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CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AMONG EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS  
THROUGH A CRITICAL RACE THEORY LENS

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida 2021

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## ABSTRACT

In this study, I conducted ethnographic participant observations and semi-structured interviews at two evangelical congregations in central Florida, Free Baptist Church (FBC) and Cornerstone Church (CC), to explore how Christian nationalist ideas (CN) are negotiated, embraced, and/or rejected in church messaging and among congregants. I collected notes from eight sermons at each church and interviewed a total of 14 congregants regarding their concerns and lived experiences as Christians in the U.S. and their opinions on racial injustice. Expanding on previous research on CN, I incorporated Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an analytical framework to understand CN as inextricably connected to White evangelicalism, White supremacy, settler colonialism, and other systems of oppression. According to my findings, both FBC and CC operated as White heteropatriarchal institutional spaces being led exclusively by White men and adhering to complementarian doctrine which favors male headship, heteronormative marriage, and the subjugation of women and children to men's authority. The messaging in Sunday sermons at FBC and CC also contributed to the fostering of White, heteropatriarchal hegemonic ideals among congregants. Main themes included topics like boundary-making, the spiritual warfare, transcendence of social problems through a future global Christian Kingdom, "law and order" based on Christian principles, support for border control, and opposition to reproductive rights, affirmation of LGBTQ+ people, and racial justice initiatives such as Black Lives Matter and CRT (particularly among White participants). Ultimately, such messaging contributed to CN views among the majority of congregants I interviewed. This study is significant as it applies a CRT lens to provide a foundation for future research on CN that will extend beyond understanding CN as a distinct cultural framework and point scholars back to the White, heteropatriarchal social structure that sustains it.

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Thank you to all participants who so kindly shared their perspectives and experiences as Christians in this nation with me, as well.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the politically repressive times, particularly for historically marginalized scholars, in which this research was being written. May this study serve as encouragement for other young race scholars in the future.

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## INTRODUCTION

Christian nationalism has become a major topic of discussion in recent years both in the political arena and academia particularly after the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection at the United States' capitol (Stroop 2022, Phillips 2022) and the subsequent adoption of the label, “Christian nationalist” by Republican representatives such as Marjorie Taylor Greene (Jenkins 2022). In *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (2020), sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry outline the prevalence of Christian nationalist attitudes among Americans at the national level. Nonetheless, Christian nationalism is not a new social phenomenon. Whitehead and Perry (2020) describe Christian nationalism as a “cultural framework” which promotes the integration of Christianity and American civic life as well as nativism, White supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, authoritarian control as permitted by God, and militarism. This combination between religious (in this case, Christian) belief and sociopolitical ideas in the U.S. can be traced back to nation's very foundation. Historians Anthea Butler (2021) and Jemar Tisby (2019) discuss the ways in which the White evangelical church in the U.S. has leveraged its social and political power to maintain systems of racial domination such as slavery, Jim Crow laws, racial segregation in schools, among others. Narratives such as the “Lost Cause” and Americanism (what is now called Christian nationalism) which were upheld by evangelical churches and White supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan were built upon the idea of restoring a mythical (White) Christian civilization that allegedly existed in the U.S. prior to the Civil War (Butler 2021; Emerson and Smith 2000). These narratives set the stage for future leaders like evangelists Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell to establish what is now known as the “Christian Right” (Fea 2018; Haynes 2021) which played a major role in opposing the civil rights activists—associating them with communism—and bypassing racial integration



laws through the creation of Christian private schools (Tisby 2019). The relationship between White supremacy, Christian nationalism, and White evangelicalism thus becomes evident.

In recent years, the Christian Right, Christian nationalism, and White evangelicals have become heavily associated with support for Donald Trump. In the 2020 Presidential election, 85% of White evangelicals who attended church services frequently voted for Trump (Norrey 2021). Trump's ability to present himself as an authoritarian leader willing to use the state as a tool to enforce "Christian values" made him particularly attractive to the Christian Right and Americans who align themselves with Christian nationalism (Haynes 2021; Fea 2018; Martí 2019; Holder and Josephson 2020; Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018; see also Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020). In keeping with previous ideas of a (White) Christian civilization, contemporary Christian nationalism has also been associated with discomfort towards interracial relationships (Perry and Whitehead 2015), denial of police brutality against Black Americans (Perry, Whitehead, and Davis 2019), individualistic understandings of racial inequality (Perry and Whitehead 2019), and negative attitudes towards Mexican immigrants and Muslim refugees (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020). At the same time, White and multiracial evangelical congregations continue to reproduce racial inequality (Bracey and Moore 2017; Martinez 2018; Martinez and Dougherty 2013) and oppose racial justice, the Black Lives Matter movement, and Critical Race Theory (Oyakawa 2019; Schroeder 2020; Land 2021; see also Tisby 2019).

Having outlined the interconnection between racial domination, White evangelicalism, and Christian nationalism at the national level, my study expands on existing scholarship by providing an in-depth understanding of Christian nationalism among local evangelicals as well as the ways in which dynamics within their churches may (or may not) promote Christian nationalist attitudes. To achieve this, I used a combination of ethnographic participant observation and semi-structured interviews at two selected churches in central Florida.

Moreover, given the history of opposition to racial justice among White evangelicals and the Christian Right—what Omi and Winant (2015a) refer to as “racial reactions”—I analyzed qualitative data through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). While this study focuses specifically on Christian nationalism as a part of a historical pattern of racial reactions throughout history, it is important to note that Christian nationalism operates at the intersection of various systems of oppression such as patriarchy, heterosexism, settler colonialism, among others. I propose the use of CRT in the study of Christian nationalism is crucial to examine the relationship between racial domination, White evangelicalism, and Christian nationalism while also understanding these as intersecting other oppressive structures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The History of White Evangelicalism and White Supremacy**

Before analyzing Christian nationalism among evangelical Christians from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective, it is necessary to first establish a historical context for the relationship between the White evangelical church as an institution, racism, and White supremacy in the United States. Understanding the intersection between these social structures is essential in order to properly contextualize the notion of Christian nationalism, the role of white evangelicals in its development, and the value of CRT as an analytical tool in the study of Christian nationalism.

#### *The Church and the “Lost Cause”*

In *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* (2021), historian Anthea Butler begins her analysis of racism within White evangelicalism with the enslavement of African peoples specifically in the U.S. South. The use of biblical passages by Christian slaveholders in order to justify or legitimize slavery was commonplace. Butler (2021) focuses on two main biblical references: Genesis 9:18-27 and Ephesians 6:5-7. The passage in Genesis 9 is centered around Noah and his three sons Shem, Japhet, and Ham whom were believed to be the ancestors of all nations. After finding his father drunken and naked, Ham is “cursed” by God along with his descendants: “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers” (verse 26). Butler (2021) explains that, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ham and the people of Canaan were interpreted to represent African peoples and the “curse” was their enslavement. Subsequently, slavery was seen as a consequence of “sin” that was permissible within the established “social order” (see also Emerson and Smith 2000). In addition to utilizing scriptures to uphold the institution of slavery, the Bible was interpreted and even manipulated in order to enforce authority over the enslaved and demand their obedience. Ephesians 6:5-7 particularly

states the duty of “servants” to “be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling...as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men...” In this way, enslavement to white—Christian and otherwise—slaveholders was seen as “God’s will” for Africans and obedience was owed to God who was seen as the ultimate authority. Butler (2021) also provides the example of the “slave Bible” which was created in England to be distributed to enslaved Africans in the Caribbean who could read. These bibles specifically excluded any passages containing themes related to freedom or liberation. Nonetheless, Butler explains that in the U.S., reading among the slaves was forbidden which allowed preachers to omit these topics.

Beyond the use of biblical passages to legitimize and enforce the system of slavery, the period following the Civil War was characterized by a particular narrative in the South which eventually aided in the conflation of White Southern identity and Christianity. The question of slavery eventually led to a schism in evangelical and fundamentalist denominations such as the Baptists which split into the American Baptists and the Southern Baptist Convention (Butler 2021). As Butler notes, despite disagreements between these denominations in terms of slaveholding, churches continued to reproduce the social structures they were situated in. For instance, the narrative referred to as “the Religion of the Lost Cause” that took hold specifically in the U.S. South after the Civil War merged Southern “chivalry” and traditions and Christianity in their call for the restoration of a “Christian civilization” (Butler 2021). Butler argues that this mythical notion of a Christian civilization that was presumed to have existed prior to the Civil War was employed to idealize the Confederacy while obscuring the enslavement and violence perpetrated against Black people during that same time period. It is this myth of the “Lost Cause” which became the basis for evangelism, moral reform, and instilling southern customs into future generations.

Ultimately, efforts to restore this imagined (White) Christian civilization led to the formation of White supremacist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), the White League, and the White Citizens' Council (Butler 2021). Although these organizations operated separately from White evangelical churches in the South, all espoused the same "Lost Cause" ideology which combined nationalistic and Christian beliefs. The influence of such narratives is evident in the KKK's statements regarding their commitment to "the Constitution, American ideals, and the tenets of the Christian religion" (Butler 2021:27). Further, Butler recounts the involvement of White evangelical ministers and congregants in lynchings behind churches and White supremacist organizations. One of these individuals was William J. Simmons, who re-established the KKK in 1915 and was a former Methodist preacher (Butler 2021). While recognizing White Christian churches in the South as distinct from organizations like the KKK and the White League, among others, their common sociopolitical and historical context and shared ideologies demonstrate their inextricable interconnection.

Shifting the focus away from the South, other scholars such as Jemar Tisby (2019) have highlighted the racist dynamics perpetuated by evangelical and Catholic churches in the North as German, Irish, and other European immigrants were assimilated into "Whiteness." Tisby discusses how Catholic schools as well as Church of God and Pentecostal congregations in Northern and Midwestern states were racially segregated even into the 1960s and 1970s despite demographic changes. According to Tisby (2019), White congregations would deliberately move out of diversifying neighborhoods into predominantly White suburbs. In addition, he emphasizes the instrumental role of evangelical voters in Sunbelt cities and suburbs such as Dallas, Texas, Phoenix, Arizona, and Orange County, California in the development of what would become the Religious Right, "These were men and women who believed in free-market capitalism, meritocratic individualism, local control of communities, and the idea that America had been

founded as a Christian Nation” (Tisby 2019:158). As noted by Butler (2021) earlier, it is important to consider that evangelical churches and their congregants reflected and reproduced the social structures they were operating within. Thus, Christian congregations across the nation perpetuated racial domination, segregation, and White supremacy in various yet similar ways.

### *The Christian Right and the Civil Rights Movement*

The intersection between White evangelicalism and racism did not only extend beyond geographic boundaries but it also evolved in response to social and political changes. As the civil rights movement gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s, evangelical Christians became more involved politically for very specific purposes. There were two primary movements that established a foundation for the mobilization of White evangelicals: Billy Graham’s “new evangelicalism” and Jerry Falwell’s “Moral Majority.” Although Christian fundamentalists were characterized by a less active role in “worldly affairs” such as politics, Billy Graham’s “new evangelicalism movement” and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) encouraged political engagement among Christians and adherence to a particular political ideology based on racial exclusivity (Butler 2021). More specifically, the new evangelicalism aligned itself with anti-communist ideology following World War II, the Red Scare of the 1950s, and opposition to the civil rights movement. While White evangelicals already viewed the “atheistic” Soviet Union as a threat to Christianity and the U.S., accusations against Black activists being communists reinforced their opposition to the civil rights movement (Butler 2021). Viewing communism as anti-American and anti-Christian, Billy Graham proposed the notion of “Americanism” in 1956. Americanism, which would later be known as Christian nationalism, was greatly concerned with the role of the U.S. in global relations, the U.S.’ status as a Christian nation, and American citizens’ responsibility to be “saved” and adhere to Christian morality (Butler 2021). Thereby, it was expected that “born-again” Christians would be oppose communism, the civil rights

movement, and any other perceived threat to the White evangelical notion of a Christian America.

Importantly, Billy Graham's commitment to both Americanism and evangelizing led to ambivalence in his responses to racism and racial equity. Although Graham disapproved of segregation and even desegregated his own audiences, he viewed racism as a problem having to do with "loving our neighbor," disapproved of Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil disobedience tactics, and condemned the riots that took place in response to police brutality in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, CA in 1965, seeing them as attempts to "overthrow the government," which should be met with tougher laws (Tisby 2019). Thus, while he did not oppose racial equity in and of itself, Graham and other evangelical ministers considered that civil rights should be decided at the courts rather than demanded through civil disobedience. In fact, Dr. King's widely known "Letter from A Birmingham Jail" was a response to a letter sent by a group of clergymen which included White Baptists, Methodists, a Presbyterian, and a Jewish Rabbi, all of whom declared marches and boycotts to be threats to democracy (Tisby 2019). At its core, White evangelical reactions to King's approach were influenced by individualistic understandings of racism as "sin" and the previously discussed desire to restore the mythical Christian America and social order of the past. For Graham, a solution to racism would not take place through social or political action. Instead, in response to King's "I Have a Dream" speech, he delivered a sermon proclaiming: "Only when Christ comes again will little White children of Alabama walk hand in hand with little Black children" (Butler 2021:44). Viewing Christ's return as the ultimate deliverance from social injustice, White evangelicals turned their attention to personal conversion and spiritual revival as they waited for the impending apocalypse.

Notably, however, White evangelicals' emphasis on Christ's Second Coming and spiritual revival did not preclude them from remaining politically and socially engaged.

Following the Supreme Court decision on *Brown v. Board of Education*, White evangelical Christians became much more politically mobilized. In 1972, Billy Graham endorsed a presidential candidate (Richard Nixon) for the very first time (Tisby 2019). His reasons for this endorsement were to restore “law and order” following the previously mentioned protests due to police brutality against Black Americans. Beyond concerns about “law and order” in the midst of demands for racial equality, White evangelical pastors spoke out against the federal government’s decision to integrate public schools—subsequently creating their own private religious schools to avoid government mandated segregation (Butler 2021; Tisby 2019). Many academies simply used the labels “Christian” and “Church” in their names to bypass desegregation mandates.

Opposition to integration also extended to Christian universities such as Bob Jones University. As a result of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Green v. Connally*, any racially discriminatory private school would no longer be granted federal tax exemption (Tisby 2019). When the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) revoked Bob Jones University’s tax-exempt status, the university sued the IRS citing a violation of their “religious freedom” as they considered integration to not be discriminatory according to the Bible: “it is a sincere religious belief founded on what we think the Bible teaches, no matter whether anyone else believes it or not” (164). The university would go on to integrate but did not allow interracial dating until 2000. Although arguments for “law and order” and against desegregation were framed by these White evangelical leaders as a matter of safety and abuse of power on the part of the federal government, these statements were racially coded. Underlying all of this was the foundation already set by previous generations, the call for a preordained social order and Christian civilization which was implicitly dominated by Whites.



Shortly after these desegregation disputes between private Christian institutions and the U.S. government, another prominent evangelical minister was able to organize White evangelicals into an official political movement. Jerry Falwell, along with Paul Weyrich, Edward McAteer, and Robert Billings, founded the Moral Majority movement in 1979 (Tisby 2019). Echoing the ideas of Billy Graham's "Americanism," the Moral Majority movement declared itself as "pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, and pro-America" consisting of a three-step program: "get 'em saved, get 'em baptized, get 'em registered" (166). By mobilizing White evangelicals, the Moral Majority played a crucial role in the election of former Republican President Ronald Reagan as he catered to their interests, using racially coded language, claiming to protect "states' rights," and vocalizing his support of Bob Jones University. Along with Graham's new evangelicalism, the NAE, and Americanism, Falwell's Moral Majority would set the stage for what is broadly known as the "Religious Right," or more accurately, the "Christian Right." Recent scholarship defines the Christian Right as "a loose partnership of individuals and groups united in the view that America's Christian foundations are fatally undermined by secularisation and that it is crucial to reverse this trend to return to the founding (Christian) values of America" (Haynes 2021:2). Building on the longstanding narrative of the "Lost Cause," the Christian Right persisted in its efforts to fight the "holy war for the moral soul" of U.S. in the face of "secularizing" forces and social progress (Fea 2018; Haynes 2021). Efforts to re-establish the U.S. as a Christian nation continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, paving the way for the phenomenon now known as Christian nationalism.

### **Christian Nationalism and White Evangelical Doctrine**

*What is Christian nationalism?*

The term "Christian nationalism" has been defined in a variety of ways across disciplines and mass media. Throughout U.S. history, there has been a recurring attempt particularly on the

part of Whites to merge Christianity with Southern heritage, White supremacy, anti-communist sentiment, opposition to integration, and the notion of America as a nation founded on Christian principles—all of which contributed to the development of Christian nationalism. In this study, use the definition provided in Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry’s (2020) book *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, which describes Christian nationalism as “a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life” which “includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism” (10). Perry and Whitehead (2020) also emphasize the importance of understanding Christian nationalism as an ideology that is racialized and not monolithic across demographic categories such as race, ethnicity, educational attainment, religiosity, political affiliation, among others.

Using national data from the 2017 Baylor Religion Survey (BRS), Whitehead and Perry (2020) designed a typology comprised of four categories to represent various levels of agreement or disagreement with Christian nationalist statements: Rejecters (strongly disagree), Resisters (mostly disagree), Accommodators (mostly agree), and Ambassadors (strongly agree). Results suggested that the largest group among respondents were the Accommodators who made up 32.1% of Americans and the smallest group were the Ambassadors who made up 19.8% while 26.6% fell into the Resisters and 21.5% were Rejecters (Whitehead and Perry 2020). According to these findings, it is evident that despite Christian nationalism’s overlap with Christianity, by definition, Americans from all religious affiliations can uphold Christian nationalist attitudes. In the BRS survey, 46% of Americans supported the idea that federal government should advocate for Christian values, 42% affirmed that the success of the U.S. played a role in God’s plan, and 32% agreed that the U.S. was a Christian nation in its origins (Whitehead and Perry 2020).

Although Christian nationalism is not *exclusive* to White evangelical Christians, 70% of Ambassadors (strongly agree with Christian nationalism) identified as White, 55% were evangelical Protestant, 69% were politically conservative, and had the highest levels of religious participation than all other categories. Therefore, despite support for Christian nationalist ideas across various demographic categories, it remains significant that Whites, evangelicals, and conservatives make up the majority in the smallest category within Whitehead and Perry's (2020) typology—that which represents Christian nationalism's most fervent proponents.

The racialization (as well as gendering) of Christian nationalism becomes salient when analyzed in relation to topics such as the “Christian nation,” national identity, immigration, marriage, the family, the social order, the law, and policing. Previous scholarship shows that Christian nationalism among Black Americans is associated with greater support for structural explanations for racial inequality while promoting individualistic explanations for racial inequality among Whites (Perry and Whitehead 2019). Perry and Whitehead infer that Christian nationalism operates differently between Blacks and Whites due to Black Americans' ideas of racial justice as consistent with a “Christian America.” Conversely, Christian nationalism among Whites results in the perpetuation of White supremacy. Christian nationalism (especially among White Americans) has also been correlated with discomfort with interracial marriage (Perry and Whitehead 2015), the belief that police do not discriminate in their treatment between Whites and Blacks and shoot Black Americans more because they are more violent (Perry, Whitehead, and Davis 2019), opposition to welfare policies and support for increased spending on police and border patrol both which are racially-coded and target racial/ethnic “Others” (Davis 2019), negative attitudes specifically towards Mexican immigrants and Muslim refugees (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020), and support for a patriarchal and heteronormative social order (Whitehead and Perry 2019; Whitehead and Perry 2020).

Although Christian nationalism among Black Americans and other people of color was also correlated with anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, and anti-Black attitudes, Christian nationalism among Whites reinforced support for racial boundaries, the preservation of a (White) Christian heritage, and denial of structural racism which were also observed among Whites who did not exhibit Christian nationalist attitudes. As Whitehead and Perry (2020) suggest, Christian nationalism among White Americans seeks to preserve existing power structures, racial/ethnic/religious boundaries, national “purity,” and a patriarchal, heteronormative social order all of which are understood as prescribed by Christian principles.

#### *Why White Evangelicals?*

Having established that Christian nationalism is not exclusive to White evangelicals, previous literature has extensively discussed the intersection between Christian nationalism and White-led evangelical theological movements such as apocalypticism, premillenarianism, dominionism, and demonology. While each of these will not be discussed in-depth in this literature review, it is imperative that scholars recognize the underlying beliefs that render White evangelicals especially inclined to adopt Christian nationalist attitudes.

After the publication of William E. Blackstone’s book, *Jesus Is Coming* in 1878, a focus on signs of the “end times” became widespread among fundamentalist “radical evangelicals” (Sutton 2014). The premise of apocalyptic Christianity at the time was that “enemies” such as communism, the Social Gospel (liberal Protestants), nihilism, wars, urbanization, among others, were symbols of the imminent Second Coming of Christ, the Rapture, the arrival of the Antichrist, a 1000-year long kingdom ruled by Christ (the Millennium), and the battle at Armageddon. However, there were disagreements on the chronological order these events would follow. Premillenarianists believed the Rapture and end times would take place *before* the Millennium would be established while postmillenarianists believed the Millennium would

precede the Rapture (Sutton 2014). Throughout the first and second World Wars, evangelicals who adhered to premillenarianism became increasingly concerned about global affairs and began to embrace nationalism due to the influence of preachers like Billy Sunday in the 1910s and later Billy Graham in the 1960s. The resurgence of Apocalyptic Christianity continued during periods of crisis from 9/11 (Sutton 2014) to contemporary discourse of an ongoing “spiritual warfare” between believers and demonic forces influencing the “Deep State” which promotes “deviance” from Christian principles (O’Donnell 2020). Together, the expectation of “true” Christians to remain loyal to the nation, the premise that America should be protected as a Christian nation from “threats” such as urbanization, communism, and the Antichrist, and the anticipation of Christ’s return to establish a new kingdom in which Christians would rule with him contributed to efforts to gain political power among White evangelicals in particular.

The objective of religious dominion among White evangelicals and adjacent apocalyptic Christian movements such as Reconstructionism and Christian Identity (Aho 2013; Durham 2008; Crockford 2018) is not only rooted in the desire to “reChristianize” America but also Manifest Destiny, that is, the belief that God intended the nation to belong to his people (Bialecki 2017). Regardless of how the “end times” unfold, Bialecki (2017) argues conservative White evangelicals’ simultaneous perception of themselves as an entitled majority and a threatened minority allows them to uphold the parallel narratives of the U.S. being a Christian nation in the past while also in need of restoration as a Christian nation prior to the apocalypse.

Thereby, authoritarianism among evangelicals has become especially relevant when discussing Christian nationalism, the Religious Right, and most recently, support for former president Donald Trump (Haynes 2021; Fea 2018; Martí 2019; Holder and Josephson 2020; Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018). Authoritarian leaders like Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump—despite their own lack of orthodoxy or adherence to evangelical Christianity—appealed

to White evangelicals due to their ability to posit themselves as defenders of the mythical Christian America (Tisby 2019; Haynes 2021; Martí 2019; Fea 2018). Thus, while federal mandates in favor of racial integration were firmly opposed by White evangelicals arguing it was an infringement on “states’ rights” and their “religious freedom,” the use of the state as a tool for protecting the interests, identity, and vision of a “Christian America” in response to the steadfast decline of evangelical influence in American society is justified. Ultimately, as argued by Holder and Josephson (2020), this support for Trump and authoritarianism among White evangelicals is the result of their desire for religious domination rather than religious liberty and pluralism. For this reason, the intersection between apocalyptic Christianity, the belief of a future Kingdom which belongs implicitly to (White) Christians, and authoritarianism among White evangelicals are instrumental in my interest to study Christian nationalism among evangelicals in predominantly White churches.

### **Critical Race Theory, Racial Reactions, and Evangelicalism Today**

#### *Critical Race Theory as an Analytical Framework*

Building on the aforementioned literature on the interconnection between systems of racial, political, and religious domination among White evangelicals, this study will examine Christian nationalism among evangelicals in predominantly White congregations from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens. Although Critical Race Theory as a term was originally developed in the 1990s by legal scholars and professors such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Derrick Bell, it is just one application of the overarching category of “critical racial theory” which can be traced back to the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, among others. Drawing from the ideas of critical theory brought forth by Max Horkheimer (1982) and other scholars from the Frankfurt School, Patricia Hill Collins develops six main tenets for critical racial theory: 1) dialectical analysis of itself as a theory, meaning, it understands itself as also interacting with the current

racial structure, 2) self-reflection and accountability for its own methods of knowledge production, 3) recognition of the social location of racial scholars and their analyses, 4) interdisciplinarity, 5) commitment to anti-racism and social justice work, and 6) a theory of social change concerning race within society and within its own knowledge base (Collins 2011). In this way, CRT and other critical racial theories provide a perspective through which the concept of race, social institutions, and the ways in which knowledge is produced—including among critical race theorists themselves—can be critiqued. According to this paradigm, dominant narratives about race and the social institutions that constructed such knowledge were embedded in systems of racial domination for the purpose of upholding White supremacy (Collins 2011). Therefore, it follows that critical racial theory must critique all methods of knowledge production as it strives to confront and dismantle systems of oppression.

When analyzing Christian nationalism within White evangelicalism from a CRT perspective, the church must be examined as an institution within a larger social structure that perpetuates systemic oppression. Before discussing the structural aspect of racial domination in U.S. society, it is essential to establish the idea of race as socially constructed through the process of “racial formation” rather than being a fixed, biological characteristic (Collins 2011). Collins explains racial formation as comprised of continuous historical and sociopolitical processes that create, change, or destroy racial categories. These ideological and structural processes through which race as a notion is produced are called “racial projects” (Omi and Winant 2015b). Thus, the view of race as a social construct leads critical race scholars to conclude that *racism*—not race itself—should be understood as the cause of racial inequality (Fields and Fields 2012). As a result of racial projects such as the enslavement of African peoples and mass genocide of Indigenous peoples, race is considered to play a central role in the foundation of the U.S. (Omi and Winant 2015b). Notably, CRT also views racial domination as

intersecting other systems of as proposed by intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and Collins's notion of the "matrix of domination" (Collins 2000). For instance, systems such as settler colonialism relied on ideas of nation, Whiteness, and "civilization" which were sustained by White supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and class oppression simultaneously (Glenn 2015).

Due to the centrality of these racial and colonial projects in the development of the U.S. as a nation according to CRT, it follows that the state—much like White evangelicalism—is a "White institutional space" characterized by "initial racial exclusion, white-privileging demographics and power distribution, white-based institutional logics and cultural practices, signifiers and metrics that mask white power and normalize whiteness" (Bracey 2015:561). White institutional spaces inherently reinforce and upholds racial domination by Whites (Bracey 2015) and, by extension, heteropatriarchy (Glenn 2015). This is especially significant when considering White evangelicalism's involvement in institutions such as slavery and "Indian schools" which involved the "Christianization" of African and indigenous people (Glenn 2015; Emerson and Smith 2000) and the Christian Right's use of the state to racial progress centuries later. Omi and Winant (2015a) describe the racially-coded policies of White Americans who belonged to the "New Right" and the Religious Right from the Reconstruction to the civil rights movement and the 1980s as "racial reactions." Racially-coded initiatives such as "anti-busing" which blocked efforts to integrate public schools on the basis of "freedom of choice" set the stage for what Bonilla-Silva (2013) refers to as "racism without racists," or "color-blind racism." Contemporary U.S. society has reproduced and institutionalized "color-blind racism" which employs a "raceless" interpretation of race-related matters (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Gotanda 2017) while simultaneously individualizing racism and furthering the image of the social structure itself as "non-racist" (Doane 2017). Below, I will outline how contemporary evangelicalism continues



to perpetuate racial reactions, colorblind racism, and heteropatriarchy—all of which bolster Christian nationalism.

### *Christian nationalism as a Racial Reaction in the Church*

Previous scholarship (Perry and Whitehead 2020) has continuously cautioned against the conflation of evangelicalism and Christian nationalism provided that Christian nationalist attitudes are not unique to Christians or evangelicals. Nonetheless, by applying a CRT lens to this social phenomenon, I analyze Christian nationalism as a product of the same sociopolitical and historical processes which framed White evangelical institutions in the U.S. in the first place. Bonilla-Silva's (2013) "color-blind racism" and Omi and Winant's (2015a) "racial reaction" concepts are especially useful to understand how White evangelicalism has worked in tandem with the "New Right" (Omi and Winant 2015b) to counter racial progress in explicit and implicit ways. While the narratives of the Lost Cause and "Christian civilization" were closely aligned with White supremacist groups (Butler 2021), White evangelicals' shift toward Billy Graham's Americanism and later Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority (Butler 2021; Tisby 2019), which opposed racial integration policies—without mentioning race—demonstrate the continuation of racial reactions in the form of color-blind racism. Similarly, Christian nationalism among the Right has evolved and continues to fluctuate between a White Christian Nation narrative (common among right-wing groups such as the KKK, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity, etc.) and a Colorblind Judeo-Christian Nation narrative which became popularized post-WWII in order to not appear exclusive of Jewish people (Braunstein 2021). Subsequently, colorblind language remains commonplace in the Right and predominantly White (and some multiracial) evangelical churches.

At the root of colorblind discourse within predominantly White evangelical churches is what Emerson and Smith (2000) call "the white evangelical tool-kit." As embodied by Graham's

approach to racial equality, the white evangelical tool-kit promotes “accountable freewill individualism” (individuals alone are responsible for their own “right” and “wrong” decisions), “relationalism” (centrality of interpersonal relationships) and “anti-structuralism” (social issues are not viewed as systemic). Consequently, systemic racism and racial inequality are reduced to a “sin problem” at the individual level which can only be resolved through personal salvation and reconciliation between individuals. Survey data shows that over 50% of White American Christians of all denominations (PRRI 2018) *and* White congregants from different religious affiliations (Cobb, Perry, and Dougherty 2015) agree that inequality between Blacks and Whites exists due to “lack of effort” among individuals. Further, a “colorblind theology” is promoted within the church as people of color are expected to identify as “children of God” and with “God’s culture” rather than with their racial/ethnic classifications (Hearn 2009). In this process, recognition of race/ethnicity among non-Whites is deemed incompatible with the belief of “God’s culture” while Whiteness is rendered invisible—and implicitly elevated. Colorblind theology and its emphasis on a “personal relationship with Christ” rather than systemic racism (Hearn 2009) become increasingly problematic considering empirical research on the racial dynamics within predominantly White and multiracial congregations.

Contemporary churches continue to perpetuate White hegemony as the racial majority (in this case, Whites) ultimately frame the collective identity of the congregation due to higher rates of participation and sense of belonging (Martinez 2018; Martinez and Dougherty 2013), produce inequality of resources between clergy of color and White clergy (Munn 2019), and enforce White spaces through the use of “race tests,” such as microaggressions and racial stereotyping in order to exclude people of color who do not align themselves with White interests (Bracey and Moore 2017). In addition to colorblindness and the reproduction of racial domination within evangelical churches, evangelical congregations have prioritized racial reconciliation and

suppressed racial justice efforts within the church itself (Oyakawa 2019). Historically White evangelical institutions such as the Southern Evangelical Seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention along with white evangelical pastors more broadly have recently denounced the Black Lives Matter movement, intersectionality, and Critical Race Theory as “anti-Christian,” “Marxist,” and “incompatible” with Christianity (Schroeder 2020; Land 2021; see also Tisby 2019). Evidently, White and multiracial evangelical churches continue to reinforce the racial domination, White supremacy, and racial reactions that have also been fundamental to the New Right and Christian nationalism.

Provided that this study focuses on Christian nationalism as a racial reaction, an in-depth analysis of the patriarchal and heteronormative dynamics within White evangelicalism is beyond the scope of this literature review. Nonetheless, as established above, CRT does engage with the intersections of other systems of oppression which serve to uphold White, colonial heteropatriarchy in the U.S. Patriarchy and heteronormativity are aspects of settler colonialism, Whiteness, nationhood, and White Christianity as suggested by Glenn (2015). Such ideals were not only instilled into African and indigenous people by European Christian missionaries, but they remain fundamental to the structure and doctrine of evangelicalism in the U.S. today. Gender ideologies such as “complementarianism,” the notion that men and women were created by God as fundamentally different and with distinct roles—men as the leaders and women as the helpmates—and the more contemporary “evangelical pragmatism,” the idea that men are only leaders in *spiritual* matters have been prominent in evangelical spaces (Piper and Grudem 1991; Colaner and Giles 2008; and Gallagher 2004). Both complementarianism and evangelical pragmatism have upheld evangelical men’s perceived positions as leaders not only within the home but in the church. Further, the use of Biblical passages to justify men’s exertion of power and responsibility over women in evangelical institutions (including academic institutions) is

referred to as “sanctified sexism” (Hall, Christerson, and Cunningham 2010). Subsequently, it is crucial to take into consideration how evangelicalism operates within the matrix of domination by not only systematically participating in racial projects, but also enforcing essentialist views of gender, the gender binary, heteronormative marriage, and a patriarchal order in the family as well as the church.

The present study expands upon previous literature on Christian nationalism by employing CRT as an critical and intersectional framework through which Christian nationalism, White evangelicalism, White supremacy, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy, are seen as co-constitutive, that is, one does not exist without the others. Understanding Christian nationalism as inseparable from White evangelicalism and other systems of oppression within the matrix of domination, this study will explore two main questions: *a) how do White congregants and congregants of color negotiate Christian nationalist ideas? and b) in what ways do these local evangelicals embrace and/or reject Christian nationalism?*

## METHODOLOGY

For this qualitative study, I utilized two main research methods: ethnographic participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Provided that the vast majority of research on Christian nationalism focuses primarily on national survey data and quantitative analyses (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020, Davis 2019, Perry and Whitehead 2015, Perry and Whitehead 2019, Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018, Whitehead and Perry 2019, Perry, Whitehead, and Davis 2019), I seek to provide an in-depth understanding of Christian nationalist ideology within and in relation to local evangelical Christian churches in central Florida guided by previous scholarship on Christian nationalism and Critical Race Theory (CRT). First, I take an ethnographic approach to observe the context within which local evangelicals create meanings and interact with each other. Ethnography, as defined by van Donge (2006), strives to understand social phenomena via daily interactions and practices. Participant observation is a crucial part of ethnographic methods as it can provide an “open approach” in which (van Donge 2006) researchers avoid drawing conclusions prior to entering a social context. Additionally, ethnography is “reflexive” (Spickard 2007), meaning it incorporates the researcher’s own interaction with the social phenomena that is being observed. I apply ethnographic participant observation in this study by noting my positionality within these evangelical congregations and gathering field notes during Sunday school meetings, bible studies, interpersonal interactions at church, and Sunday morning sermons as done by Bracey and Moore (2017). The ethnographic observations and field notes were collected over a period of eight months. I attended the two selected churches initially alternating between the two bi-weekly and later, weekly. These field notes provided me with a thorough understanding of the beliefs, ideas, dynamics, and social context that informed participants’ perspectives and experiences.

After having familiarized myself with the congregations through ethnographic participant observation, I also conducted semi-structured interviews—which included Whitehead and Perry’s (2020) Christian nationalism assessment—with individual congregants from both churches. Semi-structured interviews are particularly helpful as they allow the researcher to lead the conversation with a specific research purpose in mind while also utilizing follow up questions to unravel the participant’s “lifeworld” or interpretations of their own experiences and any inner contradictions they may hold (Brinkmann 2020). The semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore individual congregants’ understandings of the nation, their experiences as Christians in the U.S., their views on race, racism, and racial justice, and the ways in which they negotiated Christian nationalist ideas while also grounding my questions on previous literature on Christian nationalism and CRT. Out of the 29 congregants that expressed interest initially, only 14 participated in the semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted and recorded via phone and Zoom. These interviews ranged between 59 minutes to 2 hours and 23 minutes. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and all identifying information was redacted from the transcripts.

### **Study Sites**

The two evangelical congregations I selected are located in two different cities in central Florida. These two churches were selected for this study for several reasons. First, both congregations were close in proximity to my local community which made them more accessible to me. Further, I had a personal connection with an individual who had attended each of these churches which aided me as I attempted to connect with pre-existing social networks in these churches. My previous participation in other local evangelical churches also provided me with a framework for selecting these churches. Primarily, I was looking to select any local church which identified itself as evangelical as I wanted to illustrate the social context and attitudes of

“everyday” evangelicals one could encounter in a local community church. I assigned each of the churches the following pseudonyms: Cornerstone Church (CC) and Free Baptist Church (FBC). Although both cities are adjacent to each other and share similar racial demographics (71% versus 73% White Non-Hispanic, 9% versus 5% Black American Non-Hispanic, 7% versus 5% Asian Non-Hispanic, and both were 12% Latinx/Hispanic) (Data USA 2022), the estimated demographics for the immediate communities of each church were vastly different. According to data from the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) CC is estimated to be approximately 80% White making it a predominantly White congregation and FBC is around 64% White making it a multiracial church (ARDA 2015). In terms of hierarchy and social dynamics within the churches, both CC and FBC appear to be led by White males as portrayed in their respective webpages. Out of CC’s three “Elders” (one pastor, one Elder, and one Production Director) all appear to be White men. Three women are included as part of the “Staff” (Women’s Discipleship Director, Administration Director, etc.), but none hold leadership roles over the entire congregation. All women in CC’s staff also appear to be White. There is an affiliated yet separate ministry for Spanish speakers in another city which is led by a White Latino man. Similarly, out of FBC’s 13 pastors and reverends all appear to be White men despite having a multiracial congregation. The majority of the non-leadership staff (20 out of 27) are presumably women by their names; however, no images are provided on the website for any of them contrary to the White men in leadership.

In terms of doctrine, both CC and FBC fall within evangelicalism. While CC is “nondenominational” and identifies as Reformed in doctrine, its core beliefs are directly adopted from The Gospel Coalition, a “fellowship of evangelical churches in the Reformed tradition” (The Gospel Coalition 2023). Such beliefs include the Holy Trinity, the “fall” of humanity due to “sin,” the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the sins of humanity, the Bible as the

infallible word of God, and a future kingdom that will be established after Christ's return. CC is heavily involved in evangelizing and "church planting" as evidenced by their affiliation with Acts 29, a global network of "multiplying" churches (Acts 29 2022), and The Gospel Coalition (The Gospel Coalition 2023). Conversely, FBC identifies as Southern Baptist by denomination as it bases its "statement of faith" on the Southern Baptist Convention's "The Baptist Faith and Message 2000" (Southern Baptist Convention 2022). Being an evangelical church, FBC also holds the same beliefs regarding the Holy Trinity, sin, the Bible as inerrant and the word of God, and salvation through faith in Christ's death and resurrection. Like CC, FBC also places great emphasis on church planting and missionary work nationally and internationally with training programs offered locally. FBC does not offer a Spanish-speaking ministry, but it provides an English as a Second Language (ESL) program which includes English classes and a "Citizenship preparation" class that is open to adults in the broader community.

### **Sampling and Demographics**

Similar to Whitehead and Perry (2020), this study utilized convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants as I relied on two main individuals (one from each congregation) to identify other potential participants. As I interviewed participants, I also asked them to suggest additional people who might be interested in being interviewed. I must note that the lead pastors whose sermon statements are included in this study did not participate in the individual interviews. Thus, their racial/ethnic identity, gender, and age are approximates based on my observations. The total sample included 14 interviewees total, five from CC and nine from FBC. All participants were 18 years old or above, ranging from ages 21 to 80 with a median age of 43. Despite my efforts to contact equal numbers of White evangelicals and evangelicals of color via common social networks as to avoid overrepresenting any single racial group, 10 out of the 14 congregants who consented to participating identified as White. Of the remaining four, one



identified as Black/African immigrant from Uganda, one as Black/Haitian Hispanic, one as Latino/Hispanic, and one as Black/mixed-race. These four evangelicals of color all belonged to FBC. In terms of gender, eight participants identified as women and six identified as men. Eight participants held leadership positions (pastor, small group leader, administration, committee member, etc.) and six held non-leadership positions (Sunday school teacher, choir member, greeter, etc). For highest education level, four participants had some college education, two had an associate degree, three had a bachelor's degree, three had a master's degree, one had some postgraduate education, and one had a doctorate's degree. Only five out of 14 participants were willing to share an estimate of their average annual income, ranging from \$30,000 to \$280,000 with a median of \$80,000.

### **Interviews and Christian Nationalism (CN) Assessment**

The semi-structured interviews included a Christian nationalism (CN) assessment based on six questions from the 2017 Baylor Religious Survey (BRS) followed by 19 open-ended questions, as done by Whitehead and Perry (2020). First, the CN assessment designed by Whitehead and Perry includes the following Likert-scale style items: 1) *The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation*, 2) *The federal government should advocate Christian values*, 3) *The federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state*, 4) *The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces*, 5) *The federal government should allow prayer in public schools*, and 6) *The success of the United States is part of God's plan*. Participants could select any of the following options for each item: Strongly Agree (4), Mostly Agree (3), Undecided (2), Mostly Disagree (1), Strongly Disagree (0), resulting in a CN score ranging from 0 to 24. The third item in this index was reverse-coded. Whitehead and Perry (2020) analyzed the CN index scores using a typology comprised of 4 categories: Ambassadors (18-24), Accommodators (12-17), Resisters (6-11), and Rejecters (0).

Below, I include a table with the CN scores for each participant in this study along with their congregation, race, gender, and age (see Table 1).

For the open-ended questions, I only used five out of the 16 open-ended questions from Whitehead and Perry's (2020) study. Out of these five questions, I also rephrased some to better fit my particular research objective. For example, I rephrased Whitehead and Perry's (2020) question, "What do you think Christianity has to say about the way America polices its borders? How should a 'Christian nation' think about things like immigration policies and border walls?" to instead say "How should a 'Christian nation' think about things like immigration policies and border walls?" to focus more specifically on the notion of a "Christian nation" rather than Christianity and immigration more broadly. The remaining 14 open-ended questions are my original questions, such as, "Recently, there has been a lot of public discussion around racial inequality and racial justice. As a Christian, how do you respond to these topics?" and "As a Christian, do you believe that Christians will rule the earth with Christ in the future?" See Appendix A for the full interview schedule.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Attributes and CN Scores

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>CN Score (0-24)</b>	<b>CN Category <sup>1</sup></b>
<i>Deena</i>	FBC	Black/Ugandan	Woman	31	22	Ambassador
<i>Tami</i>	FBC	White	Woman	79	21	Ambassador
<i>Tom</i>	FBC	White	Man	80	21	Ambassador
<i>Devon</i>	FBC	Black/White	Man	23	19	Ambassador
<i>Tina</i>	CC	White	Woman	64	19	Ambassador
<i>Evangeline</i>	FBC	Black Hispanic	Woman	24	18	Ambassador
<i>Justin</i>	FBC	Latino/Hispanic	Man	36	18	Ambassador
<i>Ryan</i>	FBC	White	Man	42	18	Ambassador
<i>Erin</i>	CC	White	Woman	44	17	Accommodator
<i>Ashley</i>	FBC	White	Woman	21	16	Accommodator
<i>Susan</i>	CC	White	Woman	52	16	Accommodator
<i>Rick</i>	CC	White	Man	65	12	Accommodator
<i>Bernard</i>	FBC	White	Man	74	11	Resister
<i>Rebekah</i>	CC	White	Woman	39	9	Resister

<sup>1</sup> CN Typology Score Range: Ambassador (18-24), Accommodator (12-17), Resister (6-11), Rejecter (0).

This table is organized from the highest CN score to the lowest. Out of the 14 participants, 8 (57.1%) scored within the Ambassador category, 4 (29.6%) scored within the Accommodator category, and 2 (14.3%) scored within the Resister category. None of the participants fell under the Rejecter category. As shown above, most FBC participants were Ambassadors (7/9). On the other hand, CC had mostly Accommodators (3/5), with one Ambassador and one Resister. Although both churches do self-identify as evangelical, it is possible that FBC's particular doctrine and affiliation to the Southern Baptist Convention have fostered a greater affinity for Christian nationalist ideas. The Southern Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist seminaries have historically been politically engaged and supported the application of Christian evangelical principles in response to social problems like racial injustice. On the other hand, CC is a non-denominational evangelical church in the Reformed tradition which does embrace the principles put forth by The Gospel Coalition (The Gospel Coalition 2023), yet it was less politically engaged as will be observed in the sermons. Nonetheless, despite the differing levels to which CN was embraced at each congregation, it is important to note that neither showed a presence of Rejecters among congregants. As mentioned before, despite my ability to connect with networks of White evangelicals and evangelicals of color alike, the majority of the participants who committed to interviews were White. As will be discussed later in the findings, Black participants in this study all can be categorized as Ambassadors yet each of them also recognized systemic racism—to an extent.

When it comes to gender, previous research has shown that women make up a larger proportion of Ambassadors (55.3%) among Americans compared to men (44.7%) (Whitehead and Perry 2020). On the other hand, in this study, men made up a larger proportion of Ambassadors (66%) than women (50%). Being that both CC and FBC were patriarchal churches which adhered to complementarianism, it is possible that men would be more willing to express

stronger views regarding Christianity, politics, and the nation since they operate as leaders within their respective communities. Nonetheless, a larger sample size may be needed to capture a more representative image of these two congregations which could yield different results.

### **Navigating White Evangelical Spaces as a Latina**

Part of my ethnographic research method was to gather reflexive notes on my personal experience visiting FBC and CC to better understand the social context of each congregation. Prior to discussing my personal experiences at these churches, I do want to emphasize my own positionality as a Latina who was an active member of a predominantly White evangelical congregation from ages 12 to 20 years old. In this way, I possess a deep understanding of various evangelical doctrines, hierarchical structures within the church, gendered and racialized dynamics among congregants, social and political issues that matter to evangelicals in the local community, and their stances on these sociopolitical topics. Nonetheless, having left evangelical Christianity, I recognize my new position as an outsider and committed myself to approaching this study in an exploratory way to allow participants to feel comfortable in sharing their views with me. As I analyze my reflexive field notes—and later, the core findings of this study—I consider that my insider-outsider positionality provided me with unique insight to the underlying dynamics of both congregations.

When I initiated my research in the summer of 2022, I was directed to both churches by a common friend whom I had a close relationship with due to our previous involvement at another local Baptist church in central Florida. When I began visiting CC, my friend introduced me to several other women who were active at the church among which was the pastor's spouse. Upon entering CC, the congregation appeared to be medium in size with approximately enough seating for around 200 people. Even though CC was estimated to be approximately 80% White (ARDA 2015), according to my observations there was only one family and three additional church

members who appeared to be non-White. As seen on their website, the leadership staff was also exclusively White men. Some women (also White women) held unpaid leadership positions often as a joint role with their husbands such as “community group leader” or counseling other women. In terms of aesthetics, CC had a minimalistic, modern altar which featured a small stage with a small podium, a few colorful stage lights shining over the live music set up. The music was mostly contemporary Christian folk music played by a band of 2-3 vocalists who also played the acoustic guitar and bass. Most of the congregation was made up of young and middle-aged couples with young children. The rest of the congregation were seniors approximately in their 50s and 60s. As a single young Latina, I certainly stuck out among the crowd and felt noticed. Nonetheless, I was not approached by anyone for the first several months that I visited both on my own and with my friend. The only frequent interactions I had were with the few women whom my friend introduced me to. All of the women I interacted with were White. Initially, the women were intrigued by my project and asked several questions regarding my field of study. Two of them in particular immediately began sharing their thoughts on philosophy, society, current government affairs, and social issues.

Unfortunately, I began to face barriers as my research at CC progressed. Having made clear that my attendance at church and book studies would be for research purposes only, the pastor’s spouse (a 44-year-old White woman to whom I have assigned the pseudonym ‘Erin’) shared her discomfort having me as a researcher at the women’s book studies after initially inviting me. My wariness to share my views at these book studies due to the risk of further positioning myself as an academic outsider or influencing discussions—provided the racial and gendered dynamics and the hegemonic ideas that were already in place at CC—also contributed to her discomfort. Eventually, Erin directly asked about my religious beliefs and expressed distrust for non-Christian academics’ ability to reach accurate conclusions about evangelicals’

beliefs. To regain her trust, I had to leverage my previous affiliation with a local Baptist church and disclose some of my personal challenges within evangelicalism. It was made clear that any non-Christian would not be welcomed to conduct research in these small groups. After this, I was not invited to the women's book studies or allowed access to "community groups"—small group bible studies held at some congregants' homes.

My experience at FBC was vastly different. Being a Southern Baptist church, FBC was more traditional and conservative in terms of aesthetics. The church was large in size with thousands of people attending the three available services every Sunday morning. A police officer in an unmarked black vehicle would direct traffic and park at the front of the church entrance every week. Upon entering, I was greeted by a diverse group of individuals which typically included one Black young woman, two elderly White women, an elderly Black man, and an elderly White man. Right next to the entrance, I quickly noticed a private room seemingly designed for prayer with large wooden letters that read, 'War Room.' As will be discussed further in these findings, battle and war imagery particularly as it relates to the "end times" was a recurring theme at both CC and FBC. Importantly, sense of fear, imminent threat from demonic forces, and feeling like an entitled majority yet embattled minority have been prominent within "apocalyptic Christianity" and Christian nationalism (Sutton 2014; O'Donnell 2020; and Bialecki 2017). The altar was only occupied by a podium behind which was a large live orchestra and choir. There were red and blue lights lining the stairs at the back of the stage, but no other colorful lighting was used. The music was a blend of hymns and contemporary Christian music performed by the orchestra and 2-4 main vocalists. While I did not feel noticed among the thousands of congregants each morning, it was evident to me that the majority of the congregation, orchestra, choir, and leadership staff were predominantly White older adults and elderly people. Although FBC was previously estimated to be around 64% White (ARDA 2015),

both my observations and statements made by other non-White FBC members during the interviews indicate that the proportion of White congregants may be higher than is estimated. The racial and ethnic diversity at FBC was primarily embodied by the young adult and college student groups, several of whom were international students studying at a local private university.

Similarly to CC, however, my ability to connect with the young adults was hindered due to the mutual understanding that I was only at the church as a visitor for research purposes. After attending bible study for the second time after being invited, I began to notice less interaction from the congregants I saw and had previously interacted with every other Sunday morning. While 13 of these young adults signed up to potentially participate in the interviews, only 5 consented to interviewing. I eventually reached out to a senior adults group and the youth pastor which resulted in four additional participants: three seniors and the youth pastor. Given my previous experience at CC and having heard the political stances of FBC in sermons and small group discussions, I was also mindful to frame the research in a way that centered my interest in learning FBC congregants' rather than discussing concepts such as Christian nationalism and CRT. It was clear that there was a hegemonic set of beliefs and ideas which positioned me as an "outsider" in relation to the collective identity that had already been established at the church. Thus, my previous involvement in a Baptist church was also crucial in connecting with participants and earning their trust. Notably, I was not asked about my personal beliefs or current religious affiliation by most FBC congregants with the exception of the youth pastor after he had completed his interview. Overall, gaining access to the young adults FBC was easier even considering my positionality because there was already a pre-existing group of young, highly educated people of color there.



Altogether, given my positionality as a Latina social researcher and as a former evangelical, I was aware that I would be coming into these congregations as an “outsider.” The previously mentioned interactions I had with White leadership at CC further solidified their perception of me as an outsider. Thus, my main goal as I visited these churches was to blend in. My previous affiliation with evangelical churches made it easier to know how to navigate the two churches. As a woman who was aware of the previously mentioned White heteropatriarchal dynamics within White-led evangelical churches (Bracey and Moore 2017; Martinez 2018; Martinez and Dougherty 2013; Piper and Grudem 1991; Hall et al. 2010; Colaner and Giles 2008; Gallagher 2004), I was careful to wear “modest,” traditionally feminine clothing. I was also very conscious about my language, gestures, volume and tone of voice, topics I discussed, and how I interacted with men versus women at the church. Based on my observations, men were less likely to converse and interact with me at length compared to women. I was also aware of the power dynamics I was facing particularly as I was attempting to maintain the trust of White men and White women in leadership at both churches. Informal conversations about congregants’ relationships with unbelievers also added to a certain level of anxiety for me as an outsider. As will be discussed in the Findings section, boundary-making language and concerns about being “pulled away” from God by “unbelievers” or being a minority among people who “hate God” were commonplace. Finally, my efforts to keep this research as exploratory while also being guided by previous literature on Christian nationalism and CRT resulted in me having to compartmentalize in order to simply observe and get at the core of evangelicals’ concerns about the U.S. and their own experiences living in the U.S. Altogether, this process was psychologically and emotionally challenging as I attempted to manage the boundaries of congregants and my own as a researcher who is also a former evangelical.

## **Analytical Strategy**

I began my analysis of the semi-structured interviews by identifying participants' initial attitudes using the Christian nationalism (CN) index provided by Whitehead and Perry (2020). Importantly, I do not use this assessment as a categorization tool, but rather as a point of comparison for congregants' answers to the interview questions. My goal is not to simply label each participant using this typology, but rather expound upon and reassess the boundaries of such categories in the study of Christian nationalism among evangelicals. Subsequently, I use a combination of Whitehead and Perry's (2020) open-ended questions and my original questions to further dissect participants' ideas regarding American Christianity, heritage, government, race and ethnic identity, racial/ethnic and national boundaries, racial justice, spiritual warfare, and dominion. The primary analytical framework used to interpret interview data and field notes is Critical Race Theory (CRT) by employing ideas such as "intersectionality" (Crenshaw 1991), the "matrix of domination" and critical racial theory (Collins 2000, 2011), racism—not race—as the root of racial inequality (Fields and Fields 2012), "racial projects" and "racial reactions" (Omi and Winant 2015a, 2015b), the state as a "White institutional space" (Bracey 2015), and colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2013, 2015; Gotanda 2017). Ultimately, this critical lens enabled me to examine the connection between empirical findings and the broader sociohistorical context of White evangelicalism, Christian nationalism, and racial domination. All interview transcripts and field notes were coded using the QDA Miner software to identify common themes and analyze these themes through the critical lens provided by CRT.

## FINDINGS

The findings for this study are organized into three main categories: a) Us versus the World, b) The Gospel and Future, and c) Order and Obedience. The first theme, Us versus the World, refers to all boundary-making language that separates Christians from the “secular” world, the Gospel and Future theme relates to an emphasis on evangelism and God’s Future Kingdom in the midst of social unrest, and the Order and Obedience theme focuses on prescriptive ideas regarding a “rightly” ordered society based on “biblical principles” which serve to uphold the White heteropatriarchal social structure in the U.S. These three categories encompass various recurring topics observed at the two churches and during the individual interviews with participants. Since I was not able to access the book studies or small group meetings at CC, I will primarily focus on how topics related to the Us versus World, The Gospel and Future, and Order and Obedience themes were reflected in the data gathered from sermon notes and the interviews.

### **Sunday Sermons and Christian Nationalist Messaging**

During the eight months I visited both CC and FBC, I recorded detailed notes for eight sermons per congregation, exploring the messaging being transmitted from the pulpit and its potential influence on individual congregants’ attitudes towards the nation, U.S. society, and social issues. The sermons at FBC regularly discussed topics related to politics and social issues. For instance, I was informed by congregants that prior to the start of my visits the pastor had completed a series on “Cancel Culture” which covered ideas such as the “cancelation” of individuals, God’s “design for the family,” the Bible, and the Christian God. Additionally, during my first recorded sermon, the pastor was concluding a series titled “Identity Theft” which described ideas such as racial identity and political affiliation as “insecure” identities compared to the “secure” identity “in Christ” that can be obtained by those who choose to believe in God as

their Savior: “I wish young people knew they don’t have to be in the in-group because they’re already in Christ” (FBC Lead Pastor, White man, approximately in his late 40s). As I will discuss more in the interview findings, this opposition to “identity politics” actually operated as a colorblind theology which emphasized a personal relationship with God as an individual’s primary identity regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, and so on. Nonetheless, the majority of the sermons throughout my visits at FBC were focused on themes relating to different areas in Christians’ social lives: marriage, parenting, the workplace, among others. Conversely, a general pattern I noticed at CC was the absence of explicitly political or social issue-related topics. Based on my conversations with several congregants, the avoidance of political topics was deliberate on the part of the pastor at CC. As I will show below, however, the absence of *overtly* political themes does not indicate the themes discussed were not intended to have political and sociological implications.

### *Us versus the World*

The first theme, Us versus the World (Us/World), appears 28 times in my field notes from sermons at FBC and CC. This theme includes references to the “secular world,” “the culture,” an ongoing “spiritual battle,” and “Third World countries” as “spiritual strongholds” where Christianity must be furthered. The main focus among the pastors and congregants is to establish a clear distinction between Christians and “unbelievers” as a way of justifying their efforts to remain engaged in society—including the political sphere—and unbelievers’ spiritual lives as this is where the “spiritual battlefield” is perceived to operate. One intriguing aspect to consider as I discuss this boundary-making between Christians and non-Christians is the apparent malleability of these categories for evangelical Christians. While for the purposes of the Us/World theme a Christian includes anyone who adheres to the core beliefs of the Holy Trinity, salvation through faith in Christ, and a belief in a future godly Kingdom, in other contexts, these

evangelical Christians do distinguish between denominations and consider some theological stances (such as those of Catholics, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses) as "false doctrine" according to evangelical interpretations of the Bible. Thus, the Christian versus non-Christian dichotomy seems to be leveraged for the purposes of uniting against the secular world yet it is the particular evangelical doctrine of each of these churches—one which is Reformed evangelical (CC) and one which is Southern Baptist (FBC)—that is perceived as "objective truth" by its respective members. For this reason, I will be discussing the ways in which this boundary-making ultimately posits *evangelical Christians* specifically as the bearers of truth. Having established this contradiction, below I have divided the Us/World overarching theme into two subthemes: Christian hegemony and domination and the spiritual warfare.

Christian Hegemony and Domination. The first aspect of the Us/World theme involved establishing the division between Christians and non-Christian "culture" with the purpose of advocating for a society in which Christianity becomes the predominant belief system—a Christian hegemony. Below are two quotes, one from FBC Lead Pastor and one from CC Lead Pastor which illustrate their use of boundary-making language to establish the "true" children of God versus the "culture" or "World" that are inherently "at odds" with God and by extension, Christians. More specifically, the FBC pastor argues that there are only two types of people: "the saved" and the "unsaved" and the CC pastor distinguishes between the Satan's "hopeful ideology" of progress for the world and Christians' "redemptive historical reality":

"We think we're free, but when we don't know Jesus we're in bondage of sin. Three dominant influences in the life of every unsaved person: 1) the World (the World's ideas, philosophy, morality)...at odds with God's principles 2) Satan - ruler of this present world. God has given him authority until the final battle... He has blinded the lost. 3) Our sinful desires...People say "We're all children of God" but according to the Bible there's only two types of people: the saved and the 'children of wrath' who have not believed." (FBC Lead Pastor, White man, late 40s)

“Our call is to go and bear witness regardless of the culture...the world needs and invasion of the gospel...where we receive persecution, we should remain there and proclaim the gospel...pay attention, be awake and aware, prepare, do not fear...Satan operates with an evolution mentality, progressing the world into the pit...God works with a redemption framework...We do not follow a hopeful ideology, but a redemptive historical reality.” (CC Lead Pastor, White man, late 40s)

In this context, evangelical Christians view themselves as having the only “truth” and being the true “children of God” facing a secular society that is not only “at odds” with God, but also under the influence of Satan (whom they also refer to as ‘the Enemy’). There is an expectation of conflict and persecution against Christians at the hands of non-Christians due to this perceived predisposition to the power of Satan. Here, a barrier is created: evangelical Christians are on God’s side, while “unbelievers” are on Satan’s side. Again, I emphasize the view of *evangelical* Christians as being on “God’s side” provided that it is the evangelical interpretation of theology that is presented as “truth” by these participants despite denominational lines apparently becoming blurred for the purposes of presenting unbelievers or non-Christians as the opposing group. In their view, the two sides (God along with Christians and Satan along with non-Christians) will collide in the “final battle” as will be discussed in the next subsection. While individual congregants may not view “unbelievers” as direct enemies nor adhere to conspiracy theories about demonic forces controlling the government (the Deep State) entirely, it is important to consider how messaging that promotes boundary-making, viewing the secular world fundamentally opposing God and Christians, and expecting society to decline due to this perceived opposition to God’s principles, and emphasizing belief in an ongoing spiritual battle can predispose local evangelicals to embrace or uphold Christian nationalism

While the lead pastor at CC evidently avoids explicitly discussing political issues compared to the FBC pastor, his calls to action for Christians to “invade” the secular world with the gospel, his view of a “mentality of evolution” and progress in society as originating from

Satan and his subsequent remarks regarding Christians' status as a "small band of disciples" regardless of location, "We are a small band of disciples no matter where we are, political system, no matter how culture accepts us, we are always his little disciples..." (CC Lead Pastor) are certainly intended to have political consequences. Evangelicals are influenced to view themselves as a minority that must confront the rest of society and ideas of social progress or evolution. By placing Christians in opposition to social progress efforts which are centered in the political arena, the pastor is encouraging congregants to discard progressivism and embrace a conservatism that is based on "biblical narratives" of future redemption by God. Ultimately, this distinction between Christian principles and the principles of contemporary U.S. society set the stage for congregants' support of adherence to Christian values nation-wide as I will show below.

When it comes to individual participants' attitudes regarding the U.S. as a nation, 10/14 favor the idea of a Christian nation in one way or another and 7/14 question the "separation of church and state" as a Constitutional principle, yet 7/14 also claim to oppose ideas of establishing the U.S. as an "official" Christian nation via the federal government. In this way, there is a distinction made between a coerced Christian state versus a transformed Christian society which can then result in a Christian state. As seen above, there is a lot of overlap between these two ideas as 10/14 participants favor a Christian state (that is, a state that upholds Christian principles or laws) and 9/14 prefer achieving a Christian state via evangelism. This ambivalent sentiment between the Christian state and Christian society concepts is represented in the following statement by Ryan, a 42-year-old White man who is a young adult pastor at FBC and fell into the "Ambassador" category according to the CN Index. In his view, the preferable way to achieve a Christian nation would be for a "revival" to take place among the people:

I would love for the United States to be a Christian nation. But I don't think that...that government should coerce or force the United States to be a Christian nation...you know the United States is a rare opportunity for freedom for people to be able to come and to choose how and- and who they worship...it would be great for the United States to be a Christian nation. But if that happens in any way other than God getting a hold of the hearts of- of people and people's- people's eyes being opened to the truth of who God is and following after God, because He has changed their heart, if it happens any other way other than that, then I don't think that that's right...if revival comes in and God opens the hearts and...lives of people to who He is, then I would love for the United States to be a Christian nation in that way.

Ryan expresses an inner conflict, wanting to allow individuals in the U.S. to “choose how and who they worship” while also establishing his desire to see God “open the hearts” of people to achieve a Christian nation. This idea of a dominant Christian belief that is not forced is similar to the idea of fostering a “collective identity” that upholds White hegemony in the church. Keeping in mind the Us/World rhetoric employed by the local pastors calling for an “invasion” of society with the Gospel, these evangelicals’ desire to see the general public embrace Christianity as the “truth” to produce a Christian nation as a whole can be understood as a desire for evangelical Christian hegemony.

Similarly, Erin, a 44-year-old White woman who is the lead pastor’s spouse and the Women’s Discipleship Director at CC, and scored within the “Accommodator” category, explains her concern over the loss of the Bible as an “authoritative” source of truth among U.S. society when I inquire whether the nation was moving away from its “religious heritage,” in her view:

*Interviewer: Do you think we as a country are moving away from our religious heritage? In what ways? Is that for the better or for the worse?*

...we are certainly moving away from...any kind of worldview that could be considered a Christian worldview. Um, and it is for the worst...You know, we notice a lot of things about ourselves and a lot of patterns...and yet we sit and ask ourselves ‘but what are we anyway?’...Well, there’s a couple of ways we could approach that question. We could ask ourselves, but every person would come up with a different answer...Or we could find an authoritative source or we could go



to the one who actually made us because that person would actually know how to tell us what we are right? I'm talking about a Christian worldview, I'm talking about the Bible...the farther we walk away from a worldview that is tethered to something that's authoritative and objective...we hate that word authority, but you understand what I mean...The farther we walk away from that the more weird and confused everything gets because we're all just floating, right? We're just floating in unreality.

As observed in Erin's statement, the Us/World theme continues particularly in claims regarding "truth," "reality," and even "postmodernism" in contemporary society. Notably, while Erin fell under the Accommodator category, she still firmly opposes the U.S. society's progression away from what she perceives was a previously widespread belief in the Bible as "authoritative" truth. Overall, participants demonstrate a perception of the U.S. and European society as upholding Christianity prior to the Enlightenment.

In Ryan's following statement, the Bible is also equated to "absolute truth" while the "World's" theories after the Enlightenment and "relativism" are presented as threats to Christianity itself:

*Interviewer: ...you mentioned the term postmodern. So, if you wanted to kind of expand a little bit on that uh, for anybody that might not know?*

Ryan: Okay, sure...there was a uh a time that we were, um, we were heavy, heavy Christian...around the end of the 1800s...the modern age of man, um evolution, Charles Darwin, began to take over. Science kind of began to...quote, unquote, replace uh Biblical truth...science and the Bible can go hand in hand. But I think man, in his desire to remove himself out from...being accountable to God, viewed science or his own personal knowledge as God. And so he tried to reason God away.... so what you end up with is the the- theory of uh theories in the scientific realm...threw off uh absolute truth. And so now we live in a world where everybody basically makes up their own truth as they see it...we don't live in a world anymore where people say, 'This is truth because this is what God says is true in His Word'...[postmodernism] it's kind of the- the elimination of absolute truth.

Ryan's view of the past as a time where absolute truth was based in the Bible due to the development of modern science as a discipline further perpetuates the same myth of a lost

Christian civilization that is characteristic of Christian nationalists. As a Christian and a pastor, Ryan sees the deviation from this mythical Christian past and the growth of new theories about the world that are rooted in science as a way for humans to “reason God away” and not be accountable to God. Thereby, both Erin and Ryan view modernity, scientific theories, and what they perceive as “postmodern” ideas (that is, any idea that does not adhere to the fundamentalist Christian belief that the Bible is absolute truth) as step in the wrong direction for U.S. society and humanity as a whole.

Notably, Christian nationalist ideas of a Christian past and a loss of the U.S.’s Christian heritage due to influence from non-Christians are not only prominent among White participants, but also among evangelicals of color. For instance, 12/14 participants including evangelicals of color adhered to the idea that the U.S. was a Christian nation in the past and 13/14 believed it should be restored to those values. Evangeline, a 24-year-old Black Hispanic woman who is a member of FBC and fell under the “Ambassador” category described efforts toward religious pluralism as “causing unnecessary battles” between Christians and non-Christians:

I think some of the ways that we’re moving away from our religious heritage would be taking God out of almost everything...taking God and Jesus has allowed a lot of other avenues for other things to kinda come. Um, and I think that has caused...an uproar for people who truly believe that God is the basis for everything...it’s caused...some unnecessary battles between people who would say like, ‘let’s keep these things involved in everything’ versus kinda just removing it. Why would we kinda take what we formulated the basis of our nation or whatever on and kinda move from that?...it’s kinda taken away that like peace and unity in our nation I think. Um, like, ‘one nation, under God, indivisible’ so, it’s like, it’s taking that unity away and it’s causing like- like, unnecessary battles for people who wanna keep God in it, for people who don’t...

In Evangeline’s view, “peace” and “unity” were upheld in the U.S. when it maintained Christianity as its dominant religion. Therefore, an evangelical Christian collective identity for the entire nation is prioritized among these participants which results in the reinforcement of

Christian hegemony in the U.S. Along with concerns regarding the shift away from the U.S. Christian “religious heritage” due to a rejection or removal of Biblical principles by non-Christians, a concern over attacks on religious freedom was observed among 9/14 participants. Interestingly, 9/14 *also* mentioned religious freedom as a positive aspect of being a Christian in the U.S. today as seen in the following statements by Ashley, a 21-year-old White woman and young adult group leader at FBC who would also be classified as an Ambassador:

Ashley: ...I don't have to be afraid of what the nation might do...there is definitely freedom to go to church still. There's freedom to worship how we want. Um, if that were taken away, I think that would be worse. But right now, we have that. So that's definitely a pro. There is a freedom we have in America.

*Interviewer: Do you feel like your religious freedoms have ever come under attack? If so, how so?*

Ashley: I mean, not mine personally...I have seen it...with the education realm. My mother and sister are teachers, and I've seen that they are not allowed to speak to their students about God unless their students ask them, and it's only when they ask them not during school hours...so, I just I see definite- definite freedoms being taken away there.

Here, Ashley states that a positive aspect of being a Christian in the U.S. is the freedom Christians enjoy while also pointing to “attacks” on Christians’ freedoms in the classroom. Although Ashley recognizes she has the freedom as a Christian to practice her faith in her personal life and at church, she classifies restrictions on discussions about religious beliefs in a classroom at a presumably non-Christian school as an infringement on the rights of Christian teachers. As a result, she intentionally uses the phrasing, “there is definitely freedom to go to church *still*,” viewing restrictions on religious discussions in the classroom as a sign of future restrictions on Christians’ ability to attend church and practice their faith in their personal lives. The theme of potential attacks on religious freedom in the future are further discussed in the Gospel and Future section of these findings. However, under the Us/World theme, this

perception of attacks on Christian freedom among participants—perceptions which do not align with their lived experiences as they state they can attend church and practice their personal faith freely—is the result of current limitations on Christian hegemony in non-religious schools. The conclusion that limitations on proselytizing in the classroom are the beginning stages of persecution against Christians directly reflects the boundary-making language and claims of Satan’s influence over the secular World (non-Christians) observed in the sermons at FBC and CC.

Finally, these evangelicals’ belief of an inherent conflict between believers and unbelievers is another significant aspect as they negotiate ideas of freedom of religion and Christian hegemony. Ten of fourteen participants mention challenges due to personal conflict with or hostility from unbelievers, and 7/14 view unbelievers as equal citizens, yet 6/14 recognized conflicting values and goals between Christians and non-Christians. Devon, a 23-year-old man from FBC who identifies as both Black and White and fell into the “Ambassador” category discusses how he views non-Christians as having the same role as any American citizen, but ultimately sees them as competitors in the race toward what can be presumed to be the final “spiritual battle”:

*Interviewer: What is the role of those who do not choose to follow Christian values and beliefs in the United States?*

Devon: ...I think their role is as any other American...at the end of the day...It's a big game at the end of the day...you have your team, we have our team...let's see who wins at the end of the day. I- I know that- well, my Bible says that I'm- I'm victorious at the end of it...I think that their role ultimately is to be themselves...It's completely up to them. Who are we to subject them to our values or our traditions when they're not their values or their traditions?...If somebody wants to come from that world and come into our...circle I think it's important for them to...assimilate to like traditions and values, and not try to like mix uh, you know the holy with the profane...to put like this worldly view and a Christian view onto things...I think they should just stand on their lane...If I, you know, want my respect and my beliefs and my values, then I...I want their respect for their values and beliefs as well.

Devon's view not only perpetuates the idea of believers and unbelievers as fundamentally separate, but it posits Christians as victors at the end of the "game," based on what the Bible says. According to apocalyptic Christianity, beliefs about the "end times," and the spiritual warfare within evangelicalism, Christians are depicted as warriors that will one day be victorious over the "evils" of this world when God defeats Satan and his demonic forces. Thus, Devon states the final spiritual and sociopolitical implications of the initial premise that Christians and non-Christians are fundamentally at odds with each other: that the Christian God—and Christians—will inevitably achieve domination one day.

The Spiritual Warfare. Within the Us/World theme, the second major aspect was the idea of a spiritual warfare and Christians' guaranteed victory, as was alluded to indirectly in the previous sermons and Devon's statement. Below, the FBC pastor explains what he perceives are misconceptions among Christians regarding the spiritual warfare and where this battle is truly being waged. Moreover, the CC Lead Pastor reassures congregants Christians' future suffering "for the sake of Christ" will only be temporary as they—as opposed to "sinners" who have not accepted Christ—will not suffer the "final death":

"There's a lot of confusion about the spiritual battle...1) We forget we are at war in the first place...that cosmic, spiritual struggle where we are every single day. 2) We fight the wrong war. We think it's certain organizations: the liberals, the conservatives, planned parenthood...our lost culture...we need to stand against certain issues...The Enemy works, uses lost people and organizations. But they are not the real end...the souls of [unbelievers] are the battlefield...our real enemy are principalities, power, Satan and his demonic army...He opposes God, the laws of God, the gospel...[Satan] is real and at work right now in our world and in our lives. (FBC Lead Pastor, White man, late 40s)

"Sinners will receive a wage for their sin--death... There is a lie throughout history--even if there is a God and see us as sin, he may have established a right and wrong way to live, but what gives Him the right? We'll never be judged by Him. 'I may do a variety of things and find evil in my heart but there is no wrath coming!' Our salvation is not an abstract concept. Death was delivered to Jesus and he purchased

for us the wage of sin...This is THE death...No other deaths to talk about for the Redeemed--those who are in Christ...You can suffer in this world for the sake of Christ. You don't have to be afraid. You may die but there's no death or judgement for you. We can endure many trials but not the final death. For those who are in Christ there is only boldness and hope.” (CC Lead Pastor, White man, late 40s)

There is again a sentiment of ambivalence as FBC’s lead pastor indicates that the spiritual war Christians are facing is not against non-Christian individuals but against Satan and his “demonic army” which are *simultaneously* influencing the world, unbelievers, and congregants’ personal lives. By specifically mentioning “the liberals,” “the conservatives,” “planned parenthood,” the “lost culture,” and stating Satan *can* “use lost people and organizations” there is some ambiguity that further fosters uncertainty and suspicion among congregants towards non-Christians in society. Such feelings of potential threats and view of secular society and unbelievers’ souls as Satan’s “battlefield” only solidifies the Us/World idea that has been so prevalent in this study. Further, CC’s lead pastor reiterates the notion that *only* Christians will have a hopeful and victorious future while unbelievers will die and face God’s final judgement.

An additional detail that is relevant for FBC in particular is the fact that the spiritual battle is described as particularly having a stronghold in South Asian countries such as India where the lead pastor and several other members at FBC lead missions trips. For instance, the pastor refers to these South Asian nations as “some of the darkest places on Earth” where demon possession among the local people is widespread. Here, the Us/World theme takes on a racialized, colonialist, and nationalistic quality as American evangelical Christians are presented as a threatened yet entitled group that was responsible for the salvation of a society under the control of Satan not only in the U.S. but especially in these “non-Western” countries where the majority of the population is not White.

Turning to individual participants’ attitudes with regards to the spiritual warfare, 13/14 agreed with the idea that there is an active battle between good and evil, 7/14 participants

referenced the spiritual warfare directly, and 10/14 posited Christians as those “doing the good.” In alignment with messaging from the sermons, while these congregants may not view non-Christians as direct enemies they do consider themselves as entirely separate from and opposed by non-Christians. These evangelicals often viewed unbelievers as being influenced by demonic forces due to their “rebellion” against Christian principles. For example, Justin, a 36-year-old Latino/Hispanic man from FBC who would be categorized as an Ambassador describes the need for Christians to put on their “armor” and head towards the “spiritual warfare.” When I inquire about how he is able to identify where the spiritual battle is taking place in society, he explains it is found in people and “anything” that goes “against God,” in his view:

*Interviewer: How should Christians respond to this [good versus evil] battle?*

Justin: Prayer...have your armor on. Head towards the spiritual warfare...our battles aren't against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers of this dark age. What I mean by that is spiritual forces with the Devil. Because our adversary is the Devil.

*Interviewer: So, in society, how do you know where that battle is—where it's happening?*

Justin:...I guess there's some things that the Holy Spirit will direct you...sometimes uh, you just have to observe people...if they're not acting in the right mind frame...

*Interviewer: Mhm. So, you think that you can see it in people too?*

Justin: Depends, yes...

*Interviewer: Do you think that there's...is there a clear line between who's on the good side, who's on the evil side?*

Justin: Well, anything that's uh rebelling...to God and sin...witchcraft, sorcery...sexual sin...there's spiritual strongholds and idolatry...Anything that's against God, basically.

Although Justin recognizes “the Devil” as the true “adversary,” he also explains that Christians—having the “Holy Spirit”—can discern which individuals are being influenced by

Satan. This directly reflects the FBC lead pastor's previous claim that although political organizations and individuals are not the enemy, they can still be "used" by Satan. In general, Justin concludes that anyone or anything that is "rebellious" against God and practicing "sin" (from witchcraft to "sexual sin") would be on the "evil side" of the spiritual warfare. Therefore, the Us/World theme is also reiterated here as a clear boundary is drawn between those on "God's side" (evangelical Christians) and those on Satan's side (non-Christians). It is also important to note that the language of "sexual sin" is also used by evangelicals to refer to LGBTQ+ people. The view of LGBTQ+ people, especially transgender individuals, as antithetical to Christian or "biblical" principles will become more relevant in the Order and Obedience subsection of these findings.

### *The Gospel and Future*

The Gospel and future (Gospel/Future) theme is premised upon evangelicals' perceptions of current uncertainty or social unrest and a Future Kingdom that will follow the "end times" and God's (and Christians') final victory over Satan (and non-Christians). Topics falling under the Gospel/Future theme appear 17 times in the notes and quotes I gathered from sermons at both churches. While there is some overlap between the Us/World and the Gospel/Future themes, the latter focuses more on the importance of prioritizing evangelism and God's "future Kingdom" in the midst of social unrest or uncertainty. Below, the FBC pastor provides "biblical" justification against ideas such as "universalism" and describes a future in which not all people will be "saved" yet everything will be unified under "the cosmic Christ" who has authority over the church (evangelical Christians) and the universe. Echoing this sentiment, the lead pastor at CC reminds congregants about the future "Kingdom" where there will be none of the current societal uncertainties, all will submit to Christ as "Lord" and unbelievers who are against Christians will be "defeated."



“Every knee will bow, every mouth will confess that He is God. That's the ultimate plan. Paul is NOT teaching universalism—that everyone will be saved. He says that Jesus will be what unifies the creation...the whole universe and the whole church will be unified under the cosmic Christ who is the supreme head of both.” (FBC Lead Pastor)

“[Jesus] will come from David's lineage and establish a Kingdom for God forever...every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...[He will] defeat unbelievers against you...uncertain times, things are shaking...[there is] no debate in heaven, there's declaration, covenant. The wages of sin is death, the decline of cultures in history...Jesus will cleanse his people...Our Hope is in that. Humble to him, we bow our knee to Him...[there is] joy in the presence of His kingdom.” (CC Lead Pastor, White man, late 40s)

While the same boundary-making and Christian hegemony attitudes from the Us/World theme can be observed here, an emphasis is placed on a future in which “unity” will be achieved and Christians’ deliverance from contemporary social debates or uncertainties conflict will be fulfilled through God’s reign on Earth. In this Kingdom, all unbelievers along with sin will be “cleansed” and everyone will live under the rule of God. Thereby, the Future Kingdom serves as a solution to contemporary social problems and the perceived ongoing conflict between Christians and non-Christians. While several congregants later clarify that many of the details concerning this Future Kingdom are unknown or difficult to grasp, there is a general agreement that God’s reign after the end times will physically take place on Earth. This Kingdom is also referred to by the participants as the “new Jerusalem” or “Heavenly Jerusalem,” which is distinct from the Millennial Kingdom. The Millennial Kingdom is not referenced by the majority of participants. Nevertheless, this fixation on eventual global submission to the Christian God as a solution to feelings of uncertainty among Christians and social issues are key aspects of White evangelical support for authoritarianism, Trump, the political Right, and Christian nationalism.

The Gospel/Future theme is observed in the interviews when I inquire about attacks on Christians’ religious freedom, the “end times” and the return of Christ, and the concept of a

future kingdom in which Christians will rule the earth with Christ Himself. Of all 14 interviewees, 13 express uncertainty about the details of the Future Kingdom, 13 allude to Christians' final victory, 9 mention the expectation of challenges or persecution against Christians in the future, 9 discuss the importance of souls being saved, 8 wish to see a revival prior to Christ's return to Earth, and 7 believe the end times were imminent. First, as was observed in Ashley's statement in the Us/World theme, there was a fear and/or expectation among most congregants of future persecution against Christians in the U.S. Ryan, the White young adult pastor at FBC, expressed his view of safety measures during COVID-19 which placed restrictions on large gatherings at churches—among other public places—as setting a precedent for further future government overreach against Christians:

...I think that anytime precedent starts getting set along these lines, there's always a push to see how far...how much reach, or how much power the government can take, and I'm glad to see that lot of churches stood up and said, 'We're not going to allow this to take place'...I want to stress here...Romans 13 uh, it says, 'Let every soul be subject to the higher power. There's no power but of God. The power that be is ordained of God.' We are called...to subject to our- our local governments, and um as long...so we're not trying to rebel against the government. But when a government starts saying that you are no longer allowed to worship, and it's very clear that it's not because of a pandemic...what happens next when- when a church starts preaching or teaching something that the government doesn't like? Is it going to come in and shut it down then?...that's what happens in other countries around the world...

In this interview, Ryan clarifies that his belief that churches were being targeted by the government is rooted in the fact that the government had allowed businesses to stay open. Although evangelical churches are buildings were crowding, handshaking, hugging, kissing, and long periods of singing could increase the risk of transmitting a virus compared to a general store, Ryan's conclusion that freedom of religion is being attacked aligns with the belief of an ever-present threat against Christianity that is characteristic of Christian nationalists, apocalyptic Christianity, and the Christian Right. More specifically, Ryan concludes that future restrictions

may target the beliefs and speech inside churches, as well. It is this sense of an uncertain yet bleak future for Christians in the U.S. that underlies beliefs about the imminence of the end times and a hope for the arrival of God's reign on Earth.

This present feeling of uncertainty, fear, and yearning for God's redemption is acknowledged by Tina, a 64-year-old White Jewish woman who is a community group leader at CC and also fell within the "Ambassador" category. She proposes that it is the current sociopolitical context in which American Christians are living that heightens this sense of an imminent apocalypse. Notably, she compares current U.S. society for Christians to previous challenging eras in nations such as Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and Cambodia:

*Interviewer: Some people believe that we are approaching the end the end times. Do you agree with this belief?*

Tina: Um yes. I again, I- I think for American Christians, um, it feels like it more. But if we'd been living in Nazi Germany, I feel sure I would have thought that was it. If I'd been living in Russia under Stalin in the time of the pogroms when my family was there as Jews, I would have totally believed that that was the end. If I'd been living in Pol Pot's Cambodia, I would have believed it was the end. Do you know what I mean? And so, the Bible tells us that the end times began with the coming of Jesus and so, yes, we are in the end times...But I do believe we're closer to the end, and I rejoice to see the face of my Savior.

While Tina notes that American Christians' perception of the "end times" was based on living through challenging and uncertain times—she mentions Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and Cambodia as other examples of times where Christians may have felt a similar way—she does adhere to the belief that Christ's return is closer than in the past. Tina's positionality and Christian nationalist attitudes (despite disapproving of a *coerced* Christian state) are especially worth noting as she does identify ethnically as Jewish. While she recognized the prevalence of what she referred to as "hate" against Jewish people (including her own family's experiences in the past) and related it to Black Americans' experiences throughout U.S. history, she did assert

that race is “important” but “not ultimate.” Although Christian nationalism and the Christian Right have historically intersected systems such as White supremacy, nativism, opposition to integration and other racial justice efforts, Tina ultimately identified as a “conservative” and aligned with Christian nationalist ideas such as the adherence of U.S. laws and “morality” to “Christian values.”

Turning back to ideas of a future deliverance of Christians in the end times and a focus on evangelism in the midst of social unrest or injustice (both of which are key features of apocalyptic Christianity and past evangelical movements like Billy Graham’s new evangelicalism) observed in the sermons at FBC and CC, these same ideas were echoed by individual congregants during the interviews. A hope of revival is observed among participants as I inquire about their wishes for the U.S. as a nation prior to Christ’s return. Rick, a 65-year-old White man who is a community group leader at CC and was classified as an “Accommodator” describes how a revival would allow for social issues to “get taken care of” once people accepted the Bible and Christianity as “truth”:

I would love to see a- a return to Biblical truth as the standard that that would be something that many more people would believe in not moving to this state as we talked at the very outset of conversation, like, ‘Oh, we’re a Christian nation.’ But would I love to see...millions of- of believers who choose to follow Jesus happen in this country...a revival...turning to the Lord, and realizing, ‘Hey, we’ve made mistakes, and we now want to serve,’...if that [happens] then a lot of these things...the racial differences...the problems that we have with society and morality...would be addressed through many people coming to this this view that the Bible is true and that Jesus is who He says he is, and that there is a God and a Creator, and...that the rules He’s laid out for living life on this earth are right. If that happened, a lot of these other societal political issues, um, get taken care of.

Despite Rick’s rejection of a coerced Christian state (falling into the “Accommodator” category) he sees evangelism and revival as an avenue for a future society that transcends social problems by adopting Christianity, the Bible, and its “rules” as its foundation. Here, the overlap between Christian hegemony and religious domination and the white evangelical tool-kit for

addressing racism and racial inequality become relevant. In keeping with the Gospel/Future theme, Rick concludes that debates about morality and social inequality will dissipate as Christianity becomes the dominant belief system. Even in the event that a revival does not occur, the premise of an inevitable Future Kingdom that will unite all people (Christians) under God's reign and resolve all social problems persists among participants. For example, after I inquire about the possibility of a Future Kingdom in which Christians will rule the earth with Christ, Justin, the 36-year-old Latino/Hispanic man from FBC who scored within the "Ambassador" category celebrates Christians' victory in the end:

*Interviewer: Do you believe that Christians will rule the earth with Christ in the future?*

Justin: Yes. We win at the end, we win at the end. But us...because Jesus wins, at the end, the battle belongs to the Lord with his angel armies. He already won the battle and he's going to win the war. So yes, Christians win. And they shouldn't be depressed about that. We should look at this as encouragement.

Justin not only proclaims Christians' future reign with Christ on Earth but also invites other Christians to be encouraged by rising victorious and ruling in this Future Kingdom. Overall, evangelicals' uncertainty in the midst of social issues and fear regarding future persecution against them are assuaged by the possibility of a spiritual revival, appeals to a Christian hegemony in the U.S., inevitable global submission to God, and the view of God's Future Kingdom as a way to transcend social inequities and conflict.

### *Order and Obedience*

The third and final theme that is most prominent across sermons and interviews at FBC and CC is Order and Obedience. Under this overarching theme, there are two main subthemes: gender, marriage, and the family and immigration and racial justice. As will be shown below, specific topics included concepts such as "natural law," God's "divine law," children's obedience to their parents, parent's use of violence as a biblical option for discipline, wives'

“submission” to their husbands, border control, racial justice, and a future “rightly ordered society” (referred to as the ‘Heavenly Jerusalem,’ which will be established on Earth by God one day) in which injustice will be overcome through obedience to God’s law. It must be noted that while topics under the Order/Obedience theme appear 14 times in my field notes, only FBC sermons discuss ideas of a “natural law” and “divine law” that provide guidelines for order in marriage and the family. CC did not discuss marriage or the God-ordained heteropatriarchal order of the family while I visited the church. Conversely, only CC sermons discuss “biblical” ideas of “justice” versus “injustice.” FBC did not mention notions of justice or injustice during my visits there. Nonetheless, interviewees from *both* congregations did share their views of “order” with regards to the aforementioned topics such as gender, marriage, the family, immigration, and contemporary racial justice movements in the U.S.

Gender, Marriage, and the Family. Over the course of a sermon series which featured several guest preachers at FBC—all of whom were White men—congregants were reminded to view social organizations such as marriage, the family, and even the workplace “God’s way.” Below, the first guest pastor outlines the importance of “mutual submission” between husband and wife while also emphasizing “respect” and “honor” from the wife to the husband as the ‘head’:

“‘Mutual submission’ in marriage does not mean wives become second class citizens...husband and wife are equal and united but have different roles. Submission is ‘opposite of independent, autocratic spirit,’ it is...working together...The husband’s main need is respect, according to the Bible. He does not become a dictator and the wife is silent...But the male ego is fragile. Men need respect and honor...[the] wife’s greatest need is to be loved...Husbands are to love their wives in a self-sacrificial way like Jesus loved. That's impossible to achieve, but that's the goal...If a man shows love, the wife is going to respond with respect and submission...it is a mirror of the relationship of Christ the Bridegroom and His Bride, the church...Wives reflect the church when they submit to their husbands as the Head. When husbands love their wives they reflect Christ's love for church.” (FBC Guest Pastor, White man, mid 70s)

A similar dynamic is presented by the second guest pastor as he explains the “obedience” that is required of children based on “natural law” and “divine law” as well as parents’ responsibility to “discipline” even if this involves corporal punishment:

“Spirit-filled believers are to live God's way in relationships. Children are to live God's way: 1) by obedience. Children ask, ‘why?’ Because God says so in the Word. It's “natural law.” 2) Honor parents. Honor is God's “divine law.” Hold parents in higher regard...the world tells us that our parents are old fashion. But if you honor and obey your parents your friends are going to see that you are different and you can tell them about Jesus. Parents: 1) Gentleness. Be angry and do not sin...2) Discipline. Training, nurture...3) Instruction. ‘Before each [spanking] my dad would say, I spank you because I love you.’ It's one tool found in scripture...but not the only one.” (FBC Guest Pastor, White man, late 30s)

As mentioned earlier, FBC seems to be especially concerned with the submission of women and children to men—and by extension, God. The above statements first establish God’s unquestionable authority, the authority of “natural law” which is equated to God’s “divine law,” the use of these laws to justify the authority of men over women and parents over children, and an emphasis on discipline (including corporal punishment) to produce obedience among children. Here, the Bible is cited as the foundation for the belief that the husband’s “main need is respect” while the wife’s “main need is to be loved.” In other words, husbands should love their wives to receive their submission and a wives should submit to their husbands to receive their love. Despite the pastor’s phrasing of “mutual submission” between men and women in marriage, it becomes evident that only husbands are to be respected as an authority figure by wives. This submission of women to men is not only unique to marriage, as pastoral positions at FBC were held by White men exclusively. The implication of these statements made by the guest pastors at FBC is that the subjugation of women and children under men as “heads” of the family is “God’s way” for the family to function. Provided that the family is

observed as the foundation for the rest of society by these evangelicals, the subjugation of women and children under men as leaders is also “God’s way” for society, as a whole.

This preservation of a God-ordained patriarchal, heteronormative family as fundamental for the ordering of society is a key aspect of Christian nationalism.

In terms of individual congregants’ attitudes regarding gender, marriage, and the family, ideas of “order” include concerns about children’s education, reproductive rights, same-sex marriage, LGBTQ+ people, and what participants refer to as “transgenderism.” While 11/14 participants emphasize “personal choice” among all people to live freely and have their own beliefs, 13/14 favor allowing teachers and coaches to lead prayer in schools, 10/14 want more parental control over children’s education (which also involved incorporating Christian values into education and/or homeschooling), 10/14 mention the need for “good values/morality” in the U.S., 11/14 oppose *Roe v. Wade* and abortion being a choice people can make, 11/14 are concerned about the increase in affirmation of LGBTQ+ people, 10/14 support heteropatriarchal “biblical” definitions of marriage and family in society, and 8/14 condemn “transgenderism” (the increase in acceptance of transgender individuals) as a problem in U.S. society.

As it has been implied throughout these findings, these evangelicals’ resistance (or outright opposition) to pluralism in terms of “morality” is due to the underlying belief that “biblical” principles are “absolute truth” and provide the basis for a “rightly ordered” society. Rick, the 65-year-old White man who is a community group leader at CC and an Accommodator, expresses his concern regarding “chaos” and few “boundaries” in contemporary U.S. society particularly when it comes to gender and transgender individuals. He asserted that while not everyone sees the Bible as “absolute truth,” the “best” order for society comes from Christianity and the Bible:



*Interviewer: And you also kind of mentioned like order. And so do you see that that's kind of affecting uh order in society?*

Rick: I do...coming from a- a Christian Biblical viewpoint...there is an absolute truth...how God has made the world and, uh, has established society...it comes from the Bible...Not everybody believes that. But to me that's- you have to have some grounding and [when] everything's fluid, then you know...there's no base to hold to...I think the...way the Bible describes how life should be, and how people should conduct themselves, I think, is the best- the best way...Christianity or the Biblical worldview is a- is a way to view, uh, the world and society and those who may not hold to that, you know, choose to do other things. But I think that's where the order...That is the best order and the best boundaries...

Rick acknowledges that the increasing acceptance of transgender individuals in society threatens the order God has established for society. In this context, the “biblical” ordering of U.S. society should be understood as a patriarchal social order in which marriage is between a man and a woman, the gender binary is upheld as biological and biblical “truth,” and there are strict boundaries for “morality” which are based on a conservative evangelical interpretation of the Bible. A similar concern is expressed by Tina, the 64-year-old White Jewish woman from CC and Ambassador, as she expounds on what she calls the “relativization of gender” or “gender fluidity,” the ways in which this negatively affects women’s sports, and the resulting “relativization of truth” in society broadly:

...the relativization of gender, um, fluidity, and how that has, become the focus in our culture. Strangely so...to use that expression with men competing in women's, sports, for example...these men are built differently than women. Every cell in their body is male...the DNA is programmed male. So, because they put on a woman's bathing suit and swim against women and beat them every single time because of their physical structure and we're trying to say that's okay? Not even just okay, but good? But...virtuous and courageous? And I realize that gender dysphoria is a real thing...people need medical care, psychiatric care. But I think, blurring the lines to say that something is true that's not true, you know, this- this man is not a woman. He might feel that he's a woman. He might have some real emotional struggles that need care and need psychiatric counsel, but to make what he's feeling the most important thing and wounding women's sports is, is, uh is folly to me...It's just wrong...it's again- It's the relativization of truth.

Tina acknowledges the existence of people who have gender dysphoria yet frames this as a medical and a psychological disorder. The concept of a transgender individual existing and navigating society as transgender is seen as a detachment from truth or reality—“blurring the lines” between what is true and what is not. Ultimately, existing as a transgender person is viewed as a threat to “real” or “biological” women and an example of the perceived loss of “absolute truth” in contemporary U.S. culture. As mentioned earlier by Ryan (the young adult pastor at FBC), these evangelicals believe that there was a time prior to the Enlightenment when the Bible was held as absolute truth in European and American societies. Disapproval of growing acceptance for LGBTQ+ people and gender fluidity among participants like Rick and Tina demonstrates once again the resistance against pluralism, perceived threats to heteropatriarchy, and support for a society where Christian values predominate—all of which are seen among the Christian Right and Christian nationalists more broadly.

Immigration, Inequality, and Racial Justice. The second subtheme under the Order/Obedience theme is immigration, injustice, equality, and responses to racial justice movements in the U.S. today. While immigration and racial matters were not explicitly discussed during sermons at either of the congregations, CC’s lead pastor did discuss contemporary concepts of justice and inequality broadly. As I will show below, evangelicals’ understandings of injustice and their responses to calls for equality or justice are rooted in a preconceived notion of a “rightly ordered” society based on “biblical principles.” The following statement by CC’s lead pastor focuses on injustice and poverty as originating from disobedience to God’s order rather than material inequality. In his view, “God gave more land to some than others” yet it was the people’s decision to take land that was not given to them by God where the injustice took place. Thus, he calls Christians to recognize knowing and doing justice as fulfilling their respective roles within a community:

“Kenneth Barker’s 3 Cycles of Salvation and Judgment: Cycle 1 - Witness Injustice...God's land was stolen...The nature of true poverty. It's not about some having more than others. God gave more land to some than others. That's okay. The issue was they took the land that wasn't theirs...Cycle 2 - Know Justice...A just society is a society in which all its members are rightly ordered...Where do we go wrong with injustice? When our appetite occupies the place that God is supposed to have...‘A city that is to come,’ a rightly ordered community...Heavenly Jerusalem...Imagine a world that was rightly ordered with the Ten Commandments, with God as our head. Don't care if it's communism or democracy, we need a world where God is our head...Cycle 3 - Do Justice...live in community according to your role...Critiques of the church not doing justice...We are sinners. Why are we beating up anyone about this? We have failed at this perfect justice...It's not about behavior. It's about posture. Look to the Cross. Jesus has done justice, not you. It's not as justice does that we live...God is just. (CC Lead Pastor, White man, late 40s)

Once again, although immigration and racial injustice were not specifically mentioned in the sermons during my visits at FBC and CC, interviewees from both congregations do show support for border control and opposition to racial justice movements. Following the Order/Obedience theme, 12/14 participants support border control based on a desire for “law and order” which is a feature of Christian nationalism. Ryan, the FBC young adult pastor, argues that the U.S. (and any nation) must have laws as these are the “backbone” of a “civilization.” He concludes that protecting the borders is crucial in maintaining a “sovereign nation” and that immigration has become “politicized” for the benefit of politicians:

...any nation um...has to have laws...laws are the backbone of- of our civilization, our nation...I think uh America, it was really built on immigrants. We are the melting pot. But it wasn't built on lawless immigration. It was built on immigration that was done in a legal and proper manner. And uh, I- I believe that...should continue that way, um, I don't think um we are a sovereign nation...If you have a nation where you know, with um borders wide open, that people you just come across, and...you don't, have any knowledge whatsoever of what type of- of uh items or- or stuff is being trafficked into the country, as well as even the backgrounds of people that are coming in...One of the roles of government is to protect its citizens...but I think the unfortunate thing about immigration is, it's, become so politicized...so, rather than fix the problem, they've decided to just leverage it for power depending on which side of the political spectrum they fall on, and I think that's the saddest part of it.

In addition to Ryan’s concern regarding the “sovereignty” of the U.S. being threatened by “wide open” borders—despite the current existence of border patrol and ongoing construction of a border wall—there is an assumption and a fear that racial/ethnic “outsiders” will traffic “items” (which can be presumed to be drugs or weapons) that could put American citizens in danger. Potential crime and concern over the “background” of immigrants is mentioned by several participants out of the 12 who support border control measures such as a wall. There is an overarching belief that illegal items, criminals, and even terrorists are being introduced via immigration. In fact, Justin, the 36-year-old Latino/Hispanic man from FBC refers to immigrants as “rapists and murderers” multiple times during his interview. Additionally, Ryan’s statement regarding the U.S. being built on “legal” immigration is an example of historically inaccurate narratives of the past and colorblind understanding of early and current U.S. society. Here, Ryan holds a false view of U.S. history and immigration as he does not consider racial projects the mass genocide and displacement of indigenous people (including natives of what is now the Mexico-U.S. border) and the enslavement of African people in order to establish the U.S. as a nation in the first place.

Instances of historical amnesia also become apparent in participants’ views of racial domination and racism in the U.S. throughout the centuries. For some participants, such inaccurate views of history serve as the basis for their opposition to current racial justice efforts. Tami, a 79-year-old White woman who is a church committee member at FBC and fell within the “Ambassador” category, stated how the meaning of “equality” had been “lost” sometime in between the 50s and mid-60s and argues that current demands for racial justice are detrimental:

*Interviewer: Where would you say [the meaning of equality] was lost... Where do you think that happened?*

Tami: ...whenever they started giving exceptions for- for ethnicity...‘you get so many extra points if you are of this ethnicity, or that ethnicity or of this income status, or of this educational status.’...when they begin to make exceptions to the rules...late 50s to mid-60s was the initial period when it became so obvious. That was the beginning...and it's just escalated ever since.

*Interviewer: Mhm. So, basically around the time of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement...50s and 60s?*

Tami: Right. Right...My husband was...a career military man, and back in the mid-60s we were stationed in [city in North Florida] and I could remember at that time when there would be signs on water fountains, it would say, ‘White only.’ There were white churches and black churches...there may be to a degree some of those yet today. But back then, you didn't intermingle in those- in those restricted areas. So, was there equality before segregation? No. And...was that wrong? Yes, but, uh, the pendulum swung too far in the other direction, in my opinion.

While Tami recognized and even experienced living in the South during segregation where equality between White Americans and Black Americans was not a reality, she concludes that the “pendulum swung too far.” A form of historical amnesia for Tami seems to take place when she asserts that the “true” meaning of racial equality existed sometime between the 50s and 60s, yet it was “lost” when “exceptions to the rules” began to be made on behalf of certain demographic characteristics. This reference to “rules” which Tami perceives are now being bent in favor of certain “ethnicities” denote the Order/Obedience theme as she implies that order in society has been disrupted due to efforts toward racial equality. In addition, she does not seem to recall what the “true” meaning of equality was nor when this meaning was lost. Instead, she alludes to legislation such as “affirmative action” and anti-discrimination laws which were signed into law in 1964 under the Civil Rights Act (American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity 2023) as an example of an “incorrect” meaning of racial equality. Notably, she uses colorblind language by not specifying which racial or ethnic groups were meant to benefit from such policies. Historical amnesia and colorblind language allow Tami to justify her opposition to racial justice efforts in a way that does not appear overtly racist.

When it comes to specific racial justice efforts such as BLM and CRT, opposition to concepts such as equality and racial justice is common among these local evangelicals. Nine of fourteen participants oppose CRT and Black Lives Matter (BLM) and 6/14 specifically question contemporary definitions of “equality” citing concerns about critical theory, “reverse” discrimination, and Marxism/communism. In this way, BLM and CRT were observed as threats to the social order in the U.S., especially among White interviewees. Erin, the 44-year-old White woman who is the CC Lead Pastor’s spouse, discusses that her main contention with concepts such as CRT and BLM is the idea of a division between “oppressor” versus “oppressed.” In her view, achieving “equity” will lead to oppression from the government as observed in “communist” countries:

...Critical Race Theory, Black Lives Matter...I think that is inaccurate. I don't think that is a good way to view humanity. That, um, there is simply always a class of oppressors and oppressed...Critical Race Theory leads us down that path and kind of doesn't give us any other options. It may say it wants the same thing for everybody but...that's just not really- that's not really a good system to live in. All you have to do is look at places that have tried to make equity, like you know, communist countries that have like controlled to such an extent and guess what? There were still oppressors then it was just the government...as a Christian I- I cannot get on board with Critical Race Theory...I reject Critical Race Theory or critical theory and there's critical- it doesn't have to be CRT, it could be critical whatever, various kinds of theories...I think that if we stopped trying so hard to get everything equal or equitable and...I think that for the most part our country affords basic human rights to people.

Erin's opposition to critical theories (not just CRT) can be in part attributed back to ideas regarding the loss of “authoritative” and “objective” truth and opposition to “postmodernism, perceiving it as a replacement for “biblical” perspectives of truth. Notably, earlier in the interview, Erin makes a distinction between “equality” and “equity.” She establishes equality as “equal opportunity” and equity as “equal outcomes.” In her colorblind view of history and society, Erin argues that equality already exists since the U.S. affords “basic human rights” to all

people. Conversely, she perceives that demands for “equality” are truly demands for *equity*, that is, equal income, quality of life, wealth, and success for all people. In keeping with the Order/Obedience theme, Erin he accepts a lack of equity as a feature of a free society which reflects CC Lead Pastor’s statements on disparity of roles and resources as God-ordained in a “rightly ordered” society. Instead, she argues that any attempt at achieving equity in society is undesirable as it will inevitably result in oppressive governments which she attributes to “communist” countries specifically. Thus, her perception of the U.S. as a colorblind, non-oppressive nation and her opposition to equity—what social justice movements refer to as “equality”—due to fear of communism, leads her to reject all critical theories and any social movement that recognizes and seeks to address social inequality in U.S. society.

While historical amnesia and colorblind views of history play a role in justifying the idea that there is no need for racial justice or equality in the U.S., participants’ understandings of racism in and of itself also influenced their responses to CRT and BLM. Out of the 14 interviewees, 13 recognized the existence of race and/or ethnicity, yet 9 employed colorblindness to various degrees. In terms of racism, 11 recognized racism exists in society, 11 also denied racism occurred at their churches, 7 viewed it as an issue at the individual level only, 7 viewed it as both an individual and structural issue, and 1 viewed it as systemic only. As the numbers show, there was a lot of overlap in terms of how these evangelicals understood the notion of race, racism, its prevalence in society versus the church, and the ways in which racism is perpetuated in the U.S. Altogether, none of the participants denied the role of race or racism in the U.S. Rather, most *chose* to adhere to colorblindness and address racism at the individual level. Ashley, the 21-year-old White woman who is a college group leader from FBC, explains how she views race as a “social construct” in the sense that it is an identity not based on “truth” compared to the identity of a Christian:

*Interviewer: As a Christian, What are your thoughts on race and or ethnicity as identities Are these identities important to you, and should they should they be important to a Christian?*

Ashley: You know, I I really don't think that they are important to me...I do believe the identity our identity should be fully in who we are in Christ, and that's the only secure identity to actually cling to. So no, I don't think that a Christian should find their identity in their race...it's definitely not going to change, like, it's definitely just part of who you are...But if you're, you know, clinging to that as how you're going to act, or how you're going to act towards others, or how you're going to interpret others' identity, if that's what you are basing it on- this is, controversial, but it's more of a social construct in that realm. It's more of just how people have treated them, how people you know, interact as- as- as the race. It's not necessarily a secure identity based on truth as much as based on previous actions if that makes sense...

Ashley initially employs colorblind theology here as she expresses that a person's identity should be only based on their belief in Christ. She describes Christianity as the only "secure identity" a person can have. However, she also acknowledges that someone's race will not change and it is "part of who they are." She only describes race as a "social construct" when it comes to interactions between people in contemporary society. Thus, Ashley reflects an ambivalent view of race which recognizes race as a social factor in someone's personal identity but concludes that race should not play a role in interactions between individuals. Her inaccurate definition of the concept of race as a "social construct" detaches race entirely from the systems that reproduce it and results in another iteration of colorblindness. As mentioned previously, given the White hegemonic collective identity of FBC, the expectation that congregants of color should allow their identity as Christians to supersede their racial, ethnic, or national identity (specifically in their interpersonal interactions with White evangelicals) ultimately serves to uphold the interests of the racial majority and suppress any demands for racial justice.

When I inquire directly regarding racism in the church and society, most participants deny that racism occurred inside their churches. However, they do recognize the possibility that



some congregants *could* have racist attitudes, but it is viewed as a “heart” issue rather than as a direct result of systemic racism in the U.S. social structure within which evangelical churches are operating. Susan, a 52-year-old White woman who is the Operations’ Director at CC and fell into the “Accommodator” category shares this sentiment as she acknowledges the existence of racial injustice in U.S. “culture,” “corrupt departments,” and individuals while also opposing movements like BLM because she perceives it as promoting “automatic assumptions” of racist “motives” on the part of police:

*Interviewer: So, recently there has been a lot of public discussion around racial inequality and racial justice as a Christian. How do you respond to these topics?*

Susan: ...I think that there is still um racial injustice in our culture today. I think in certain circumstances it's being handled poorly. I think sometimes people jump to conclusions when they- they see something...and automatically assume it's an act of racism...I think it particularly in the in the Blue [Blue Lives Matter] versus Black [Black Lives Matter] argument...I feel like, you know, we don't wait to find out if the person was really a criminal before we assume that the motive was racism...I think we moved too quickly um to to boil something down. Um, But I still think that on- on the flip side of that coin there are corrupt departments. There are corrupt people. Um, And I think they do need to be addressed. I- I just think it's a bad idea to- to assume that all the time all the people are that way...I do think I do think there's a problem, and I do think people need to check their hearts. And I do think that even in within Christianity and within our churches there are people who need to check...

Susan understands racism in a similar way to the “white evangelical tool-kit” as she perceives it as a problem that can be resolved by individuals “checking their hearts” both in “secular” society and within churches. When it comes to CC, however, she denied that any racism occurred—while also pointing out their desire for more “diversity” as most of the congregation is White. Moreover, Susan disagrees with the systemic approach of BLM toward police brutality and upholds a blend of individualistic understandings of racism that also recognize some institutional “corruption” in police departments. Overall, Susan seems to have

ambivalent feelings with regards to racial inequality in the U.S., its causes, and potential responses to achieve racial equality.

Although Black participants in this study—all of whom attend FBC—hold the same views as White participants in terms of the Christian hegemony, heteropatriarchal marriage, and border control, their views on racial matters are distinct. Black interviewees understood the structural aspects of racism and racial inequality in the U.S. more readily compared to White interviewees, even if they held ambivalent views in terms of the causes of or solutions to racial inequality. First, Devon (the 23-year-old man from FBC who identifies as both Black and White and scored as an Ambassador) mentions he does firmly oppose BLM and CRT referencing right-wing commentator Candace Owens’s documentary on the BLM organization and “oppression mentality” among Black Americans. However, when I inquire more about his opinion regarding systemic racism, his response blends structural and individualistic understandings of racism in the U.S.:

*Interviewer: ...you refer to the oppression mentality...how do you view- Do you view that there is racism in the system? Or do you see that as also part of the oppression mentality?*

Devon: ...I believe that it’s kind of...a double-edged sword...I do believe there is such thing as systemic racism. There are systematic things...that have um disproportionately affected African Americans in our society more than White Americans in our society...If you look at, you know, uh crack charges or crack cocaine charges back in the early eighties and...Um crack was more seen in, you know, under developed...uh urban neighborhoods, whereas cocaine, the same drug just mixed a little differently...people with that crack would have higher sentences than people with cocaine...it was a richer man’s drug, White man’s drug...then crack was like that urban kind of inner-city drug...I do think that’s unfair...So, this is my caveat to that argument...the oppression, mentality, and the racist- Racist mentality is like, you have to understand, though, at the end of the day, if a criminal commits a crime, not saying that the sentencing should be unfair or unjust but you cannot glorify the person because they’re Black, and say, ‘Oh, well, they don’t need to be punished because they’re black.’ No, no, no...So, I do believe in this um systemic racism, right? But to take on the identity of that systemic racism and say that’s part of me...I think that is the oppression that kind of builds on it...as the Black community...we want this equality, but we’re not uh willing to do the things

that kind of position us in the right places...there is this overarching indoctrination of inner city and urban environments...You grew up in an environment where drugs are prevalent...people that are role models that you see in your neighborhood are...drug dealers, rappers, athletes...that's not on the back of any other person or any other people group...it's our fault...instead of, 'okay, let me aspire to be a doctor or a lawyer or a politician...something that will help my overall environment'...I think we are indoctrinated in a way and I do think that is systemic, in a way...maybe I'm- I'm an exception...But for the majority of people um, especially African Americans...we kind of fall into this...oppression mentality because it's easier. We don't have to like uh fight the system as much we could...

Devon's response demonstrates a simultaneous belief in systemic racism, citing racial disparities in the criminal justice and legal system, residential segregation (White affluent communities versus the "inner-city, urban" areas which are equated, in this context, to Black impoverished neighborhoods) and a perceived cultural "indoctrination" that leads Black individuals to *choose* careers that do not allow them to "help their environment." In this way, Devon tries to reconcile the systemic disenfranchisement faced by Black Americans compared to White Americans and individualistic explanations for racial inequality that attribute such disparities to lack of effort or personal responsibility among Black Americans. Provided that individualistic understandings of racial inequality are characteristic of the White hegemonic ideals present in these congregations, it is evident that Devon is negotiating his own lived experience as a Black man in the U.S. and the ideas regarding racial matters that were common among White participants at his church.

In terms of racial dynamics in the church, Devon and the other two Black participants in this study (Deena and Evangeline) all recognize their status as a racial "minority" at their church. Evangeline, the 24-year-old Black Hispanic woman who also scored as an Ambassador describes her experience being perceived as a Black woman "in need" due to racial prejudices and stereotyping within the church which she hesitates to label as "racism":

*Interviewer: Do you believe racial inequality and/or racism occur inside your church?*

Evangeline: ...visiting different churches just coming as I am, there is a little bit of like a different treatment, I would say, because I have darker skin, different type of features, darker hair, darker eyes...and with that there is almost like a lesser-than, like, 'oh, are you here 'cause you need help?' like 'are you here because you need something? How can I help you? Tell me-'...I've come across that so many times because one thing we have to remember is there's a lot of money in the church...a lot of people giving money...I have definitely experienced- I wouldn't call it like racial inequality- but...Most brown skinned people- they're not financially in a certain place, I think there's a stigma...People already have...a prejudiced, pre-conceived thought...about someone who may look like me coming into the church...I just don't know if I wanna put the word 'racism' on it...and it's a statistical thing. People that look like me, I'm female, I'm brown skinned, I'm all this other stuff, I might not be educated, I might not come from a good family, I might, you know, have baby daddy issues...where when you kinda come against a norm and come against a statistic- and I do see a shift, when I- you know, let people know a little bit more about myself...even in the church there's a little bit of a shift...

Although Evangeline chooses not to utilize the term “racism” to describe the dynamics within the church, like Devon, she does recognize the intersection of systemic racism and socioeconomic inequality that frame Black Americans’ lived experience in the U.S. Importantly, Evangeline believes there is a degree of “stigma” and “prejudiced” attitudes in the churches she has attended—which have been predominantly White evangelical churches—that lead to benevolent yet discriminatory treatment towards her as a Black woman. Later in the interview, she discusses her decision to straighten her hair particularly when performing in front of the congregation which is primarily comprised of older, White congregants. When I asked directly whether this prejudiced treatment was originating from a particular racial group, she clarified that it was primarily perpetuated by “the older generation, 50+ [years old]” of White evangelicals.

Finally, when it comes to addressing racial inequality as a social problem, these Black evangelicals also presented a blend of individualistic and structuralist approaches. For instance,

Deena, a 31-year-old Ugandan immigrant woman who was a young adult group leader at FBC and scored as an “Ambassador,” described the role of slavery in framing the experiences of Black Americans in the U.S. and the rise of Black Lives Matter as a legitimate consequence:

Deena: ...You have to remember... America was a country that went through slave trade... Where one race was treated differently because they were that race and they had you know to be owned by others... So... I think some people haven't forgiven you know?... I've seen some videos on the internet where people are like, 'oh, when my son became a teenager I had to have the difficult conversation with him,' you know, 'when you meet a police officer, your life may end so do A, B, C, D, E...!' And that is not a conversation you should have with a child, but they have those conversations because they experienced- they know the history and they haven't moved on from that history. And they've seen, like, today if a Black man is running through the neighborhood and somebody calls 'oh, there is somebody you know who looks like a thief in this neighborhood' That- that's messed up! You know? If you're jogging in a neighborhood and somebody thinks you don't belong in that neighborhood, that is messed up... So, there is sides to it. There is a side of people who have failed to forgive and there's people who are still you know fueling these situations... And of course, Black Lives Matter is gonna come up...

*Interviewer: Mhm. And...do you think race matters in that case?*

Deena: Absolutely. Absolutely, because if [participant's name] is walking the neighborhood and you're looking through your window to make sure you see where they are going, you're doing that because she's Black.

Deena's statement being an African immigrant who navigates U.S. society as a Black person, demonstrates her greater awareness of racial discrimination and police brutality compared to White participants. Although she mentions the need for “forgiveness,” consistent with the white evangelical tool-kit and ideas of racial reconciliation, she does emphasize the history of racial domination and contemporary incidents of police brutality fueled by anti-Black racial prejudice. Due to these systemic issues, she finds that it is reasonable for BLM to mobilize. Later in the interview, she does establish that issues related to police brutality and racial inequality *also* stem from individuals' backgrounds and the communities they are a part of. Therefore, despite Black participants' deeper understanding of the historical and structural

aspects of racism in the U.S., they also demonstrated some ambivalence with regard to how to address racial inequality presumably due to the White hegemonic ideas in their congregation which favored individualistic explanations *and* solutions for racial inequality. When analyzing the perspectives of White evangelicals and evangelicals of color in conjunction, it appears that the ambivalence results from a constant tension between ideas of society as “rightly” ordered by God, the acknowledgment of racism and inequality in society (and to a lesser degree, among certain churches or individual Christians), and the view of racism as a “sin” or “heart issue” that should be resolved at an interpersonal, spiritual level.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As mentioned above, this project was exploratory yet guided by previous literature on Christian nationalism (CN) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Initially, there were two research questions I wanted to answer: *a) How do White congregants and congregants of color negotiate Christian nationalist ideas?* and *b) In what ways do these local evangelicals embrace and/or reject Christian nationalism?* In order to answer these questions, I not only interviewed individual congregants about their opinions regarding the U.S. as a nation, their responses to current social issues, and their experiences as American Christians, but I also set out to observe the social contexts within which their perspectives as Christians were being shaped. Thus, I conducted ethnographic observations of church sermons, Sunday school, small groups, interpersonal interactions, symbols used, and the overall aesthetic of each congregation. Throughout this study, Christian nationalism can be observed as a phenomenon that is not only negotiated by congregants at the individual level but also at the structural level. In this discussion, I contextualize the findings by drawing two main conclusions: 1) the existence of a White, heteropatriarchal *structure* within these evangelical congregations and 2) the reproduction of a White, heteropatriarchal hegemonic *collective identity* which results in overwhelming support for Christian nationalism (hereafter, CN) among evangelicals at the *individual* level.

### **(White) Evangelical Churches as White, Heteropatriarchal Institutional Spaces**

As outlined in the Methodology section, although CC was estimated to be a predominantly White congregation and FBC was estimated to be a multiracial congregation (ARDA 2015), both churches operate as White institutional spaces (Bracey 2015) that are sustained by a White supremacist, heteropatriarchal structure. Despite being in a racially and ethnically diverse area of the city where international students and immigrants resided, based on my observations and those of other congregants of color at FBC people of color are heavily

concentrated within the young adult groups. All leadership is exclusively White men, the choir and orchestra are almost exclusively White, and the majority of the older adult population is also White. At CC, the leadership is also exclusively White men (with the exception of married couples which lead “community groups” and the women-led women’s book studies) and most of the congregation is White. In this way, the demographics of the congregations plays a significant role in establishing and maintaining a structure led by White men. Given that the leadership is exclusively made up of White men and the large majority of the congregation is also White, CC can be considered a White institutional space that is a direct product of the racial segregation that has been historically and systemically perpetuated by the broader institution of White evangelicalism in the U.S. (Butler 2021; Tisby 2019; Emerson and Smith 2000). Previous research has also pointed to the inequality of resources and exclusion of clergy of color in leadership opportunities, even in multiracial congregations (Munn 2019). Additionally, both FBC and CC largely subscribe to complementarianism—the belief that men were created by God to be leaders and women were their ‘complementary’ helpers—which has historically been a part of White evangelicalism (Piper and Grudem 1991; Hall et al. 2010). A heteropatriarchal structure justified by complementarianism is evidenced in the absence of women in leadership roles at both churches, especially if they are married. In this way, these churches are not only White institutional spaces in which racial domination is upheld but a space in which Collins’ (2000) “matrix of domination” is at work as White supremacy intersects with patriarchy and heteronormativity.

Situating the social context of these congregations upon the concept of White heteropatriarchal institutional spaces is particularly significant as this is what ultimately shapes the messages being disseminated and the gendered and racialized dynamics being reproduced at the interpersonal level. As argued by Bracey (2015), White institutional spaces benefit from the



initial exclusion of non-White people which serves to establish a logic, cultural practices, and power distribution that benefits the interests of Whiteness. Moreover, the use of boundary-making to reinforce a specific racial, ethnic, national, and/or ideological identity among White evangelicals and White Christian nationalists is significant in my analysis of these congregations (Bracey and Moore 2017; Perry and Whitehead 2015; Perry and Whitehead 2019). As a Latina sociologist, several of the aforementioned barriers I faced (particularly at CC) can be attributed to this White heteropatriarchal structure and boundary-making practices established within these churches.

For instance, the ability White women congregants had to overtly express their thoughts and shared concerns regarding political and social matters without visible dissent was indicative of the dominant culture that exists in the congregation. On the contrary, I was not provided access to small groups at CC because of my identity as an “outsider,” both in terms of race/ethnicity, my ambivalent beliefs in evangelical Christianity, my status as a non-member of the church, and my role as an academic researcher. Such marginalization aligns with previous research which shows that contemporary churches where Whites are the racial majority enable the creation of a collective identity that favors the perspectives and interests of White congregants—a White hegemony—resulting in less participation and sense of belonging among those who are not of the racial majority (Martinez 2018; Martinez and Dougherty 2013). Similarly, at FBC, sermons and interpersonal interactions in which “identity politics” (as it relates to sexuality and race, specifically), “cancel culture,” and social justice values were overtly scrutinized also made evident the hegemonic ideas that prevail there which can potentially block efforts toward racial justice as suggested by previous research (Oyakawa 2019). In order to navigate this marginalization, I had to center CC and FBC congregants’ experiences and views

while explaining my research without discussing concepts such as CN and CRT in conversation provided that these were considered opposite to their political interests.

### **White, Heteropatriarchal (Christian) Hegemony and Support for Christian Nationalism**

Having established how both FBC and CC operated as White, heteropatriarchal institutional spaces, I will now turn to the White, heteropatriarchal hegemony that was fostered within the church and individual congregants via sermon messaging. It was this hegemonic messaging that ultimately bolstered adherence to CN among congregants. An important detail to highlight prior to proceeding with the discussion is the limited number of non-White participants in this study. Thus, this discussion largely represents the attitudes of White evangelicals. The three Black participants and the Latino/Hispanic participant in this study did share similar ideas as White participants in most themes discussed *except* racial matters. Black participants, in particular, demonstrated a greater awareness of racial disparities in the church and systemic racism in society more readily than White participants. This distinction in perspectives on race and racism between White participants and Black participants will be highlighted further in the “*Gender Equality, LGBTQ+ People, and Racial Justice as Threats*” subsection of this discussion. To reiterate, there were three main themes I identified in the Findings section: Us versus the World, The Gospel and Future, and Order and Obedience. Below, I will apply a CRT lens as I analyze how these themes were negotiated by congregants and how each related to Christian nationalist ideals as outlined by previous research.

#### *Boundary-making and the Spiritual Warfare*

The Us versus the World theme is based upon the believer/unbeliever and good/evil dichotomy that these evangelical Christians applied from the pulpit to their daily lives as Americans. Under this theme, a desire for Christian hegemony in the U.S. and a belief in an ongoing spiritual battle between God (and Christians) and Satan (and non-Christians) were

prevalent. For the pastors at FBC and CC, it was important to establish a clear line between the ideologies of the secular world and Biblical “truths” which were only accessible to evangelical Christians. Appeals to “authoritative” and “absolute” truth as rooted in the Bible alone as opposed to ideas of “postmodernism” and relativism within secular society were also made by individual congregants. Thus, boundary-making language was a recurring strategy among these local evangelicals. Boundary-making is a major part of White evangelicalism and CN which is not only limited to racial, ethnic, and national origin, but religious affiliation as well (Bracey and Moore 2017; Perry and Whitehead 2015; Perry and Whitehead 2019; Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020). In Perry and Whitehead’s (2019) study, Christian nationalists considered “true” Americans as needing to be affiliated with Christianity. In this context, evangelical Christians view themselves as having the only “truth” and being the true “children of God” facing a secular society that is not only “at odds” with God, but also under the influence of Satan (whom they also refer to as ‘the Enemy’). While participants did express ambivalence between a coerced Christian state and a transformed Christian society that would lead to a Christian nation, most participants supported the adoption of Christian values by the U.S. population based on a belief in a mythical Christian past as observed among Christian nationalists (Whitehead and Perry 2020). In fact, the vast majority of these local congregants were categorized as Ambassadors for CN with the second most common category being the Accommodators. Only two participants fell into the Resister category and there were no Rejecters. The prevalence of Ambassadors in these congregations is especially significant provided that in Whitehead and Perry’s (2020) previous work, Ambassadors were the smallest group among Americans.

Such boundary-making language coupled with spiritual warfare imagery also served to instill a simultaneous sense of impending doom due to Satan’s unwavering influence over the secular world and hope in God’s future redemption of Christians among congregants. Notions of

the imminent “end times” and constant conflict between God/Christians and Satan/non-Christians are key components of apocalyptic Christianity which has been historically connected to CN and recent discussions among the Christian Right regarding demonic forces and the “Deep State” (Sutton 2014; O’Donnell 2020). There was also a sense of uncertainty and suspicion provided that unbelievers were not seen as direct enemies, yet Satan’s influence was thought to manifest among them. Further, the FBC Lead Pastor emphasized the importance of missionary work given the more salient role the spiritual warfare was perceived to have among South Asian nations such as India. Thus, Christian hegemony must also be understood as intersecting other mechanisms of oppression such as colonialism (Glenn 2015) and “racial projects” (Omi and Winant 2015b; Collins 2011) such as slavery which have been a part of White Christianity throughout U.S. history (Emerson and Smith 2000; Butler 2021; Tisby 2019). As argued by Bialecki (2017) these local evangelicals not only perceived themselves—American Christians—as a threatened minority but as an entitled majority tasked with the dissemination of Christianity in the U.S. and around the globe. At the same time, as stated by several participants, they ultimately saw themselves as victorious once the spiritual warfare would be won by God and Christians. As Holder and Josephson (2020) suggest, this resistance to religious pluralism among White evangelicals (particularly those who align with the Christian Right) is rooted in a desire for religious domination. Christian hegemony is not only an ideal for these local evangelicals but a guaranteed outcome after the spiritual battle is won.

### *Transcending Social Problems and the Global Christian Kingdom*

The idea of a spiritual victory and future redemption that will result in Christian domination became even more central in the Gospel and Future theme. While sermons at FBC were more politically-inclined than at CC, the messaging at both churches built upon the idea of an ongoing spiritual conflict taking place in U.S. society (and around the globe) by emphasizing

a Future Kingdom as a solution to current social problems and unrest. This sense of uncertainty in the face of evangelical Christianity's declining social influence is precisely what underlies support for authoritarianism, politicians like Trump, and the Christian Right among White evangelicals (Haynes 2021; Fea 2018; Martí 2019; Holder and Josephson 2020; Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018; see also Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020). Pastors at FBC and CC not only reminded congregants of perceived ongoing and future threats against them as Christians such as the loss of freedom to practice their faiths in their personal lives, but they also encouraged congregants to place their hope in this future "rightly ordered" society that would be achieved under Christ's rule. Most participants emphasized evangelism and wished to see a revival not only in the U.S. but all over the world. This fixation on the salvation of souls and future transcendence of sociopolitical issues upon the arrival of Christ's eternal reign is a contemporary version of the apocalyptic Christianity of the 1800s and Billy Graham's new evangelicalism in the midst of the civil rights movement (Sutton 2014; Butler 2021).

It should be understood that the "Millennial Kingdom"—which is a temporary 1000-year reign of Christ over the earth prior to the final spiritual battle—right-wing and White nationalist Christian movements such as dominionism, premillenarianism, Reconstructionism and Christian Identity believe in (Sutton 2014; Aho 2013; Durham 2008; Crockford 2018) is distinct from what evangelicals at FBC and CC viewed as the "Future Kingdom." Rather, these local evangelicals referred to the "New Jerusalem" which follows the final battle between God and Satan and involves the restoration of Earth and the eternal reign of Christ along with Christians. Despite this distinction, the concept of global submission to God—along with missionary efforts in nations where the majority of the population is not European nor White—should also be examined as historically connected to mechanisms such as colonialism, Manifest Destiny, racial projects, racial domination, White supremacy, Americanism, CN, nativism and anti-immigration

attitudes, Islamophobia, apocalyptic Christianity, and dominionism (Glenn 2015; Omi and Winant 2015b; Collins 2011; Emerson and Smith 2000; Butler 2021; Whitehead and Perry 2020; Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020; Sutton 2014; Aho 2013; Durham 2008; Crockford 2018).

The function of a belief in a future global submission to the Christian God remains the same: to justify a Christian hegemony that is also implicitly a White, heteropatriarchal Christian hegemony.

### *Gender Equality, LGBTQ+ People, and Racial Justice as Threats*

The third and final main theme that framed the pastor's sermons and individual congregants' attitudes was Order and Obedience. The belief in a hierarchical ideal for society in which law and order—based on conservative evangelical Christian values—prevail was a recurring theme particularly in the topics of gender, sexuality, marriage, immigration, and racial justice. While the FBC sermons explicitly discussed the importance of a patriarchal order in marriage and parenting as required by complementarian doctrine (Piper and Grudem 1991; Colaner and Giles 2008; and Gallagher 2004; Hall et. al 2010), CC sermons did broadly discuss social justice and embraced the idea that inequality was natural and ordained by God. Moreover, the CC Lead Pastor suggested that “biblical” justice was achieved when individuals adhered to their predetermined roles in a society ruled by God's law. Although these local evangelicals do not fully embrace dominionism as an ideology, this idealization of a society ruled by the “laws of God” such as the Ten Commandments is aligned with theocratic ideas promoted by dominionists, Reconstructionists, and Christian Identity groups who seek to “reChristianize” the U.S. (Aho 2013; Durham 2008; Crockford 2018). Nonetheless, messaging about the heteropatriarchal ideal of marriage and family as well as appeals to “order” in society were intended to have political implications as congregants were encouraged to resist any ideals that may challenge the existing social structure or demand social justice.

Once again, opposition to ideas of social progress and equality were already embedded in the White, heteropatriarchal hegemonic collective identity of the churches. Subsequently, most participants in this study simultaneously adhered to ideas of personal choice for Christians and non-Christians alike while also opposing reproductive rights, acceptance of LGBTQ+ people, same-sex marriage, the affirmation of transgender individuals' existence and liberties, and racial justice initiatives like BLM and CRT. Most of these local evangelicals did support border control, prayer in schools, and more parental control over the educational system along with the incorporation of "Christian values" into the children's schooling (several favored homeschooling). Despite claiming to oppose a coerced Christian nation, these local evangelicals' attitudes reflected the overwhelming support for authoritarianism and politicians on the Right who posit themselves as defenders of Christian interests present among Christian nationalists and White evangelicals in previous studies (Haynes 2021; Fea 2018; Martí 2019; Holder and Josephson 2020; Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018; see also Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020). Most participants understood these conservative evangelical Christian values as the *best* order for U.S. society as a whole, reinforcing the idea of Christian hegemony. As a result, LGBTQ+ people—especially transgender people—were portrayed as a threat to the ideal heteropatriarchal social order Christian nationalists strive to preserve (Whitehead and Perry 2020; see also Whitehead and Perry 2019).

In keeping with an intersectional CRT lens, it must be reiterated that systems such as heteronormativity, the gender binary, and patriarchy which emerged in the previous subsection also intersect with White supremacy and settler colonialism in the U.S. as part of the matrix of domination (Glenn 2015; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991). Thus, as local evangelicals strive to preserve heteropatriarchy, they also seek to protect a national structure that is sustained by White supremacy, racial domination, and settler colonialism. The use of principles such as "law and

order” to maintain systems of racial domination in the U.S. manifested in participants’ overwhelming support for border control, questioning of “equality” as an ideal, use of colorblind theology, perpetuation of inaccurate historical narratives, and opposition to contemporary racial justice movements. The racial/ethnic boundary-making and nativism previously observed among White evangelicals and Christian nationalists (Bracey and Moore 2017; Perry and Whitehead 2015; Whitehead and Perry 2020; Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020) was also evident among these local evangelicals—including Black and Latinx/Hispanic participants—as they emphasized the importance of national sovereignty, protecting U.S. citizens from crime, and maintaining order. While Black Americans who uphold CN have previously held differing views than White Americans on racial matters (Perry and Whitehead 2019), CN remains strongly interconnected to negative attitudes towards Mexican immigrants and Muslim refugees in particular (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020). Nevertheless, Black participants in the present study did demonstrate a greater awareness of racial dynamics within the church and systemic aspects of racism in U.S. society compared to White participants. Most White participants acknowledged the existence of race and ethnicity, but they chose to adhere to a colorblind theology which prioritized the “Christian identity” over racial, ethnic, and/or national identity. As argued by previous research, colorblind theology, the ideal of racial reconciliation, and a White hegemonic collective identity in the church ultimately serve to suppress racial justice efforts and results in a decreased sense of belonging and rates of participation among those in the racial minority (Hearn 2009; Oyakawa 2019; Martinez 2018; Martinez and Dougherty 2013).

Opposition to racial justice initiatives such as BLM and CRT among White evangelicals hinged upon colorblind understandings of the law and U.S. Constitution, false narratives about history, and largely individualistic understandings of racism. A colorblind perception of the Constitution, the individualization of racism in U.S. society, the White evangelical tool-kit in



which racism is reduced to “sin” and interpersonal relationships, and historical amnesia are some of the strategies identified by race scholars and scholars of Christian nationalism which allow individuals—especially (but not limited to) White Americans—to uphold racial domination and CN (Gotanda 2017; Doane 2017; Bonilla-Silva 2015; Emerson and Smith 2000; Braunstein 2021; see also Cobb, Perry, and Dougherty 2015; Whitehead and Perry 2019). While these local evangelicals were aware of racism and racial inequality in U.S. society, most denied racism and racial inequality existed inside the church despite the fact that the church operates within the same social structure. In this way, local evangelicals (especially White congregants) understood racism as a “heart issue” that is more prevalent in secular society despite the ways in which White and multiracial evangelical churches continue to reproduce White hegemony and racial inequality (Martinez 2018; Martinez and Dougherty 2013; Oyakawa 2019; Munn 2019; Bracey and Moore 2017).

It is also crucial to note that a denial of police brutality against Black Americans and support for increased funding for policing and border patrol has been associated with Christian nationalism (Perry, Whitehead, and Davis 2019). Thus, local evangelicals’ support for border control yet denial of systemic racial injustice and opposition to movements such as BLM which are actively challenging police brutality against Black Americans aligns with Christian nationalism. For White participants in particular, resistance to ideals of equality seemed to be rooted in concerns about communism and Marxism, viewing them as fundamentally opposed to Christianity. Fear of communism and Marxism has not only been historically observed among the Christian right, apocalyptic Christianity, and Billy Graham’s Americanism, but also among contemporary evangelical seminaries (Butler 2021; Schroeder 2020; Land 2021; see also Tisby 2019) which have denounced BLM and CRT as “Marxist” and “anti-Christian.” Conversely, for the three Black participants—all of whom attended FBC and scored as Ambassadors—adherence

to CN did not result in entirely individualistic understandings of racial inequality nor opposition to BLM or CRT (with the exception of one participant who identified as Black and White who did oppose BLM and CRT despite recognizing some aspects of systemic racism) which coincides with previous research (Whitehead and Perry 2019). For Black participants, there was a tension between structuralist and individualistic understandings of racism characteristic of the White evangelical tool-kit which favored interpersonal solutions to racial inequality. This ambivalence between individualistic and structuralist views of racial inequality among Black congregants most like resulted from the White hegemonic collective identity already established at FBC. Altogether, colorblind theology, individualistic understandings of racism, historical amnesia, and resistance to racial justice serves to prevent the dismantling of White hegemony—and by extension, heteropatriarchy not only in the church but in the U.S., as a nation.

### **Contributions and Limitations**

Through this ethnographic study, Christian nationalism can be observed as an ideology that is negotiated within local, White-led evangelical churches. Although, as argued by Whitehead and Perry (2020), CN must be distinguished from evangelicalism provided that it is not exclusively present among evangelicals, it is evident that the messaging being promoted via church sermons is rooted in the same White, heteropatriarchal ideals that also set the foundation for CN attitudes among the majority of participants. It must be acknowledged that these White, heteropatriarchal *ideals* are a product of the White, heteropatriarchal *structure* that underlies U.S. society. Thus, while evangelical Christianity (particularly White evangelicalism) is not unique in its intersection with CN attitudes, it does become a conducive space for the rise of CN given its historical interconnection to racial and colonial projects (Glenn 2015; Omi and Winant 2015b; Collins 2011; Emerson and Smith 2000; Butler 2021; Tisby 2019) and ideas of spiritual warfare and dominionism (Sutton 2014; Aho 2013; Durham 2008; Crockford 2018) through which a

rationale for boundary-making and domination is constructed. In other words, White evangelicalism in the U.S. becomes a “perfect storm” for CN because of its arrival to the American continent already entangled with colonialism and White supremacy and its inherent belief in ultimate victory over the “secular” (non-Christian) world through a future godly Kingdom. Understanding these White, heteropatriarchal systemic dynamics, this study goes beyond distinguishing CN from White evangelicalism, the Christian Right, and other related organizations. By employing CRT as an analytical framework, this study analyzes how CN is inextricably connected to White evangelicalism and other systems of oppression that operate within the matrix of domination. Here, CN is not only understood as a cultural framework held by individuals but as a structural mechanism of White supremacy that also intersects with White evangelicalism, settler colonialism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity.

It must be noted that the findings of this research are limited for several reasons. First, due to time constraints and limited resources, this qualitative study only focuses on two evangelical churches in central Florida. These churches were selected based on my personal connections with members within each church. Moreover, participants faced challenges in committing to interviews due to holidays and travel between November and January. Next, the demographics and social networks at both congregations made sampling a diverse group of individuals difficult. CC was predominantly White and while FBC had a diverse young adult group ranging from ages 18 to 35, the vast majority of the older adult population was White. While I was able to contact several young evangelicals of color at FBC, the majority of those who committed to interviewing identified as White. Given that several of these young adults of color were students and employed full-time, I presume time constraints can also be attributed to their inability to participate to the same extent as older adults and elderly participants, all of whom were White, as well.

Related to social networks, my own positionality as a Latina woman who no longer attends evangelical churches also became an obstacle in some ways as I tried to build relationships with congregants at CC and FBC. As discussed in the ethnographic observations section of the findings, the two points of contact I had at each congregation (a White woman at CC and a Black woman at FBC) were not enough to help me attain my initial goal of 20-24 participants despite each of these individuals being very active and in leadership positions in their respective churches. My role as an “outsider” and “academic” also became a point of friction particularly with the leadership at CC, precluding me from access to small group meetings and additional social networks. The political themes discussed in my research may have also contributed to discomfort or hesitation on the part of local evangelicals provided the sociopolitical climate in the U.S. at the time this study was being conducted. Future research seeking to explore political views among local evangelicals and their negotiation of Christian nationalist ideas utilizing an ethnographic approach should strive to cultivate strong relationships with insiders of evangelical churches that will be supportive of academic research on such topics, visit a larger number of churches spanning a broader geographical area, connect with social networks that include both White evangelicals and evangelicals of color, and provide a longer period of time for interviews to be conducted in case of holidays and church events that could limit the availability of participants.

Despite its limitations, this study expands on previous research on Christian nationalism by taking an ethnographic approach and focusing specifically on local evangelicals, most of whom did not readily identify with CN as an ideology. The findings demonstrate how sermons and individuals do not need to espouse CN explicitly or consistently in order to uphold the same mechanisms of oppression that sustain it. Likewise, not all evangelicals need to be CN Ambassadors in order for this phenomenon to be perpetuated in the structure and messaging of

the local congregations. Ultimately, this research seeks to aid in the future incorporation of critical and intersectional theories such as CRT in the study of CN as a phenomenon for the purpose of moving beyond systems of categorization into systemic understandings of CN in the U.S. In other words, CRT takes scholars from the individual and/or social groups back to the structure. Throughout this study, CRT allowed me to understand how these two churches as local organizations are influencing individual congregants' attitudes towards U.S. society at large and how these findings can be situated within the ongoing historical pattern of reactions among White evangelicals, the New Right, White supremacist groups, among others, against perceived threats to the White supremacist, colonial, heteropatriarchal social structure that persists in this nation.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name (Pseudonym):

Date:

*Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. During this interview, I am interested in learning more about your personal thoughts, beliefs, and feelings as a Christian in the United States today. We will discuss a variety of topics related to the church, social issues, government, and your personal experiences as a Christian. This interview will be filmed and/or recorded per your consent, and I will be taking notes throughout. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, you are free to skip these questions. Lastly, participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to end the interview at any moment.*

### **Demographic Information**

Congregation: CC or FBC

Role/Ministry:

Age:

Gender:

Race/Ethnicity:

Highest Education Level:

Marital Status:

- If married/in a relationship,

Role/Ministry:

Age of Spouse/Partner:

Gender of Spouse/Partner:

Race/Ethnicity of Spouse/Partner:

Household Income (estimate):

### **Christian Nationalism Assessment – (Whitehead and Perry 2020)**

*Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:*

- ***The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation.***  
*Strongly Agree – Mostly Agree – Undecided – Mostly Disagree – Strongly Disagree*
- ***The federal government should advocate Christian values.***  
*Strongly Agree – Mostly Agree – Undecided – Mostly Disagree – Strongly Disagree*
- ***The federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state.***  
*Strongly Agree – Mostly Agree – Undecided – Mostly Disagree – Strongly Disagree*
- ***The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces.***  
*Strongly Agree – Mostly Agree – Undecided – Mostly Disagree – Strongly Disagree*
- ***The federal government should allow prayer in public schools.***  
*Strongly Agree – Mostly Agree – Undecided – Mostly Disagree – Strongly Disagree*

• ***The success of the United States is part of God’s plan.***

*Strongly Agree – Mostly Agree – Undecided – Mostly Disagree – Strongly Disagree*

**Open Ended Questions**

**The Christian Nation**

1. As a Christian, what are some concerns you may have regarding the state of our nation today?
  - Follow up: What do you think is the cause of these issues in society today?
2. Do you think the United States is a Christian nation? If yes, why? If not, why not?
3. *Should* the U.S. be a Christian nation? Why or why not?
4. What does a “Christian nation” mean to you in terms of the family, the law, education, etc.?
5. What do you think about teachers/administrators/coaches holding prayer or Bible studies before school starts, or before high school football games? Even if there are lots of non-Christians present? Should opportunities be given for other religious traditions (e.g., Muslims, Buddhists) to pray or study their scriptures before those events?
6. How should a “Christian nation” think about things like immigration policies and border walls?
7. Do you think we as a country are moving away from our religious heritage? In what ways? Is that for the better or for the worse?

**Living in the U.S. as a Christian**

8. Are there any particular challenges you have faced as a Christian in America today? Are there any positive aspects to being a Christian in America today?
9. Do you feel like your religious freedoms have ever come under attack? If so, how so? Have you ever feared that this would happen?
10. In your view, what is the role of those who do NOT choose to follow Christian values and beliefs in the United States?

**Race, Racism, and Racial Justice in Society and the Church**

11. As a Christian, what are your thoughts on race and/or ethnicity as identities? Are these identities important to you? Should they be important to a Christian?
12. Do you believe racial inequality and/or racism occur inside your church?
13. Recently, there has been a lot of public discussion around racial inequality and racial justice. As a Christian, how do you respond to these topics?
  - Possible follow up: As a Christian, what is your reaction when you hear about Critical Race Theory and Black Lives Matter?

**Christianity, Political Conflict, and Domination**

14. Are political topics discussed during sermons at your congregation? How about in bible studies?
  - If yes—what are the most important topics you have heard being discussed?



- If not—are there any topics related to politics you wish to hear more about at church?
- 15. Should topics related to politics be discussed at church? Why or why not?
- 16. Some people believe we are living in a time of conflict—a battle between good and evil—do you agree with this idea?
  - Possible follow up: If yes, how should Christians respond to this battle?
- 17. Some people believe we are approaching the “end times.” Do you agree with this belief?
  - Possible follow up: If so, are there any actions Christians should be taking right now?
- 18. What should the ultimate goal be for Christians in the U.S. before the “end times”? Is there anything you wish to see achieved in this nation before Christ’s return?
- 19. As a Christian, do you believe that Christians will rule the earth with Christ in the future?
  - Follow up: If so, what would this kingdom look like to you? Who can be a part of it and who cannot?
  - Follow up: Does the idea of this future kingdom influence how you view political and global issues as a Christian? If so, in what ways?

## APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board  
FWA00000351  
IRB00001138, IRB00012110  
Office of Research  
12201 Research Parkway  
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

**EXEMPTION DETERMINATION**

October 13, 2022

Dear Marina Rivera:

On 10/13/2022, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Christianity, Nation, and Politics in Central Florida
Investigator:	Marina Rivera
IRB ID:	STUDY00004660
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRP-251 Signed Form.pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval;</li> <li>• Study 4660 HRP-254 Edited Explanation of Research_TF edits (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Study 4660 HRP-254 Explanation of Research for Small Groups_TF edits (2).pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Study 4660 HRP-255 Edited Request for Exemption_TF edits (1) (1) (3).docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Study 4660 Interview Schedule_TF edits.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions;</li> <li>• Study 4660 Recruitment Script - Email and Text_TF edits (1).docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Study 4660 Recruitment Survey_TF edits.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> </ul>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu). Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Tamiko Fukuda  
UCF IRB

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