

Black Republicans:  
A Minority within a Minority

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And lastly, to truth and honor.

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## **Abstract**

Black Republicans are a rarity in United States politics, as illustrated by the 2008 presidential election when 95 percent of black Americans voted for Barack Obama while only four percent of black Americans voted for John McCain. Despite their relative obscurity, black Republicans are nonetheless important and influential. However, the literature on black Republicans has been neither well informed nor satisfying, typically portraying black Republicans as adherents to a single strain of Republican thought. In response, this thesis aims to document the diverse array of thoughts, opinions, and experiences among black Republicans. Nineteen black Republicans from Colorado, Georgia, and Iowa were interviewed and asked questions concerning their political identity, their positions on policy issues, and their experiences. This thesis aims to broaden our understanding of black Republicans and to postulate future directions to the study of black Republicans.

## Introduction: Black Republicans

In the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama handily defeated John McCain due to the diverse array of voters he was able to attract.<sup>1</sup> Black Americans were no exception, with Obama receiving 95 percent of their vote.<sup>2</sup> While it is tempting to focus on the 95 percent of black Americans who voted for Obama, there are intriguing questions about the four percent of black Americans who voted for McCain.<sup>3</sup> Who were these voters who self-identify as black Republicans?

Black and Republican. How is it possible to meld these seemingly contradictory identities? How could black Americans vote for a political party that many believe is antithetical to their needs? What do we know about this minority within a minority? Often, answers to these questions are neither satisfying nor well informed. Scholarly analyses tend to focus on the most prominent black Republicans, such as Ben Carson, Justice Clarence Thomas, Condoleezza Rice, and Thomas Sowell.<sup>4</sup> Less is known about rank-and-file black Republican voters. For many ordinary Americans, both black and white, black Republicans remain an enigma, and they have been objects of scorn and derision. In interviews for this thesis, the black Republican interviewees recalled being labeled as “Uncle Toms,” “traitors,” “Oreos,” “coons,” or “white folks’ niggers.”<sup>5</sup> Clearly, there is a need for more study of black Republicans that will further our understanding of this marginal and marginalized political group.

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<sup>1</sup> “Inside Obama’s Sweeping Victory,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified November 5, 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/05/inside-obamas-sweeping-victory/>.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study, I use the term “black American” instead of African American or African-American. “Black American” was the preferred term the interviewees wanted to be called. Some disliked the word “African” while others disliked the hyphen.

<sup>3</sup> “Inside Obama’s Sweeping Victory,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified November 5, 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/05/inside-obamas-sweeping-victory/>.

<sup>4</sup> “Black and Right: The Bold New Voice of Black Conservatives in America” by Stan Faryna, Brad Stetson, and Joseph Conti (ed.) and “Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America” by Michael Ondaatje are two premier works that focus on prominent black Republicans (see Works Cited).

<sup>5</sup> Even though the derogatory term “coon” can be used to describe any black American regardless of party affiliation, there are instances where black Republicans have been called “coon” because of their political affiliation (see Figures 1 and 2 in Appendices).

The literature often characterizes black Republicans as staunch conservatives opposed to affirmative action, social welfare programs, and other policies and programs black Americans typically support. Yet some of this thesis' interviewees defended the use of affirmative action and social welfare programs, and were concerned about mass incarceration, income inequality, and police brutality. These findings suggest that there may be more variety among black Republicans than previously thought. As Michael, a 22-year-old black Republican college student who was an interviewee for this thesis, stated, "There are ranges, there are levels to black Republican ideology. We are not monolithic."

The need to recognize variety has been articulated more generally by anthropologist Clifford Geertz:

*...the world is a various place, various between lawyers and anthropologists, various between Muslims and Hindus, various between little traditions and great, various between colonial thens and nationalist nows; and much is to be gained, scientifically and otherwise, by confronting that grand actuality rather than wishing it away in a haze of forceless generalities and false comforts.*<sup>6</sup>

Following Geertz, this study attends to the variety of black Republicans.

This study relied on qualitative interviews with 19 black Republicans, all of whom were 20 years or older, and who voted for Republican candidates and initiatives at the local, state, and national level. Most were political activists or candidates for political office in the 2016 election cycle. Most were also college educated and most had served or were currently serving in the military. All were practicing Christians. Interviewees were selected using a snowball sampling method and were interviewed either in person or by phone. The interviews took place between December of 2015 and February of 2016 and were conducted in Colorado, Georgia, and Iowa. Interviewees were asked questions pertaining to their political affiliation, their family's political history, issues that were important to them, and how they perceived the major political parties.

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<sup>6</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1983), 234.

These questions were informed by larger questions, such as: Who are black Republicans? Why do some black Americans choose to associate with the Republican Party? Was the decision to affiliate with the party a conscious decision resulting from an accumulation of experiences or was it something that just made sense? What issues do black Republicans care about in particular, and why do they care about those issues? In what ways do black Republicans agree with their party's policies and platforms, and in what ways do they disagree? Do black Republicans bring new ideas to the Republican Party, and, if so, what are they?

While the objective of the interviews was to collect basic information on black Republicans, the interviewees' answers were detailed and multi-layered. In this thesis, interviewees are quoted at length because they spoke at length and wanted their voices to be heard. Nicole, a 42-year-old candidate running for a local office, expressed her desire to be recognized during the interview, "It's good to be acknowledged. It's good to be researched because that means that we matter, right? If someone is studying you, then you matter. And I think that everyone, no matter what ethnic group they're in, wants to know that they matter."

This thesis provides a framework for understanding black Republicans, including a review of the literature, an examination of the historical context, an analysis of contemporary representations, and interviews with black Republicans. After reviewing the literature, we will explore the historical context, vital to understanding how the Republican Party has interacted with the black American community. Not only does history inform our understanding of the past, it can also inform our understanding of the present. We will begin with the birth of the Republican Party in 1854 and conclude with the 2016 political moment.

The next section of the thesis is about contemporary representations of black Republicans in the media. These representations can assist in recognizing the kind of rhetoric and images black Republicans evoke.

The interviews with black Republicans are the centerpiece of this thesis. We will examine why interviewees chose to join the Republican Party, how they use history to legitimize their choice of party, their sense of identity with the Republican Party, similarities and differences among interviewees, how they are perceived and treated in private and public life, and lastly the ways in which they resemble mainstream Republicans and the ways they do not.



## The Literature on Black Republicans

The published literature on black Republicans is limited. Overviews include Leah Rigueur's *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power*, which focuses on the period between 1936 and 1980, a period that is largely absent from the literature.<sup>7</sup> In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America*, Angela Dillard provides one of the most comprehensive analyses on black Republicans and, more broadly, minority Republicans using political homelessness as an organizing concept.<sup>8</sup>

Michael Ondaatje's *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America* reports on prominent black Republicans, including Thomas Sowell and Shelby Steele, and outlines their positions on issues such as education and affirmative action. He also examines President Ronald Reagan's role in the rise of the black conservative movement.<sup>9</sup>

Lewis Randolph's "A Historical Analysis and Critique of Contemporary Black Conservatism" examines differences among black Republicans, sorting them into three different categories: organics, neoconservatives, and antistatists. Organics are black Republicans who are heavily influenced by religion. Neoconservatives are former liberals who strongly oppose government assistance programs. And antistatists are the more moderate, "establishment" black Republicans.<sup>10</sup> In addition to classifying black Republicans, Randolph provides an overview of the history of black Republicans, and examines their role and impact on contemporary politics.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the literature is critical of black Republicans. For example, in "Rooming in the Master's House: Psychological Domination and the Black Conservative," black American scholar Ronald Hall argues that black Republicans are living remnants of the antebellum era,

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<sup>7</sup> Leah Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Angela Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Lewis Randolph, "A Historical Analysis and Critique of Contemporary Black Conservatism," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 19, no. 3 (1995): 149-151.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-152.

“For many reasons, the role of Black Conservatives in sustaining the pathologies of antebellum politics has remained an embarrassing and unspeakable taboo amid the Black population at large.”<sup>12</sup> Hall also argues that black Republicans are impeding the progress of the black American community, stating, “...the ability of Black Americans nowadays to overcome their oppression and attain the desired quality of life rests on their willingness to challenge Black Conservatives who operate within their midst.”<sup>13</sup>

In another journal article titled “Black Conservatism and the Social Problems in Black America: Ideological Cul-De-Sacs,” Seth Asumah and Valencia Perkins criticize ideas held by black Republicans, including individualism, materialism, limited government, and self-help. For example, the authors argue that the belief in self-help does not originate from a sense of selflessness, but rather is a character flaw, “The self-help philosophy of Black conservatives in actuality is a façade for savage individualism behind which they hide to satisfy their greed.”<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the academic literature, there are autobiographies by prominent black Republicans such as Allen West, Justice Clarence Thomas, and Shelby Steele. Allen West’s remembrance of his military and political careers, *Guardian of the Republic: An American Ronin’s Journey to Faith, Family and Freedom*, is partially about how black Republicans are perceived in American society and partially about West’s career in the Republican Party.<sup>15</sup> Thomas’ autobiography is similar to West’s. Thomas talks about issues like school busing and conservative thinkers such as Thomas Sowell who influenced his gradual change from liberal Democrat to Independent and finally to conservative Republican.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ronald Hall, “Rooming in the Master’s House: Psychological Domination and the Black Conservative,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 4 (2008): 566.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Seth Asumah and Valencia Perkins, “Black Conservatism and the Social Problems in Black America: Ideological Cul-De-Sacs,” *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 1 (2000): 63.

<sup>15</sup> Allen West, *Guardian of the Republic: An American Ronin’s Journey to Faith, Family and Freedom* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Clarence Thomas, *My Grandfather’s Son: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 104-108.

Shelby Steele's *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* is partly an analysis of the Civil Rights era and the impact of the Great Society programs, and partly an autobiography. When discussing black conservatism, Steele recounts an experience he had on a faculty committee board about a proposal for a course titled "Afro-American Literature." When the committee chairwoman asked committee members their opinion of the proposal, she skipped Steele because she assumed that he approved of the class due to the color of his skin. In fact, Steele adamantly disapproved of the class:

*...when my turn to speak came, Betty said, "I think we can all agree that it's not necessary to hear from Shelby. He'll be with me." She spoke as if doing the committee a kindness. My race so obviously signaled my support for her proposal that hearing from me would only waste the committee's time and energy.*

*Talk about invisibility range! I started to explode. My head filled with ugly, even brutal, epithets that I wanted to spit back at her. But instead I gave out a long sigh – "Oh God" – and contained myself.*

*"So you think I'm an automatic vote for you because I'm black?"*

*... "Well, doesn't being black make you an automatic on this?"*

*"I suppose you don't see anything racist in what you're saying?"<sup>17</sup>*

In addition to autobiographies, there are first-hand accounts and portrayals of black Republicans published by conservative media outlets. For example, John Fund, a columnist for *The National Review*, authored an article about how liberals have treated minority conservatives. Fund reports, "Progressives often reserve their deepest hostility for conservative minorities...because they are a threat to the notion that minorities should only think and vote only like leftists."<sup>18</sup> In another article by *The National Review*, Elaina Plott, a fellow at the

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<sup>17</sup> Shelby Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 158.

<sup>18</sup> John Fund, "The War on Conservative Minorities," *The National Review*, last modified December 1, 2013, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/365178/war-conservative-minorities-john-fund>.

National Review Institute, writes about how then-presidential candidate Ben Carson had the ability to give a voice to black Republicans and attract the black American vote.<sup>19</sup>

The existing literature on black Republicans is sparse and tends to be either general or focused on prominent black Republican figures. Little is known about actual black Republican voters. To understand black Republican voters, it is important to cover the history of the relationship between the Republican Party and black Americans. The next section discusses this history.

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<sup>19</sup> Elaina Plott, “Black Conservatives See an Opportunity for Growth in 2016,” *The National Review*, last modified September 25, 2015, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/424618/black-conservatives-see-opportunity-growth-2016-elaina-plott>.

## A History of the Relationship between the Republican Party and Black Americans

To understand contemporary black Republican voters, it is necessary to understand the history of the relationship between the Republican Party and black Americans. At times, this relationship has been fraught and highly contentious while at other times it has been beneficial to black Americans.

Black Americans were once almost entirely associated with the Republican Party, and the idea of a black American becoming a Democrat was unthinkable. Just as some black Republicans are marginalized by black Democrats today, so black Democrats prior to 1936 were viewed as traitors to their community by black Republicans. For example, one black American voter in the early 1930s proclaimed, “The Democratic party is controlled by devils from below the Mason-Dixon line.”<sup>20</sup> Another black American voter proclaimed, “The Republican Party is the party for all, regardless of race, color, or creed.”<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes the disdain for black Democrats went beyond words. A *Time* article from August 17, 1936 reported:

*...any Negro who voted Democratic was threatened with social ostracism if not bodily harm by Republican members of his race. No respectable Negro congregation would dream of allowing a Democratic political meeting to be held in its church. Moreover most Negro politicians were subservient blackamoors [“dark skinned” person] who sold their flocks to this or that white Republican faction paying the highest price.”<sup>22</sup>*

What was it about Democrats prior to 1936 that made the majority of black Americans despise them and overwhelmingly support Republicans? The answer lies in the genesis of the Republican Party, its nominee for President of the United States in 1860, and its legislative record during and directly after the Civil War.

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<sup>20</sup> Leah Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> “RACES: Black Game,” *Time*, August 17, 1936 (web).

*The Birth of the Republican Party, the Fight to Halt the Expansion of Slavery, and the Emergence of Black Republicans (1850-1893)*

Throughout the 1850s, the question of slavery and its expansion permeated the political landscape. Before the 1850s, however, the question of whether slavery should expand into other territories and states was not a seriously contested national issue. The Missouri Compromise of 1820, which confined slavery south of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, and the Compromise of 1850, which admitted some states as free states, lessened concerns about the expansion of slavery.<sup>23</sup> The relative complacency over the question of slavery was disrupted in 1854 when the Kansas-Nebraska Act proposed to introduce slavery north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, a direct threat to the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The implications and potential passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act sparked protests and political upheaval throughout the United States.<sup>24</sup> Soon, there was talk of a new political party that would primarily focus on preventing the expansion of slavery into new territories and states.<sup>25</sup> This new party, founded in 1854, was called the Republican Party.<sup>26</sup>

The Republican Party quickly became an established political force, but free black Americans who were permitted to vote were not immediately drawn to the party. More radical, pro-abolitionist parties, such as the Liberty Party, were more appealing to black Americans who wished to eradicate slavery entirely.<sup>27</sup> However, black Americans' interest in the Republican Party was heightened when Frederick Douglass, one of the most famous freed black Americans, endorsed Abraham Lincoln for president during the 1860 election. Douglass' primary reason for endorsing Lincoln rather than pro-abolitionist candidates, who Douglass had campaigned for in

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<sup>23</sup> Lewis Gould, *The Republicans: A History of the Grand Old Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12-13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Hanes Walton Jr., Sherman Puckett, and Donald Deskins Jr., *The African American Electorate: A Statistical History, Vol. 1*. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 128.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis Gould, *The Republicans: A History of the Grand Old Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Hanes Walton Jr., Sherman Puckett, and Donald Deskins Jr., *The African American Electorate: A Statistical History, Vol. 1*. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 120-128.

the past, was Lincoln's clarification of his policies that aimed to halt the expansion of slavery.<sup>28</sup> Even though Douglass endorsed Lincoln for president, no black American delegates were present at the nominating convention.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Lincoln was able to become the nominee and ultimately be elected as President of the United States in 1860.

During Lincoln's reelection bid in 1864, black Americans' interest in Lincoln turned into considerable support at the ballot box.<sup>30</sup> Douglass' continuing praise of Lincoln, the disdain black Americans had for the Democratic Party's nominee George McClellan, and The Emancipation Proclamation of 1862-1863, which declared that all slaves in rebel states would henceforth be free, enabled Lincoln to gain considerable black American support and be reelected.<sup>31</sup>

On and off the battlefield, black American support for the Republican Party and Lincoln was overwhelming. Nearly all black Americans who could participate in the franchise, including black American Union soldiers, seized the opportunity to cast their support for the Great Emancipator.<sup>32</sup> Sergeant James Ruffin, a black American Union soldier, proclaimed in a letter written to his sister-in-law, "We are all for Old Abe. I hope he will be elected."<sup>33</sup>

Lincoln was also revered among slaves. Booker T. Washington, a freed slave who would go on to found the Tuskegee Institute, described slaves mentioning Lincoln in his autobiography. In one instance, Washington heard his mother praying:

*In one way and another many of the slaves of the plantations managed to keep pretty good track of the movements of the different armies and, after a while, it began to be whispered that soon all the slaves were going to be free. It was at this time that the slaves*

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<sup>28</sup> Hanes Walton Jr., Sherman Puckett, and Donald Deskins Jr., *The African American Electorate: A Statistical History, Vol. 1*. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 128.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>31</sup> "The Emancipation Proclamation," *archives.gov*, accessed March 27, 2016, [https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured\\_documents/emancipation\\_proclamation/transcript.html](https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/transcript.html).

<sup>32</sup> Hanes Walton Jr., Sherman Puckett, and Donald Deskins Jr., *The African American Electorate: A Statistical History, Vol. 1*. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 229.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

*out in the cabins on the plantations began to pray for the success of “Massa Linkum’s soldiers.” I remember well a time when I was awakened one morning, before the break of day, by my mother bending over me, and where I lay in a bundle of rags in the corner of my master’s kitchen, and hearing her pray that Abraham Lincoln and his soldiers might be successful and that she and I might some day be free.*<sup>34</sup>

After John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln in 1865, black Americans mourned his loss. They travelled to Lincoln’s residence and pressed their faces against the iron gate of his residence.<sup>35</sup> The grief expressed among black Americans was also evident during the procession following Lincoln’s casket. The 22<sup>nd</sup> United States Colored Infantry, accompanied by more than 40,000 mourners, led the procession.<sup>36</sup>

The legacy of Lincoln continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. An unidentified black American penned a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* in 1908 endorsing William Howard Taft for president:

*I am a colored man. I am for Taft and the Republican Party because Lincoln and such men as Judge Alonzo Taft, Taft’s father, freed me from slavery. I am for Taft because I was wounded, with thousands of black men, before Richmond by Democratic bullets.*<sup>37</sup>

In 1909, Booker T. Washington gave one of his more rousing and complimentary speeches about Lincoln during a dinner commemorating Lincoln and his legacy:

*Lincoln lives today because he had the courage which made him refuse to hate the man at the South or the man at the North when they did not agree with him. He had the courage as well as the patience and foresight to suffer in silence, to refuse to revile when reviled. For he knew that if he was right the ridicule of today would be the applause of tomorrow.*<sup>38</sup>

After the death of the Great Emancipator, the Republican Party continued to attract black American voters by passing legislation that positively impacted the black American community.

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<sup>34</sup> Louis Harlan and John Blassingame, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers, Volume I: The Autobiographical Writings* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 412.

<sup>35</sup> Noah Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln’s Time* (New York: University of Illinois, 1896), 265.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 239.

<sup>37</sup> “A Negro on Taft,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 2, 1908 (web).

<sup>38</sup> “Cheer Former Slave as he Lauds Lincoln: Booker T. Washington Pays a Remarkable Tribute to the Man Who Set Him Free,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1909 (web).



The ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup>,<sup>39</sup> 14<sup>th</sup>,<sup>40</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup><sup>41</sup> amendments, which secured inalienable rights for all Americans regardless of skin color, can be credited to the Republican Party and Lincoln's vision.

Yet the Republican Party was not able to sustain this support due to obstruction from the Democratic Party, the emergence of pressing economic challenges, and detrimental Republican losses in both the House and the Senate in 1890.<sup>42</sup> Once the Republicans lost their majorities in Congress, they effectively lost control of the direction of civil rights legislation. Economic issues, not racial issues, came to define the Republican Party platform between 1877 and 1893, also known as the Gilded Age. Republican presidents between President William McKinley and President Herbert Hoover did little to advance racial issues.

*From McKinley to Hoover: An Era Marked by Black American Disillusion with the Republican Party (1897-1932)*

The Republican Party's new approach resulted in discontent among black American leaders and voters because the party did not live up to the standard set by Lincoln. President William McKinley was mostly silent on racial matters, refusing to address a white riot in North Carolina that left 14 black Americans dead.<sup>43</sup> Black American leaders were appalled by his silence and demanded a swift response. Influential black leader T. Thomas Fortune remarked that McKinley was "a man of jelly who would turn us loose to the mob and not say a word."<sup>44</sup> It was clear that black Americans were not going to find an advocate in McKinley.

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<sup>39</sup> Section 1 of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

<sup>40</sup> Section 1 of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment states, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

<sup>41</sup> Section 1 of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment states, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

<sup>42</sup> Lewis Gould, *The Republicans: A History of the Grand Old Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 85.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Vice President Theodore Roosevelt assumed office after the assassination of McKinley. Unlike his predecessor, President Roosevelt spoke to black Americans' interests but stopped short of addressing racial issues with serious legislation. From time to time, Roosevelt decried discrimination but he hesitated to call on the federal government to abate it, arguing that ending discrimination was the role of the individual, not the federal government.<sup>45</sup>

Adding to the frustration of black Americans, Roosevelt appointed few black Americans to federal positions. He even conceded that he had made fewer black American appointments than his predecessors but countered that he made "fewer and better Negro appointments than any other Republican Presidents."<sup>46</sup>

To express their disappointment with Roosevelt, black American leaders took to the newspapers. An article published in *The New York Times* on November 30, 1906 reported that a black American pastor was urging black American voters to make their dissatisfaction with Roosevelt known at the voting booth and to demand a return to Lincoln's principles:

*Roosevelt must go down in history as the uncertain quantity in the political world and the destroyer of a Nation's confidence. As we look back over the history of our country we think of Washington as the Inaugurator, Lincoln the Emancipator, Grant the Pacifier, but we must place Roosevelt as the prevaricator; Washington the truthful, Lincoln the honest, Grant the fearless, Roosevelt the unjust; Washington the patriot, Lincoln the statesman, Grant the warrior, Roosevelt the political trickster.*<sup>47</sup>

The fortunes of black Americans slightly improved under President Calvin Coolidge. In his First Annual Address to Congress in 1923, Coolidge asked Congress to approve a half-

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<sup>45</sup> Roosevelt alluded to his stance on the federal government's role in ending discrimination in his speech on February 13, 1905 at the New York Republican Club, "The problem is so to adjust the relations between two races of different ethnic type that the rights of neither be abridged nor jeopardized; that the backward race be trained so that it may enter into the possession of true freedom while the forward race is enabled to preserve unharmed the high civilization wrought out by its forefathers. The working out of this problem must necessarily be slow; it is not possible in offhand fashion to obtain or to confer the priceless boons of freedom, industrial efficiency, political capacity, and domestic morality. Nor is it only necessary to train the colored man; it is quite as necessary to train the white man, for on his shoulders rests a well-nigh unparalleled sociological responsibility. It is a problem demanding the best thought, the utmost patience, the most earnest effort, the broadest charity, of the statesman, the student, the philanthropist; of the leaders of thought in every department of our national life. The Church can be a most important factor in solving it aright. But above all else we need for its successful solution the sober, kindly, steadfast, unselfish performance of duty by the average plain citizen in his everyday dealings with his fellows."

<sup>46</sup> "The Negro in Politics," *The New York Times*, March 7, 1903 (web).

<sup>47</sup> "Pastor Says Ballot is Negroes' Hope Now: Urges Black Men to Move from the South and Vote if Congress won't Aid Them, Colored Congregations Hear the President Denounced and Raise Funds for Discharged Soldiers," *The New York Times*, Nov. 30, 1906 (web).

million dollar appropriation bill for medical courses at Howard University, one of America's most preeminent all-black colleges. Congress approved the appropriations bill and reapproved it years after its original passage. Many historians credit this appropriations bill with aiding in the growth of the black American middle class and helping black Americans obtain jobs in healthcare professions.<sup>48</sup>

Adding to his reputation was Coolidge's speech at Howard University. During this speech, Coolidge praised the efforts of black Americans during the Civil War, citing their sacrifice for the Union and their efforts in advancing racial equality:

*The nation has need of all that can be contributed to it through the best efforts of all its citizens. The colored people have repeatedly proved their devotion to the high ideals of our country. They gave their services in the war with the same patriotism and readiness that other citizens did...The propaganda of prejudice and hatred which sought to keep the colored men from supporting the national cause completely failed. The black man showed himself the same kind of citizen, moved by the same kind of patriotism, as the white man. They were tempted, but not one betrayed his country...They came home with many decorations and their conduct repeatedly won high commendation from both American and European commanders.*<sup>49</sup>

In other, more provocative speeches, Coolidge courageously confronted the Ku Klux Klan, decried the segregation policies adopted under President Woodrow Wilson, and argued for the passage of anti-lynching legislation. Unlike his predecessor President Warren Harding, Coolidge did, although infrequently, turn his rhetoric into action. For example, Coolidge commuted the prison sentence of Marcus Garvey, a prominent Jamaican political activist. He was also careful to reach out for advice from Howard University's president, Emmett Scott, and to officials from the Negro National Educational Congress.<sup>50</sup> Black leaders and black-owned newspapers also frequently interviewed Coolidge. One black-owned newspaper, *The Washington*

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<sup>48</sup> Kurt Schmoke, "Calvin Coolidge, rights pioneer?" *Politico*, last modified May 8, 2013, <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/05/calvin-coolidge-civil-rights-pioneer-091065>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Alvin Felzenberg, "Calvin Coolidge and Race: His Record in Dealing with the Racial Tensions of the 1920s," *Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation*, accessed March 27, 2016, <https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/essays-papers-addresses-34/>.

*Eagle*, wrote, “Much significance is attached to the easy access to the White House which colored citizens now enjoy.”<sup>51</sup>

Yet Coolidge was hesitant to move beyond meetings and rhetoric to advocate for serious legislation, leading to a sense of disappointment among black Americans. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) released a statement expressing this sentiment in an indirect manner, “[Black American] political salvation and...social survival lie in our absolute independence of party allegiance in politics and casting our vote for our friends and against our enemies.”<sup>52</sup>

The NAACP’s statement foreshadowed the impending split between black Americans and the Republican Party. Black Americans could no longer be taken for granted; their support had to be earned through policy successes, not party allegiance. This sentiment was a preview of what would happen to the Republican Party’s grip on black American voters during and directly after President Herbert Hoover’s term.

Black Americans, who had remained loyal to the Republican Party for over 50 years hoping that it would return to the ideals and practices of the Party of Lincoln, slowly drifted away from the Republican Party. Yet it would take the Great Depression, Hoover’s incompetence, and President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal programs to fundamentally transform black Americans’ relationship with the Republican Party. Black Americans were poor, politically powerless, and looking for other options. They found hope in the Democratic Party and in Roosevelt.

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<sup>51</sup> Maceo Dailey Jr., “Calvin Coolidge’s Afro-American Connection,” *A Journal of African and Afro-American Studies* 8, no. 7 (1986): 84.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America from McKinley to Hoover: 1896-1933* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973), 224.

*Black Americans' Migration from the Party of Lincoln to the Party of the New Deal (1932-1956)*

Black American leaders began to rethink their association with the Republican Party prior to Herbert Hoover's presidency, but as a whole they did not begin to vote for Democrats at the ballot box until the 1936 presidential election after President Franklin Roosevelt's first term. Before the 1936 presidential election, black Americans were reluctant to vote for the Democratic Party, which up to that point had obstructed civil rights legislation. Even though Hoover remained largely silent on black Americans' needs and his handling of the Great Depression was inadequate at best, the majority of black Americans still voted Republican. While black Americans were unemployed to a greater extent than other groups during the Great Depression (black Americans constituted 31.5 percent of the unemployed in Baltimore by March 1931 and constituted 16 percent of the unemployed in Chicago<sup>53</sup>), the majority remained steadfast Republicans.<sup>54</sup>

This reluctance to change parties can be observed in the black press. One black-owned newspaper advised readers, "Four more years of [Hoover] as a Republican will be better than a possible eight years of any Democrat."<sup>55</sup> Black American leaders were aware that Roosevelt had no track record on racial matters and that his family in Dutchess County, New York had used slaves on the estate decades earlier.<sup>56</sup> For these reasons, black Americans largely allied themselves with Hoover in the 1932 presidential election.

As the Great Depression worsened between 1932 and 1936, black Americans became poorer, hungrier, and more disenchanting with the Republican Party. They were desperate for economic relief. The Republican Party had little to offer other than empty rhetoric that denounced the New Deal and expansion of government. In contrast, Roosevelt was offering

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<sup>53</sup> Nancy Weiss, *Farwell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 17.

<sup>54</sup> Lewis Gould, *The Republicans: A History of the Grand Old Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15.

<sup>55</sup> Nancy Weiss, *Farwell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 17.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

economic relief in the form of New Deal programs. Even though many New Deal programs discriminated against black Americans in employment, black Americans still saw these programs as tangible relief and momentary hope from the gloom of the Great Depression.<sup>57</sup> In 1936, black Americans voted overwhelmingly for Roosevelt, the incumbent, with 71 percent of black Americans supporting Roosevelt while 28 percent voted for the Republican challenger, Alf Landon.<sup>58</sup> Black Americans were happy that some politicians were recognizing their needs and proposing beneficial legislation. One black American remarked, “Negroes had been so depressed, so frustrated, almost having given up hope, that nearly anything would have created substantial support...The outlook was so bleak...that little things counted a great deal...Apart from questions of policy, treating Negroes as human beings was a very significant factor.”<sup>59</sup>

Just as Lincoln was hailed by black Americans, so was Roosevelt. Black Americans flooded the White House with penciled notes describing their love and admiration for Roosevelt. Many black Americans saw Roosevelt as a savior; he was treated like royalty and viewed as a father-like figure.<sup>60</sup>

Black Americans’ newfound relationship with the Democratic Party fundamentally transformed how they perceived both parties. The 1936 presidential election spurred a political realignment from which the Republican Party has never recovered. Between 1940 and 1952, 67 to 76 percent of black Americans gave their support to Democratic presidential candidates.<sup>61</sup> During President Dwight Eisenhower’s reelection bid in 1956, he was able to attract 39 percent of the black American vote.<sup>62</sup> This slight improvement in black American support was not

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<sup>57</sup> Nancy Weiss, *Farwell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 50-61.

<sup>58</sup> Leah Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 311.

<sup>59</sup> Nancy Weiss, *Farwell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 210.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-221.

<sup>61</sup> Leah Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 311.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

sustained however. Barry Goldwater's presidential election bid in 1964 reversed the advances made by Eisenhower during the 1952 and 1956 elections, and once again reaffirmed black Americans' suspicions of the Republican Party. Goldwater purposefully courted the white vote and ignored black Americans during his campaign. Black Americans now could only seek change in the Democratic Party.

*The Result of Barry Goldwater's Candidacy: A White Man's Party*

Barry Goldwater, a lifelong Republican, a dedicated conservative, and Senator from Arizona, redefined the constituency of the Republican Party and the Republican Party's message. With the Goldwater candidacy came the full realization of a far-right, highly conservative platform, especially on issues pertaining to civil rights. Even though Goldwater supported civil rights for black Americans while he was Senator and donated frequently to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), he promoted an anti-civil rights agenda during his presidential campaign.<sup>63</sup> Goldwater's opposition to federal civil rights legislation was primarily due to his ardent belief that the decision to segregate or desegregate should be left up to the states. On the Senate floor on June 18, 1964, Goldwater exclaimed that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would require a "federal police force of mammoth proportions."<sup>64</sup>

This platform resonated among Republican Southern and Southwestern whites, many of whom believed that the federal government was favoring black Americans' demand for equality over the right of white choice.<sup>65</sup> During his presidential run, Goldwater sought to expand the Republican Party's base into the South and Southwest by standing firm against any civil rights legislation. During a press conference, Goldwater infamously stated, "We're not going to get the

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<sup>63</sup> Lewis Gould, *The Republicans: A History of the Grand Old Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 248.

<sup>64</sup> Timothy Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP's Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Press of Kansas, 2013), 171.

<sup>65</sup> Lewis Gould, *The Republicans: A History of the Grand Old Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 248.

Negro vote as a bloc in 1964 and 1968, so we ought to go hunting where the ducks are.”<sup>66</sup>

Goldwater’s statement aptly summarized the new brand of Republican politics.

To the majority of black Americans, including black Republicans, the Goldwater candidacy was frightening. Baseball player Jackie Robinson told Richard Nixon that a Goldwater nomination would heighten the widespread perception that the Republican Party was dismissive of black Americans’ needs and interests. Nixon acknowledged Robinson’s concerns in the April 1962 edition of *Ebony*, “If Goldwater wins his fight, our party would eventually become the first major all-white political party.”<sup>67</sup>

At state assemblies and the national convention in 1964, which hosted numerous black American delegates in the past, the result of Goldwater’s campaign was evident. George Lee, a prominent black Republican, along with 200 black Republicans walked out of a Republican state assembly in Memphis following their refusal to join Goldwater delegates.<sup>68</sup> At the national Republican convention, only 14 out of the 1,308 delegates were black; for the first time since the Civil War there were no Southern black American delegates present.<sup>69</sup>

Goldwater’s platform and the limited outreach efforts by the RNC led to a dismal approval rating of the Republican Party among black American voters. A *Newsweek* 1963 poll found that only 11 percent of black American voters considered themselves to be Republicans.<sup>70</sup> In the 1964 presidential election, 94 percent of black Americans voted for Democratic nominee President Lyndon Johnson, the Democratic Party’s largest share of the black American vote up to that point.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Timothy Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP’s Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Press of Kansas, 2013), 172-173.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>71</sup> Leah Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 311.



What had been the self-proclaimed Party of Lincoln before 1936 was now a Republican Party that courted segregationists and white supremacists. As a result, black Americans fled the party in large numbers. Although roughly 10 percent of black Americans returned to the Republican Party after the 1964 election, the Democratic Party continued to increase its appeal among black American voters; between the 1968 and 1980, 85 to 87 percent of black Americans voted for Democratic presidential candidates.<sup>72</sup>

Both President Richard Nixon and President Ronald Reagan attempted to regain black American support. Despite their proactive efforts, the Republican Party could not attract more than 15 percent of the black American vote.<sup>73</sup> However, among the remaining black Republicans, a black conservative movement emerged during Reagan's presidency. Due to black American intellectuals like Thomas Sowell and Clarence Thomas, as well as the appeal of Reagan's policies, this movement gained significant momentum and was able to secure a space in the modern conservative ideological landscape.

*The Emergence of Black Conservatism and the Further Dissolution of the Black Republican Vote (1980-2016)*

After President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, it was evident that the Republican Party was having difficulty in appealing to black American voters. What was the Republican Party to do? Even though many Republicans in Congress had helped pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, acclaim was reserved for Johnson and the Democratic Party.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Leah Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 311.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Timothy Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP's Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Press of Kansas, 2013), 156.

During his 1968 presidential campaign, Richard Nixon attempted to increase the black American vote using magazine advertisements and radio broadcasts. In a special election edition of *Jet* magazine, Nixon's campaign ran a two-page advertisement targeted at black Americans. The first page showed a picture of a well-dressed black man named Homer Pitts. The photo's caption read, "This Time Vote Like Homer Pitts' Whole World Depended On It." On the second page, Nixon's campaign argued that "black capitalism" could benefit people like Homer:

*He'll get his degree. Then what? ...laborer, factory job...or his own business? A vote for Richard Nixon for President is a vote for a man who wants Homer to have the chance to own his own business. Richard Nixon believes strongly in black capitalism. Because black capitalism is black power in the best sense of the word. It's the road that leads to black economic influence and black pride. It's the key to the black man's fight for equality – for a piece of the action. And that's what the free enterprise system is all about. This time...Nixon.*<sup>75</sup>

Nixon also invoked the ideals of black capitalism and entrepreneurial spirit in a CBS broadcast aired in April 1968 named, "Bridges of Human Dignity." Nixon emphasized black pride and self-help:

*For too long, white America has sought to buy off the Negro – and to buy off its own sense of guilt – with ever more programs of welfare...the bridge of black success – a bridge that can only be built by those Negroes who themselves have overcome, and who by their help or their example can show that the way to the American dream is not barred by a sign that reads, "Whites Only."*<sup>76</sup>

This advertisement sponsored by Nixon's campaign reflected the ideals of personal responsibility, self-help, and free enterprise that many Republicans, including black Republicans, espoused.<sup>77</sup> Recalling the 1964 election, Nixon believed that Goldwater had appealed to the wrong states and the wrong voters ("foam-at-the-mouth segregationists," as Nixon stated).<sup>78</sup> He

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<sup>75</sup> Leah Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 136.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Crespinio, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 205.

thought the Republican Party had alienated much of the country.<sup>79</sup> Nixon approached the black American community far more subtly.<sup>80</sup> In 1968, Nixon was able to attract 10 percent of the black American vote, up from the six percent Goldwater attracted. This vote still paled in comparison to pre-1964 levels, in which the black American support for the Republican Party ranged between 21 percent (1952 election) and 39 percent (1956 election).<sup>81</sup>

President Ronald Reagan was arguably more successful in reaching out to the black American community. Reagan received 14 percent of the black American vote in 1980 and was able give the emerging black conservative movement credibility and support.<sup>82</sup> Many of the prominent black Republicans working in politics today, including Justice Clarence Thomas, Allen West, and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, emerged out of the black conservative movement that began during Reagan's presidency.<sup>83</sup>

After Reagan's inauguration, a group of black conservative professionals gathered in San Francisco for a workshop sponsored by the Institute for Contemporary Studies. This gathering would later be called the "Black Alternatives Conference" and its proceedings would be published as *The Fairmont Papers*.<sup>84</sup> *The Fairmont Papers* called for a transformation of the policy debate on race. At its forefront was Thomas Sowell, now a Hoover Institution senior fellow. In his manifesto, Sowell argued that policies directed at black Americans needed reform:

*The economic and social advancement of blacks in this country is still a great unfinished task. The methods and approaches currently used for dealing with this task have become familiar over the past few years and they demand reexamination... There is growing factual evidence of counterproductive results from noble intentions... In addition,*

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<sup>79</sup> Glenn Feldman, *The Irony of the Solid South: Democrats, Republicans, and Race, 1865-1944* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2013), 301.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Leah Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 311.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Michael Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

*numerous political trends in recent years indicate declining voter and taxpayer support for these approaches...*<sup>85</sup>

In addition to calling for a reformation of political thought and policy, the black conservative professionals praised the principles of self-help and free market economics.

The workshop had an impact far beyond *The Fairmont Papers*. Reagan appointed many of its attendees to high-level positions in his administration. Clarence Thomas, who would later be appointed as a Supreme Court justice by President George H.W. Bush, was appointed to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and Clarence Pendleton was appointed to head the Civil Rights Commission.<sup>86</sup> Outside of the Reagan Administration, conservative think tanks began to recruit black conservative intellectuals through fellowship programs. The Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and the Hoover Institution were three of many to do so.<sup>87</sup>

Even as the black conservative movement expanded its influence during the course of the Reagan Administration, Reagan's economic policies were having a devastating impact on black Americans who were experiencing high levels of unemployment, resulting in a low approval rating for Reagan among black Americans.<sup>88</sup> As a consequence, the Democratic nominee Walter Mondale in the 1984 presidential election accrued 89 percent of the black American vote, the largest share of black American support for a Democratic candidate since President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 election bid.<sup>89</sup>

As the share of the black American vote for the Republican presidential candidates decreased, the Republican Party's need to engage black American voters and to generate

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Michael Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 115.

<sup>89</sup> David Bositis, *Blacks & The 2012 Democratic National Convention* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2012), <http://jointcenter.org/sites/default/files/Blacks%20and%20the%202012%20Democratic%20National%20Convention.pdf>.

minority outreach initiatives became clearer. Some Republicans recognized that if the Republican Party wished to win presidential elections, the Republican tent would have to expand. Congressman Jack Kemp pioneered Republican minority engagement efforts not only in elections but also in policy. Despite pushback from the Republican Party, Kemp led numerous urban reforms and revitalization projects, supporting anti-poverty programs while heading the Economic Empowerment Task Force in Congress.<sup>90</sup> Kemp also forcefully argued that Republicans needed to remember their beginnings as the Party of Lincoln:

*I would like to see an America where black and white actually listen to each other. These issues can't be solved with rhetoric but with sound positive progressive inclusive policies. I want to see the Republican Party lead that debate because we are the Party of Lincoln and we must be an inclusionary party...I'd like to see an America where half of all black Americans are voting Democrat and the other half are voting Republican.*<sup>91</sup>

Despite Kemp's best efforts at minority engagement, black Americans continued to overwhelmingly vote for Democratic presidential candidates. In the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections, Republicans attracted less than 15 percent of black American support.<sup>92</sup> As Bill Clinton played the saxophone on *The Arsenio Hall Show*<sup>93</sup> and played golf with business executive and civil rights activist Vernon Jordan<sup>94</sup>, Republicans continued to lose their support among black Americans.

Republican minority engagement increased during the 2000 presidential election when a new brand of conservatism – “compassionate conservatism” – emerged. Republican Party nominee George W. Bush attempted to make conservatism more appealing to minority voters,

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<sup>90</sup> Jason DeParle, “How Jack Kemp Lost the War on Poverty,” *The New York Times*, last modified February 28, 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/02/28/magazine/how-jack-kemp-lost-the-war-on-poverty.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Meet the Press with Timothy Russert, “Meet the Press, February 9, 1997,” *Meet the Press with Timothy Russert* video, 58:00, February 9, 1997, [http://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cvideo\\_work%7C2327089/meet-press-february-9-1997](http://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C2327089/meet-press-february-9-1997).

<sup>92</sup> David Bositis, *Blacks & The 2012 Democratic National Convention* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2012), <http://jointcenter.org/sites/default/files/Blacks%20and%20the%202012%20Democratic%20National%20Convention.pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> The Arsenio Hall Show, “Clinton Appearance on Arsenio Hall Show,” *The Arsenio Hall Show* video, 4:24, June 3, 1992, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?26472-1/clinton-appearance-arsenio-hall-show>.

<sup>94</sup> Jeff Gerth, “THE FIRST FRIEND -- A special report.:Being Intimate With Power, Vernon Jordan Can Wield It,” *The New York Times*, last modified July 14, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/14/us/first-friend-special-report-being-intimate-with-power-vernon-jordan-can-wield-it.html?pagewanted=all>.

including black Americans.<sup>95</sup> One of Bush's first steps toward improving the perception of the Republican Party among black American voters was giving a speech to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the first Republican candidate to do so in 12 years. In his speech, Bush candidly admitted that the Republican Party often has not lived up to the Party of Lincoln, "...there's no escaping the reality that the Party of Lincoln has not always carried the mantle of Lincoln."<sup>96</sup>

The Republican Party also changed its tone at the convention, as it was careful to nurture a more open and accepting message. As a result, 85 black American delegates were present at the Republican convention, and Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice gave major addresses.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the best efforts of Bush and the Republican Party, black Americans still voted for the Democratic Party, with 90 percent casting their support for Democratic Party nominee Al Gore in 2000. During the 2004 presidential election, 88 percent of black Americans supported Democratic Party nominee John Kerry.<sup>98</sup>

Then, in the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama was able to attract 95 percent of the black American vote, the highest percentage of black American voters in the history of the Democratic Party. While Obama's ethnicity certainly was a decisive factor in appealing to black American voters, his mobilization efforts also energized the black American community.<sup>99</sup> This support continued in his 2012 reelection bid, with 93 percent of black Americans supporting Obama.<sup>100</sup>

Amid declining support among all minorities, including black Americans, Republicans

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<sup>95</sup> Tasha Philpot, *Race, Republicans, and the Return of the Party of Lincoln* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> David Bositis, *Blacks & The 2012 Democratic National Convention* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2012), <http://jointcenter.org/sites/default/files/Blacks%20and%20the%202012%20Democratic%20National%20Convention.pdf>.

<sup>99</sup> Tasha Philpot, Daron Shaw, and Ernest McGowen, "Winning the Race: Black Voter Turnout in the 2008 Presidential Election," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73, no. 5 (2009): 995-996.

<sup>100</sup> "How Groups Voted in 2012," *Roper Center*, <http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/how-groups-voted/how-groups-voted-2012/>.

realized that they were in the midst of a “demographic death spiral,” in the words of Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC).<sup>101</sup> After the 2012 election, the GOP released an autopsy report titled “The Growth and Opportunity Project.” Minority engagement was one of eight key recommendations mentioned in the report:

*If we believe our policies are the best ones to improve the lives of the American people, all the American people, our candidates and office holders need to do a better job talking in normal, people-oriented terms and we need to go to communities where Republicans do not normally go to listen and make our case. We need to campaign among Hispanic, black, Asian, and gay Americans and demonstrate that we care about them, too.*<sup>102</sup>

To specifically address the issue of black American engagement in the Republican Party, the RNC outlined specific steps that would need to be taken, including engaging historically black American colleges and universities, developing a national database of black American leaders, establishing a presence in black American communities and black American organizations, and recruiting and supporting black American candidates.

While there have been some successes at the local level and in U.S. Senate races, polls indicate that black Americans remain skeptical of the Republican Party.<sup>103</sup> The 2016 presidential election may, in fact, worsen the Republican Party’s relationship with the black American community. Donald Trump, who continues to be the Republican frontrunner, has the lowest favorability ratings among black Americans of any candidate.<sup>104</sup> Trump has also espoused racially insensitive remarks and has equivocated on David Duke’s endorsement, a white nationalist and former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, the Democratic Party’s

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<sup>101</sup> “Lindsey Graham: Donald Trump is ‘Unelectable,’ Morning Joe, MSNBC,” *YouTube* video, 6:59, posted by MSNBC, January 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-jsn0ar8S0>.

<sup>102</sup> *Growth and Opportunity Project* (Washington, D.C.: Republican National Committee, 2012), <http://goproject.gop.com>.

<sup>103</sup> Chelsi Henry, “Republicans are winning the support of black Americans. This election was a turning point,” *The Washington Post*, last modified November 7, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/11/07/republicans-are-winning-the-support-of-black-americans-this-election-was-a-turning-point/>.

<sup>104</sup> Eugene Scott, “Poll disputes Donald Trump claim on black voter support,” *CNN.com*, last modified August 28, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/27/politics/donald-trump-african-american-polls/>.

<sup>105</sup> Eric Bradner, “Donald Trump stumbles on David Duke, KKK,” *CNN.com*, last modified February 29, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/28/politics/donald-trump-white-supremacists/>.

presumptive nominee, Hillary Clinton, has a high favorability rating among black Americans<sup>106</sup> and has attracted their support in the Democratic primaries.<sup>107</sup>

The Republican Party has moved far from its beginnings in 1854. Concerned about the impending expansion of slavery north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, Republicans and their 1860 nominee, Abraham Lincoln, made it their explicit policy to address the question of slavery. While not immediately drawn to the Republican Party, black Americans eventually cast their support for Republicans in overwhelming numbers. Now black Americans cast their support for Democratic candidates with the same fervor. Black Americans' current voting patterns are a result of many decades of change, beginning with President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs. The Republican Party continued to lose ground with black Americans due to Barry Goldwater's white-centric campaign, President Reagan's economic policies, and President Clinton's appeal among black American voters. Understanding how the Republican Party has interacted with black Americans in the past can inform our understanding of black Republicans in the present, contextualizing the contemporary representations of black Republicans in the media. The following section reviews some of these representations.

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<sup>106</sup> Justin McCarthy and Andrew Dugan, "Clinton's Favorability Strong Among Black Americans," *gallup.com*, last modified August 10, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/184547/clinton-favorability-strong-among-black-americans.aspx>.

<sup>107</sup> Molly Ball, "Barack Obama's Heir," *The Atlantic*, last modified February 27, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/clinton-south-carolina/471276/>.



## Contemporary Representations of Black Republicans in the Media

The current image of black Republicans is reflected in their representation in the media. They have been delegitimized using rhetorical and visual devices associated with black American history.

For example, a protracted, highly publicized reaction from *Star Trek* star and gay rights activist George Takei and Americans on social media to Justice Clarence Thomas' dissent on the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) Supreme Court ruling appeared on both television and social media.

On the day of the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) ruling, Takei posted a statement on Facebook, "Today, justice wasn't color blind. #LoveWins #OneFamily #RuthBetterWinsberg #KennedyCenterHonors" (Figure 3). Takei also posted a picture in addition to the statement that showed the Supreme Court justices wearing their traditional black robes. Takei colored the robes of the justices in the majority and did not alter the color of the robes for the justices who dissented. Though Takei's statement was not directed at Justice Thomas, Facebook users seized the opportunity to target Justice Thomas. The top two comments, which received between 500 and 1,000 likes five minutes after Takei posted his statement, read, (1) "Apparently the one on the front left forgot what it was like when people were discriminated against," and (2) "Shame on you Clarence Thomas – your marriage was illegal once too #lovewins." Similar posts frequented the comments section and each one accumulated a significant number of likes.<sup>108</sup>

Dissatisfaction with Justice Thomas' dissent extended beyond the Facebook comments section and appeared on national news. A local Arizona television news station interviewed Takei and his husband about the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) ruling. The most controversial

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<sup>108</sup> George Takei's Facebook page, accessed March 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/georgetakei/photos/a.737221629640626.1073741825.205344452828349/1293287407367376/?type=3>.

moment during the interview occurred when the reporter asked Takei about Justice Thomas.<sup>109</sup> In response, Takei offered critical comments, referring to black American history and his own family's history of being sent to a Japanese internment camp:

*[Justice Thomas] is a clown in blackface sitting on the Supreme Court. He gets me that angry. He doesn't belong there. For him to say that slaves have dignity...I mean doesn't he know that slaves were in chain? They were whipped on the back...They were raped. My parents lost everything that they worked for, in the middle of their lives, in their 30s. His business, my father's business, our home, our freedom, and we're supposed to call that dignified? Marched out of our homes at gunpoint. I mean, this man does not belong on the Supreme Court. He is an embarrassment. He is a disgrace to America.*<sup>110</sup>

It did not take long for the media to report on Takei's "blackface" remark. Once the story spread, supporters and critics of Takei flocked to social media outlets to offer their opinions. William Shatner, Takei's co-star on *Star Trek*, came to Takei's defense on Twitter.<sup>111</sup> On Facebook, Takei's supporters argued that his blackface comment was not racist but was, in fact, "true":

*George Takei, I did not take it as racist at all. I took it as the truth. Clarence Thomas has continually expressed opinions and made decisions that are detrimental to black folk, other people of color, women, LGBTQA folk, and anybody experiencing or who has experienced marginalization. You set your phasers for BURN and you burned that Uncle Thomas. You have been so eloquent in your speech for so long, and I enjoyed seeing you get HEATED and take it to that clown in blackface. Cuz that's what he is. Live Long and Prosper, George!*<sup>112</sup>

Praising Takei, another commenter noted Justice Thomas' limited knowledge of black American history:

*George: You've noticed, haven't you, that there doesn't seem to be anywhere NEAR as much 'outrage' over Clarence Thomas's remarks, which shows a shocking lack of understanding about his own history! With everything that you've experienced in your*

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<sup>109</sup> In his dissent, Justice Thomas argued that the government cannot give or take away human dignity, "The corollary of that principle is that human dignity cannot be taken away by the government. Slaves did not lose their dignity (any more than they lost their humanity) because the government allowed them to be enslaved. Those held in internment camps did not lose their dignity because the government confined them. And those denied governmental benefits certainly do not lose their dignity because the government denies them those benefits. The government cannot bestow dignity, and it cannot take it away." *Obergefell et al v. Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health, et al.*, 556 U.S. 17 (2015).

<sup>110</sup> Eugene Scott, "George Takei walks back 'blackface' remark about Clarence Thomas," *CNN.com*, last modified July 5, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/03/politics/george-takei-clarence-thomas-star-trek/>.

<sup>111</sup> William Shatner, Twitter post, July 2, 2015, 3:46 p.m., [https://twitter.com/WilliamShatner/status/616740436292440064?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/WilliamShatner/status/616740436292440064?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw).

<sup>112</sup> George Takei's Facebook page, accessed March 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/georgehtakei/posts/1299475283415255>.

*own life, I can't really blame you for being angry – which is MORE than justified – about him saying that the government can't take away human dignity through slavery, internment, or whatever. Even if your words weren't as carefully chosen as they could have been, your anger is understandable, and I don't think it's out of line!*<sup>113</sup>

Takei's critics argued that his comments were misguided and racist. Democratic strategist

Marc Lamont Hill expressed his opinion by posting a series of statements on Twitter:

- (1) Just saw George Takei's comments on Clarence Thomas...I think he overstepped.*<sup>114</sup>
- (2) If @GeorgeTakei were Ted Nugent, and Clarence Thomas were Obama, we'd be having a whole different conversation about his 'blackface' comment.*<sup>115</sup>
- (3) It's one thing to critique Thomas' positions. I do all the time. But to suggest that he's 'blackface clown' and 'unqualified' is wrong.*<sup>116</sup>
- (4) There's plenty of space to challenge Clarence Thomas' ideas. But part of anti-Black racism is the perennial questioning of our very existence.*<sup>117</sup>

Blogger and YouTuber, Young, Black and Conservative, took a more direct approach with her criticism of Takei in a *YouTube* video:

*It takes a certain kind of racist to decide that black people can't have their own opinion... George Takei: you are a racist. It doesn't matter what you say. It doesn't matter how you try to cut it... You're a racist. You made a racist statement. I'm not giving you slack for it.*<sup>118</sup>

In addition to the more serious critiques, some critics turned the blackface controversy into a humorous moment. A popular meme shows a picture of Justice Thomas with the associated caption, "Votes for the party that freed his ancestors," and a picture of Takei with the associated caption, "Votes for party that put him, personally, in an internment camp" (Figure 4).

A political cartoon by Jeff Danziger that depicted former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice serves as another example of contemporary representations of black Republicans. In this cartoon, Secretary Rice is sitting in a rocking chair milking an aluminum tube, a reference to the

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<sup>113</sup> George Takei's Facebook page, accessed March 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/georgetakei/posts/1299475283415255>.

<sup>114</sup> Marc Lamont Hill, Twitter post, July 2, 2015, 4:25 p.m., <https://twitter.com/marclamonthill/status/616734483056861184>.

<sup>115</sup> Marc Lamont Hill, Twitter post, July 2, 2015, 4:31 p.m., [https://twitter.com/marclamonthill/status/616736089139728384?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/marclamonthill/status/616736089139728384?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw).

<sup>116</sup> Marc Lamont Hill, Twitter post, July 2, 2015, 4:26 p.m., <https://twitter.com/marclamonthill/status/616734628708241408>.

<sup>117</sup> Marc Lamont Hill, Twitter post, July 2, 2015, 4:28 p.m., [https://twitter.com/marclamonthill/status/616735203940257792?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/marclamonthill/status/616735203940257792?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw).

<sup>118</sup> Young, Black and Conservative. "Young, Black And Conservative – Video In Response To George Takei," *YouTube* video, 3:21, July 4, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nMS7D1bk94>.

aluminum tubes the Bush Administration used as justification to invade Iraq in 2003. As Secretary Rice nurses the aluminum tube, she exclaims, “I don’t know nuthin’ about aluminum tubes...”<sup>119</sup> a reference to Prissy, a slave in the movie *Gone with the Wind* who famously proclaims, “I don’t know nuthin’ ‘bout birthin’ babies.”<sup>120</sup>

In another example of the iconography used to depict black Republicans, the cover of *Emerge* magazine in their August 1996 issue featured a cartoon of Justice Thomas wearing jockey garb and holding a lantern. The title of the issue, “Uncle Thomas: Lawn Jockey for the Far Right,” refers to Uncle Tom, the ever-patient slave from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The Uncle Tom reference was also used to preface an article in the same issue, using a quote from Malcolm X’s autobiography in which he describes the “twentieth century” Uncle Tom:

*Today’s Uncle Tom doesn’t wear a handkerchief on his head. This modern, twentieth-century Uncle Thomas now often wears a top hat. He’s usually well-dressed and well-educated. He’s often the personification of culture and refinement. The twentieth-century Uncle Thomas sometimes speaks with a Yale or Harvard accent. Sometimes he is known as Professor, Doctor, Judge, and Reverend, even Right Reverend Doctor. This twentieth-century Uncle Thomas is a professional Negro...by that I mean his profession is being a Negro for the white man.*<sup>121</sup>

In yet another example of the critical treatment of black Republicans facilitated by the Internet, University of Pennsylvania professor Anthea Butler became momentarily famous when her remarks about then-presidential candidate, Ben Carson, went viral. After Carson argued that NASCAR had the right to depict the Confederate flag on their cars if fans favored it, Butler

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<sup>119</sup> Matt Vespa, “Flashback: Do You Remember Those Racist Condi Rice Cartoons?” *Red State*, last modified November 26, 2012, <http://www.redstate.com/diary/mvespa/2012/11/26/flashback-do-you-remember-those-racist-condi-rice-cartoons/>.

<sup>120</sup> After receiving a barrage of criticism from conservative media outlets, Danziger removed the cartoon from his website. However, an image of the political cartoon still circulates on the Internet. The source in the above footnote has a link to the photo.

<sup>121</sup> David Love, “My Letter to Clarence Thomas, The Man Who Desecrates the Legacy of Thurgood Marshall,” *The Black Commentator*, [http://www.blackcommentator.com/236/236\\_color\\_of\\_law\\_clarence\\_thomas.html](http://www.blackcommentator.com/236/236_color_of_law_clarence_thomas.html).

called Carson a “coon” on Twitter. Butler quickly removed the tweet, but not before a Twitter user took a picture of her comment.<sup>122</sup>

While there are many other examples of how black Republicans are represented in the media, the examples presented above demonstrate the ways black Republicans are perceived by the American public. Although each of these examples appeared in different venues, they persistently demonize black Republicans using imagery from black American history, particularly the antebellum era.

Having reviewed the history of the relationship between the Republican Party and black Americans and contemporary representations of black Republicans, we can turn to the interviews with the 19 black Republican interviewees. These interviews will offer an answer to the question: who are black Republicans?

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<sup>122</sup> Katherine Timpf, “Ivy League Prof Calls Ben Carson a ‘Coon,’” *The National Review*, last modified October 6, 2015, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/425141/ben-carson-ivy-league-professor-racial-slur>.

## **The Black Republican Interviewees: An Introduction**

Using a snowball sampling method, 19 black Republicans from Colorado, Iowa, and Georgia were identified and interviewed. Conducting interviews, rather than collecting aggregate statistics, offered a greater insight into the interviewees' experiences, views, and opinions.

Three interviewees were female, 16 were male, and they ranged in age from 20 years old to 71 years old. All except one were active in Republican politics. All interviewees were practicing Christians; a majority were non-denominational. Eight of the 19 interviewees had also served or were currently serving in the military.

The youngest interviewees (20-26) were Tim, Marissa, Harold, Michael, and Simone. All, with the exception of Tim, were active in Republican politics. At the time, Marissa, a 21-year-old college student active in the Navy reserves, was interning for a Republican organization in Colorado to fulfill credits for her political science major. Harold and Michael attended the same college in Georgia. Harold, 23, was Catholic; Michael, 22, was Methodist. Although Michael is studying chemistry and mathematics and Harold had studied leadership and business, they both were politically active and identified as moderate Republicans. Michael was involved in a black Republican caucus in his state and so was Simone, 26, who identified with the Tea Party faction of the Republican Party. Tim, 20, who was studying economics, was the only interviewee not directly involved in politics, although his mother Nicole was running for a local office at the time.

Many of the interviewees were running for political office or had run for political office in the past. At the time of the interviews, Landon, Nicole, and Allen were running for political office, including a U.S. Senate seat, a County Commissioner seat, and a seat in the House of Representatives. Landon and Nicole had worked in politics for quite some time, while Allen had

little political experience and was the only interviewee without a college degree. Landon, Allen, and Nicole had served in the military.

James, 71, was also running for political office in a Southern state at the time. James combined his mother's Catholic faith and his father's Baptist faith and identified as a Catholic Baptist. He been involved in politics most of his adult life and was well known in Republican circles, locally and nationally. At the time, he was holding a state elected office while running for a federal seat. According to James, he grew up working class and has remained working class throughout his life

Erik, 36, had also run for political office and had worked in Republican politics for the majority of his life. So did Scott, who was elected to a position in his state's Republican Party. Unlike Erik, Scott had served in the military.

Although they never had run for political office, this study's middle-aged interviewees were working in politics, either in non-profits or in campaigns. Clarence, 34, was working on a high-profile 2016 presidential election campaign. Both Travis, 36, and Isaiah, 34, were working in non-profits dedicated to improving education. Clarence, Travis, and Isaiah had not served in the military but all three were college graduates with degrees in political science.

Ryan and Larry were also working in politics, although less directly. Ryan was the president of a local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter and was involved in addressing police brutality across the country. Ryan, 56, had served in the Army and said that he had grown up "dirt poor" in the South.

Larry was not part of a political organization or non-profit. Rather, he founded his own radio show to discuss God and political issues. In addition to doing radio, Larry was also working full-time at a company that recycled used electronics.

Mike and Sheldon were the only middle-aged interviewees not employed in politics, but they volunteered their free time to attend political functions, including American Conservatives of Color meetings.

Diverse in upbringing, religious denomination, occupation, and political experience, the interviewees come from different walks of life. Nevertheless, they were all Republicans or at least identified with conservative principles and voted for Republican candidates and initiatives a majority of the time. How did they become Republicans?



## Why Choose the Republican Party?

There was no single path the interviewees followed to arrive at their political identity. For some interviewees, the Republican Party had always been their political home. Others experienced what could be considered a political epiphany while others had a gradual transformation of their views rather than having a singular experience. Some could be considered contrarians who disagreed with the majority, whether it was their own community or family members. Each of these paths is examined in more detail below.

### *Always a Republican*

Five interviewees had been Republicans ever since they first voted. There was no transformation, sudden or gradual. They were Republicans because it always “felt right.”

Erik, who participated in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program at an early age, was placed with a family who identified as Republicans. His “Big Brother,” Jim, directly influenced Erik’s perception of the Republican Party:

*Yes...Because I didn't have a father in the household...I grew up in Pennsylvania. My mom got me into the Big Brothers Big Sisters program when I was around 8 years old. And so I came into contact with Jim's family...it was Jim who became my Big Brother. And he was a Republican and that was really my first influence, around 8, about politics and about the political process and political views and all that. So Jim's family, who I am still close with today, heavily influenced me and my political views from an early age. I figured that if they were Republican then they couldn't be bad people.*

Brief statements from William, Tim, and Sheldon, respectively, illustrate their unwavering support for the Republican Party:

*(1) William: I've always identified as a Republican since I became voting conscious...a participant.*

*Scout: Was there a specific group or person that influenced your position?*

*William: It was my own efforts to understand the issues and how they best serve me and what I believed and what I was striving to accomplish in my own life. I saw the Republican Party as the best way to achieve that.*

*(2) Tim: I've always identified as a Republican. I never really questioned it. For me, I kinda...In my personal opinion Republicans are more pro-capitalism, which I'm all for.*

*(3) Sheldon: I don't know why but I always felt that I have been predisposed to being a conservative. Growing up – I grew up in New York City – I would always listen to talk radio. I don't know why. I just always loved radio. But I've always believed in being objective, seeing where the evidence takes me. If I see socialism working, then tell me! I'll change my ways. I just don't see it.*

Clarence began working for the Republican Party because his brother was working on minority outreach for the Republican National Committee (RNC), and Clarence wanted experience working in politics. He found a place for himself in the Republican Party as a result of what his brother was doing in the party, his career goals, and what he saw as best for his community:

*In high school, my brother was working for a Republican governor and he was hitting up minority outreach efforts in the southeast portion of Michigan, which is primarily all of Detroit and the cities that surround Detroit. I just wanted to get a lot of experience. That's how I became a Republican.*

### *The Epiphany*

Roughly half of the interviewees described a singular experience, a moment when they began to investigate the Republican Party's platform and become a Republican. One of the more dramatic experiences described by an interviewee was James' epiphany. His decision to change parties was spurred by what a Democratic Party chairwoman said during a speech on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2013. In her speech, she proclaimed that opposition to the ACA and its expansion was because of President Obama's skin color. After hearing the chairwoman's statement and receiving a phone call from his mother, James decided at that moment to become a Republican:

*I was sitting in the Senate, we were in session, and I got a phone call from my mother because the head of the Democratic Party had said something racist. So my mom said, "Well James, did you hear what that woman said?" "Yes ma'am I heard what she said." "Well are you with those people who said that?" "Uh, not really mom." "What do you*

*mean...not really? Either you are or you aren't." "No mother, I'm not." I hung up the telephone and called up voter registrars and said, "I'm changing my voter registration right now." And my mom was a Democrat when she said that! It was her values, about the honor of her family. And she said that right before we hung up, "I don't want you to hang out with those people over there so you don't bring dishonor to our family." And so I heeded that gentle motherly nudge and became a Republican at that moment.*

In addition to having disagreements with Democrats, James was also swayed by the need to uphold his family's honor, something James referenced throughout the interview.

Mike's epiphany occurred while listening to a business lecture. Before the lecture, Mike was a Democrat and supported President Bill Clinton throughout the 1990s. During the lecture, the presenter compared the Democratic Party's philosophy on economic redistribution to the assignment of school grades:

*You know what, it's funny – you know how people talk about pivot points? I can tell you...you're going to laugh over what it was. I heard a business speech by a guy that my brother was friends with. He said, – I'm paraphrasing – "The problem I have with liberals," or Democrats, he said, "Is that they want everything to be the same...everybody to be the same. Take college. If you are working hard in college and get an 'A' and your buddy Joe was out partying all night and came home hung over and he had a big test the next day and you got an 'A' and he got an 'F–' Democrats feel like you should go ahead and give up your 'A', drop that down to a 'C+' and give those points to Joe so that he can get a 'C+' because Joe's mom is a single mom, working as a waitress and his dad used to beat him and you had both parents working and they worked hard enough just to give you just a bit of money to start your college education but you're still getting loans. Why would that be okay yet...If you ask any Democrat they would say, "That's ridiculous, you can't do that." But they'll do that about your money and say "Hey, you make a million dollars a year, you shouldn't make a million dollars a year. You should give me half a mill of that then you make half a mill, now we're the same!" That hit me like a bolt of lightening because my mom was an educator and when I heard him make that analogy about grades I was like, "That would never happen." But, thinking about it logically, why wouldn't the argument for money be okay but the argument for grades isn't? Why do you even go to college? To get a better job. What's a better job? A job that pays more. Why do you want a job that pays more? So I can live a good life. Well, okay, if you want to make more money and live a good life, why do you vote Democrat where they take – why are you supporting Bernie Sanders where he would have a top rate of 90 percent? That's what flipped me then I started investigating conservative viewpoints. And I found out that I was really more libertarian than Democrat.*

This business lecture prompted Mike to rethink his party preference, which ultimately changed his worldview. Mike may have been a “closet” libertarian who did not discover his libertarian-leaning strains until he began actually researching political issues and party platforms.

Allen also had a defining moment that led him to seek more information about the Republican Party’s platform. Allen was initially liberal:

*When I graduated from high school and joined the military, I was 17. I was a hardcore progressive, militant liberal, young black man...angry at the world. So I went into the military and I was going to become an officer.*

While training to become an officer, the program that financially supported Allen was defunded shortly after President Ronald Reagan’s inauguration. The defunding of this program caused Allen to think differently about governmental programs and his ability to be academically self-sufficient:

*I was in a training program that allowed minorities to be in a program for officer training but you could get lower grades and stay in the program. So you could be just above failing and still be okay. So when Reagan took office, one of the first programs his administration got rid of was the program I was in. And I was in class one day and was having this internal discussion with myself, blaming the Republicans for, once again, cutting programs away from us poor minority people and then I realized that they didn’t cut me out of class...they only removed the safety net. So now I was on the same playing field as everybody else in the class. As long as I got good grades I was fine but if my grades fell below passing then I was out just like anybody else was out. Then I started to analyze that and I was saying “So why is that a problem?” I grew up thinking that I was disadvantaged then I realized that I got the same advantage that everybody else had. That doesn’t mean that I have tons of money or tons of resources, but I can study just like anybody else can study, I can go on the Internet just like anybody else can...I mean there’s no rules that say because I’m black I can’t go on the Internet. Or I can’t read a book. So there’s nothing stopping me from learning what I need to learn to be successful in America.*

In another experience that can be likened to an epiphany, Scott was catalyzed to change parties because of the Democratic Party’s conduct during Clinton’s impeachment hearings in 1998. Scott was a Democrat because “that’s what everyone else was” (meaning black Americans). However, during the impeachment hearings, Scott saw that the Democrats were

trying to protect Clinton even though it was obvious to Scott that Clinton had lied under oath.

For Scott, the Democrats' protection of Clinton was enough to justify becoming a Republican.

Larry transitioned from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party when John Kerry, then the Democratic nominee for President, gave, in Larry's opinion, a speech that was insensitive to Christianity and American values. It was at that moment Larry began to research the history of the Republican and Democratic parties on civil rights:

*Scout: Before you registered as a Republican, were you ever registered as a Democrat?*

*Larry: I was registered as a Democrat, yes.*

*Scout: And did you ever believe in any of the Democratic policies?*

*Larry: I believed in my mother and my father. My father being my idol, my role model...when my daddy speaks, I listen. The only thing that my father and I failed to see eye to eye on in recent history is why I am a registered Republican. To answer your question, it was my father and family and them being Democrat. So I went along with that tradition until I did my own research. It was finally during those years that I actually looked up historical facts about the parties. During those years, I was awakened by the facts...just the facts, man. So when I looked up those historical facts, I would have to be a fool to exist in the Democratic Party. That was the party of Jim Crow, that was the party of Dred Scott laws and movement, that was a party that promoted and glorified slavery. So as black Americans, we would have to be fools to continue on as Democrats once you have the historical facts. Let the facts speak for themselves! And they spoke to me. I looked at the facts for about nine minutes, it took me a day to confirm them, and I switched my party affiliation within 24 hours and nine minutes.*

*Scout: Was there something that caused you to start doing your own research?*

*Larry: Back in 2003, I was listening to a speech by John Kerry. In that speech, he began to lambast God and lambast the traditions of America. Apple pie, white picket fences...the values of America. Our traditions are conservative values...we all want to be free and pursue happiness. And John Kerry was just pushing up against that. And the rebuttal from that speech was given by a Republican, who was George W. Bush.*

Though James, Allen, Scott, Larry, and Mike all had an epiphany that spurred a rethinking of their political identity, each of these interviewees had somewhat different reasons for doing so. What these stories reveal is how these former Democrats differentiated themselves from the majority of black Americans and became Republicans voters and activists.

## *Gradual Transformation*

Some of the interviewees gradually rethought their views without feeling that they were necessarily being prompted or pressured to change.

Landon never registered as a Democrat, but he believed he was one because black Americans in his community predominantly identified with the Democratic Party:

*I grew up in Bloomington, North Carolina...it's in the south right near the coast in a predominately black community. As is the case even today, predominately black communities are predominately Democrat. I was never registered as a Democrat growing up, but I always thought I was one because everyone I came into contact with in the black community was a Democrat, I always thought that I must be because everyone else was.*

His motivation for wanting to seek out more information was prompted by a simple question: to which party do I really belong?:

*It was few years later...A few years into my late teens, early twenties that I finally said I wanna know: what am I? Am I Republican, am I a Democrat? It was through that process of doing my own research and investigation that I identified with the principles and the history of the Republican Party. The Republican Party was the party that fought for the abolition of slavery, it fought to enact the civil rights amendments...13, 14, 15...it fought for women's suffrage. It fought for the causes that I thought would give more opportunity for everyone. And then I aligned that with the principles of the party...protecting the rights of the individual, strengthening free enterprise, strong fiscal responsibility, things along those lines. So when I coupled those principles with the history of the party, I said that I think this party more aligns with what I believe to be best, what I think is right. That was in my early twenties. So I've been active in the Republican ranks since I was at least 22.*

Harold's gradual transformation was catalyzed by the 2008 presidential election. After assessing the policies and positions of each party, Harold decided that his opinions were most similar to the Republican Party's platform:

*I didn't always identify as a Republican. I guess the shift happened when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2008 election when Barack Obama was running. I really started to pay attention to the positions, the policies of each party and I found that most of my opinions mostly aligned with the Republican Party.*

Travis' political identity evolved by being politically active in his community and understanding the needs and wants of his community:

*I'm not going to say that I've always identified as a Republican. I didn't really know what a Republican was but I guess I practiced those values. So it wasn't until 2008, maybe 2009, that I become more politically involved and investigated what both sides were offering politically. So I guess what really made me active was by working in the community and seeing what the black community needed. And it was a slow accumulation throughout time. And seeing legislation throughout time that just did not fit with what I believed. A lot of social welfare, a lot of corporate welfare to a point, certain ideas about abortion. And really, seeing the Democratic Party as being oppressive. When people think of the Republican Party they say, "Oh they're racist." But when I think of the Democratic Party I see them in terms of oppressing other people.*

Nicole was influenced by a close friend:

*Nicole: There might have been a spat of being an Independent and that have been right from high school when I transitioned to college. My first vote was for Ross Perot.  
Scout: Did you ever identify as a Democrat, or was it just Independent and Republican?  
Nicole: No.  
Scout: And was there a particular experience you had that influenced your decision to affiliate with the Republican Party?  
Nicole: I had a friend who was a Republican and he started to explain economics to me and so I thought, "That makes sense."*

### *Contrarianism*

Interviewees took positions that were contrary to what most black Americans believe. Some interviewees prided themselves on being contrarian, as did earlier black Republicans like journalist George Schuyler and author Zora Neale Hurston. In analyzing Schuyler's life and works, historian Oscar Williams concluded that Schuyler always found himself in the opposition, no matter the issue, "One could easily say that Schuyler was arbitrarily belligerent and lived for confrontation."<sup>123</sup> Williams also commented that Schuyler and Hurston were intent on irritating others; they were "...conservatives who purposely took their position to aggravate and irritate others."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Oscar Williams, *George S. Schuyler: Portrait of a Black Conservative* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 165.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

Among this thesis' interviewees, contrarianism was expressed in different ways. For example, Michael became a Republican primarily because of his peers' support for Al Gore in the 2000 presidential election:

*I remember back when George Bush was running against Al Gore. Many people were against Bush because he was a Republican and I remember thinking, "I'm going to be supporting this guy because everyone else is against him." At that time, I couldn't really formulate ideas or what it meant to be part of one party or another, even the platforms themselves.*

Although Michael did cite other reasons for his attraction to the Republican Party, his peers' opposition to Gore drew him to the Republican Party.

Larry's contrarian tendencies were apparent when describing his confident personality:

*But Larry [referring to himself] has always done his own thing, including in my own family. I'm the only one who is left-handed. My friends and family will poke fun at me, my wife, and kids being conservative...for being Republican.*

Larry's description is like Michael's, in that they both took positions contrary to what their peers believed to be right or normal, no matter the expected backlash.

James opposed his own party while still a Democrat:

*It was a very contentious relationship I had with the Democrats. We fought like cats and dogs on issues like gun control, abortion, and freedom. And I was going to leave, I had made a decision to leave the Democrat Party and I was going to join the Republican Party because their values matched the values of my community and my church and my heart and my family.*

All interviewees stated that their family members, sometimes all their family members, were Democrats and that there were consequences for changing parties. For example, Allen said that those closest to him, including his family, threatened severe repercussions:

*My grandparents were Democrat, if I had to classify. My parents, growing up...I grew up in a Democrat family, so the majority of my family was Democrat. In fact we didn't have a choice growing up – you either were a Democrat or you were disowned from the family.*



Mike was also threatened repercussions for becoming a Republican from his family members. He described two instances, one where he was dealing with his father and another dealing with his cousin, in which he was ridiculed for identifying as a conservative and voting for Republican candidates and initiatives:

*Scout: What has been the composition of those responses?*

*Mike: Some from my own family. One of my cousins. She was making the argument about “healthcare is a right, doctors shouldn’t get rich, you should have a right to healthcare, healthcare should be something you get for free.” And I explained to her why that’s not true because, and I said this to my son – he was sitting there, “If the government can give you something, they can take it away from you.” So why would you want to put them in charge of that? I mean, for crying out loud, have you been to the DMV? It’s not federal but still. These guys can’t manage an envelope opener.*

*Scout: And then what was her reaction?*

*Mike: [making comical noises] “You’re such an Uncle Tom.” And my dad thought I was nuts before he died. Like I tried to tell him, “Dad, you used to listen to Rush Limbaugh.” [Dad] “Yeah, but I never liked him. He’s a big fool, he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He’s just a big racist.” And I was like, “Why do you think he’s racist?” [Dad] “Because he doesn’t want anybody to do anything for anybody. He doesn’t want anybody to help anyone.” And I said that it doesn’t have anything to do with anything. People need help, but why does the government need to be the one to do it? [Dad] “Bah! You’re just out of your mind, you’re crazy. Of course the government has gotta help you!”*

Even though Mike and many other interviewees experienced a barrage of criticism from family members, they continued to hold values and opinions most closely associated with the Republican Party. No matter the criticism or its frequency, interviewees were proudly Republican, or at least proudly conservative, and were not especially concerned with the criticism they received.

## Perceptions of Black Republicans

A majority of interviewees received hostile comments about being black Republicans either in person or on the Internet. They were asked if they received these comments from a white person, a black American, or from a family member. Overall, the likelihood of receiving a negative comment was dependent on how much the participant talked about politics and/or their political affiliation.

For Marissa, politics typically was not a topic of discussion among her family members:

*I haven't gotten any backlash about it. And I think that's because in my family we don't really speak about our political views. But in the 2008, 2012 elections a lot of people assumed that my mom was voting for Obama just because they were both black. Which wasn't true at all. But besides just those general assumptions, I haven't received any backlash.*

In other cases, the likelihood of receiving a derogatory comment was dependent on how they framed political discussions. Michael and Landon cautiously negotiated their political identities with others. When initiating a conversation on politics, Michael was careful not to say he was a Republican. Rather he stuck to conservative talking points:

*In my community, it depends on where I share it. If I say right off the bat "I'm a Republican" there's immediate drawback. But if I come into a talk just in general about "What are your views about politics? Do you think that local communities have a better outlook on what needs to be done as opposed to somebody in Washington?" I mean, it just truly depends on how we approach the situation. If I ask questions that are relevant to the Republican, conservative platform, it's generally pretty good. But if I start off by saying "I'm a Republican," then I'm met with the responses, "So you're supporting Donald Trump" or "You're selfish, you're interested in advancing yourself." So there are a lot of bad stigmas to overcome. But if I just engage in a conversation, then I get "Oh you're certainly not as bad as the media says you are. So maybe there's some validity, something to your perspective."*

Michael's guarded approach to political conversations usually shielded him from derision, but not always:

*I've been called an Oreo or they think I'm a martyr. That was when I was younger but I will say that since I've been in college I haven't too much had a negative response*

*because my approach is much different now. I don't go in and lead with "I'm a Republican." I go in and ask questions and get a feel for how everyone is thinking and feeling. And if I feel like there's room for meaningful dialogue I'll engage and if I feel like there isn't then I don't engage. That's how I avoid much of the negativity.*

James, the older elected official, received the most hostile comments. Some were very negative, while others he viewed as more serious questions that could be conversation starters:

*Scout: Have you ever received a negative response from a black American because of your political identity?*

*James: About 60 percent serious questions. Have you abandoned us? Are you leaving the black community? Are you deserting the black community? I get about 10 percent absolute negative. No matter what I say. You're a Republican, and I am a Democrat, and so we can't talk.*

*Scout: Have you ever received racial slurs when describing your party affiliation to anyone?*

*James: Yes I have. Quite a few actually.*

*Scout: Has this been in person, through e-mail?*

*James: E-mail, text, mail, my office phone.*

*Scout: If you don't mind, what were some of the racial slurs?*

*James: Uncle Tom, white folks nigger, foot shuffler...*

*Scout: Wait, what was that? Foot... shuffler...? What does that mean?*

*James: Lord only knows. I liked it because I used to be a dancer, but I'm sure it wasn't meant to be used in that way. Another was cracker. I've received harm and threats of death.*

*Scout: And then have you received any of these racial slurs from a white person or has it been mainly from black Americans or both?*

*James: I received those from African Americans. But from the rabid, radical leftists in America I have received a different kind of slurs. They have tried to chastise me...they've said unkind things.*

*Scout: If they say that to your face, what is your response?*

*James: Oh they don't say that to my face! You see, cowards would never confront a man with some humbug like that. They know that there's a possibility that I'll pull out my switchblade and cut them. I'm joking of course.*

Like James, Larry received slurs on the Internet and by e-mail. Along with comments from black Americans residing in his community, from time to time Larry heard off-the-cuff remarks from his own family members:

*Larry: I've mostly received negative responses from African Americans, never once from a white person. But mostly from African Americans who are close to me in terms of my uncles or some of my family members. The response is like, "Why you doin' that, why you doin' that?! You gotta be a Democrat because Democrats let us do..." Nah nah nah.*

*That's not even an excuse. Obama is all these Negroes want? No. So the negative response comes from those closest to me, those who have historically and those who have been Democrat. My mother is one. She'll tell you that she'll vote for a Democrat no matter who's there. My own mother will tell you that. But my mother lacks historical understanding.*

*Scout: Have those responses ever included racist slurs?*

*Larry: Of course you'll hear the rhetoric of Uncle Tom, Negro Cheerio...*

*Scout: Wait what? Did you say Negro Cheerio?*

*Larry: Cheerio. Honey, Negroes, and oats.*

*Scout: Like because it's white?*

*Larry: [laughs] Yeah! But yeah it comes from Facebook stuff. You never get it to your face. They're laptop gangsters.*

Sheldon received harsh comments from black Americans when he visited his favorite barbershop. As he spoke with the barber and customers about the Republican Party as an alternative for black Americans, he was met with disapproval:

*Scout: Have you ever received a negative response from a black American because of your political identity?*

*Sheldon: Yeah, at the barber. I deserve a medal and went inside a black barber shop and try to talk sense into these guys. I said, "Imagine going to the same car dealer every five years and asking for a new car. How about we give ourselves more options?" They wouldn't hear it. The boos and the catcalls, "What's wrong with you?!" It was amazing. So that gave me an insight into where my people are at right now.*

*Scout: Have they ever called you names?*

*Sheldon: Uncle Tom, sellout, coon.*

Mike had a similar experience when representing a conservative-leaning booth at a cultural event:

*Scout: Have you ever received a negative response from members of your community?*

*Mike: Yes. Uncle Tom. When I went to the Juneteenth thing...we had a booth a couple of years ago. But I had discussions with folks...people were saying to me, "Why would you want to be a Republican." [comical noises] "You're a bunch of racists." [more comical noises] And that's why a lot of our folks won't vote for Ted Cruz because they think he's racist.*

Some interviewees' experiences with their family members were quite positive. When Erik spoke about his political affiliation with his family members, there was no criticism. When

he ran for a congressional seat, he received generous support from his family, particularly his mother:

*Scout: How have members of your community and/or immediate family responded to your political affiliation?*

*Erik: Supportive. Whenever I ran for Congress my mom was very supportive – my siblings were. People in my community, they liked me. They were like, “Erik, I just don’t know if I can vote for a Republican.” I said, “Look, you’re not voting for a Republican, you’re voting for me. I just happen to be in the party.” So I came across a lot of that. But overall, people who know me tend to want to support me.*

On the other hand, Larry described a family member who said:

*“Oh, you’re a white folks’ nigger. They gotcha. You drank the kool aid.” Haha yeah, I like the kool aid!*

As for Michael, his mother was at first skeptical about his decision to become a Republican, but later was accepting and understanding:

*My mom had an issue with me saying that I was a Republican just because of George Bush. And so initially there was that drawback, you know, “What’s your reasoning?” So there was that initially, but I explained the ideas of national defense, the idea that you’re willing to engage in a capitalistic system so I can I achieve a better education. These are the very reasons why. So once I set a foundation where I could communicate my own thoughts and explained my own thoughts, my mom drew back and said that that’s okay because that’s what “I raised him to do.” And from a conservative perspective, let’s not think about the federal government making decisions for people, let’s empower local communities and let communities and states make those rules, let’s decentralize the power to them so local communities can come up with their own solutions. When I combat the issues with that response, everyone seems more happy because we certainly can govern ourselves as opposed to some bureaucrat in Washington. The idea that we have a say in what funds go to which schools and which roads are being built and which traffic lights, like in Chicago, should be taken down. These are all important decisions that we, as citizens, can have an impact on. So to answer your question, there was a lot of draw back initially.*

## Varieties of Black Republicanism: The Issues

Among the 19 black Republicans interviewed for this thesis, there were clear differences, especially on issues pertaining to abortion, same-sex marriage, presidential candidate preferences, limited government, affirmative action, and political compromise, among others. For interviewees, some issues were more significant than others.

### *Abortion and Same-Sex Marriage*

A majority of interviewees were opposed to same-sex marriage and abortion. Like many social conservatives, they supported legislative action on these issues. However, some interviewees strongly rejected the Republican consensus and argued that if the Republican Party wanted to succeed it needed to discard these archaic views.

Interviewees appeared to be most concerned with abortion. When asked to identify the most critical issue affecting the black American community, a number chose abortion. This concern is largely in agreement with the black American community at large, black American Democrats included. A 2008 Gallup survey found black Democrats closely aligned with Republicans on the acceptability of abortion, with 30 percent of Republicans believing abortion to be morally acceptable and 37 percent of black Democrats in agreement.<sup>125</sup>

Though a majority of the black Republican interviewees identified as pro-life, the way they expressed these sentiments varied. Larry likened the Democratic Party's stance on abortion to slavery:

*[The Democratic Party's] approach toward the black community is a devilish approach. So if you look at the history, Democrats are doing the same thing with their platform today as they were back then. Back then slaves were viewed as property, just as disposable as trash. So we see it today with the Democratic Party and with the support of what? Abortion. Out of 100 abortions, 53 of those are black babies. Disposable. Trash. Property. Have no rights. Have no voice. And what party pushes abortion? What party*

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<sup>125</sup> Frank Newport, "Blacks as Conservatives as Republicans on Some Moral Issues," *gallup.com*, last modified on December 3, 2008, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/112807/blacks-conservative-republicans-some-moral-issues.aspx>.

*supports abortion, Planned Parenthood? Black Americans would not be a minority to this day if it wasn't for abortion. If we didn't abort the black babies we would be the majority. But we're disposable, we're trash.*

Other pro-life interviewees were less dramatic in their language. Sheldon, for example, stated that life begins at conception. As for Mike, he alluded to his pro-life position when he expressed his disappointment with Speaker of the House Paul Ryan's decision not to defund Planned Parenthood as promised.

James tied the issue of abortion to Planned Parenthood, the decimation of the black American family, and the loss of millions of lives:

*Planned Parenthood is the reason why millions of young Americans are being killed. It is responsible for the loss of millions of black folk and it is destructive to the family.*

Scott was concerned about the loss of black American lives but he took it one step further and called it a self-induced genocide:

*We are causing our own genocide with abortion. We used to be 18 percent of the population, now we're at 12 percent. Abortion disproportionately affects the African American community.*

William shared James' and Scott's feelings on abortion, and was highly critical of President Obama:

*The most dangerous place for blacks is a mother's womb...so [President Obama] has proven that he would like to see blacks not even be born than to provide opportunities for blacks to self-advance themselves.*

Michael was more moderate on the issue of abortion. He spoke about the financial and educational impacts of pro-life policies and how his upbringing on the South Side of Chicago informed his opinion<sup>126</sup>:

*I believe it's definitely something that should be left up to the family and up to the woman who is having the baby. I mean I don't believe that someone should be able to get 30 abortions in one month but the idea that you should be allowed to abort if it's something that you can't financially support...or for whatever personal reason. I believe you have*

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<sup>126</sup> South Side is capitalized here because it refers to a specific portion of Chicago that is named "South Side."

*that right. And when I go back home to the South Side of Chicago I see all these teens with babies and I see the impact that has on worsening the rate of education and poverty.*

Erik, while pro-life, recognized that *Roe v. Wade* (1973) was the law of the land and wished the Republican Party would respect the Supreme Court's decision:

*My stance on abortion is that I am pro-life. When I was a candidate for Congress in Georgia and when I ran for the state senate, I was endorsed by [a pro-life activist group] twice. Roe v. Wade is the law of the land and we have to respect that. That still doesn't mean that we can't be vocal about reducing abortions or outlawing late term abortions. I think late term abortions are wrong and should be outlawed, because I believe at five, six, or seven months that is definitely a fully formed life. I do however think it is disingenuous for some Republicans to run on platforms claiming that they will be the one to outlaw all abortions. It is disingenuous to the voters and its contrary to the law of the land. The whole abortion issue is gut wrenching. My mom got pregnant in college and my father said "see ya later." My mom actually thought about abortion because she wanted a career in journalism. And we'll never know. But she had Erika [Erik's twin sister] and I. And she actively considered it. I'm glad she didn't because I wouldn't be here. It is tough.*

Pro-life interviewees were also likely to support traditional, heterosexual, Christian marriage. Larry offered an appeal for the retention of traditional marriage along with a critique of the politicization of same-sex marriage:

*Scout: How do Republicans politicize the Constitution?*

*Larry: I mean, you're wavering. You either you have freedom of religion or you don't, right? Either you have the Second Amendment or you don't. Either your rights shall not be infringed upon or they will be. So if we're taking a stand against gay marriage, then take that stand. Don't say, "When it becomes law...well they didn't go against the Bible, you know, it's the Supreme Court. It's the law." No you don't, you gotta abide by the Bible, not that damn law. Because you're not going to see that law when you reach the pearly gates, you're going to see God. You're going to see Jesus. The politicizing of marriage makes my skin crawl.*

Marissa expressed her opinion regarding same-sex marriage when pressed to elaborate her concern that some Republicans were straying from Christian values:

*Marissa: And I guess that some of the views the Republican Party has align more with my Christian beliefs even though I feel like in recent years we've sort of moved away from those views but they're still there somewhat.*

*Scout: How do you feel like they're moving away from those views?*



*Marissa: With gay marriage. Like around some Republican circles they've been more accepting on that right.*

James was also for the preservation of Christian, heterosexual, traditional marriage, believing that the values of the Republican Party helped shape the success of America:

*Scout: What aspects of the current Republican Party appeal to you?*

*James: Values. I believe that what is best for America and coincidentally what is best for the black community are the same. God. Country. Gun ownership. Hard work. That is, getting up in the morning and going to work. Marriage. Family. All of those basic values that made America great, that has made the black community great.*

Yet Michael was quick to question socially conservative principles. He stated that socially conservative principles should not be included in the party's platform and legislation. In particular, Michael discussed marijuana legislation, same-sex marriage, and the millennial generation:

*Social conservatism is a battle I don't think we can win. I mean the millennial population is progressive on a lot of issues and social issues are a major topic. When it comes to gay marriage, these are just battles we can't win with millennials. These are just election talking points that we just can't use. I mean, surely, you can have your own principles, your own personal beliefs, but it's not something that the Republicans should hang onto. The idea of marijuana legislation, I can imagine the perspective that young college students have on this. And then also from my perspective, being on the South Side of Chicago, many family members and friends in general have been put in prison for what Colorado is profiting off of now. I think the Republicans in general bear better to the wants and needs of their constituents than their own party officials. I'm not saying that you should go against your own values, but as a representative, you're here to represent your people. So as a party if we listen to the people more I think we'll be better off.*

### *Limited Government*

All but one of the interviewees wanted to limit the size and scope of government. Marissa, though conservative and Republican in many ways, was the only interviewee concerned about what a limited, small government might actually look like:

*Marissa: I'm all in for self-governance and limited government but some of it doesn't appeal to me. Like how are we supposed to make some of these ideas work? Some of it has gone wrong and in a way that hasn't been expected.*

*Scout: Are you saying that small government hasn't been adequately implemented?*

*Marissa: Yeah. And at the same time I don't think that so far it has been very effective. People like to say "limited government" so people aren't scared of the government. I'm scared to see this actually implemented because would it work, how would society function? [The government] is part of our lives whether we like it or not. I'm scared to think how we will act if it were to go away or just be very, very limited.*

Marissa's caution was unique, as all interviewees argued for the reduction of "big government."<sup>127</sup> Michael, for example, was strongly in favor of empowering local communities and reducing the size and scope of the federal government:

*From a conservative perspective, let's not think about the federal government making decisions for people. Let's empower local communities and let communities and states make those rules. Let's decentralize the power to them so local communities can come up with their own solutions. When I combat the issues with that response, everyone seems more happy because we certainly can govern ourselves as opposed to some bureaucrat in Washington. The idea that we have a say in what funds going to which schools and which roads are being built and which traffic lights, like in Chicago, should be taken down. These are all important decisions that we, as citizens, can have an impact on.*

Ryan and William echoed Michael's appraisal. Ryan thought government was an obstacle to prosperity and that small government was a way of galvanizing future generations:

*Ryan: Smaller government, more inclusive as far as the perception of hands up, not hands out.*

*Scout: What does smaller government mean to you?*

*Ryan: That means that the government is out of your house, that means the government is not telling you how to live your life, the government is not continuing to...instead of developing programs to help you move yourself and future generations to reach the prosperity of this country, you continue to hand out, subsidize things to live by. Which creates a generation that can't help themselves.*

Like Ryan, William saw the federal government as a barrier to citizens achieving success, though he did outline what he believed to be a necessary, but limited, role for the federal government:

*William: Limiting government in our own lives, reducing taxes, providing access to people so they can achieve their own idea of success. I think the height of it all is minimizing government intrusion in people's lives and letting people work out their own lives and their own problems.*

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<sup>127</sup> Jeffery Jones, "Americans Remain Divided on Role They Want Gov't to Play," *gallup.com*, last modified September 19, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164444/americans-remain-divided-role-gov-play.aspx>.

*Scout: You mentioned limited government. Why does that resonate with you?*

*William: Because government was designed to not be a solution, but rather it was designed to be a means to protect our borders, to protect our citizens, to build infrastructure but not to dictate the terms of our lives, not to dictate winners and losers. So that's how I view government's role.*

### *Privilege and Economic Inequality*

A majority of Republicans do not view privilege and economic inequality as pressing issues. According to a 2015 Gallup survey, 56 percent of Republicans believed that the nation's distribution of wealth was fair, compared to 12 percent of Democrats. Moreover, only 34 percent of Republicans believed that wealth should be more evenly distributed, compared with 86 percent of Democrats.<sup>128</sup>

Yet some interviewees dissented from the Republican majority. Marissa and Erik supported equal opportunity for all. Marissa also discussed the issue of privilege and how she had personally observed the significance of privilege while attending college:

*Marissa: Economic inequality has always been a big issue. And I feel like this whole class system is just so stupid. It's sad. Like you want to try to have people be equals with one another, women and men and races...It's very frustrating you don't get to get something that you want because you work hard for it but that people and their privilege get it because they have privilege, because they are of a higher class than you. It's just really sad seeing people getting more than others because of their class and privilege.*

*Scout: Is this coming from a personal experience?*

*Marissa: Yeah. Observations and personal. I see it here everyday on this college campus.*

*Scout: What particularly do you see?*

*Marissa: There was a situation where this person did something very terrible to someone else and he should have went to jail for it. But he didn't because his father gave a lot of money to the university. And that's just to show you that how privilege can make someone get away with something if they have money, whereas someone who doesn't have money can't get away with that.*

Simone talked about economic inequality in terms of reforming Wall Street and ending predatory mortgage lending practices:

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<sup>128</sup> Frank Newport, "Americans Continue to Say U.S. Wealth Distribution Is Unfair," *gallup.com*, last modified May 4, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/182987/americans-continue-say-wealth-distribution-unfair.aspx>.

*When it comes to Wall Street reform, even though I certainly don't identify with Bernie Sanders, I certainly understand the effect of predatory housing and mortgage lending...the effect that it's had on our communities. So there needs to be some standards put in place, there needs to be some limit that the government puts in its place to secure or insure that the citizens are secure from financial institutions or from those who have more know-how of the system than they do. I don't believe that taxing people at high effective rates solves that problem but there is something to be said about that argument, about the present system.*

Like Simone, Harold talked about the need to reform Wall Street, but rather in the context of President Obama's broken promises:

*I think [Obama] has actually carried on a lot of Bush's legacies. President Obama ran on this huge progressive tax structure, which is what Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders are talking about now, and that didn't really happen. President Obama also ran on the regulation of Wall Street, which also really didn't happen.*

Nicole thought that economic inequality was inevitable and therefore one of the least important issues affecting Americans today:

*Capitalism is an inherently unequal system. There will always be people at the top and people at the bottom. We will always have economic inequality and that's something I don't believe we, or the government, can change.*

### *Police Brutality*

Police brutality was a concern of some interviewees. This may be somewhat surprising as 51 percent of Republicans had a very favorable opinion of police officers, while only 28 percent of Democrats shared that opinion.<sup>129</sup>

Michael, Erik, Harold, and Tim were concerned about the pervasiveness of police brutality and its impact on the black American community. Michael was proactively reaching out to victims of police brutality:

*Scout: What's the number one issue affecting the black American community?*  
*Michael: Police brutality is definitely one of them. One of the things I've done here is reach out to who spearheads the Black Lives movement in Chicago, who is calling for the removal of Mayor Rahm Emanuel. So that's an issue that's definitely close to my heart. I*

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<sup>129</sup> Emily Ekins, "Who Really Likes the Police? Older, Richer, White Conservative Republicans," *reason.com*, last modified October 24, 2014, <http://reason.com/poll/2014/10/24/who-really-likes-the-police-older-richer>.

*also like the idea of legalizing marijuana because that plays into criminal justice so that's also close to my heart because of my upbringing in the South Side of Chicago.*

Erik described a disquieting personal experience where he was stopped by a police officer:

*Yeah I've been stopped. I was dating my ex-fiancé at the time and we got pulled over. I was doing the speed limit and a white trooper pulled me over and said I was speeding. Honest to God it wasn't true. So I experienced that. And that wasn't good enough for [the white trooper]. She had to get the canine dog out and try to say I was transporting drugs. And I caused a scene on the side of the highway. And a black trooper just happened to be driving down the highway and turned around and came and said, "Hey, look man, I saw you over from the highway and I thought you looked really angry." And I said, "Yeah she pulled me over because I was black." But I think by and large that kind of activity is decreasing. But what this country hasn't wrestled with and why I think there is still some negativity is because we still have to come to grips with what happened in the past. Both black and white glaze over it and sweep it under the rug.*

Although Tim had never been harassed by a police officer, he was worried that this might happen to him:

*Scout: What are some contemporary policy issues that are most important or relevant to you?*

*Tim: Police brutality is definitely up there. I just worry that I'll somehow be caught in that position one day.*

Harold discussed his concerns about police brutality when talking about disagreements with Thomas Sowell on the matter:

*I don't know what [Sowell's] deal is. His writing just comes off as very offensive, as if he's an uneducated man...which I know he's not. He feeds into a lot of the stereotypes and negative stigma about Republicans and minority engagement. For instance, he talks about black-on-black crime that's happening and how blacks should protest that instead of the police officers killing black people. I do think that he had one thing correct, in that you're more likely to be killed by another black person than a police officer. However, I think he misses and a lot of people miss when they talk about black-on-black crime is that black-on-black crime is just as much of an issue as white-on-white crime. People tend to kill people who they live next to. He also misses the point of why we're having the protests. People have protested black-on-black crime forever and they still do. It's the idea that people pay these police officers out of taxpayer money and we're not being protected equally by these people.*

Mike differed from Michael, Erik, Harold, and Tim on the subject of police brutality.

Mike talked about Americans' fear of black American males and his own experiences:

*What is the thing that scares white America and society the most? The young black male. What is Black Lives Matter about? Not young black women getting shot by cops, no! It's young black men – I mean sure young black women get shot by cops but see here's the thing...I have never been arrested, I've never been hassled by a cop...I've been pulled over...I've never had any of that stuff. And I lived in Boston, New York City, LA, Dallas...I've lived everywhere. None of my wife's brothers...she has three brothers...none of them. My dad, my brother, none of us... Why is that?*

#### *The Republican Party's Minority Engagement Efforts*

Every interviewee agreed that the Republican Party could be more effective and more proactive in reaching out to black Americans. How this was to be carried out was a point of contention. Some interviewees wanted the Republican Party to seriously address issues affecting the black American community, ranging from mass incarceration to police brutality. Other interviewees said that they would like to see Republican candidates, white and black, show up in black American communities and discuss their policy proposals.

Michael was one of the interviewees who wanted to see the Republican Party address issues important to the black American community:

*I think it's valid in a lot of respects. I mean we had John Kasich debate Marco Rubio briefly on Black Lives Matter and the different injustices that African Americans face in this country. But that's it. It's not been something that's been at the forefront of the Republican Party and I can understand that because its base right now isn't African American. I think the Republican Party has to do better with understanding the issues that are important to the black community. And after they understand its importance of these issues, we need to act and come up with plans that will positively impact the issues and problems we're facing. Until that happens we won't have the effect. If you look at the Tea Party movement and grassroots movement, we have Donald Trump, we have Ted Cruz, we have those individuals who believe that the Constitution has been violated, we have individuals who believe the government is out of control, we have individuals in the Republican Party who are directly speaking to the representation of their constituents. So it comes down to representation. So if we want more blacks in this party we need to get more black perspectives represented in this party and I think it's as simple as that.*

Clarence said that if the Republican Party was serious about engaging black Americans, then the party must explain the Republican Party's platform in a targeted manner:

*Before the New Deal, before the 1940s, the majority of blacks were Republicans. The Republican Party freed us, freed African Americans. The Republican Party elected the first black senator. When you look at everything pre-1940 then look at everything post-1940 and you come down to a few instances that turn the vote of African Americans over to the Democrats, then they became beholden to them...It became more about: Republicans are against blacks, Republicans don't care about African Americans because the issues the Republicans are presenting don't make it to minority communities to be talked, to be presented because they don't show up, they don't come. And what I have found through my own efforts and being a black Republican, talking to other Democrats and African Americans who don't know much about what being a conservative is, what the Republican Party stands for...If you get them in a one-on-one conversation, they start to agree, "Oh that makes sense!" Once the Republican message gets to the minority communities and it's articulated in a way that is systematic, that they can understand it, then you get a lot of "Yes, I agree" or "Yes, I understand." Then you get more open arms, you get more acceptance.*

Harold described a disappointing personal experience he had with the Republican National Committee's (RNC):

*Harold: Are you familiar with the Office of Black Communications?  
Scout: I've heard of them. I got a call from them once about this honors thesis.  
Harold: I was getting e-mails from them for some time. A lot of their messaging was like...who's doing this? What they did is that they went out of their way to send out a press release about Black Music Heritage Month. I was like...I didn't even know that existed. I don't know any black people who celebrate Black Music Heritage Month. It just felt like a complete miss...A lot of it. And I was thinking about a lot of the people who work in those groups and they didn't have any folks from historically black colleges, they didn't have any folks who lived in urban centers. It doesn't feel like it's a full effort.  
Scout: That's really disappointing to hear.  
Harold: I don't know...I've become used to it.*

Interviewees were also critical of how others defined Republicans. James argued that Republicans needed to become more proactive in not allowing Democrats to label them as rich, old, white men:

*Scout: Some people argue that the Republican Party has had a difficult time in reaching out to the black American community. Do you agree with this argument?  
James: That argument is completely truthful. Because Republicans have sat back and permitted Democrats to define Republicans – Democrats have been at the forefront of*

*civil rights and equality because Republicans have sat back and let Democrats define us. As rich, white, old men – we're stuck with that. And it's unfortunate. We have got to do better, which have got to define ourselves and let the world know who we are. We are able to recruit African Americans, we just have to tell the truth using American history and American politics.*

Larry argued that black Americans have wrongly defined Republicans:

*Scout: Some people argue that the Republican Party has had a difficult time in reaching out to the black American community. Do you agree with this argument?*

*Larry: Yeah, that's true. [The Republicans] put human opinion out there...they don't put facts out there and history out there. And blacks are hell bent on tradition of family and what they family history and tree has as their voting history. It's hard as hell to pull a black American out of what his family is doing, what his friends are doing, what his color and culture is doing. So if you look at the Republican Party and look at the staunch, old, white folks...you see master, you see slave owner in that type of look. And then you have the Democratic Party, the party of any-damn-thing goes. But the Republican Party comes with a stigma that black Americans have given it themselves. Black Americans honestly believe that the Republican Party is the party of slavery, the party of Jim Crow.*

*Scout: How would you like the Republican Party to engage the black American community?*

*Larry: I don't think the Republican Party needs a gimmick or shtick to appeal to black Americans. They simply need to talk about the facts. And if they can't read put a damn video out there. But you don't have to gimmick to attract black people. Just put facts out there, historical facts. Let them make up their own mind. And our people are perishing now from lack of knowledge.*

*Scout: What would a gimmick look like to you?*

*Larry: A gimmick would be to put a Negro up on the TV screen and have him say "I'm a Republican, ya'll should follow me." Well that's just as racist as anything else!*

*Scout: I just thought of another question. A common quip is that the Republican Party is racist in its policies. Do you agree with that? Do you see it?*

*Larry: No, I don't see it. You're going to have racism, racists in all walks of life...in all parties, in all affiliations. But history speaks for itself...if we're going to just reach back to the 1900s we haven't reached far enough. Right? So we really need to go back and exercise what history really talks about. So no, I don't see the Republican Party as being the party of racism. I do see the Democratic Party as being the party of racism and promoting racism*

### *Presidential Candidates*

The interviewees' preferences for specific 2016 Republican presidential candidates exposed greater differences of opinion than the topics of limited government and social conservatism. Some interviewees could easily state their most and least favored candidates while



others had difficulty in choosing a candidate to support. Michael and Marissa expressed disappointment in all the Republican candidates although they did not totally discount them.

Michael outlined qualities that he desired without having a particular candidate in mind:

*I don't have a single candidate in mind right now because I don't think they've addressed those issues. To propel America forward you have to propel these communities forward. I don't see a candidate right now that's going to propel my community forward on the Republican side. And on the Democratic side I can see candidates who are going to propel our communities but don't propel America. It's not worth the trade off. I will say that while I'm not a fan of the rhetoric that Donald Trump puts out, I am a fan of the black leadership that he is bringing at least here in the state of Georgia. While I'm not exactly a fan of Ted Cruz, he has some good ideas when it comes to tax reform. John Kasich, I believe, is the perfect moderate that can really do some bipartisanship that can move the country forward, I just don't know how excited the base will be to elect him. You know, Dr. Ben Carson, another individual who has interesting ideas and who grew up in an extreme situation and prevailed through the ranks. I just don't see a candidate who can connect with all Americans in 2016. We'll just have to see how everything unfolds. There's just so much bad on stage that there's potential. We just have to keep our eyes and ears open and just see what happens.*

Marissa also had difficulty in choosing a candidate, but she was able to name some possibilities:

*Honestly, so far none of them have actually stood out to me or made me in some way make me believe that they would stay true to anything that they say. And don't get me wrong, some people have to compromise, that's part of getting things to work smoothly. You're not always going to have your way, this is not a dictatorship so you have to compromise. But some will say one thing and do the exact opposite of what they're supposed to do. If I had to choose, Marco would be my first choice and Ted Cruz my second choice.*

The rest of the interviewees were able to identify one or more Republican presidential candidates they favored for the nomination. Ted Cruz was the clear favorite (five said he was their favorite, three said he tied with other candidates, and one had a favorable comment) (see Appendices, Table 1). Other candidates mentioned as favorites included Marco Rubio, Scott Walker, Rand Paul, John Kasich, Donald Trump, and Carly Fiorina. Jeb Bush, Rick Perry, Rick

Santorum, Mike Huckabee, George Pataki, Bobby Jindal, and Lindsey Graham did not receive any mention, positive or negative.

Interviewees who held a favorable opinion of Ted Cruz liked his opinions on a range of issues, as well as his willingness to remain steadfast on principle:

*Sheldon: Socialist light and socialist heavy, that's my options? But Ted Cruz is the leader of the pack. I would have picked Ben Carson but I have to be realistic about this.*

*Scout: Why Ted Cruz?*

*Sheldon: Me being what is known as an evangelical Christian, he's number one. He's not an outsider. From what he's done inside the government, he has stood his ground for the most part. He doesn't have to be a Christian. I just don't want Christians to be persecuted.*

Although Michael was cautious about choosing a candidate, he did praise Cruz for his policies on tax reform, “While I’m not exactly a fan of Ted Cruz, he has some good ideas when it comes to tax reform.”

Erik was the only interviewee to pick Rand Paul as a favorite:

*If I really had to go with my gut and pick someone who is going to work with everybody and be a forward thinker of where this country is and where we need to be, in terms of socially, economically, and globally...it's probably going to be Rand Paul.*

The interviewees who praised Carly Fiorina (none picked her as a favorite) discussed her impressive business and administrative credentials. Erik praised Fiorina even though Paul was his favorite candidate:

*I actually like Carly, to tell you the truth. She knows how to run a business and she knows how to run teams and at a high level. When you're a President, you're pretty much a glorified manager of governmental agencies. I mean seriously. You do set the policy and enter into treaties.*

Scott specifically praised Fiorina’s manner of speaking, “Whenever Carly speaks, she always says something intelligent.”

Travis and Nicole each picked candidates who were rarely mentioned. Travis selected Marco Rubio as his favorite candidate because of his ability to include the younger generation in

the political process. He also talked about Ted Cruz, his second choice, although Travis was critical of his speaking style and whether he would set an inclusive tone:

*I think my top pick right now would be Marco Rubio. I think he would give us our best chance. I mean he's young, he has great ideas that I think that I can get behind. And I think he knows enough about our generation to allow us to participate in the process. We finally have someone to hear us and to understand what we're talking about. My second choice would be Ted Cruz. I think he's a great guy but also a stern leader. My only issue with him is that I think that, especially when it comes to politics, he becomes a bit too churchy. It kinda bothers me just because personally I think I would be okay but my Jewish neighbor? Would my Islamic neighbor be okay with that?*

Nicole was the only interviewee who chose Scott Walker as her favorite candidate, and she was also the only one who chose a candidate who, at the time, was no longer in the race.

Walker's reputation as a union-buster won Nicole over:

*If Scott Walker was still in it I would vote for him. I think he has done fantastic work in Wisconsin and I think that he took on a very tough task with the unions. I think anybody who can win three times in four years and bust the Democrats they have my vote.*

Some interviewees, like James and William, believed that Donald Trump was one of the better Republican candidates running in 2016. For William, it was Trump's commanding presence and his ability to lead America in the right direction:

*Trump has the gumption and the wherewithal to do what needs to be done in a candid, straightforward, non-political type of way. It's not about him sharing my faith. It's not about my skin color. It's about him being the type of leader we need to put America back in control, back in authority. And I think Donald Trump is the only one who can do that. He has a no-nonsense attitude. He doesn't care what people think, he's not someone who can be monopolized. He would really shake up the establishment on both sides. If America can have a chance to regain some type of footing before D-Day, only Trump can do it. My second would be Ted Cruz because he has proven himself capable of coming out against the establishment. But I just don't believe that he has the roughness and toughness and the freedom to call it the way it is.*

James was able to narrow down his favorites to Trump and Cruz:

*James: I like Trump and I like Cruz. I like Cruz a lot and I like Trump a lot right now. Scout: Why is that?*

*James: They speak to the basic needs of America, I believe. Actually I like every single Republican candidate, I can vote for every one of them, I can work for every one of them,*

*I can support every one of them, but I do believe that Cruz and Trump stand head and shoulders.*

*Scout: Do you think they can do a good job in addressing the needs of the black American community?*

*James: Both of them have made commitments and policies...discussed policies that help middle class and poor Americans.*

James was the only interviewee to praise every Republican candidate. Other interviewees were not so kind. From Trump to Ben Carson, the interviewees offered detailed opinions on their least favorite Republican candidate. Trump received the most number of dislikes among the interviewees (nine dislikes) (see Appendices, Table 2). John Kasich, Chris Christie, Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush, and Ben Carson were also disliked although not as much as Trump (see Appendices, Table 2).

Mike offered perhaps the most critical review of Trump:

*Trump [is my least favorite]. Because (A) he's not a real conservative and (B) he's a progressive and (C) he's lying on several things. And I think if you're going to elect somebody to the most powerful office in the country and in the world and he actually has no self-edit whatsoever and he can just say, "I can just stand on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and shoot people and I wouldn't lose any votes" and he can actually say something like that. It's just nuts. It's dangerous. We can't have somebody...I mean I don't want somebody who is going to lie to me...I think people are so fed up with "politik-ies," the Jeb Bush approach of "Well you gotta work your way to the middle and I'm gonna say this and that and I've been tested..." They're sick of that. They want somebody to talk to them like a real person, like you and I are talking. That's what Donald Trump does but the thing is, like, if you want someone to talk to you like a real person then you have to accept the fact that the real person is sometimes full of crap and that they don't know what the hell they're talking about and that they have no self-edit, they have no self-control. We need to have a higher bar for somebody who is going to have that kind of power, you know? Who's willing to say one thing one day and then contradict it the next day because he's not moored to anything other than the tune of the day.*

Sheldon also criticized Trump for many of the same reasons, as well as his involvement with the Clintons:

*Here's the problem with Donald Trump: he hasn't always been a conservative. He's used to hanging out with the Clintons – they all have money. He says he's a Christian. Now here's what I don't know: did Donald Trump actually change? We don't know. I don't*

*have anything against him personally but up until now he's said and done certain things and when you have him on the stage people take that as gospel.*

Simone went further, saying that Trump was a fascist and likened him to Adolf Hitler:

*[Trump] is not a conservative and he's not a Republican. And he also believes that freedom should come second to an agenda. He's a fascist, he's authoritarian. And you might as well be a liberal if you're a fascist because you're dictating reality. And the fourth thing is that he's completely incompetent. He has no idea what he's doing, he has no ability to be Commander in Chief, to elect people to the Supreme Court, to deal with the Senate, to make those executive decisions...he's completely and utterly incompetent. Do I believe that people should be life-long politicians? No. Do I believe that you should know a little about the Constitution before you become the leader of the free world? Absolutely. And the fifth reason is that he's unethical.*

Mike and William chose John Kasich as their least favorite candidate. William cited his looks and attitude:

*Scout: Who is your least favorite presidential candidate?*

*William: Kasich. Because he does this all the time [makes motions with his lips].*

*Scout: And he has weird hand motions too.*

*William: It reminds me of an old horror movie.*

*Scout: Is it just based on his body or is there anything specific policy-wise?*

*William: I know what he's done in his state and I get that. I just haven't really heard broad, sweeping abilities that he would really make a difference. He just argues from that one position on what he's done. And I just don't believe that he has the force necessary to be taken seriously. There's a difference between having a punch like Mike Tyson and having the attitude of Mike Tyson. It's Mike Tyson's attitude that you know he can punch whereas you might have his punch but you don't have his attitude you might have to prove your punch too late.*

Mike disliked Kasich for a different reason:

*I'm a big Glenn Beck fan. He puts things in a way that really, really help make sense and he says it in an entertaining way. And he has a sense of humor, which I think is really important to get a point across. He said, and I'm paraphrasing, the best thing that could happen to America is Bernie Sanders as the Democratic nominee and Ted Cruz as the Republican nominee. Because then it would be black/white, true left, true right, bold colors on both sides. Do we want to be Denmark? Do we want to be a constitutional republic? Make a choice and you know what? Let the chips fall where they may. It would be a steel cage death match for the soul of America as opposed to Hillary Clinton or John Kasich. That would be like worst.*

Erik selected Chris Christie as his least favorite due to his involvement with the War on Drugs:

*Erik: And now a lot of Republicans are just beginning to understand the toll and the consequences from the anti-crime bill legislation that came through in the 90s with Bill Clinton and the sentencing guideline disparities...they understand that. And really it's been sparked by Rand Paul and others who want to try to correct that.*

*Scout: Yeah it's really been Rand Paul and surprisingly Chris Christie. He gave that emotional speech that was posted on The Huffington Post.*

*Erik: Yeah, yeah I saw that. His friend that he went to law school with. Now I'm more critical of Christie because Christie was a federal prosecutor. He was locking up the Laquans and all that versus, you know, the Downey Jr, 's of the world and the Charlie Sheens of the world that just kept on getting slaps on the wrists and 30 days in jail – in a county jail. Meanwhile, they're sending other people from low-income neighborhoods and families in inner city s who are doing five to 10 years in prison. So, Chris Christie was a part of that. But it didn't really hit home until one of his friends...now I'm not saying that you can't have a change of heart, but he was part of that process.*

Marissa disliked Carson because of his annoying mannerisms and his lack of political experience:

*Scout: Who is your least favorite Republican candidate?*

*Marissa: Ben Carson, not gonna lie. One, I'm just picky, I don't like the way he talks. And you gotta be in the field of politics to understand politics. That's me going and trying to be a nurse when I've never been one. I'm not going to try to operate on someone when I've never operated before. That's terrifying. But some people like that idea of not being a career politician. I don't. I feel like if you're going to try and be in such a position of power, like being the President, you need to know something about politics.*

What is interesting about these interviewees' candidate preferences is that Rand Paul was not chosen more frequently. Out of all the 2016 Republican presidential candidates, Paul polled the highest among black Americans<sup>130</sup> due to his proactive minority outreach efforts on issues like mass incarceration and the War on Drugs.<sup>131</sup> This lack of support suggests that it may not be enough for a Republican candidate to discuss issues that directly affect black Americans when talking to black Republican voters.

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<sup>130</sup> Matt Naham, "Rand Paul is getting more black support than almost any other Republican," *rare.com*, last modified May 19, 2014, <http://rare.us/story/rand-paul-is-getting-more-black-support-than-almost-any-other-republican/>.

<sup>131</sup> Alexander Bolton, "Rand Paul courts the black vote," *The Hill*, last modified November 2, 2014, <http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/222533-rand-paul-courts-the-black-vote>.

Ben Carson's absence from the interviewees' favorites and Marissa's dislike of him also go against conventional wisdom. Some pundits and scholars have asserted that if the Republican Party included a black American on the ticket that black Americans would vote for that candidate. Yet David Niven, an assistant professor at the University of Cincinnati, found that black Americans were less likely to vote for a black American candidate if that candidate was a Republican.<sup>132</sup> Skin color may not be a deciding factor either. When observing the favorability ratings among the 2016 Republican presidential candidates, Jeb Bush, Ben Carson, and Donald Trump all had the same net favorability ratings – 20 percent – among black Americans as of Fall 2015.<sup>133</sup> Carson's favorability among black Americans paled in comparison to Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton. At 80 percent, Secretary Clinton polled the highest of any candidate running in either party.<sup>134</sup>

### *Political Compromise*

Political compromise between the Republican and Democratic parties was another salient issue for this study's interviewees. The likelihood that a black Republican participant rejected compromise was correlated with strong conservative views. For example, Mike believed that a willingness to compromise led Speaker Paul Ryan to back down on defunding Planned Parenthood. He also noted his dislike for politicians like Jeb Bush who compromise:

*Mike: I think that with what Paul Ryan said he would do when he got in and what he has done is one of the big problems with the Republican Party.*

*Scout: Meaning in terms of conceding?*

*Mike: Yeah. The Planned Parenthood thing, like not going after that funding. I mean you can get really bogged down in it. I mean I think it's something that we do need to deal with. But there are sort of bigger fish to fry, but if there ever was a time to fry that fish it was now. I don't like the progressive aspects of the Republican agenda...What did Jeb Bush say? "You gotta work your way to the middle..." Why? Why do we want to be*

<sup>132</sup> Rachael Richardson, "Can Black Republicans Win Black Votes? Not Likely, UC Study Finds," *University of Cincinnati*, last modified September 8, 2015, <http://www.uc.edu/news/NR.aspx?id=22176>.

<sup>133</sup> Justin McCarthy and Andrew Dugan, "Clinton's Favorability Strong Among Black Americans," *gallup.com*, last modified August 10, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/184547/clinton-favorability-strong-among-black-americans.aspx>.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

*Democrat light? Why do we want to do that? Ronald Reagan said, “Bold colors, not pale pastels.”*

Sheldon had similar misgivings. When talking about the pitfalls of compromise, he praised Ted Cruz for shutting down the government in order to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA or Obamacare). Sheldon also noted his dissatisfaction with Republicans, who, once elected, start to compromise:

*Scout: Which aspects of the current Republican Party do not appeal to you?*

*Sheldon: Compromise! I am sick of it. Up until now – Ted Cruz stood his ground when shutting down the government. And during the primaries, Republicans campaign as conservatives and during the general they campaign as moderates. When they get into the White House, it’s compromise all the way!*

Other interviewees were more forgiving when politicians compromised. Erik and Michael expressed more moderate views on the practice of compromise. They favored compromise, and liked or disliked certain candidates for their ability to compromise.

Erik disliked Donald Trump for multiple reasons, including for his unwillingness to compromise:

*Scout: Who is your least favorite 2016 presidential candidate?*

*Erik: Donald Trump’s tone in his campaign is xenophobic, anti-constitutional, and bigoted. I do not know Trump personally, but where I’m from you have to take a man at his word. He has offended so many people across all demographics in this country. Also, he’s destroying the bridges that the Republican Party has been building in order to grow the party. How do you compromise or work with the very people you offended if you are president? If you are an authoritarian with an attitude of take or leave it, that leaves no room for compromise. I think we need to have more middle ground in this country. It can’t be all or nothing.*

When discussing the Republican presidential candidate that he most favored, Michael liked John Kasich for his moderation and his willingness to work across the aisle to craft and pass legislation:

*John Kasich, I believe, is the perfect moderate who can really do some bipartisanship that can move the country forward.*



## *Affirmative Action*

Like privilege and economic inequality, affirmative action is not supported by a majority of Republicans. Just 12 percent of white Republicans believe that minorities should be afforded preferential treatment.<sup>135</sup> This contrasts with the 89 percent of black Americans who favor affirmative action programs intended to get jobs for disadvantaged minorities.<sup>136</sup> While Ryan, James, and Erik were in agreement with the majority of black Americans opinions on affirmative action, they were out of step with the Republican majority.

Ryan thought that affirmative action was still necessary because companies continued to discriminate when hiring:

*Scout: What are the most important issues affecting the black community?*

*Ryan: Unemployment and affirmative action.*

*Scout: Why do you believe affirmative action is important?*

*Ryan: There are some discriminatory practices in this country and the reason why this party was designed was because of discriminatory practices and it's still the same way. This organization [NAACP] was founded because of discriminatory practices. And it still goes on today. Affirmative action keeps our fingers on the pulse of those who don't believe that every...there are a percentage of people in this country who don't want blacks to succeed. So let's not take our eye off of that.*

Erik, like Ryan, supported affirmative action, but felt it should eventually be eliminated because it would be unnecessary for future generations:

*I don't think that we're at a point where we can entirely get rid of affirmative action. I just don't. Until we start addressing these issues and put everyone on the same line...when everyone is on the same starting line, then I can say we don't need it anymore. I think we're probably, to be honest with you, a generation to a generation and a half away from ending it.*

Like Ryan and Erik, James found that affirmative action had positively impacted the lives of black Americans. However, he stated that while affirmative action was once vital, it was no longer needed:

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<sup>135</sup> "Public Backs Affirmative Action, but Not Minority Preferences," *Pew Research Center*, last modified June 2, 2009, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2009/06/02/public-backs-affirmative-action-but-not-minority-preferences/>.

<sup>136</sup> *Optimism about Black Progress Declines: Blacks See Growing Values Gap Between Poor and Middle Class* (Pew Research Center, 2007), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/Race-2007.pdf>.

*Scout: Do you believe in the use of affirmative action?*

*James: Affirmative action was an important tool. I helped bring affirmative action to America. Affirmative action was an important tool in recreating America. It worked extremely well. Affirmative action, not highway into the future. It was a bridge over troubled waters, we needed to use it get folks who have been left out. And we did it in education, in colleges, employment. But we can't forever. I mean you can't say to people who are bright and who have worked their way through the system that there's somebody else who's earned a right to the system. You can't say, "Oh you can't go because 400 years ago that person's great great great great granddaddy was a slave." Does that make sense to you? It can't can it? Well it was a bridge and the value of that bridge is no longer there. We don't need it anymore. What we need to do is to get the best education possible and go to college.*

More conservative interviewees, like Mike, were critical of affirmative action, denouncing it as government intrusion. Mike supported black Americans' autonomy. In this way, Mike aligned with the Republican majority:

*One of the things that has made the black community so monolithic in its voting is that we've been told by the Democrats that we can't be left alone to do our own thing, to make our own way, to do what we know we can do because the system is rigged, everything is racist and that we can't prosper without them. Which is government, which is this program and this program, and affirmative action and Head Start, and this and that. Whereas if you just say, "We're gonna get out of your way. If somebody discriminates against you because your name is Shaniqua Johnson and they see that on an application and they don't call you for an interview because your name is Shaniqua Johnson and they call Betsy Moore...they give her an interview and you feel that you were discriminated against and if found to be true, those guys are going to wish they never ever did that." So, no, I don't agree with the Democrat approach.*

#### *President Bill Clinton*

There were no questions asked about President Bill Clinton during the interviews, yet many interviewees volunteered their opinion of Clinton. In fact, many black Republican interviewees were eager to discuss Clinton and how his administration's anti-crime policies had negatively impacted the black American community. Some interviewees were visibly angry and had to pause before discussing Clinton further. This was unexpected, as many black Americans

have viewed Clinton as the “first black president.” Clinton’s favorability rating among black Americans is also high.<sup>137</sup>

Erik was the most critical of Clinton and referred to him throughout his interview, however he was careful to not place sole responsibility on Clinton because he was cognizant of the fact that President Reagan started the War on Drugs. Nevertheless:

*Under a lot of Democrats, including Bill Clinton, who passed the anti-crime bill in the 90s, which incarcerated large numbers of blacks for crack cocaine versus Robert Downey Jr. who had cocaine. Robert Downey Jr. got 30 days in jail, or less than 90 days...somewhere around there...in a Beverly Hills jail cell versus Laquan in the inner-city who got busted for crack and who is serving five to 10. So that was created through the Clinton era and also through the Ronald Reagan era with the “get tough” War on Drugs thing. But it really accumulated in the 90s with the Clintons.*

Erik also spoke about Clinton’s anti-crime measures when thinking about how members of his community have responded to him being a Republican:

*Yes. I’ve had many [responses] but I’ll give you the typical response. Typical response is, “Why would you want to be a Republican? They’re racist.” But then they would talk of facts, as they perceived in their mind, and then after they’re done ranting why, I ask, “Why was Bill Clinton doing an anti-crime bill that has disproportionately affected black people?” They would have no answer. And I say, “You supported Bill Clinton, yeah?” “Yeah.”*

Michael was critical of Clinton, attributing much of the blame to Hillary Clinton and her role in advancing and passing anti-crime measures. Like Erik, Michael was conscious of how President Reagan’s anti-crime and anti-drug policies affected the black American community:

*Her record is reminiscent of her husband’s, Bill. And Bill even came out in The New York Times and said that his policies negatively impacted the black community. I particularly focus on criminal justice reform and most of the problems attributed to mass incarceration can be directly attributed to Bill’s presidency and his outlook on it. And that’s not to say that Republicans aren’t to blame. I do understand that Reagan started the War on Drugs, something that has hugely affected the black community.*

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<sup>137</sup> Justin McCarthy and Andrew Dugan, “Clinton’s Favorability Strong Among Black Americans,” *gallup.com*, last modified August 10, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/184547/clinton-favorability-strong-among-black-americans.aspx>.

### *Support for Core Republican Issues*

Interviewees' disagreements on some issues with the Republican Party did not negate their support for other Republican Party core issues, including fiscal responsibility and Second Amendment rights. Each participant strongly believed in these principles.

For Landon, free enterprise and fiscal responsibility were issues that attracted him to the Republican Party. He also liked the party's concern with protecting and securing the rights of Americans:

*Scout: Which aspects of the current Republican Party appeal to you?*

*Landon: Free enterprise and fiscal responsibility. And protecting the rights of the individual. I just have this belief that if you protect the rights of the individual, you protect the rights of the community. You can't have one without the other. Those principles really matched up well with what I believe and it was the history of the party too that put me over the top. That's not to say though that there hasn't been time and again over the years where I have agreed completely with my party. Sometimes they have gotten away from those principles and the history that has made the Republican Party a great party to some of the leaders out there who are spouting off rhetoric that's divisive. To this day, I still believe that the Republican Party is still one of the better vehicles to pursue the beliefs and values that I believe made America great.*

Travis, Nicole, and Marissa cited strong national defense as appealing aspects of the Republican Party. For Travis, it was not just an interest in a strong national defense that was appealing about the Republican Party, but also values such as personal responsibility:

*Scout: Which aspects appeal to you about the current Republican Party?*

*Travis: Strong military. I would also say personal responsibility, entrepreneurship, small government, freedom of the people...I'm a constitutionalist more than anything. I like the whole aspect of people having the voice, not the government.*

For Nicole, a robust national defense was, without a doubt, the issue that most appealed to her:

*Nicole: National security is the most important by far.*

*Scout: Would you like to define how you view that particular issue?*

*Nicole: So I believe in a strong national defense. I'm a veteran from the Navy and my husband is a veteran from the Marine Corps and we always looked at the country and*

*our military and how our military is utilized around the globe. So I'm very much in favor of always being on offense on their soil rather than defense on our soil.*

When Tim answered the same question, he mentioned the protection of Second

Amendment rights:

*Scout: Why do you believe the Second Amendment is important?*

*Tim: I don't know, I think it's important to be able to defend yourself. When guns start being taken away that's when, historically, we start seeing things go bad for groups of people.*

Personal responsibility, fiscal conservatism, Second Amendment rights, and entrepreneurship were commonly cited as vital for the black Republican interviewees. Larry was the only interviewee to say that the Republican Party's adherence to Biblical traditions was a strong appeal:

*[Republicans] are still the party of traditional, American values and the Bible. The Republican Party takes the traditional stance of marriage being between a man and a woman. And as long as we hold those Biblical traditions near and dear to our heart... that's what attracts me continuously...is the stance on what is Biblically correct, not what is politically correct. And just standing up for what is not just a piece of paper but what is the Constitution. If you heard the President of these United States of America yesterday talking about that God-awful executive action on gun control...He equated the Constitution to a simple piece of paper. And I think that's demonic within of itself. But you have a party, the Republican Party, that will stand up...and it's a God-awful shame that we have to stand up for the Constitution...for the Constitution. But the Republican Party holds true to the Constitution, but first and foremost to the Bible.*

## Political Homelessness

During the interviews, interviewees responded to questions directly and candidly. However, there was something left unspoken yet pervasively apparent: a sense of political homelessness. All interviewees identified themselves as Republicans or as conservative, but some did not feel entirely welcomed by the party.

Political homelessness was explored by Angela Dillard in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America*. In her analysis, Dillard wrote that a sense of political homelessness was evident in black Republicans' autobiographies:

*The often difficult and even painful search for self-awareness, identity, and a home is a common motif in the genre of autobiography, and it plays an overt, politically charged role for conservative authors...Many of these narratives highlight the often high cost of individualism and individuation, while simultaneously emphasizing their value.*<sup>138</sup>

The most notable example of the search for a political comfort zone comes from Justice Clarence Thomas' essay "No Room at the Inn: The Loneliness of the Black Conservative." In this well-known piece, Justice Thomas writes about his negative treatment by the media, black Americans, the Democratic Party, and the Republican Party. The Republican Party, Justice Thomas remarks, has been just as guilty as other groups for not accepting black Republicans:

*It appears that we are welcomed by those who dangle the lure of the wrong approach and we are discouraged by those who, in my view, have the right approach. But conservatives must open the door and lay out the welcome mat if there is ever going to be a chance of attracting black Americans.*<sup>139</sup>

Some of the interviewees harbored similar feelings, both publically and some privately.

Erik and Nicole had the most public, visible experiences with political homelessness because they were running for public office. While Erik was running for elected positions, he

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<sup>138</sup> Angela Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 113.

<sup>139</sup> Clarence Thomas, "No Room at the Inn: The Loneliness of the Black Conservative," *Policy Review* 72, no. 58 (1991), 77.

had to work with both the Democrats and Republicans. When collaborating with party representatives, Erik said that he felt stigmatized and marginalized by both political parties:

*Erik: [Black Republicans] are stigmatized by the Democratic Party and marginalized by our own party, believe it or not. Now they tried to marginalize me in Georgia – now I had a unique experience being a black Republican in the South running as a Republican for a federal office. But yeah I think the Republican Party tends to marginalize. And that is a huge, huge mistake to make.*

*Scout: How do Democrats stigmatize black Republicans?*

*Erik: I think they're hostile. And this is my own personal experience. I've been around Democrats who have been hostile toward me. But if they had sat down with and had a conversation with me like this, they probably would have found that we agree on a lot of things. But they have this connotation that if you're a Republican then you have to be hostile. Even worse if you're a black Republican. Which is ignorant. I don't say, "You're white, why do you want to be a Democrat?" When are we going to get to the point where we can get past all that?*

Erik also discussed his frustration with the Republican Party and its attempts to stonewall his minority outreach proposals. He also described an experience where he was met with hostility from the Democratic Party's candidate:

*I was frustrated with the Republican Party because, as I was telling you before, I was trying to do more inclusion and trying to create a plan to get more African Americans in the party in Georgia. That was falling on deaf ears and that was frustrating me. So when I ran for the state senate, my challenger – I decided to run as a conservative, I was still pro-life and all – the challenger at the time confronted me and said, "You're black... Why would you want to be a Republican?" So it was very negative.*

Allen and Nicole had experiences that were in the grey zone between political homelessness and political comfort. While they felt neglected by both parties, they were able to find a niche within the Republican Party where they felt somewhat comfortable and accepted. In Allen's case, he chose to identify as a conservative instead of Republican because of his disappointment with both parties:

*Allen: If I were pressed to classify myself I would say conservative... Christian conservative.*

*Scout: So why not say Republican?*

*Allen: Because I'm not impressed with the Republican Party. They're just as much to blame for where we are today as the Democrats are. I closely relate to the Republican*

*Party because of my views and their platform but a lot of the Republicans who have that title don't uphold the Constitution nor do they uphold the platform. So I'm registered as a Republican running in this congressional race but I see very few Republicans living out the platform the Republican Party has.*

Where was Allen's home? The Tea Party:

*The Tea Party has never been hostile. Never, ever. It's the exact opposite with how they try to portray the Tea Party. The Tea Party has been very welcoming, loving, and kind and all that. But the groups that are hostile are the black groups. The Black Roundtable, the NAACP...you know those types of groups. You know, you're off the reservation, so how dare you.*

Nicole said that she felt accepted by the Republican Party while working as an activist, but not when she was running as a candidate on the Republican ticket. Tim, who was interviewed with his mother, did not share her feelings of political homelessness:

*Scout: Do you feel accepted by the Republican Party?*

*Tim: Everywhere I've gone people love me.*

*Nicole: You know, I think that, and I can answer this from two perspectives...as a Republican activist, a worker in the party I absolutely feel accepted. Because they want you to work. As a candidate, not so much. It turns into a power, good-ol'-boy, we're going to keep it concentrated where it's always been.*

*Scout: What do you mean by where it's always been?*

*Nicole: It's always been with the white, male candidates and the race I'm in now, I have a very aggressive opponent. And what I'm seeing is that people don't have a good rationale to support him. He's not more knowledgeable, he's not more experienced but in terms of the role of County Commissioner he's not prepared for it and they know that he's nasty. But yet, for whatever reason, they're still willing to support him. And there's no rhyme or reason why. If you know that that person is not even well liked, why would you then still support him?*

Nicole also expressed her dismay with the Republican Party because they did not issue a statement criticizing Jeff Danziger's cartoon portrayal of former Secretary of States Condoleezza Rice (mentioned previously in Contemporary Representations of Black Republicans in the Media):

*[That cartoon] is so far from what is really her. She's a classically trained pianist, she's very prolific, and she is a brilliant woman. So that's very derogatory. That's probably along the lines of what a liberal depiction would be and so it looks more negative. But people in our party have a responsibly to debunk the stereotype and they're not*



*debunking it. If we keep power concentrated the way it has always looked, then what do we think is going to change? How does that reflect the rest of the country? If you want my vote, you have to work for it. And working for it means that you value me and that you have a policy that appeals to me. And not just me as an African American but me as a parent, a student, or an employee or employer.*

During his interview, Mike viewed the marginalization of black Republicans by the Republican Party in different terms. When answering a question about the Democratic Party's approach toward the black American community, Mike posed a choice: would someone rather be ignored or lied to?:

*Mike: I'll put it this way: what would you rather be? If you had to make a choice, someone has a gun to your head, you gotta make a choice. Would you rather be lied to or ignored?*

*Scout: Ignored, honestly.*

*Mike: The Democrat Party lies to the black community. The Republican Party ignores the black community. But the black community has said, "I'd rather be lied to than ignored." And that goes to our history, where we come from.*

At the end of the interview, Mike became quiet and looked off into the distance. I had asked him for any final thoughts about black Republicans. He responded by using an analogy from the Civil Rights era:

*You know the picture of the police officers spraying hose water on the black protestors? Those hoses are liberals and the blacks are the black conservatives. It's what liberals have been doing to Herman Cain and to Allen West. That's what they're going to continue to do to any black American who tries to speak of liberty instead of government dependency. Those hoses are still being sprayed on us today. And we're all still dripping from that water from those hoses everyday – it's just a constant attack. We have no friends in the liberal media, we don't have any one who wants to understand us...to ask us about our viewpoints.*

Other interviewees felt politically homeless when considering salient issues such as crime and mass incarceration. Ryan was particularly frustrated with the inability of both parties to address these important issues:

*I am not satisfied with either party the way they have approached African American issues. There is more concern across this country about the immigration problem than there is on black-on-black crime. There is more concern about the problems in Syria than*

*about the incarceration of African Americans. There is more concern about nearly anything else than the unemployment among African Americans. If either party was concerned about the African American community, we wouldn't have the highest unemployment rate in the nation, we wouldn't have the highest incarceration, we wouldn't have the worst schools.*

Marissa shared these opinions, commenting that while her values were most consistent with the Republican Party's platform, it did not mean that she would vote along party lines during the election:

*Marissa: There's this part of me that like, "What's the point of political parties?" We are all like striving for equality but the two political parties are so divisive and it's based on separating people. Either you're a Democrat or Republican and if you're an Independent then you're fucking confused and you need to figure out where you need to go. If you're not supporting one party then you're automatically ostracized and now in politics you can't even get the Democrats and Republicans to work together even though we're all working for the same fucking cause. So it's disgusting and stupid and I don't get the point of it. We're all here to make the nation great, whether we have different views – different views can make things better. If I had it my way, I think we should just squash these two fucking parties cause I don't see the point in them. They are there to divide people.*

*Scout: So do you personally affiliate with the Republican Party?*

*Marissa: My views tend to be more Republican than Democratic. That doesn't mean that I like everything the Republican Party says and does and that doesn't mean that I hate everything the Democratic Party says and does. But when I vote this year, I won't vote based on the party but I'll vote based on the individual.*

Michael also pinpointed policies affecting the black American community that he felt like were not being adequately addressed. He was particularly critical of the Republican Party for not legitimizing the Black Lives Matter movement or addressing police brutality:

*Scout: Do you think the Republican Party could be doing more to address the issues you just talked about?*

*Michael: Certainly. When we look back on the debates and think about just the general responses on Black Lives Matter from the Republican candidates, the idea that "All Lives Matter" or the idea that we have fantastic cops...I don't think anybody is combatting that. We are just combatting that many aren't or that the bad cops should face the repercussions, that there should be a system in place to protect citizens. And no one has really expressed that. I mean John Kasich has a good view and Marco Rubio with expressing the story of his personal friend on how the cops pulled him over. But there hasn't been a widespread conversation among Republicans on those ideas. And to this date, there hasn't been a single town hall dedicated to black rights or dedicated to the perspective of blacks. Whereas Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have come to*

*Morehouse to do just that. So you just can't say that you're going to donate \$10 million to black engagement and have that be the end all. The RNC must be much more involved.*

Harold had a unique experience, where he was active in the Republican Party ranks by working as an intern but was dismayed when he did not get hired:

*When I was in college, my friends and I were all very gung ho about trying to change the base of the party and put our fingerprint on it. But we quickly learned from the old guard that it wasn't worth it. My friend Matt had an internship with the state party and as he was graduating, there was no position for him. You would think...we were some of the few black Republicans with the College Republicans chapter and no staffers were trying to hire us to go to D.C. The RNC wasn't making positions available for internships or for jobs. The RNC talks a big game about wanting to be more inclusive and diverse but I don't they really understand what it's going to take to get there. They think they can do it alone, but what they really need is younger, more diverse people.*

## History as a Claim to Legitimacy

Black American and civil rights history were touchstones throughout the interviews. History was often invoked to justify and legitimize party choice and political opinions. Prominent black Republicans have used this history in their autobiographies. In *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*, Shelby Steele argued that modern conservatism often echoed the rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr.:

*In fact, most of today's conservatives sound like Martin Luther King in 1963. Contemporary conservatism treats race with precisely the same compassionate Jefferson liberalism that Martin Luther King articulated in his "I Have a Dream" speech. Is there, on the right, a covert, unspoken loyalty to racial hierarchy, a quiet atavistic commitment to white supremacy? In the hearts of some there must be. There are fools and devils everywhere. But today's right has made itself accountable to the democratic and moral vision of the early Martin Luther King.*<sup>140</sup>

Angela Dillard observed that black Republicans have often referred to their history as a way of establishing legitimacy:

*In contrast to their white, male, and heterosexual counterparts, women and minority conservatives are continuously called upon to provide justifications of not only their political philosophies but their very existence as well. It is less than shocking, therefore, that, in the process of defining themselves and defending their politics, many women and minority conservatives have turned to history as a source of authenticity, authority, and legitimization.*<sup>141</sup>

Some interviewees also referred to seminal black American leaders during the interviews. In describing her disdain for Donald Trump, Simone discussed how President Lincoln, Rosa Parks, and Frederick Douglass would not permit her to vote for a "leftist fascist":

*[Donald Trump] doesn't have the ability to look at anything outside of his own two ears. He's also a horrible person. He's unabashedly horrible. And how he could say that he could shoot someone in the middle of Times Square and people would still follow him...I mean we might as well have Hitler. I prefer Hillary Clinton who at least will pretend while in front of the camera to have integrity than to someone who says that integrity doesn't matter any more. And I'm not so desperate to replace this socialist [Obama] that*

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<sup>140</sup> Shelby Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 177-178.

<sup>141</sup> Angela Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 13.

*we have with a leftist fascist [Trump]. Abraham Lincoln wouldn't let me, Frederick Douglass wouldn't let me, Rosa Parks wouldn't let me. I wouldn't be able to look in the mirror. I definitely can't do it.*

Other interviewees historicized their answers in expressing their opinions about how the Democratic Party's policies have affected the black American community. Some interviewees, like James, cited President Lyndon Johnson:

*Scout: Do you agree with the Democratic Party's approach toward the black American community?*

*James: Democrat Party?! No I don't. Lyndon Johnson said right after he signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, "I'm gonna give [black Americans] not too much...just a little. Just enough to keep them quiet. I'll have those niggers voting Democrat 200 years." That's what Lyndon Johnson said in 1964. The Democrats have lived up to what he said, what he promised. They have given.... When I was a kid, everybody went to work. Everybody supported their families. Today there are people who just don't work, don't work support their families, they'll never buy a new car, a new house, they will never send their children to college. It's another form of enslavement. If you just give folks a little subsistence and prevent them from achieving, reaching out, and taking advantage of their opportunities. If that's what you do, then you enslave us. Enslaved by government. It says, "Come here, I'll give you a little food stamps and I'll save you a few dollars every month." They've convinced people that that is destiny, that that's the best way to live, that is absolutely an enslavement. I abhor it and that is the Democrat Party.*

Like James, William discussed Johnson and welfare:

*Scout: What's the number one issue affecting the black American community?*

*William: Welfare. It's done nothing to cause the community to advance, to grow. Welfare is good when you need it but it should be used as a method to take you where you need to be, not to live there. It's been used as a crutch. Much of the welfare state was created to keep black Americans under control. It was not created to give them any type of advantage. It actually disadvantaged them. This is why you have four, five, six generations on welfare. LBJ took the approach that we'll control them, we'll take care of them. So the only way they can get welfare is if a woman doesn't have a man in the home. So you had thousands of social workers making sure no man was in the home. And here we are today. Seven out of 10 black families don't have a father. So it worked.*

Sheldon also criticized Johnson:

*Scout: What is the most important issue affecting the black American community?*

*Sheldon: We need to focus on the loss of the black family. Something happened in the 60s and that was President Johnson. Boy he nailed us good. He sowed the seeds of our own destruction. Johnson was a stone-cold racist, that's what he was. He implemented policies that led to the break up of the black family.*

Larry used history as a way to appeal to black Democrats:

*[My friends and family] say, "How can ya'll do that?" Cause they don't understand their own history. My question to them is: why are you a Democrat? If you knew your history, why are you a Democrat? But I don't get a lot of flack because they know me. They know I'm not going to retract my statement. The truth will set you free.*

Like Larry, William responded to critics by using history to highlight differences between the Republican and Democratic parties and to remind them that the Republican Party was formally in support of advancing civil rights legislation:

*Scout: Have you ever received a negative response from a white person?*  
*William: So you always run across liberals, no matter what color they are, and I've run across a few. And they say, "Why would you be a Republican? Look at what they've done to blacks." I say, "Excuse me? It's not what the Republicans have done, it's what the Democrats have done. Obviously you don't know your history." So when you talk about the history and where the true oppression came from, which is the Democratic side and it was the Republicans who wanted to inspire the blacks to be free and to run their own businesses and compete and there was the Democrats who not only caused rifts but actually murdered a lot of people to stop them from crossing into the Republican Party. So you have those few.*

While the interviewees are certainly Republican, vote for Republican candidates and initiatives, or at least hold conservative principles, every interviewee offered points of view on some policies and approaches that were not concordant with mainstream Republican and conservative thought. Interviewees were not passive receptacles of Republican doctrine; they acted as independent agents within the Republican Party, rethinking some of its agenda and advocating for change. Interviewees voiced their opinion on issues such as privilege and economic inequality, affirmative action, race relations, Republican minority outreach, and police brutality. While the interviewees embraced numerous Republican Party platforms and policies, they were not complacent and did not remain silent on issues that they felt the Republican Party needed to address.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

Whether deep in the Amazon rainforest or in an urban neighborhood in the United States, anthropologists attempt to document the lives of people who live in relative obscurity. Black Republicans, a minority within a minority, are just such a group. A review of the literature suggested that much work still needed to be done to gain a better, more comprehensive understanding of black Republicans. This preliminary study examined views, experiences, and opinions of a small sample of black Republicans, often using their own words to do so.

The 2016 election cycle offered a rare opportunity to listen to the voices of 19 black Republicans, virtually all of whom were politically active. Five were running for political office. Landon, Allen, Erik, Scott, James, and Nicole had experience running for political office. Mike, Sheldon, Ryan, Larry, and William were politically active in their communities, attending American Conservatives of Color meetings, heading a NAACP chapter in their local community, or founding their own radio station aimed at discussing issues pertaining to God and politics. Middle-aged interviewees like Clarence, Travis, and Isaiah, had political careers working in high-profile 2016 presidential campaigns or in non-profits promoting the value of education. The youngest interviewees, Marissa, Simone, Harold, and Michael, with the exception of Tim, were just as politically active. Whether attempting to oust Mayor Rahm Emanuel or working in a black Republican caucus in their state, these young black Republicans represent a new political generation.

My interaction with these interviewees occurred not only during the interviews, but, in many cases, for extended periods of time after the interviews, continuing to the present. I visited interviewees on the campaign trail and talked with them about their campaigns, and even helped one interviewee to set up a campaign event. I attended an American Conservatives of Color

meeting and was able to meet many black Republicans there. Some of us have become friends on Facebook and interact frequently by “liking” each others’ posts and messaging one another. James and I talk on the phone at least once a month to discuss his campaign and the prospect of visiting his home state to observe it.

I also continue to see many of the interviewees because of my position as a field organizer for the Colorado GOP. We talk about their campaigns and follow up on the interviews. Some of these interviewees wanted to add to or revise portions of their interviews because of recent experiences on the campaign trail. As I was receiving updates from these interviewees, the thesis underwent several revisions so as to best represent their changing views.

Before I accepted my position as a field organizer for the Colorado GOP, I was active on campus, volunteering for many conservative student organizations, including Students for Rand [Paul]. I was also able to meet and spend time with Senator Rand Paul to talk about his efforts to diversify the Republican Party. I traveled to Iowa to volunteer for his presidential campaign and I was able to talk with some of his staffers, including a Hispanic Republican, about Senator Paul’s minority engagement efforts, which enabled me to see these efforts in action.

Lastly, I became acquainted with the black American community, something I had never experienced because of my white, upper middle class upbringing. Some interviewees wanted to take me out of my comfort zone and observe another America. One interviewee brought me to his barbershop to see how the owner and customers reacted to his political views. Another interviewee took me his neighborhood in Colorado to witness the abject poverty black Americans were experiencing. These experiences added context to the interviews and gave me a greater appreciation for what the interviewees were communicating to me.



Four main themes emerged from the interviews: becoming a Republican, legitimizing a Republican identity, positions on the issues, and political homelessness.

The interviewees' stories about how they became Republicans were varied. In some cases, interviewees grew up as Republicans and had no political transformation whatsoever. Other interviewees described having an epiphany, as when James' mother gave him a call during a legislative session. Some experienced a gradual transformation, moving from Democrat to Republican or from Independent to Republican.

The interviewees used civil rights and black American history as ways to legitimize their political identities and to persuade others. Sheldon and James used President Johnson's social programs as a way to oppose the Democratic Party, while Larry used history as a way of persuading black Democrats to become Republicans. The use of history to legitimize and persuade is reflective of how the past informs the contemporary moment. Interviewees were not just bound by contemporary discourses and events, but were also influenced by earlier discourses and events.

The interviewees expressed a variety of views on the issues, suggesting that black Republicans' opinions are more varied than previously believed. While there were many similarities among the interviewees, such as military service, college education, Christian faith, and political activism, there were differences, ranging from opinions on affirmative action to abortion. There was no single brand of conservative thought to which all interviewees subscribed. As with most political groups, these interviewees occupied different ideological positions, from moderate Republicanism to ultra-conservatism.

Some interviewees did not accept standard Republican positions on a host of issues, including the need to address police brutality and to combat income inequality and privilege. The

interviewees were very Republican on core issues, though. Personal responsibility, fiscal responsibility, a robust national defense, and the protection of the Second Amendment were issues on which the interviewees commonly agreed among themselves and with the party. As political activists, they wanted a greater voice in the party. In this way, the interviewees acted as independent agents working within party parameters. They had rejected the Democratic Party and attempted to find a place for themselves in the Republican Party even if ignored or ridiculed for doing so. Several interviewees expressed feelings of political homelessness. Nicole, Allen, and Erik felt the Republican Party was not entirely receptive to their proposals or their presence. Allen identified as a conservative because of his disappointment with both parties; he felt most at home in the Tea Party.

There is still much to learn about black Republicans. The sample for this study was small and not representative. A quantitative analysis using American National Election Studies (ANES) data could draw from a larger sample of black Republicans throughout the United States. This kind of study could identify large-scale patterns, such as religious affiliation, occupation, voting history, and opinions on a variety of policy issues. Identifying these patterns may help researchers discover which factors predict which black Americans become Republicans.

The interviewees, although very active in Republican politics, were not part of an organized political network or a political movement within the Republican Party. And they held mixed opinions on the future of black Republicans within the party. Harold and Landon believed that black Americans were slowly starting to rethink their party identity and that more would become Republicans in the future. Landon observed that more black Americans were becoming Independent. However, James, the most politically experienced of the interviewees, stated that

black Republicans would not become a movement until there was more funding for black Republican candidates, black Republican groups, and political action committees (PACs) committed to funding and electing black Republican candidates.

Will the 2016 election cycle lead to more black Republican office holders locally and nationally? Recently, Representative Mia Love (R-UT) and Senator Tim Scott (R-SC) were elected to high-profile federal offices, successes for the Republican Party's minority engagement efforts. However, the net favorability rating for the Republican Party among black Americans remains low, so the future success of black Republican candidates remains uncertain.<sup>142</sup> This future will be dependent on the Republican Party's support for black Republican candidates and elected officials, funding for black Republican political groups, and engagement with black Republican groups and leaders throughout the country to see how much traction they have gained in their communities. We will need to observe how voters, black and white, view particular black Republican candidates, including the activist interviewees in this thesis. How these interviewees' political campaigns fare in November will clarify the future of black Republicans and, perhaps, the Republican Party.

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<sup>142</sup> Justin McCarthy and Andrew Dugan, "Clinton's Favorability Strong Among Black Americans," *gallup.com*, last modified August 10, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/184547/clinton-favorability-strong-among-black-americans.aspx>.

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## Appendices

### *Survey Questions*

1. What is your age?
2. What is your sex?
3. Which gender do you identify with?
4. Have you attended college or are you in the process of obtaining a college degree? If so, what is/was your major(s)?
5. What, if any, is your religious affiliation?
6. Do you perceive yourself as working class, middle class, or upper class?
7. When you were growing up, did you perceive yourself as working class, middle class, or upper class?
8. Is the majority of your immediate family Democrat or Republican? If applicable, please describe the party affiliation of your mother, father, grandmother(s), and/or grandfather(s).
9. Have you always identified as a Republican? If not, when and why did you become a Republican? Was there a specific group, individual, or a specific event that influenced your decision to become a Republican?
10. Which aspects of the current Republican Party appeal to you?
11. Which aspects of the current Republican Party do not appeal to you?
12. Would you consider yourself slightly conservative, moderately conservative, or highly conservative? Why?
13. Some people argue that the Republican Party has difficulty in attracting African American voters. Do you think this argument is valid? Why or why not?
14. How would you like to see the Republican Party appeal to African American voters?
15. Do you agree with the Democratic Party's approach toward the African American community? Why or why not?
16. How have members of your community and/or in your immediate family responded to your party affiliation?
17. Have you received a negative response when describing your party affiliation to an African American? Please describe your experience, if any.
18. Have you received a negative response when describing your party affiliation to a white person? Please describe your experience, if any.
19. Do you believe that there is a negative stereotype surrounding African American Republicans in the United States? Why or why not?
20. Please identify from this list of contemporary policy issues which three are most important to you as a Republican. Please explain why you chose these three policy issues.
21. Please identify from this list of contemporary policy issues which three are least important to you as a Republican. Please explain why you chose these three policy issues.
22. From this list of issues affecting the African American community, which is of most concern to you as an African American? Why?
23. From this list of issues affecting the African American community, which is of least concern to you as an African American? Why?
24. Please choose from the list of all 2015 Republican presidential candidates your first choice for the Republican Party nomination. Why is this candidate your first choice for the Republican Party nomination?

25. Please choose, from the list of all 2015 Republican presidential candidates your least favorite choice for the Republican Party nomination. Why is this candidate your least favorite choice for the Republican Party nomination?
26. If you ever ran for political office, do you feel that your political affiliation and race would negatively impact your campaign?
27. Do you feel that your identity as an African American Republican has harmed you in any way?
28. What are your opinions of contemporary black Republicans who have gained popularity in the mainstream media? Some popular black Republicans include Dr. Thomas Sowell, Dr. Shelby Steele, former House Representative Allen West, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Dr. Ben Carson, and Herman Cain.

Lists for Questions 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, and 26

This list pertains to questions 20 and 21. Questions 20 and 21 pertained to contemporary policy issues that are most important to you as a Republican.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • Economic inequality in the United States    | • Patriot Act and the National Security Agency (NSA) |
| • Police brutality                            | • Wall Street reform                                 |
| • United States' Middle East policy           | • Chinese data hacking on United States' servers     |
| • United States debt                          | • Gun control and gun violence                       |
| • Climate change and environmental regulation | • College affordability                              |
| • Welfare and welfare reform                  | • Women's health issues                              |
| • Social Security and Social Security reform  | • Public education and public education reform       |
| • Veterans Administration (VA) reform         | • Russia and China aggression                        |
| • Planned Parenthood and abortion             | • Healthcare and healthcare reform                   |
| • United States immigration policy            | • Transgender rights                                 |

This list pertains to questions 22 and 23. Questions 22 and 23 pertained to contemporary issues affecting the African American community that are of most concern to you as an African American.

- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| • Education          | • Abortion             |
| • Police brutality   | • Unemployment         |
| • Capital punishment | • Single-parent homes  |
| • Welfare            | • Voting rights        |
| • Affirmative action | • Access to healthcare |
| • Gerrymandering     |                        |

This list pertains to questions 24 and 25. Questions 24 and 25 pertained to your most favorite and least favorite candidate for the Republican presidential nomination.

- Rick Perry
- Carly Fiorina
- Rick Santorum
- Jeb Bush
- Marco Rubio
- Rand Paul
- Donald Trump
- Mike Huckabee
- Chris Christie
- Scott Walker
- Ben Carson
- Ted Cruz
- George Pataki
- Bobby Jindal
- John Kasich
- Lindsey Graham

### *Interviewee Information*

- (1) Erik: 36 years old; male; college graduate with degrees in political science and international relations; Christian, non-denominational; currently upper class; grew up working class (“we were poor. Is that a category?”)
- (2) Ryan: 60 years old; male; college graduate with a degree in criminal justice; Southern Baptist; currently upper class; grew up working class (“real poor”)
- (3) Isaiah: 34 years old; male; college graduate with degrees in history and political science; Protestant; currently upper class; grew up working class
- (4) Clarence: 34 years old; male; college graduate with a degree in political science; Christian, non-denominational; currently middle class; grew up working class
- (5) Nicole: 42 years old; female; college graduate with a degree in political science and a masters degree in business administration; Christian, non-denominational; currently working class; grew up working class
- (6) William: 51 years old; male; attended college for two years to seek a degree in communications; Christian, non-denominational; currently upper class; grew up upper class
- (7) Simone: 26 years old; female; Protestant; college graduate in business; currently working class (“with a capital ‘W’”); grew up working class (“poverty”)
- (8) Michael: 21 years old; male; college student studying chemistry and mathematics; Methodist; currently middle class, grew up middle class
- (9) Larry: 46 years old; male; went to school to become a cop; CHRISTian<sup>143</sup>; “I consider myself a first class citizen. I’m not second to anyone. I’m just an American citizen”
- (10) Scott: 55 years old; male; college graduate with a degree in economics; Christian, non-denominational; currently middle class; grew up middle class
- (11) Sheldon: 51 years old; male; college student studying business management; Christian (“sometimes that term is misused so I’m a follower of Jesus Christ”), non-denominational; currently lower class/middle class; grew up middle class
- (12) Mike: 52 years old; male; college graduate in mass communication radio; Christian, non-denominational; currently middle class; grew up middle class

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<sup>143</sup> “I am a CHRISTian. I don’t gangbang the gospel. I am a CHRISTian. I was raised Baptist and then went to the non-denominational side of CHRISTianity. Very specific on how my words are pronounced if you’ve noticed. Because we will first called CHRISTal. The laymen’s term is Christian. But no where in scripture is it pronounced Christian. We don’t worship anyone named Chris, we worship a Christ.”

(13) Marissa: 21 years old; female; college student studying political science and communication with a minor in business; Christian, non-denominational; currently lower class/middle class; grew up lower class/middle class

(14) James: 71 years old; male; college and law school graduate; Catholic and Baptist; grew up working class; currently working/middle class

(15) Allen: 56 years old; male; has taken college courses but never received a college degree; Christian, non-denominational; currently middle class; grew up middle class

(16) Landon: 38 years old; male; attended college and graduate school, undergraduate degree in general studies with a minor in management and graduate degree in organizational leadership; Christian, non-denominational; currently middle class; grew up working class (“working poor”)

(17) Travis: 36 years old; male; Christian, non-denominational; college graduate; currently working class; grew up middle class

(18) Harold: 23 years old; male; attended college and received degrees in professional studies, political science, and business; Catholic; currently working class; grew up middle class

(19) Tim: 20 years old; male; college student studying economics; Christian, non-denominational; currently working class; grew up middle class

## Tables

	Rand Paul	Carly Fiorina	Ted Cruz	Ben Carson	Marco Rubio	Donald Trump	Scott Walker	John Kasich
Erik	X	Praised, close second						
Ryan*								
Isaiah*								
Clarence	X							
Nicole			X, tie (was still running)	X, tie (was still running)	X, tie (was still running)		X, would vote for if still running	
William				X, second choice		X		
Simone			X					
Michael			Praised					Praised
Larry			X					
Scott*								
Sheldon			X					
Mike			X					
Marissa			X, tie		X, tie			
James			X, tie			X, tie		
Allen		Praised	X	Praised				
Landon	X, tie	Second choice			X, tie			
Travis					X			
Harold								X
Tim				X, tie		X, tie		

Table 1. The interviewees' favorite Republican candidates running in the 2016 presidential election. 'X' indicates that this is who they would vote for. Some interviewees were split between two or more candidates. Some interviewees praised candidates but stopped short of saying that they would vote for that candidate. Ryan, Scott, and Isaiah have asterisks next to their names. Ryan was not able to choose a candidate because of his high-ranking political position, Scott was not able to choose a candidate for the same reason, although he did praise certain candidates, and Isaiah was not able to complete this portion of the interview.

	Marco Rubio	Ben Carson	Chris Christie	Donald Trump	Jeb Bush	John Kasich	Lindsey Graham
Erik			Mentioned	X			
Ryan*							
Isaiah*							
Clarence				X			
Nicole					X		
William						X	
Simone				X			
Michael*							
Larry						X	
Scott*							
Sheldon				X			
Mike				X			
Marissa		X					
James*							
Allen	X		X	X	X	X	X
Landon				X			
Travis				X			
Harold				X			
Tim					X		

Table 2. The interviewees' least favorite 2016 Republican presidential candidates. 'X' indicates the interviewees' least favorite candidates. Nine interviewees chose Donald Trump as their least favorite. While Erik definitely chose Trump as his least favorite candidate, he did mention Chris Christie. Ryan, Isaiah, Scott, and James have asterisks next to their names for different reasons. Ryan and Scott were not able to choose a least favorite Republican candidate because of their high-ranking political positions. Isaiah was not able to complete this portion of the interview. James was not able to choose a least favorite Republican candidate because he liked each of them equally.



## Figures

Can Jodeci please get back together and remake Feenin as "You got me coonin?"



Like Comment Share

11

1 share

Figure 1. A Facebook post referencing Ben Carson's endorsement of Donald Trump for President. The user's comment, "You got me coonin?" illustrates how the "coon" slur can be directed at black Republicans because of their party affiliation.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Not cited to protect anonymity.

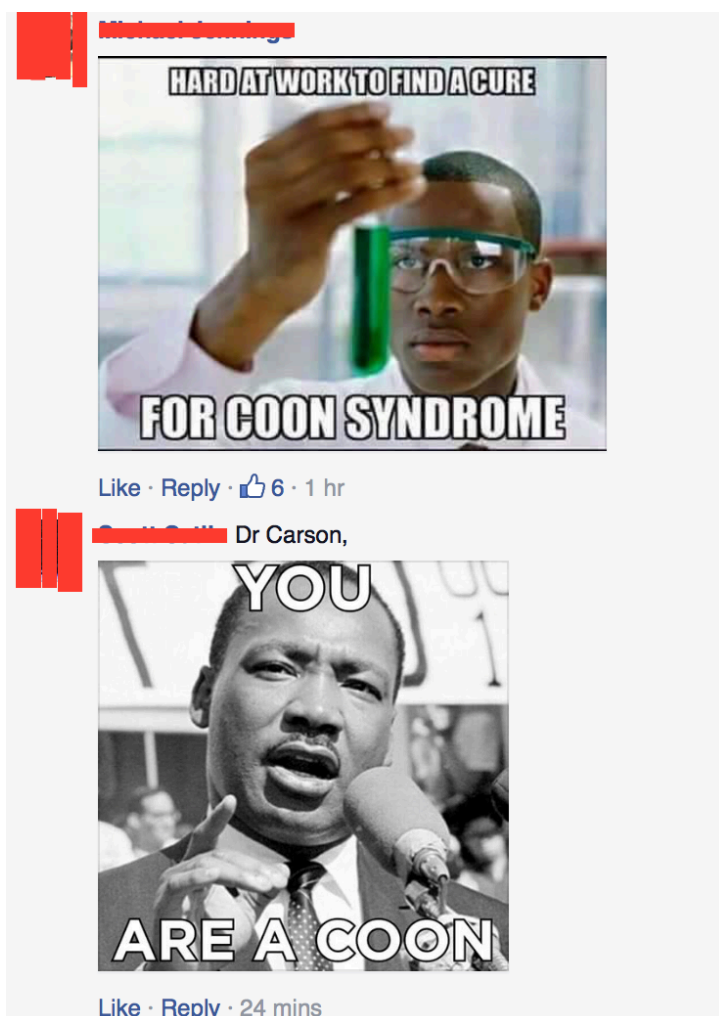


Figure 2. Two replies to the post shown in Figure 1. Again, this illustrates how the slur “coon” can be aimed at black Republicans because of their party affiliation.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Not cited to protect anonymity.



Figure 3. George Takei's Facebook post pertaining to the Supreme Court's ruling on same-sex marriage. The justices who were in the majority are shown with their robes in rainbow colors while the justices who dissented are shown wearing their typical, black robes. The most-liked comment on Takei's post demonstrates how Americans respond to black Republicans or, in this case, Justice Clarence Thomas.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Not cited to protect anonymity.



Figure 4. A meme that was circulating on the Internet after George Takei made his “blackface” comment that made light of the situation.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> John Roberts, “This Clarence Thomas Meme is Going Viral and Destroys George Takei,” *Young Conservatives*, last modified July 4, 2015, <http://www.youngcons.com/this-clarence-thomas-meme-is-going-viral-and-destroys-george-takei/>.