



Building Justice Podcast

Season 1, Episode 14: Black Voters Matter: Black Political Engagement Post-Obama, a conversation between Dr. Chris Towler and Dr. Monicka Tutschka.

Please note: This transcript may contain imperfections. Please contact Dr. Chris Towler should you have questions.

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Music Intro Lyrics

Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

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Monicka: Welcome to Building Justice, a podcast by Sacramento State's Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice. Our acronym is CRISJ. We explore critical issues affecting our communities, with the hope of creating a healthier and more just world. Your host for today are me, Monica Tutschka, a professor of political science at Sac State and Dr. and Professor Chris Towler who is also a professor of political science here at Sac State. Chris and I have weathered many department meetings together, and we have managed to survive teaching through COVID.

Chris is the director of the Black Voter Project, which is a public opinion polling project focused on the political attitudes and behaviors of Black Americans. In his research, Chris examines the dynamic relationship between progressive social movements and far right movements. His most recent scholarship examines the mobilizing power of both racial threat and political hope. Hello, Chris. It's really great to have you on the podcast today.

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Chris: Hi, Monicka, thank you so much for the great introduction, and I am excited to be here and have this conversation with you in the audience.

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Monicka I'm excited, too. This is going to be fantastic. Today, we're going to be discussing two of Chris's recent publications. The first is a coauthored piece titled, "Between Anger and Engagement, Donald Trump and Black America." This is published in the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*. The second coauthored piece titled, "Shut Up and Play: Black Athletes, Protest Politics, and Black Political Action." This was published in *Perspectives on Politics*. Congratulations, Chris.

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Chris: Thank you so much. I'm excited to discuss these pieces and the continued research on this topic.

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Monicka Both articles grapple with black political mobilization. The articles distinguish black political mobilization during the Obama era from mobilization after President Obama left office. What brought you to the study of black political mobilization in the Obama era and in the post Obama era?

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Chris: Thanks again, Monica. This is a wonderful question. I entered graduate school in the summer of 2007, and so I was essentially becoming politicized as a graduate student in 2008 during President Obama's run for office. Someone already wanting to study race and politics, specifically African-American politics as a first-year graduate student during that time was sort of magical in a way. And so I became obsessed with understanding African-American support for President Obama. And after he won on the back of historic black political mobilization and turnout, I continue to want to know more and more and more about how the African American community supported President Obama, what that would mean for the future, and what sort of a response to President Obama's presidency would be not just in Black America, but in the country at large. And so for me, I was really becoming a student of political science and an academic during this time where we have this historical moment in our country that we've never had before and really trying to understand what it meant in that moment and continuing to try and understand what it's meant for politics in the last decade and a half.

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Monicka: Chris, it sounds like it sounds like Obama and Obama's campaign and Obama's presidency had a real impression on you as a graduate student, as a scholar. Can you describe what characterize the way Obama

mobilized the black community and discuss some of the challenges that the black community faces vis-a-vis mobilization after President Obama left office?

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Chris: Yeah, absolutely. So watching Obama rise to the office of the President as a young graduate student, I already saw his narrative fitting into the literature that I was familiar with as an undergrad and a graduate student at the time. And so literature suggests that candidates who have a sort of more intimate or strong connection to the communities that they are trying to mobilize can excite, inspire and even empower individuals to enter politics or become engaged in politics in ways that then that they might otherwise not be.

And so President Obama capitalized on what we call descriptive representation within the African-American community by sort-of embodying this hope and change narrative as the first nonwhite president to have a sort of real, legitimate chance at winning office once he won the Democratic primaries and became the the Democratic candidate on the ticket.

And this caused African-Americans across the country to engage politics, to think about politics, to feel empowered in politics in ways that they may have never been before. And we have these anecdotal stories of sort of elders in the black community saying I never thought this would happen in my lifetime. I never thought I'd have the opportunity to vote in actually, potentially successfully elect an African-American president. And so this is really this this narrative of hope and change work to mobilize the black community to historic numbers where we saw historic turnout. In some cases, 98 percent of the electorate in certain state, 98 percent of the black people who voted voted for President Obama.

This changed the electoral map. And so in 2008, states that were considered tough wins, swing states or maybe not even [states] considered on the map for Democrat states such as North Carolina, Virginia, Indiana, Ohio, Florida at the time went blue, due in large part to this historic turnout within the African-American community. But those gains, right, were historical and monumental, but also uncertain. And so that that takes us to this discussion of what what happened in 2016 when President Obama left office after his tenure.

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Monicka: Chris, I'm hearing you talk about just how inspiring Barack Obama was to the black community because he is a black person. But in addition, he capitalized upon a hope and change narrative and then delivered in the sense that he changed the electoral map, and he brought a sense of possibility and empowerment to the black community that they may have not had before, given American history.

And now you're saying, "Well, what happens in 2016 when Trump is rising and we start to see resistance to Obama, resentment for Obama within the Trump campaign, we start to wonder about how is this resentment and resistance going to affect black political mobilization and America

generally? Can you talk a little bit about how the rise of Trump informs your own work on black political mobilization and how it affected the electoral gains that were made with Obama's historic activity?

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Chris: Yeah, those are, those are great points. For me, at the time, it was really exciting to to study and understand African-American engagement in the Obama era. As you move through Obama's tenure, though, it becomes very apparent that there was a very strong, very strong reaction to President Obama's victory. And so those of us who were studying sort of 'politics in responses to politics' could not ignore the rise of the Tea Party in 2008/2009 and really the culmination of a national sort of tea party movement by 2010. [We see the movement] dramatically affecting the 2010 midterm elections, essentially taking back the House and the Senate for the Republican Party. This reactionary movement is in response to President Obama's sort of symbolic victory and the progressive vision that he has put forth for the country by taking the White House on these ideas of hope and change.

And so the rise of Trump---in order to really understand the rise of Trump---you have to go all the way back to the first years of the Obama presidency. And it's very clear---and there's been a lot of research on this----there is a groundbreaking book called *Change They Can't Believe In* by Chris Parker and Matt Barretto that outlines the rise of the Tea Party and identifies ideas of fear, anxiety, threat, anger as main factors, [for] understanding why a conservative movement and resistance ~~to Trump rose and became so power. I'm sorry,~~ and resistance to Obama rose and became powerful enough to sort of culminate in Trump's campaign in 2016. And so as I continue to understand the Obama era, it was impossible to ignore the resistance to Obama and how that played into the rise of Trump.

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And then I continue to wonder, OK, once Obama was gone, could there be sort of a continued dynamic relationship between these political movements insofar as a reaction to Trump that could maintain or build upon Obama's progressive vision?

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Monicka: You hypothesize that Black people might be mobilized by anxiety about Trump's radical conservatism and Trump's anti-Blackness, that their own anxiety about what Trump is up to and the movement that. Trump is a symbol of could push Black people into politics. So could you tell the audience a bit more about this hypothesis?

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Chris: So previous research I completed focused on understanding the reactionary conservative movement in response to President Obama. And so I did a lot of work looking at how psychological factors such as anger and anxiety caused individuals to enter politics or to take action, rather than to remove themselves and sort of take apathetic perspective.

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And I did work in the 1960s as well, understanding that this is not something unique to this era, but that we have a sort of historical timeline of reactionary conservative movements building on anxiety, building on anger, building on a sense of unknown in the world in response to strong progressive movements, in response to movements that are changing politics in ways that that make people really wary about the future. And then they capitalize on this anger on this anxiety and really push people to mobilize, push people to participate. And oftentimes that that reactionary conservative movement is strong enough to sort of end any type of progressive movement that's taking place.

And so my work on understanding reactionary conservative movements led me to this question of whether or not Trump's racial conservatism and the strong anti-blackness in his own politics and campaigns could be used in a similar sort of psychological way to mobilize or engage African-Americans into politics, post Obama. Right. And so I wanted to continue to take a look at ways that threat here could work psychologically as it angers individuals, as it creates anxiety to further push people into politics and spark political engage.

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Monicka: Chris, I'm hearing you say threats can trigger anxiety that can trigger mobilization in a reactionary, conservative movement. You know, [the] empirical question is: do the same kind of logics and dynamics and psychosocial processes work in a different context: here, the context of Black Americans who are facing anti-Blackness and threats to progressive gains. Could that same dynamic work of experiencing or perceiving a threat, generating anger from that threat, and then doing something about it---mobilizing [people] politically---whether in terms of voter turnout or engaging in protest politics or other grassroots activities?

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And let's take a break and we'll talk about your findings. Hello, everyone, welcome back to the Building Justice podcast.

MUSIC BREAK

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Monicka: I'm talking with Chris Towler today, Professor of Poli-Sci, and we've been exploring his discussion of movement, counter movement politics; how the perception of a threat can generate anger, which can mobilize people into politics. Chris, you've been studying this and exploring this through polling research and in other ways. Can you tell us some of your results? Did the strategy of harnessing threat mobilize Black voters?

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Chris: I fielded a survey, and I first asked, [I] simply asked, people: How do you feel about Donald Trump and why do you feel that way? And what I found is that an overwhelming majority of African-Americans that I asked questions to felt negatively about Donald Trump. And they said that their negative feelings were associated with Trump as being racist. Trump as being anti-Black. Trump as being against Obama. Many of the things that we had heard about in the news over the years during Obama's presidency and Trump's rise. And so sort of anecdotally, the connection was there, right in the responses the respondents were telling me.

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So I then took a look at the survey data statistically and found that there were significant statistical relationships between individual African-American attitudes towards Donald Trump and their likelihood of participating in 2016 in the 2016 election, such that African-Americans who strongly opposed Trump and believe that he was a threat to the country or quote unquote destroying America, were far more likely, significantly more likely to vote in 2016 than African-Americans, who did not have a strong opinion of Trump at all.

I also found that they were significantly more likely to say they were going to confidently vote in 2018 and also significantly more likely to have participated in politics and a number of other ways, such as attending political meetings, donating to campaigns and even getting out and protesting or rallying in 2016 and beyond.

This, to me, suggested that in 2016 there was the potential for counter movement mobilization that may not have been capitalized on due to a number of reasons, one being maybe a lack of understanding here, but also that moving forward, as long as Donald Trump, as long as this reactionary movement that Donald Trump embodied was central to politics, this potential to mobilize likely remains.

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Monicka: Chris, do you, in your research did you find that certain ways of formulating what a threat is had a greater correlation with mobilization than other perceptions of threats within the Black community at this time?

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Chris: I conducted additional national surveys in which I embedded survey experiments that looked at what types of political threat might be more, more mobilizing than others. And so in 2019, I conducted an experiment where I asked African-American respondents questions about their intent to participate politically following primes or statements that were designed to influence how they think about politics. And so one prime, one statement was specifically focused on Donald Trump as a racial threat and described Donald Trump as threatening the racial progress of Black America. Another prime described Donald Trump as an economic threat and sort of laid out an argument for how Donald Trump might be

threatening economically Black America. And a third prime described Donald Trump as an existential threat or a threat to America itself, not specifically race or economic, and outlined an argument for that. And these primes were compared to a control where a group of respondents did not get any statements prior to answering questions about their political engagement.

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And what I found is that out of these three primes, only the prime arguing or describing Donald Trump as a racial threat as a threat to racial progress in America was there a relationship between these statements and political engagement, such that African-Americans who received the racial threat prime said that they were more likely to participate in politics than those who received any of the other primes or no prime statement at all.

These types of further analyses have really solidified the fact that it is a racial threat more than anything else that has worked here, and that if if we are going to try and understand ways to mobilize African-Americans without Obama or a similar figure at the top of the ticket, capitalizing on these ideas of racial threat and anxieties about Donald Trump's ability to to stunt or halt racial progress is one place that we should look.

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Monicka: Chris, those findings are just fascinating, and they lead me to think now about the Biden presidency. I mean, I didn't hear President Biden talk a lot about racial threat or the campaign really capitalize a lot on Trump as a racial threat. And yet we did see African-American voters engaged in politics during Biden's election. How does your work speak to the Biden victory?

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Chris: Well, I think President Biden's run for president in 2020 taught us a few things, right. It taught us that embedded in our current political context, are ideas of racial threat. And we saw this clearly in the Democratic primary, where there were a number of candidates who looked more like underrepresented communities, specifically looked like the Black community. Yet there were strategic decisions made to support Joe Biden in an attempt to unseat Trump due to the threat that he posed to these communities.

There was a continual question as to how inspirational Biden was as a candidate, which in 2020 led me to conduct further research. And on another survey that I conducted, I put together a similar survey experiment, this time instead of testing different types of political threat I tested whether or not President Obama or I'm sorry, President Biden, as a hopeful candidate, could compete with Donald Trump as a racial threat. And so I conducted a survey experiment in which I compared two primes: one prime describing Joe Biden as a candidate of hope and change similar to President Obama's rhetoric, describing Joe Biden as someone who would fight for racial justice and would continue Obama's legacy. In another statement, I discussed Donald Trump as a racial threat

again, and described Donald Trump as being an impediment to racial progress moving forward. Again, these primes will give in separate sections of survey respondents and compared to a third portion of the survey respondents who did not receive any crime or framework at all.

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What I found is that only those who received the statement about Donald Trump being a racial threat had any difference in their attempts to politically participate or their responses regarding their political participation. And so, only the framework describing Donald Trump as a racial threat again---not the framework describing Joe Biden as hopeful and inspirational when it came to racial progress----influenced African-Americans ideas or considerations when it came to political participation.

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And so looking forward, we have to understand that even in times where we have candidates who receive African-American support and win victories on what seems like similar sort of backing (although in 2016 and 2020, African-American levels of political participation and turnout fell significantly from 2008 and 2012 back down to sort of historical averages. And so we didn't see the same historical turnout. So there's there's a lot going on in 2020 to understand Joe Biden's victory, not simply African-Americans turning out historically like they did for Obama. However, there were certain battleground states that were won on the back of African-Americans. In this case, we look at states like Pennsylvania as one where these types of dynamics [help us] in understanding what really drove African-American participation; [this] is significantly important in my findings. My continued to work on this suggests that [Black political participation is] still really about these racial dynamics [and] this racial threat more than anything else.

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Monicka: Chris, it sounds like there's just so much more research to be done to tease out these movement/counter-movement dynamics, how folks get mobilized, how Black Americans respond to racial threat, how that could be used positively to turn out black voters. Let's take a break, and then we'll move in to your next article, which also continues your research in Black political mobilization.

MUSICAL BREAK

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Monicka: Welcome back, everyone. We're going to move to talking about "Shut up and Play." In this piece, Chris, you turn our attention back to the hope and inspiration framework for Black political mobilization. Again, you're exploring a context devoid of a candidate or an incumbent like Obama, and you're focusing here on non-traditional political actors who are embodying a hope and inspiration orientation. And you're asking if they might effectively mobilize black Americans to engage politically? Why turn back to hope and inspiration when racial threat can be so potentially effective?

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Chris: Hope and inspiration is the way to go, and is potentially even more powerful than sort of threat, anger and anxiety when it comes to mobilizing, and especially when it comes to mobilizing the African-American community.

A recent book by David Phenix, titled *The Anger Gap*, posits that anger is sort of a tricky way to go when trying to mobilize African-Americans because of the stigma attached to Black anger and in stereotypes attached to how African-Americans can express anger in a white society. And so anger might be useful, as I've shown in my research, but it might not be as useful as hope as inspiration, because African-Americans are not always feeling like they can fully express anger without backlash, without being labeled as an angry black person. And so its [utility is] tempered in a way.

And so Phenix posits that there is an enthusiasm advantage and that we should really look towards enthusiasm to try and mobilize the Black community. This is tricky, though, because much of his work also focuses on traditional political candidates, on people running for public office. And it's very difficult, especially at the national level, to sort of understand or envision a political leader similar to Obama in the near future, someone who can generate that much enthusiasm that an enthusiasm advantage can be something realistically available.

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However, this this did push me to continue to want to look at hope and inspiration. And so I started to look at individuals that had caught my attention with their political role, with their political activism. One such being Colin Kaepernick in 2016 as he took a knee protesting police brutality during the national anthem prior to San Francisco 49ers football games, really following the killing of Trayvon Martin, and [Kaepernick] inserting himself into that conversation as a political voice, eventually a political leader outside of the realm of traditional politics (he wasn't running for office). He wasn't trying to become a politician or hold a political campaign. However, I believe that there absolutely was the potential here for Colin Kaepernick to inspire or create enthusiasm around politics in a similar way.

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Monicka: Chris, I'm hearing you say a lot of things. One is that, you know, mobilizing black Americans on the basis of threatening anger can be tricky because we live in a white society that has punished black Americans in so many cruel ways and has created a stereotype of an angry Black person. And to use that kind of [anger] strategy might be reproducing those stereotypes that then might in turn affect and harm the black community negatively. And yet [the anger strategy] still can be effective, as you were saying, as a mobilizing force. And so you're shifting or thinking about additional strategies and reminding us that we don't have to use one strategy or there isn't just one strategy in the in the toolbox.

But if there might be ways to harness the hope and inspiration strategy that statistically ha[ve] shown to be more effective, if there is someone who can embody that hope and inspiration strategy effectively, and that [if] led you to turn to a nontraditional political actor, Colin Kaepernick.

Can you tell us a little bit more about Kaepernick's activism? Who he is? What you mean when you say that he embodied or symbolized hope and inspiration for the Black community? Tell folks who might not know anything about Kaepernick, how he is important in your research in Black political mobilization.

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Chris: There's a long history of African-American sports athletes, especially those who have become celebrity athletes, inserting themselves into politics and having a very powerful political voice in mainstream political campaigns in politics. We go back to figures such as Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, all of whom became national political figures on the backs of their sports careers. As Colin Kaepernick made the decision to protest during the national anthem, to protest on the sports field, on this main stage, he he inserted himself into a similar role as these previous athletes.

However, when looking at the research and these scholarships written about these previous athletes, there was absolutely nothing or little to nothing that actually empirically looked at a connection between their activism, between their politics and the politics, or the political engagement of the African-Americans. And so in 2016, as I'm trying to understand ways to continue to mobilize the black community, Colin Kaepernick seemed like a very exciting and logical person to take a closer look at. And so for for me, Colin Kaepernick was sort of the the perfect test case to start with, to try and understand if some of this research on hope and inspiration, on empowerment, and descriptive representation could be extrapolated to a political figure like Colin Kaepernick, who was working in sort of a nontraditional way and working outside of a mainstream political campaign.

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Monicka: So what did you discover? What are your, what were your findings? Did Kaepernick mobilize Black Americans in any way into politics?

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Chris: What I found is that in 2017, there wasn't really a direct link or connection between support for Colin Kaepernick and traditional political participation. But there was a strong connection between Colin Kaepernick or support for Colin Kaepernick and sort of nontraditional political acts, or what might be seen as contentious political participation in acts such as boycotting, such as attending a protest or march, such as donating to a political campaign, working in ways outside of simply voting.

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And I also found that individuals who also ascribed to or supported the Black Lives Matter movement and showed strong support for Colin Kaepernick were the most likely to say they participated in these types of ways, in these nontraditional ways. And so there was a strong relationship here. One mediated by attitudes towards the Black Lives Matter movement between Colin Kaepernick and Black political action. As I continue to explore this relationship between Colin Kaepernick and Black Political Engagement in 2019/20 a stronger statistical link between Colin Kaepernick and African-American voting participation: a majority saying it inspired them to vote, but a large majority continuing to say it inspired them to participate in these other sort of nontraditional, non-voting ways.

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Monicka: Chris, you're reminding all of us that there are various forms of political participation, and of course, voting is important, and winning an election is extremely important. But we cannot discount the significance and the effectiveness of nontraditional forms of political participation. Getting people out to boycott, to protest really puts pressure on elected officials and can lead to greater accountability and greater responsiveness, which is fundamentally important for democratic politics. Insofar as Kaepernick did inspire some Black Americans to go to the polls was there any particular subset within the Black community that you noticed went to the polls that correlates with their relationship with Kaepernick?

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Chris: Yes, there was. And in the most recent survey results I have, there is a special connection there between Black individuals who do not participate in politics or who have not voted in the last two election cycles and a political figure like Colin Kaepernick that is not there when it comes to Joe Biden and even a descriptive represented representative such as Kamala Harris.

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Monicka: Chris, when I think about the unlikely voter, that person is so often forgotten in a political campaign because there are scarce resources and it's like, "Let's try to turn out the likely voters and let's not spend capital on unlikely voters." And here you're (kind of) saying that Kaepernick can inspire those unlikely voters, and that might be extremely important when margins are thin, when and---[it's important] in principle---we want more people participating in the political process. Personally, for me, if I'm out there trying to turn out the vote and I realize that there are ways to get Black Americans who are unlikely to vote to vote---you know-- that that's a harder strategy, but I think it would be more rewarding to know that you have turned out folks who never participated or who are unlikely to participate, rather than folks who are so. So Kaepernick does really seem to be inspiring me to think differently about politics and to pay attention to folks who are on the

margins and unlikely to vote politically, and to get them in the game, and how that could, you know, really change elections, particularly when the margins are slim.

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Chris: As we look forward, understanding that the historic rates of participation during Obama's presidency is the goal, [and] is sort of the necessary means to a political map ending in consistent Democratic victory or ending in the consistent potential for racial progress, we have to look at the unlikely voters because that's where we're going to get these margins from within the Black community. That's where we're going to get these historic averages of turnout to, once again, rise to historical levels that we saw under President Obama.

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Monicka: What comes to mind immediately is, yes, we can. We can do this. And simply going after likely voters is just not enough. And it's not going to lead to the victories that we care about.

You know, when I think about celebrities and politics and sports celebrities, I immediately get concerned because there is a lot of literature that speaks to concerns about demagoguery and politics. Why are celebrities rising in politics? Why should we encourage a democratic politics that puts so much emphasis on celebrities, that suggests kind of an elite understanding of political life? Are you concerned at all about the rising influence and role of celebrities, and/or sports celebrities in our liberal democratic politics? Or do we need to take white supremacy into consideration when we engage this question?

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Chris: I think celebrity has always been a part of politics. I mean, we have to look no further than Ronald Reagan to understand how celebrity can be used to influence politics and build political support and campaigns.

The celebrity that I'm talking about, the African-American celebrity, though, does need special consideration because of the role white supremacy and racism plays in politics, and will continue to play for this for the foreseeable future.

These black celebrities such as Colin Kaepernick ([and] sports celebrities of the past) oftentimes gain political stature with the Black community when they receive sort of punishment for their activism or for their political voice. And so historical work suggests that one of the reasons the Black community connects to these sports celebrities, these African-American sports celebrities, is because they speak up and then they are punished; Or there is backlash to their political voice that dramatically influences their sports career and their ability to participate or to continue to be sports celebrities. [This is what] the black community relates to. The black community sees these celebrities as still under the influence or still at risk of white supremacist systems,

building a relationship or building a connection to them. Due to the fact that they see similarities, they see they're still constrained by these systems that every African-American individual is as well.

Colin Kaepernick, where he has essentially been blacklisted and removed from the NFL, although talks are "he's getting workouts," it's very unlikely that he will sign with the team and ever have a NFL career again due to his activism and his political voice. This builds a connection with the Black community within systems of white supremacy that suggest he is still one of us, he is still constrained by the system and we need to support him, and we will support him for these reasons.

This is concerning, though, because it makes it difficult to understand or grasp what it might mean for figures or voices such as Colin Kaepernick to move from a [non-]traditional realm of politics into a traditional realm and actually lend their support to traditional political candidates. If we were to see Colin Kaepernick onstage with Joe Biden, would that support transfer? Would individuals who are participating, who are engaged or enthusiastic about politics due to Colin Kaepernick become enthusiastic about Joe Biden? Or would he lose legitimacy when [he] mov[es] from a non-traditional to a traditional realm; [would the move] actually dampen the enthusiasm around him? These are questions that I am now wanting to answer, working to answer. [They are] my continued research questions that become (sort of) concerns when thinking about how to utilize enthusiasm versus threat/versus anger in today's political world.

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Monicka: Chris, I'm hearing you say a couple of things. One, just by listening to you, I've really been forced to think about what it means to be a celebrity. I mean, to be Colin Kaepernick, to have risen in football, and to be constantly subject to racial injustice, and to be resisting and carrying on with resilience is a very different kind of celebrity than somebody like Donald Trump. What a distinction we need to make not only vis-a-vis understanding white supremacy in a white society, but the kind of character that distinguishes these celebrities and the sort of principles that they stand upon as they rise to celebrity status and the kind of connection that somebody could have with Kaepernick versus a very different sort of connection somebody might have with a Trump.

And I'm wondering, what do you, you know (speculating) find most promising about the mobilization that you discovered Kaepernick inspired? And where does your research go from here? What's the next project?

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Chris: As I've looked at Colin Kaepernick, it's only sort of been logical to try and expand the research beyond just one sports celebrity. And so, as I mentioned, recent research also includes attitudes towards sports figures like LeBron James, sports figures that are sort of less in an activist role and are still participating in the sports world. And so as

I move forward, I'm working to look at *Celebrity Beyond* Colin Kaepernick and *Beyond Sports Celebrity* by looking at other figures such as Naomi Osaka, such as Jay-Z, potentially African-American celebrities in music, in acting in Hollywood to see how these types of relationships between the black community and these celebrity figures might work in similar, in different ways to what I found with Colin Kaepernick.

I still fall back on this idea: it's not necessarily one or the other when it comes to inspiration or threat. And there can be a number of different strategies that can be used at different times, depending on the political context and environment. And until we do have a traditional political candidate who the Black community relates to in such ways that they feel empowered and inspired, like, unlike other times, the threat and anger---due to Donald Trump, due to the reactionary right, due to far-right extremism---must remain in the conversation. And I don't think I'm at a point where it can be one or the other. But we need to (sort of) understand and capitalize on any strategy, on any type of relationship, that mobilizes the African-American community at this point, because the Black community is, has been, [and] will continue to be instrumental in the fight towards racial progress within electoral politics and beyond.

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Monicka: Chris, I really love the way you on the one hand, remind us that we need to be realistic and we need to be attentive to the existing context and understand that certain strategies might be effective at different times. And even the strategies we use, you know, come with problems, come with risks, come with unintended consequences. And yet, one might have to weigh the potential costs and benefits and make a judgment [and] you know, you absorb the costs for the sake of the benefits? So you're not (sort of) "guilting the lily" and pretending like there aren't tradeoffs. And that's a very realistic approach to politics.

And yet at the same time, I'm hearing a deeply inspired, deeply hopeful, deeply courageous academic who is, is fundamentally committed to a progressive agenda that is more inclusive of all people. [I'm hearing] a real commitment to social justice, to equality, to freedom, to empowerment of everyone in the U.S. And that is something---that those two [realism and hope] are (kind of) hard to hold together. And it makes me want to read more of your articles.

And I am really excited to see more work on sussing out how there are different kinds of celebrities or nontraditional political actors, and to (kind of) think about how---in particular contexts---they can harness and mobilize Black Americans to vote more; and [I'm excited] to create those careful distinctions so that we have a clear understanding of the important work that they can do while being mindful that harnessing threat and anxiety and fear to mobilize voters is also part of a realistic understanding of politics, given the context that we live in, given the real, the real threats that are out there, and the real impediments to making progress to create a better world.

I want to really thank you for participating in the Building Justice podcast. I want to ask if there's something you want to tell the audience--a final remark---and then I will close.

00:44:17

Chris: Thank you, Monicka. I appreciate your words. I think, as I leave the audience, I would just like to say that there are ways to engage and mobilize the Black community. There are ways to regain the political strength that the Democratic Party had during the Obama era. Democrats or otherwise just need to understand and prioritize these types of strategies, prioritize ways of mobilizing, engaging Black Americans as they look towards the future.

And, for me, my work is about understanding how Black Americans can be brought into politics can be a part of mainstream politics, because that's that's the only way that (sort of) a progressive vision for equality and equity in America becomes a reality.

However, if parties in charge are not willing or not wanting to use resources and time to investigate or take up these strategies, we're only going to get as far as those parties allow. And so, as we move forward, right, these these strategies, these findings are extremely exciting. But there needs to be continued advocacy at all levels for understanding, listening and wanting to engage with the Black community when it comes to state, local and national politics. That has to be the starting point for all of this. Thank you again.

00:45:49

Monicka: Chris, there is so much work to do and you are telling us the kind of work that we should be doing to advance social justice in America. Thank you everyone for listening. I so appreciate having this opportunity to talk to Dr. Towler about his research. We hope that our ongoing conversations spark understandings, empathy and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all. Take care, everyone.

Musical Lyrics Outro

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.