to other similar people groups, the arrival of individuals from Middle Eastern regions was historically recent. It was only up until the twentieth century that their numbers became relevant in the general demographic landscape of the U.S. Between 1930 and 1940, there were only 130,000 people of Middle Eastern descent in the United States. With the passing of the Refugee Relief Act in 1953, this number increased. “Under this law, 2,000 Palestinian refugees were admitted to the U.S. Additionally, Muslim Arabs begin arriving in larger numbers than Christian Arabs”(Adams et al, 2007,p.3H-6). For decades, the existence of Arab Americans was exoticized and exclusionary, but never as controversial as African, Asian or Latino Americans.

By 2001, the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act completely changed the experience for Middle Eastern people in the United States. This act gave “the federal government the power to detain suspected ‘terrorists’ for an unlimited time period without access to legal representation. Over 1,000 Arab, Muslim and South Asian men were detained in secret locations” (Adams et al, 2007). Building upon the exoticization that Middle Eastern Americans had to suffer through the years, this new hegemonic discourse of “terrorism” and “evil” added a new (yet familiar) layer to the racial and cultural exclusion of people groups: religion.

Although religion had been constantly used in the past as an excuse for antagonism with almost every other people group, it was the first time in U.S history that religion moved front-and-center as the main argument for criminalization. While the fundamentally Christian origin of the United

States as a nation saw a perceived threat in religious diversity from immigrants of Catholic and Jewish origin, there is a vital difference with those considered Muslim since “Neither of these religions had a history of frontal confrontation with Christianity, where the fate of both depended on the outcome of the clash...[...]...conservative Western intellectuals describe recent events as “the Clash of Civilizations” and that most radicalized Muslims denounce the Western presence in the Middle east as the new Crusades” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2014, p.341). After 9/11 “Middle Eastern and Muslim immigrant communities became vulnerable to blanket racialization as ‘terrorists’, ‘potential terrorists’ or accomplices and sympathizers” (Lee, 2005).

As we have been able to observe throughout U.S history, the idea of immigration as a threat is far from novel. Time and time again, cultural differences have been used to accuse and present figures of danger that could potentially undermine the “American way” (Hollander, 2010,p.79), a concept that seeks to represent the intangible ideals of wellbeing and success that most U.S citizens vehemently adhere to. Along with the fervent Christian values of destiny and purpose, the role of “good agent” is attributed to the United States, as a country that boasts to build its foundation in God’s trust.

Hollander (2010) writes that,

From the early history of the American colonies through the birth of the nation, the social imaginary has been infused with themes related to Manifest Destiny, the historical belief that this country was ordained and destined by the God of Christianity to extend its civilization across the North American continent and beyond. Advocates of Manifest Destiny believed that expansion was not only good, but that it was obvious (“manifest”) and ordained as “destiny”. The theme of American exceptionalism, that is, the virtue of the American people and their institutions, can be traced to America’s Puritan heritage and to John Winthrop’s famous sermon of the “City built upon a Hill” as the new Jerusalem. Later exponents of Manifest Destiny argued on behalf of the God-given mission of the US to redeem and remake the rest of the world, a conviction that still

guides US foreign policy rationalizations for interventions of all kinds on every continent (p.76).

In the perceived fight between good and evil, the United States claims it “sides with God.” In this case, the Judeo-Christian God, which is considered the ultimate good in Western world views. Through this logic any and every nation or individual that becomes an enemy to the United States becomes an enemy of goodness, therefore, an agent of “evil”. The portrayal of the political enemy as an “evil doer” or an agent of “evil” evokes historical connections between religion and politics as they are inherited from a time where those two realms of society were interdependent.

Today, formally, religion and politics are separated but in a nation like the United States, the distinction between one and the other is merely theoretical. In practice, time and time again, political leaders have invoked religious (Christian) concepts to paint a specific picture regarding the world conflicts of the time³. Perhaps the clearest and most recent use of this rhetoric of evil can be observed right after the events that transpired on 9/11, as then president George W. Bush, addressed the people of the nation: “Today our Nation saw evil” (Bush, 2001). Eventually, this evolved to be an “axis of evil” (Glass, 2019) consolidating the sentiments the administration of the United States was trying to evoke and install in the collective mindset of Americans. David Frum, one of the original authors of the first speech in which the term “axis of evil” was employed, explains that his original choice was not the word “evil” but “hatred.” It was Bush himself who decided to replace the word hatred with evil, taking directly from the book of the psalms

³ Citing Marx and others, Neocleous calls attention to the importance of religion in American society as one of the most influential political institution.”(Neocleous, 2016, p.157)

(Neocleous, 2016) In fact “Bush would go on to use the term ‘evil’ over a thousand times—914 times as a noun and 182 times in adjectival form” (p.156). But, what is it exactly about this particular choice of words that calls so much for attention? Aren’t ‘evil’ and ‘hatred’ synonyms for that matter? The answer rests on the cultural connotations of the two terms. In a Judeo-Christian society like the U.S, evoking Christian sentiments is one of the most effective calls to arms in the midst of an armed conflict, since “Any nation that sees itself as blessed by God and as carrying out a divine mission is especially prone to demonize its enemies, and one finds that the state that regards itself as possessing a manifest destiny has a long tradition of suspecting that those who oppose ‘the American way’ must be in league with the Devil” (p.220). It clearly delineates the fight between “good and evil” and by calling out “evil”, we have immediately declared who are the “good guys”. This type of rhetoric paints a very black and white world, in which, the good guys (us) should and must do whatever is needed to stop “the bad guys”. The bad guys in turn, are then considered not really human (or at least not deemed to have the benefit of humanity) since they are evil, and there should be no consideration towards them when trying to stop them.

Neocleous (2016) recognizes the malleability and usefulness of conflating the devil with almost every political enemy in a vastly Judeo-Christian society. From the fight against the demonic savagery of Native Americans to the satanic political peons within Communism and the latest embodiment of evil through terrorism “once the devil had been invented there was no end to the enemies that could be described as in league with him; no end to the mobilization of security in the name of God and the Good” (p.250).

In another take on the question of enemies and evil, Rothe and Muzzatti utilize Cohen's moral panic theory to frame the social phenomenon that succeeded the events of 9/11 in America. According to these authors, for moral panic to take hold there needs to be a set of six different actors: folk devils, rule enforcers, media, politicians, action groups, and the public. Muslim and Middle Eastern individuals in post-9/11 America were contemporary "folk devil," or those labeled as the embodiment of evil (Rothe and Muzzatti, 2004, p.329). Within the understanding of a constructed moral panic, the rule enforcers would be perceived as the "good guys" in this fabricated duality of good and evil. These "good guys" will suffer no further repercussions (Hollander, 2010)⁴ or should respond to none other than god himself about what they do or not do with the bad guys. They do what 'needs to be done'. After attributing labels of "good and bad", dehumanizing others becomes easier. This is consistently aided by media, another actor recognized within the Moral Panic discourse, which consistently presents the western represented by the United States as beyond reproach, authorized to do anything needed to stop the bad guys or evil in question.

Once the notion of enemy has been thoroughly constructed, it can become flexible, applied to demonize other ethno-racial groups perceived as threats or groups seen to aid and abet them. Donald Trump has proven himself capable of manipulating such language to apply to racialized groups as well as the American media. In the article "Enemy Construction and the Press" Jones and Grow Sun analyze Donald Trump's relationship with the press and his constant efforts to antagonize it as the "enemy of the

⁴ By conceptualizing "Muslims as terrorists" as active and potential attacks to the "American way of life" It frames every response from the U.S as merely defensive and free from any possible criticism (Hollander, 2010)

American people” (Grynbaum, 2017). The authors discussed the essence of enemy construction from the standpoint of the sovereign and his capacity to attribute and construct arbitrary meanings. According to the authors, the writings of German political theorist Carl Schmitt are especially relevant. Schmitt analyzes the construct of the press as an enemy, and his “ideas express the zeitgeist of the creeping national- security exceptionalism that characterized much of the Cold War and that has deepened in many quarters since 9/11—an exceptionalism justified by the identification and declaration of a parade of “existential threats” to the American way of life” (Jones and Sun, 2017, p.1307). Thus, this sovereignty bestowed upon the political leader is utilized to define and declare who is the enemy at hand, which is any possible threat whether internal or external, attacking everything the community and the nation has built over the years and is perceived as the good and right ‘way of life’ (Jones and Sun, 2017, p.1308). Here is where the framework of Christianity and the conception of good and evil from this faith becomes “handy” to create these definitions of enemies, particularly, dehumanized enemies.

IV. Presidential Rhetoric and Fear

Immigrants and Presidential Rhetoric through the Years

In any type of successful political discourse, the context in which the discourse is produced and reproduced is of utmost importance. In her 2006 work, Vanessa Beasley discusses the added tensions that U.S presidents face at the time of formulating and addressing the nation, particularly after stressful situations. For Beasley, the rhetorical situation surrounding presidential rhetoric on the topic of immigration can be recognized to operate on three different levels: arguments involving the pragmatic politics of the moment, those linked to problems of that particular presidential administration, and those that “invoke the larger and more abstract symbolic themes of the mythos of U.S nationalism” (Beasley, 2006, p.5). The author also recognizes two themes in tension within the collective imaginary of U.S society: Immigrants as a symbol of hope and immigrants as a symbol of danger. Both themes are often referenced by authors and public leaders alike, but only the latter is consistently utilized in the rhetoric of presidential figures. While Beasley references these themes as coexisting and struggling for dominance within the public and presidential narrative, the reality is that in recent years, the negative rhetoric of danger and threat far surpasses the idealistic notions of immigrants as beacons of resilience and hope, as shown in the voting polls (Klinkner, 2017).

Although most presidents have operated among these three levels and have utilized a combination of these two themes (often overlapping among each other), Donald Trump is perhaps the only president in the last few decades to utilize in such a constant and overt manner those arguments invoking the deep-rooted nationalism and white

supremacy of U.S society. His overt usage effectively frames immigrants as dangerous, as well as an undeniable threat to the fundamental aspects of the US as a nation.

The Negative Shift

As we can see, although negative rhetoric towards immigration from presidential figures is not something new in the U.S, it has definitely experienced an exponential growth in the last decade. For Arthur and Woods (2013), three of the most significant predictors of negative rhetoric on U.S immigration within the presidential narrative are economic factors, geographic location and security concerns (post 9/11 climate) (Arthur and Woods, 2013). Although the factors in which immigrants are found as culprits are diverse, and change from administration to administration, it is possible to see a pattern of response, one that obeys to the political climate of the president's time. For president George W. Bush, the shift towards negative rhetoric on immigration came after his gradual loss of approval during his second term. For him, the most effective way to frame undocumented immigrants was to emphasize their "illegality," and the threats that this illegality might represent to the United States. Surprisingly, for President Barack Obama, the negative framing of immigrants did not rely so much on the illegality aspect of their stay, but instead upon the supposed detrimental economic consequences of their fault, "one might speculate that his use of the economic threat frame is response to the economic crisis he encountered upon entering the presidency"(Arthur and Woods, 2013, p.481). Although the findings of Arthur and Wood's work resonates with the common themes presented in this thesis, there is also an undeniable additional quality in Trump's rhetoric. It seems to be both the embodiment of the legacy of a society built upon racial exclusion, and at the same time, a somehow novel and loud spectacle that provides an

outrageous voice to white frustration as a whole. This frustration can be perceived as being fueled by the deep racial anxiety behind the economic instability of the times and the fear of losing one's apparent position of power or dominance over others (Chokshi, 2018). The perpetual rhetorical tension that past presidential figures have had to navigate—between upholding immigrants as the symbol of American hope and progress on the one hand and the necessity of creating and cultivating the image of the foreign enemy on the other—finds its final resolution in the person of Donald Trump. For Trump, the tug-o-war over this matter has ended. Immigrants are the problem, “America is full” (Irwin and Badger, 2019) and the time for openness and “opportunity for all” is over. Now is “time to take care of our own” (Tillett and Watson, 2018), when “our own” is clearly the white Americans that voted him in power.

The Trump Effect

For most of the U.S, it began as a joke, or at least, that is what most people believed it was; nothing more than a fringe candidate (Enten, 2015) that would eventually be swept away by the reality of the political race. Although his chances seemed slim, Donald J. Trump had announced his candidacy for president of the United States and the late-night comedy industry rubbed their hands with anticipation at the new and outrageous political material for satire (Bauder, 2018). What unraveled in the months coming after his announcement, can only be defined as an uncontrollable snowball of unfortunate candidates, well placed scandals and a legacy of structural racism and social discontent that turned Trump from fringe candidate to the sitting President of the United States.

From the beginning of his campaign, Trump's platform was overall consistent. He ran on the perceived "dispossession" of the primarily white middle class and the promise of a change within the political establishment, while painting himself as an outsider. His rhetoric, provocative from the very beginning, found early culprits to the troubles that affected the nation. In his campaign announcement speech, Trump presented the early clues that would set the tone for his message. The argument found within his words is simple; the problem with the United States is not only a matter of poor management (even though this is important as well) but the forgotten, so-called greatness of an "America" that he plans to restore. The culprits of this oblivion are not necessarily outside parties, but an enemy within that needs to be expelled in order to truly prioritize the United States. From its inception, the nationalistic approach of Donald Trump's campaign was clear.

Within Trump's rhetoric, three notorious themes emerge as the rationale for condemning immigrants to and in the United States. First, he largely defines them by criminal activity. Second, he goes even further to conflate undocumented immigration with terrorism, more specifically ISIS. Both of these claims are wholly unsubstantiated with no basis in data and reflect only his own personal ideas and impressions of the matter, or those of his advisors. Last, he employs a highly dehumanizing rhetoric that compares undocumented (and, at this point, criminal and terrorist) immigrants to animals and monsters. Completely detached from the human condition, these beings are therefore easier to exclude, deport, or even kill without the hassle of human compassion or empathy.

However what Trump has been doing is simply picking up the ever-present thread of racist and anti-immigration feelings, represented in the exaggerated language of ‘invading hordes’ of immigrants at the border, which have been championed repeatedly throughout U.S history (Chacon and Cardona, 2006, p.216). This sees its ultimate culmination in the exploitation of this white anxiety, represented here in the words of Fox News’ anchor Tucker Carlson (Estrada, 2019):

No nation, no society has ever changed this much, this fast. Now, before you start calling anyone bigoted, consider—and be honest—how would you feel if that happened in your neighborhood? Doesn’t matter how nice the immigrants are, they probably are nice...That’s not the point. The point is, this is more change than human beings are designed to digest. This pace of change makes societies volatile, really volatile, just as ours has become volatile (para.6).

The importance of presidential rhetoric is not simply anecdotal. The president of a nation, particularly one like the United States, holds a significant amount of symbolic power that can be easily translated into material power. On the president and his rhetorical influence, Woodrow Wilson explains that once the “confidence and admiration” of the people is positioned on the figure of the president he is a force of influence that “no other single force can withstand”. For Wilson, the president takes the position of the “imagination of the country” (Novak, 2006, p.21). In the case of the United States, the president also shares the title of “the leader of the free world,” a lofty accolade that multiplies exponentially the symbolic power his or her words bring upon those listening to them. Herein lies once again the importance of analyzing from a critical mindset the problematic rhetoric championed by Donald Trump and his allies, from the campaign trail to the office.

Immigrants as Agents of Violence

Since the campaign trail, Donald Trump has associated terrorism, criminality and immigration as one big phenomenon at the southern border, from the arbitrary lumping of middle eastern “terrorist groups” making their way to the U.S through the Mexican border (Gomez, 2019) to the hyperbolic and overblown treatment of central American gangs, such as MS-13.

Gangs such as MS-13 and others are very real problems that need addressing, however the scapegoating from the administration in regards to these groups demonizes entire populations of (immigrant) people. In addition to the outrageous claims of “Middle Eastern terrorists infiltrating the Central American caravans”, the numbers behind the presence of gang members among asylum seekers entering from the southern border are far from real. On Jan 9th, 2016, Trump (2016a, 0:59) addressed Ottumwa, IA:

From the beginning, I was strong against illegal immigration then six month later they figured out I was right. Than you have beautiful Kate In San Francisco and she was killed shot in the back by somebody that came in 5 or 6 or 7 times they don't know...[...]...All of a sudden Kate Is killed, Jamel in Los Angeles is killed—a veteran a woman 66 years old raped, sodomized, and killed by an illegal immigrant...[...]... not even to mention the jobs and the economy and all of the other things that are happening

The language here is vastly intentional. Defining the victim as “beautiful Kate”, as if a personal appreciation of her physical appearance would enhance her value as to make his argument more compelling (an MO that is not uncommon within Trump’s rhetoric (Filipovic, 2017), the seemingly unclear number of deportations of the perpetrator (5 clear deportations according to the record), the mention of Jamiel Shaw to sustain his argument and possibly add a more diverse aspect to it, and the specific choice of words regarding the case of Marilyn Pharis (a 64-year-old woman and not 66 as he claims) are

all clear indicators of a rhetoric embedded with a shocking and hyperbolic factor. On the same campaign trail, Trump (2019b, 28:03) brings up the same cases once again, this time in North Carolina;

Horrible things happened, you have Kate in San Francisco, beautiful Kate shot in the back by an illegal immigrant. You have numbers come out that were horrible what is doing to the economy...[...]...you have Jamiel...[...]...shot in the face by an illegal immigrant...[...]...shot him for sport!...[...]... You have the veteran, the... female... the marine the veteran in L.A was raped, sodomized and killed, 65 year old woman, raped, sodomized and killed. People are saying Trump is right, is really right we have a problem

In this passage, after mentioning the cases he concludes by saying that “Last year was reported 179k immigrants who are criminals”. Although the number might seem alarming, from those 179,000 reported by the DHS memo (Gehrke, 2015), it is impossible to know the cases within that number that have been criminalized simply by immigration violation. To simply state “immigrants who are criminal” as a blanket statement paints a dangerous and worrisome picture of possible gang members and “high-level criminals wreaking havoc” (like in the cases he previously mentioned) without truly leaving room for the large number of immigrants considered “criminals” as well, simply for crossing a border unauthorized or failing to renew authorization papers in time. Not clarifying between the “crime” of unauthorized immigration and the crime of rape, assault, or murder, allows for an instillation of overgeneralizing rhetoric which diminishes the apparent need for further analysis of actual facts which surround them.

In Cleveland in July of the same year, Trump (2016b, 9:24) went on at length speaking about the biggest and most important problem of “illegal” immigration: the violence. He begins by explaining how the number of people crossing the border had already doubled since his speech the previous year, however that was not entirely

accurate. In fact, in the past years (including the years he was referencing) unauthorized immigration had been on steady decline (Qiu, 2018). Once again, he alludes to this idea of chaos, using it to his political advantage, and we begin to see what will eventually turn into this concept of “invasion” or “crisis”, culminating in the declaration of a National Emergency in 2019 and a push for the construction of a border wall. It is also quite interesting that during the same speech, Trump claimed that “Of all my travels in this country, nothing has affected me more deeply than the time I have spent with the mothers and fathers who have lost their children to violence spilling across our border” (Trump, 2016b, 45:12), his claims of compassion for the very real grief experienced by these parents is selective and does not seem to extend, by contrast, to the large number of children killed by gun violence in the United States (Mervosh, 2018), which is a far larger number of violence than any which can be attributed to undocumented immigrants. Of course, as we know, the NRA is one of the most faithful supporters of Donald Trump (Newman, 2019), so alluding or speaking on the number of children and adults that are lost every year to gun violence would not be in his interests to further his agenda. He claims that this “violence spilling across our border” is something “we can solve. We have to solve it”, but there is silence and rejection on his part when legislation regarding gun control is brought to the table. It seems that Trump is only moved by the grief of parents’ whose children’s death serves the presidential rhetoric, anything that goes against his platform is not only ignored but even actively opposed (Allen, 2018).

During his speech in Miami, Florida in November of 2016 Trump (2017a) brought national attention to a new case of fatal violence perpetrated by an undocumented immigrant: “Countless innocent Americans have been killed by illegal

immigrants. Last year, as an example, 17-year-old Starlett Pitts, her boyfriend and her mother were stabbed to death in their Lee High Acres home by an illegal immigrant” (Trump, 2017a, 27:49), once again using “countless innocent Americans.” As the numbers are far from “countless”, the effect of such an incendiary adjective weighs heavy among his supporters and strengthens their ideology regarding undocumented immigrant violence.

In a further attempt to fan the flames of fear, Trump declared that “Hillary has pledged totally open borders, meaning you don’t have a country anymore” (Trump, 2017a, 27:00). Although Clinton’s policies are certainly not as drastic as Trump’s, in no way was Hilary Clinton’s platform presented or intended as an “open borders” policy (Gregorian, 2018). In another opportunity, he boldly claimed that Hillary Clinton actually “unleashed ISIS to the world” because she has “failed at everything” (Trump, 2016d, 56:45). Eventually, his final remark on the matter always seems to end the same, on Trump himself, as opposed to Clinton, finally using his presidential powers to efficiently fix and take care of everything. “A Trump administration will stop illegal immigration, deport all criminal aliens and save American lives.” Besides the lofty promises on very complex issues that have not been resolved in years of U.S history, the last three words are perhaps the most telling in the statement: “save American lives.” Neither Trump, nor those represented by this type of rhetoric, have the common good in mind. They do not govern for the sake of mankind, instead for the “American kind”, a select category of human beings that is truly worth protecting.

The reality behind the conflation of violence, danger and immigration is a stark contrast with the position that Donald Trump has sustained over the years. Studies

continuously show no correlation between criminal violence and immigration status (Burnett, 2018). This is a stance widely accepted and supported. And yet the administration and those unofficially a part of it (such as the right-wing media conglomerates) consistently push for a rhetoric in which the immigrant is only shown as directly related to extreme violence. From that reasoning and within that framework, the immigrant must also be feared by the general population, and punished by the corresponding authorities.

Immigrants as Economic Culprits

Extensive research shows that presidential approval is highly correlated to the perceived health of economic indicators. Problems in the economy along with higher rates of unemployment have proven to be one of the key factors when criticizing the performance of a president in office. “In other words, when the economy is doing well, Americans say that the president is doing his job well. The inverse is also true when the economy is doing poorly, Americans say that the president is doing his job poorly” (Arthur and Woods, 2013, p.472). In an attempt to capture or regain the approval of the people, presidential figures resort to placing blame on the underclass (mostly composed by racial minorities), the repercussions of an economic system plagued with inequalities (Cohen, 2008). However, in an interesting turn of rhetoric, Trump attempts to bring African-American and Hispanic-American voters to the conversation, by appealing to their supposed “benefit” of supporting his immigration stance. He does this by pinpointing the consequences of undocumented immigrant influx upon their communities and people: “No group has been more economically harmed by decades of illegal immigration than low-income African-American workers” (Trump, 2016e, 11:30).

In this remark, there is a complete disregard for the real obstacles that African-Americans⁵ face every day in a capitalist society that favors whiteness over all. He then continues to say that he will “restore the civil rights of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and all Americans by ending illegal immigration” (Trump, 2016e, 23:20) appealing to the very real problem of justice that people of color face in the U.S. Placing the blame for the perils faced by African-American and Hispanic-Americans on immigrants is grossly reductionist. As we have discussed in chapter one, attempting to understand the challenges of African Americans in the U.S from any other lens besides the historic legacy of white supremacy would be incomplete. The subsequent problems of a supposedly post-racial and colorblind society are in direct connection to the economic system at large, and are in no way a result of the flow and interplay of migrant populations into the national territory.

Immigrants as Terrorists

By conflating immigration with terrorism as one similar phenomenon, there now seems to be a valid excuse for persecution, one which allows no consideration for immigrants and immigration at all. The meaning inherent in that ideology, that all immigrants are terrorists, and all terrorists are immigrants, lumps them together and allows both to be considered as one similarly dangerous threat. Although, no individual considered a “terrorist” has been caught crossing the southern border “politicians cultivate a permanent fear that terrorists are across the border blending into the stream of migrant workers coming into the country” (Chacon et al, 2006, p.216). The utility of

⁵ As a substantial example, the limited access to the banking system as banks deny housing and business loans to African Americans at a disproportionately large scale in comparison to white Americans (Weitz,2018; Yale, 2018)

otherizing and distancing the figure of the migrant worker from the “average American” is imperative. Now, it is not only an other that speaks different, looks different and ‘might take your job’, but he is also a highly dangerous creature that can inflict direct and inhuman harm. For this reason, any and all measures taken against him no matter how tough they can be, are justified. And with that reasoning, those actions can now be considered a matter of “national security.”

The well-oiled and historical machinery of prejudice works well for Trump, allowing him to negatively racialize those of North African and Middle Eastern descent. As discussed in the previous chapter, the issue of prejudice towards individuals of North African and Middle Eastern regions pre-dates 9/11. But the amplification effect that this event had on the U.S perception of those framed as “Arab” and Muslim, is undeniable. On the issue of Islamophobia, the findings are increasingly alarming. In a study conducted through the years 2008-2011 by the Gallup institute, findings show that Americans showing the largest bias towards Muslim and individuals of Middle Eastern descent are those with the least amount of education (Gallup, 2011, p.16). A large portion of them claim to have little to no knowledge of Islam, and yet still manage to maintain negative views about the religion and the people profiled as professing it (Gallup, 2011, p.13). It is unsurprising that those reporting the most prejudice towards Muslims are more likely to identify themselves as Republicans (Gallup, 2011, p.17). Trump is both a spokesperson for the party and the ideals behind it, while simultaneously being the instigator of these ideals, using overblown rhetoric and fueling the same historical machinery that brought him to power.

After 9/11 the concept of “national threat” was “refreshed and reinstalled” in the public mindset. “Keeping people safe” is such an enticing concept that there is almost no section of the general population that would not adhere to these values. The problem however, is not necessarily the idea of keeping the people within a country safe, but the means and the allowances made for those “protecting said country”. By turning all immigration matters to a specific agency of safety and security like Homeland Security “the government is sending the message that all immigration, not just those immigrants who have links to terrorism, should be considered a matter of national security” (Lee, 2005, p.4). The discretionary power of the U.S., when it comes to issues considered of National Defense has no limits, hence, the complex and problematic nature of dealing with immigration issues from a national security standpoint. In *No one is Illegal*, Chacon discusses this point by framing this argument of conflation of immigration and terrorism as a two-folded device of scapegoating: “By promoting the illusion of “out of control borders” and “invading hordes”, the right wing seeks to inflate the issue and deflect attention away from its failures and unpopular policies” (Chacon et al, 2006, p.217).

On October 26th, 2016, Trump “warned” about the seemingly reckless position of Clinton on immigration, claiming that she wants to “allow 550% increase over what president Obama is allowing (Trump, 2016e, 24:45) regarding Syrian refugees. First, the 550% claim goes clearly in line with the constant stream of exaggerations utilized by Republican candidates. Moments before the hyperbolic number, Trump is quoting saying: “Don’t forget many of these refugees are coming from Syria and other parts of the world we don’t know where they are from who they are, what their thought process is; and they are being let in by the thousands” (Trump, 2016e, 24:25). Although this statement is

ridiculous, it is somehow effective in furthering this idea of “strange” and “different” to his audience. For Said (1994), the ‘Oriental’ constitutes an ontological pathology. Existing is a crime, the crime of precisely being an ‘oriental’. “The ‘oriental’ was seen not as a citizen or even as a person but as a racial form...[...]...rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed...as problems to be solved” (Cheng, 2013, p.151),

Once again, this idea of a ‘culturally imprecise being’ with all of its perceived potential differences, posing a fundamental threat to U.S society. Saying, “we don’t know where they are from, who they are, what their thought process is” alludes to an ideal all-knowing vetting process which simply does not exist. On the contrary, when it comes to asking for asylum in western nations, the United States of America has one of the most extensive and exhaustive processes in operation. Trump also appeals to the “strangeness” and otherness of these refugees by bringing up their “thought process” as something that the average American needs to worry about (Gilsinan, 2018). Interestingly enough, Mr. Trump never actually mentions countries that have proven ties to terrorist organizations, such as Saudi Arabia, but seems dedicated to antagonizing nations like Syria and Iraq instead. Perhaps the active economic ties that the U.S government possess with Saudi Arabia, weigh a bit more heavily than the actual prospect of national danger (Trump, 2017b).

In another instance in Appleton, Wisconsin, Trump (2019c) posed the question to his audience as to “who these undocumented people might be?”(24:05). It does not matter that the practicalities of people coming from the middle east, infiltrating to the US through the Mexican border are incredibly impractical, he purposefully wonders: “We don’t know who they are. They’re undocumented. Are they ISIS? We don’t know where

they come from...[...] we are taking in thousands of people and we don't know where, we have no idea where some of these people—probably all of these people come from, they have no documents, are we crazy?" (Trump, 2019c, 24:06)

“Are we crazy?” (Trump, 2019c, 24:37) he asks the crowd once again, permitting them the illusion of arriving to their own conclusion. Although delivered coarsely, as most of his flamboyant rhetoric is, Trump, has communicated something quite powerful. Simply by bringing up the undocumented status of the people mentioned, there is a new path of reasoning regarding the dangerous nature of those undocumented. Innately, we don't know who they are, what they want or what their capacity to harm “us” may be. As he guides them down through this path of questioning, it becomes easier and almost effortless to conflate being undocumented with potential danger. The fact that we “don't know who they are” is reason enough to assume their dangerousness, and successively their exclusion, expulsion and/or punishment. Consequently, when he calls out for “closing our borders to terrorists” he is, in fact, calling for the closure of American borders, and seeking to inhibit the admittance of anyone seeking asylum within those borders. This would not be limited to those directly connected to terrorist efforts, but anyone deemed as a suspected, dangerous other . Anyone from certain areas, anyone without documentation, allows these people to fit the part of the “dangerous stranger”. Here, to be unknown is to be dangerous (Trump, 2016c).

The Power of Rhetoric and Its Consequences

As previously mentioned in the anterior chapter, when looking at the dehumanization of immigrants from a moral panic perspective, we recognize the importance of several factors in the conception of this generalized fear. One of them is

the voice of political leadership: “It is important that politicians present themselves as purveyors of the moral high ground. As such, they often align themselves with the press and the rule enforcers in a struggle against the evils perpetrated by the folk evils” (Rothe and Muzzatti, 2004, p.329). Within this quote lays the importance of the nationalism displayed when calling to arms and battle against those that have been defined as a threat. Using a slogan such as “Make America Great Again” not only taps into those nationalist feelings and tendencies that have been bubbling under the surface for years, but also presents a unified front against the perceived foreign and racialized menace, whose brown face presents demographic and existential threats to American lives (Trump, 2016f).

Besides hyperbolic numbers, abuse of superlatives, and over-patriotic language, Trump’s rhetoric is peppered with interesting key words that serve as icons of the underlining dehumanizing message. In order of “more human” to “least human” his terminology for those considered the enemy is quite colorful: criminals, barbarians (Trump, 2016b), animals and monsters (realDonaldTrump, 2018). For him, the path from criminal to monster is not long. “These people are criminals, monsters” he conveniently declares, mostly speaking of gang members, but conveniently not making any other distinction. It is important that the link between “immigrant” and “criminal” is connected and strong. Using words like “invasion” and “spreading” denote not only an occupation but an occupation from a non-human nature, a plague that needs to be seen as something other and void of eliciting any type of empathy. Referring to a ‘plague’ and an ‘invasion’ immediately evokes an idea of existential threat, a threat that must be eradicated at all costs. Another interesting example of applied terminology is the word ‘animal’, referring

to those suspected of committing acts of terror so awful that their actions are no longer considered human. On Twitter Trump announced that these “animals are crazy and must be dealt with through toughness and strength” (Emanuel, 2018). There is however one category of terrorists that Trump has not yet called “animals” or “monsters”, those accused of terrorist attacks under white supremacist allegiances. Although he attempted to defend himself by saying he was not calling every undocumented person an animal, instead referring to certain gang members, he continuously lumps these two groups together, applying the same label to the entirety of the population in the process. He has also made comments and remarks such as the following:

"Here's something that I wanted to read to you, OK? This has to do with illegal immigration....[...] Think about ISIS. Think about the Syrians. Think about what you're getting. Think about illegal immigration...[...]...This was written by the great Al Wilson.. You remember Al Wilson from years ago? Rock and roll singer. And I adapted it a little bit. But I will tell you, I just think it's great....[...]...Oh, shut up silly woman, said the reptile with a grin...[...]...You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in. Right? Right? Right? Do the vets agree with me? Right? You understand. I mean, it's so obvious folks. We're going to have problems like you've never had before. We're being infiltrated" (Trump, 2019c, 43:52).

Here, the language is explicitly clear. Trump goes beyond a simple label of “animals” and compares those coming into the country unauthorized to snakes, as if conveying the danger of a creature is not enough, he adds a layer of cunning and deceiving with his choice of animal analogy. Expanding on the concept of a non-human creature, his use of words like “infesting” (Klein and Liptak, 2018) clearly evokes imagery and feelings associated with a plague or even a disease. This particular language used is much akin to what was used in a different time and place in history, where people were referred to as rats or cockroaches in order to legitimize their systematic extermination (Livingstone,

2011). Once again, the conjured images of non-human enemies who are all willing to violently harm and pollute the good people of the United States with their very monstrous nature.

For Robert Terrill (2017), Trump presents a post-racial and post-ethical discourse that appeals to the ingrained white supremacy found among white America, all without awakening the potential white-guilt which might arise when discussing racial disparity in the U.S. In contrasting Trump's contribution with that of Carson's and Obama's, that represented a relieving illusion of post-racialism, Trump offers an 'ethical safe space', or a moral timeout. His presidency is a place where racism is permitted, and where white power can continue unchecked as the dominant and supposedly righteous power. "He crafted both a material and a discursive space where his overwhelmingly white audiences felt safe because it was a space within which they are insulated from the burdens of reciprocity and where citizenship is reduced to self-interest" (Terrill, 2017, p.505). With his "free floating assortment of vague assertions that are thrillingly untethered from the norms and obligations that might enable civil virtue. He invites us to reject all such burdens" (Terrill, 2017, p.505). It is in this space where he invites us to participate in a space that rejects any type of moral and ethical speech, "It is difficult to imagine a discourse less adequate for the cultivation of civic virtue or more corrosive to democratic ideals" (Terrill, 2017, p.506).

IV. Conclusion

Family detention centers, children in cages, and racially targeted mass shootings are some of the headlines that incite the inevitable questions among some of us, “Why is this happening? How is this possible in a free western democracy like the U.S.?” Shock, anger and disbelief are some of the reactions that many encounter when addressing these issues. However, is this so hard to believe? As previously stated, this is a nation built on white supremacy. The discrimination that propelled the systematic extermination of indigenous groups, the enslavement of African Americans and the exploitation and exclusion of many considered ‘racial others’, was once confined simply to skin, but eventually expanded quickly to location, culture and ethnicity in order to prevail. This expansion was achieved through the otherizing of almost anyone and everyone not racialized as ‘white’ and creating said concepts of racial difference in the first place. This marks the genesis of ‘whiteness’ as a category and value. Eventually this concept is reinforced through narratives of danger and otherness that would antagonize certain people groups. These beliefs, these same narratives of dangerous otherness have not changed. We can still recognize their existence as alive and well, for example in the discourse of Donald Trump, the holder of the most important office of the United States, and perhaps the most influential opinion leader in any democratic nation.

Why is this dehumanization occurring? Is it harm for the sake of harm? Or are there any other interests at hand? The utility of this dehumanization has different angles. One of them is the tremendous financial profit behind it. The carceral state as a whole (both the surveillance branch and the incarceration industry) benefit greatly from the continuous criminalization of those racialized as non-white. On the other hand, the

financial gain of unregulated or cheap labor presents high dividends of profit, for many industries, such as agriculture. Another angle, is the symbolic power that representation grants.

If one narrative is always considered as the norm, the power will reside in those considered the majority. The ever-present push for whiteness as a synonym of “America” (here understood as the United States) is powerful symbolic capital that eventually translates into political, social and financial gain. A third and more interesting angle to consider is the one presented by Gargi Bhattacharyya in the book *Rethinking Racial Capitalism*. The dehumanization of racial others is useful for the economy in the sense that it provides a myriad of benefits for those in power in a Capitalist state. It provides political scapegoats in times of crisis, furthering division and creating a climate of insecurity that prompts for a greater police and authoritarian force, which in turn allows for a greater control of the population. Eventually, the dehumanization of marginal populations is simply an attempt to save ‘themselves’ from the perils and injustices of a system plagued with them. Racialization within capitalism is a way of defending those considered to be dominant from the evil dehumanizing labor of capitalism, by redirecting this dehumanization towards other people groups that have been designated ‘less than’ or expendables (Bhattacharyya , 2018, p.21). This designation as ‘less than’ is carried out through specific tropes and myths that push forward this specific rhetoric of otherness and danger. This country is built on the foundations of racism and white supremacy with the purpose of feeding the greed necessary to sustain and reproduce a racial capitalist social order.

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