

“HOW MUCH A DOLLAR COST?”¹ POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, RELIGION, AND POVERTY POLICY THROUGH THE LENS OF KENDRICK LAMAR’S MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

The election of Donald Trump to President of the United States casts in stark relief the ideals of a portion of his base—white evangelical voters—and his policies as they impact the working class and the poor. The Christian ethos has long been typified by concern for “the least of these,”² at least in theory. Paradoxically, white evangelical voters lined up, and continue to do so, behind a man with little regard for the working class or the poor. In fact, his policies reflect such. This article highlights that paradox: the notion that (1) Christians are supposed to care about the poor and downtrodden; (2) political conservatives often score higher on metrics of religious attitudes than liberals; (3) in practice, political conservatives often embrace

¹ KENDRICK LAMAR, *How Much a Dollar Cost*, on TO PIMP A BUTTERFLY (Aftermath Entertainment 2015).

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² *Matthew 25:34-40* (King James).

nonegalitarian attitudes towards the working class and the poor; and as such, (4) political conservatives, even Christians, endorse policies that are harmful to the working class and the poor. The authors analyze this paradox through the lens of rapper Kendrick Lamar’s song, “How Much a Dollar Cost?”

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I. INTRODUCTION

Kendrick Lamar Duckworth was born on June 17, 1987 in Compton, California.³ His parents moved from Chicago in 1984—his father one of seven children, his mother one of thirteen.⁴ His father was a member of the Chicago street gang Gangster Disciples and wanted to escape, but he still found himself on the streets in Compton while his wife worked in fast food.⁵ Growing up, Lamar was a “quiet, observant kid who made good grades.”⁶ His youth was marked by realizations that not every community had the

³ *Kendrick Lamar Biography*, BIOGRAPHY.COM, <https://www.biography.com/people/kendrick-lamar-21349281> (last updated Jan. 16, 2019).

⁴ Jessica Hopper, *Kendrick Lamar: Not Your Average Everyday Rap Savior*, SPIN (Oct. 9, 2012), <http://www.spin.com/2012/10/kendrick-lamar-not-your-average-everyday-rap-savior/>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Rebecca Haithcoat, *Born and Raised in Compton, Kendrick Lamar Hides a Poet’s Soul Behind “Pussy & Patron”*, L.A. WEEKLY (Jan. 20, 2011, 4:30 AM), <http://www.laweekly.com/music/born-and-raised-in-compton-kendrick-lamar-hides-a-poets-soul-behind-pussy-and-patron-2168759>.

same tumultuous existence as Compton.⁷ His father encouraged him to make something of his life.⁸ Lamar then began to see that the youth in Compton were going to jail and dying with disturbing regularity, a recognition of reality that he called “a gift from God.”⁹

Lamar’s dream of becoming a rapper began upon seeing Dr. Dre and Tupac shoot the music video for “California Love” around the corner from his house.¹⁰ When he was thirteen, Lamar began writing rhymes and, after seeing 50 Cent’s mixtape success, he realized that he could begin sharing his music.¹¹ By the time he was sixteen, Lamar’s mixtape, *Youngest Head N**** in Charge*, under the pseudonym K-Dot, had made it to Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith of record label Top Dawg Entertainment.¹² After freestyling for an hour with Top Dawg, his talent was recognized, and he has been with Top Dawg ever since.¹³ Lamar’s success began to unfold in 2010 when he released *Overly Dedicated*, which peaked at number 72 on the Billboard Top Hip-Hop Albums chart.¹⁴ Dr. Dre then recruited Lamar to collaborate on the Dre and Snoop Dogg “eternally-delayed” *Detox* album.¹⁵

In July 2011, Lamar released his first full-length album, *Section.80*, which included the single “HiiiPoWeR,” a song produced by fellow rapper J.Cole.¹⁶ It received critical acclaim.¹⁷ In 2012, shortly after releasing hit single “Cartoons and Cereal,”¹⁸ Lamar was signed to Interscope Records

⁷ Hopper, *supra* note 4.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Haithcoat, *supra* note 6; Nadine Graham, *Kendrick Lamar: The West Coast Got Somethin’ to Say*, HIPHOPDX (Jan. 6, 2011, 12:24 PM), <http://hiphopdx.com/interviews/id.1641/title.kendrick-lamar-the-west-coast-got-somethin-to-say>.

¹³ Haithcoat, *supra* note 6.

¹⁴ See *Kendrick Lamar Chart History: Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums*, BILLBOARD (last visited Nov. 15, 2018), <https://www.billboard.com/music/kendrick-lamar/chart-history/r-b-hip-hop-albums>.

¹⁵ Graham, *supra* note 12.

¹⁶ Steven Horowitz, *Kendrick Lamar Speaks on the Meaning Behind “HiiiPoWeR,” Working with J. Cole*, HIPHOPDX (July 1, 2011, 10:36 AM), <https://hiphopdx.com/news/id.15795/title.kendrick-lamar-speaks-on-the-meaning-behind-hiiipower-working-with-j-cole>; A. Jacobs, *Hip Hop Album Sales: The Week Ending 7/3/2011*, HIPHOPDX (July 6, 2011, 9:19 AM), <http://hiphopdx.com/news/id.15846/title.hip-hop-album-sales-the-week-ending-7-3-2011>.

¹⁷ Ogden Payne, *How Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Section.80’ Catapulted Him into Hip-Hop Royalty*, FORBES (July 2, 2016, 7:58 AM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ogdenpayne/2016/07/02/how-kendrick-lamars-section-80-catapulted-him-into-hip-hop-royalty/#6154f8715b4d>.

¹⁸ *Cartoons and Cereal - Single*, ITUNES (Feb. 6, 2012), <https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/cartoon-cereal-single/671739552>.

and Aftermath Entertainment.¹⁹ It was announced that those two companies, along with Top Dawg, would be releasing Lamar's next album,²⁰ *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, which debuted in October 2012.²¹ Featuring hit singles such as "Swimming Pools" and "Poetic Justice," the album was met with widespread acclaim and was certified as platinum nine months after its release.²² Lamar made waves in 2013 when he recorded a verse on Big Sean's track, "Control," in which he disparaged numerous rival rappers and proclaimed himself "The King of New York" (in addition to having been previously proclaimed the "New King of the West Coast"),²³ which led to much discussion.²⁴ This controversy, however, helped to expand Lamar's followers and listening base.²⁵

In late 2014, Lamar released tracks for his third studio album, including the song "i,"²⁶ a song for which Lamar would win a Grammy for Best Rap Song in early 2015.²⁷ In March 2015, one week before its official release date, *To Pimp a Butterfly* was leaked.²⁸ The album was met with widespread critical acclaim, including being called the "Great American Hip-Hop Album" and "a lush volcanic riverbed of harmonic cunning and complexity [that] [o]nly a lyricist of Lamar's skills, scope, poetics and

¹⁹ Nadeska Alexis, *Kendrick Lamar, Black Hippy Ink Deals with Interscope and Aftermath*, MTV (Mar. 8, 2012), <http://www.mtv.com/news/2497306/kendrick-lamar-signs-with-intercope-aftermath/>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Latifah Muhammad, *Kendrick Lamar's good kid, m.A.A.d. city Goes Platinum*, BET (Aug. 22, 2013), <https://www.bet.com/news/music/2013/08/22/kendrick-lamar-s-good-kid-maad-city-goes-platinum.html>.

²² *Id.*

²³ Andres Tardio, *Kendrick Lamar on Being "King of West Coast Rap," Explains Positive Perspective*, HIPHOPDX (Dec. 7, 2012, 8:39 AM), <https://hiphopdx.com/news/id.22134/title.kendrick-lamar-on-being-king-of-west-coast-rap-explains-positive-perspective>.

²⁴ William Gruger, *Kendrick Lamar's 'Control' Feature Yields Huge Twitter Followers Jump*, BILLBOARD (Aug. 22, 2013), <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/5672483/kendrick-lamars-control-feature-yields-huge-twitter-followers-jump>.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Nathan Slavik, *Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' Album Official Tracklist: Exclusive*, DJBOOTH (Mar. 12, 2015), <https://djbooth.net/features/2015-03-12-official-tracklist-kendrick-lamar-to-pimp-a-butterfly-album>.

²⁷ Erika Ramirez, *Taylor Swift Cries Tears of Joy Over Kendrick Lamar's Grammy Wins*, BILLBOARD (Feb. 8, 2015), <http://www.billboard.com/articles/events/grammys-2015/6465578/taylor-swift-kendrick-lamar-grammy-wins>.

²⁸ Andrew Flanagan, *Explained: Kendrick Lamar's Chaotic (and Planned) Surprise Release of 'To Pimp a Butterfly'*, BILLBOARD (Mar. 6, 2015), <https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/6502263/explained-kendrick-lamar-to-pimp-a-butterfly-surprise-planned-release>.

polemics would dare hop aboard.”²⁹ *To Pimp a Butterfly* was named Best Album of 2015 by the *Rolling Stone*,³⁰ a magazine which has featured Lamar on its cover.³¹ In fact, in 2015, President Barack Obama’s favorite song that year was none other than a song off of Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly* album: “How Much a Dollar Cost.”³² As Lamar described the song:

It’s a true story . . . These are moments in my life deeper than just handing somebody a dollar. These are actually moments of integrity, actually being able to talk to somebody. Me talking to [this homeless man] was simply a thank you from God. And I felt God speaking through him to get at me.³³

In this article, we draw upon Lamar’s lyrics to make sense of how political and religious ideologies influence attitudes toward the poor and, in turn, poverty policy.³⁴ In short, we contend that political conservatives score higher on measures of religiosity than political liberals.³⁵ As such, one might suspect that conservatives also have stronger egalitarian attitudes towards the poor than liberals. However, we found just the opposite. We found that conservatives endorse and put forth harsher public policy vis-à-vis the poor.³⁶ Accordingly, in Part II, we provide some historical context to understanding how hip-hop music has been used to understand social conditions in the United States. Then, in Part III, we employ the Intro, Verse 1, Verse 2, Verse 3, and the Outro of Kendrick Lamar’s “How Much a

²⁹ Dan Weiss, *Review: Kendrick Lamar Returns with the Great American Hip-Hop Album, “To Pimp a Butterfly”*, SPIN (Mar. 20, 2015), <http://www.spin.com/2015/03/kendrick-lamar-to-pimp-a-butterfly/>; Greg Tate, *To Pimp a Butterfly*, ROLLING STONE (Mar. 19, 2015, 1:15 PM), <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/kendrick-lamar-to-pimp-a-butterfly-20150319>.

³⁰ *50 Best Albums of 2015*, ROLLING STONE (Dec. 1, 2015, 3:52 PM), <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/50-best-albums-of-2015-146153/>.

³¹ *The Trials of Kendrick Lamar: Inside the New Issue*, ROLLING STONE (Mar. 11, 2015, 2:28 PM), <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-trials-of-kendrick-lamar-inside-the-new-issue-107516/>.

³² Ryan Reed, *Obamas Pick Kendrick Lamar, ‘Uptown Funk’ for Favorite 2015 Songs*, ROLLING STONE (Dec. 9, 2015, 5:29 PM) <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/obamas-pick-kendrick-lamar-uptown-funk-for-favorite-2015-songs-20151209>.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ In 2012, Caleb Mason employed a similar methodology in his analysis of the Fourth Amendment as framed in Jay-Z’s song “99 Problems.” See Caleb Mason, *Jay-Z’s 99 Problems, Verse 2: A Close Reading with Fourth Amendment Guidance for Cops and Perps*, 56 ST. LOUIS U. L. J. 567 (2012) (analyzing the second verse of Jay-Z’s *99 Problems* as a proxy for how accurately pop culture interprets criminal justice).

³⁵ See *infra* pp. 226.

³⁶ See *infra* pp. 229–32.

Dollar Cost,” respectively, to analyze our thesis. Throughout Part IV, we cast our findings from Part III on our current political moment—i.e., the paradox of many white evangelical voters’ and white working-class voters’ support for President Donald Trump. This support comes despite his persona and policies being anathema to their respective values and interests. In Part IV, Section A, we explore how President Trump’s policies adversely impact the working class and the poor. In Part IV, Section B, we explore the factors that drove Trump voters. And in Part IV, Section C, we further explore the paradox of Christians’, specifically white evangelicals’, overwhelming support for Trump.

II. MUSIC AND POLITICS

Music may put into context the seemingly paradoxical relationship between white evangelical voters and Trump. If politics is the blood that feeds our societies with the energy to evolve, then music is an essential ingredient to political transformation. We listen to music not only to be entertained, but to also understand ourselves individually and collectively. It is specifically because music is so entertaining that it allows such great potency as a vehicle for political expression.³⁷

Music’s potential to influence society’s political evolution has long been recognized by thinkers. For example, Socrates warned that “the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions.”³⁸ As such, soul and rap music became ways to express various forms of black consciousness.³⁹ “And the debates about rap, as about jazz earlier in the [twentieth] [c]entury, reflect the special double character, the essential tension in black music.”⁴⁰

In the late 1970s, rap music emerged as a street-styled folk poetry and became a way for young blacks to speak their minds.⁴¹ Even more, it is rooted in African American youths’ expression of political and social protest, as voiced by urban African American youth.⁴² As music writer

³⁷ COURTNEY BROWN, *POLITICS IN MUSIC: MUSIC AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION FROM BEETHOVEN TO HIP-HOP 1–10* (Farsight Press 2008) (discussing a brief history between social scientists and their belief that music directly influences politics, as well as the primary ways in which music can express political content).

³⁸ Richard Brody, *Breaking Muse*, *NEW YORKER*, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/breaking-muse> (last visited Feb. 18, 2019).

³⁹ RON EYERMAN & ANDREW JAMISON, *MUSIC AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS* 104 (Jeffrey C. Alexander & Steven Seidman eds., 1998).

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 104–105.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 105.

⁴² *Id.* at 103–105.

Dorian Lynskey explains:

The July 1977 blackout brought [New York City]’s agonies bubbling into the streets. At that point, only the violence and deprivation was visible to the watching world, but a growing clique of South Bronx residents was building something new, a form of music which would capture the ears of the world. That was hip-hop’s DHM [Deep Hidden Meaning]: *We’re still here. You gave us nothing, and we made something.*⁴³

The blackout of 1977, in a strange twist of events, actually proved to give a huge boost to hip-hop.⁴⁴ Kids would knock over hi-fi stores to get their hands on their first turntables, and thus was the birth of a new generation of DJs.⁴⁵ Courtney Brown explains:

[T]he political turmoil of the 1970s involving the Black Panther Party became one (of many) focuses of hip-hop awareness. For example, Afeni Shakur, the mother of the late rapper Tupac Shakur, was a member of the Black Panther Party, and some have argued that her politics had an influence on that of her son. . . . Some early political influences on hip-hop politics can also be traced to Malcolm X as well as other even more radical African-American political leaders.⁴⁶

New York City experienced a 10.7% unemployment rate in the summer of 1982.⁴⁷ The South Bronx was hit the hardest, and despite improvements to the borough since 1977, the rest of the country still thought of the South Bronx as “*the ghetto*” of America.⁴⁸ Movies like Paul Newman’s *Fort Apache*, *The Bronx*—with the tagline “15 minutes from Manhattan there’s a place where even the cops fear to tread”—did little to alter this perception, especially given that many of the stereotypes were not entirely inaccurate.⁴⁹ Along with that summer’s extreme plight came an exciting era in the genre of hip-hop.⁵⁰ The songs heard on the radio, though, were a much different flavor than the party beats mixed for the dance floors

⁴³ DORIAN LYNKEY, 33 REVOLUTIONS PER MINUTE: A HISTORY OF PROTEST SONGS, FROM BILLIE HOLIDAY TO GREEN DAY 336 (2012) (emphasis in original).

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ BROWN, *supra* note 37, at 187 (internal citations omitted).

⁴⁷ LYNKEY, *supra* note 43, at 329.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 329–30 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 330.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

in nightclubs: “a halting, wounded rhythm . . . a slow and steady litany of grievances” with a sound that was “local,” “introspective,” and “paranoid.”⁵¹ The Furious Five,⁵² except for Melle Mel, echoed the thoughts of the majority of artists at the time who were confused by this new trend.⁵³ With the dooms of reality just outside their window, many artists struggled to understand why an audience would want to hear about it in their songs.⁵⁴ In their minds, dance music’s function was an escape from reality.⁵⁵

One person who was quick to get behind this new movement in music was Sylvia Robinson.⁵⁶ She and her husband, Joe, created Sugar Hill Records in a time when local DJs were the next big thing.⁵⁷ After being turned down in their attempt to sign Grandmaster Flash, a well-known DJ, Sugar Hill Records decided to take matters into their own hands and formed their own rap group, the Sugarhill Gang.⁵⁸ The group unexpectedly enjoyed great success with their first record, selling eight million copies.⁵⁹ However, the record’s ultimate success was a nonsensical track called “Rapper’s Delight.”⁶⁰ For over fifteen minutes, “the trio meanders through dance floor chants, randy boasts, daft smiles, outlandish fantasies of wealth, and extended analogy about chicken dinner, and an amorous encounter with Lois Lane”⁶¹—all of which gives the impression that the song was freestyled on the spot.⁶² The song very simply raised the bar for all hip-hop singles to come.⁶³

After rejecting Robinson’s offer to sign with Sugar Hill, Grandmaster Flash continued to hone his craft in the city’s streets.⁶⁴ In the very early days

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² The Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five were a South Bronx hip-hop group formed in the 1970s, who introduced revolutionary rapping and turntable techniques to the genre. Members included Joseph Saddler (“Grandmaster Flash”); Melvin Glover (“Mele Mel”); Nathaniel Glover Jr. (“The Kidd Creole”); Eddie Morris (“Scorpio aka Mr. Ness”); Keith Wiggins (“Keef Cowboy”); and Guy Williams (“Rahiem”). *Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five*, ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME, <https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/grandmaster-flash-and-furious-five> (last visited Jan. 2, 2019).

⁵³ LYNSKEY, *supra* note 42, at 331.

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.* at 332.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

of his career, Flash had the creative genius to attempt playing sixteen records in two minutes by blending each song into a continuous beat.⁶⁵ When the young DJ first took this new craft to the stage, however, he was not met with cheers; instead, he said: “[i]t turned out to be a seminar. They were just standing and staring. I think I cried for a week after that.”⁶⁶ The experiment led Flash to realize that MCs were going to be integral to his newfound art form.⁶⁷ When “Rapper’s Delight” was released and the glass ceiling above hip-hop artists was shattered, Flash quickly rethought his decision to reject Robinson’s offer, and soon the Furious Five accepted a record deal with the label.⁶⁸

Edwin “Duke Bootee” Fletcher, the house percussionist for Sugar Hill, unintentionally came up with the rhythm and then the lyrics for a song that would eventually be titled “The Message.”⁶⁹ The song was raw, mentioning glass being broken in the streets and other common occurrences that accompanied living in South Bronx.⁷⁰ It was a reality in a song. Robinson was obsessed with the new single and was more than excited for the newly signed Furious Five to record it.⁷¹ However, the group was not a fan of the song.⁷² Flash even admitted his reluctance, saying:

Like you [sic] listening to music, let’s say throughout the week you’re nine-to-five, you had a hard week’s work, you’re tired, you want to go out and party. Why would a person want to hear this? . . . The risk factor was so high, either it was going to be a big thing or it was gonna miss.⁷³

Despite the group’s reluctance, Robinson did not let up and continued to pressure the artists into recording the song.⁷⁴ She was convinced that the public was craving political commentary in their music, and she was right.⁷⁵ While the short trend of “message rap” failed to sell at the time,⁷⁶ hip-hop with a message did. “With hindsight, ‘The Message’ was inevitable. It was the record that critics, especially white ones, had been waiting for, placing

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 332–33.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 333.

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 333–34.

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.* at 334.

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *Id.* at 334–35.

⁷⁵ *Id.* at 335.

⁷⁶ *Id.*

hip-hop in the socially conscious bloodline of Stevie Wonder, Curtis Mayfield, and Gil Scott-Heron.”⁷⁷

Nothing about “The Message” was obscure:

In a few stark, eloquent verses, Edwin Fletcher sketched out the city that the hip-hop kids came home to when the clubs and the block parties were over . . . Here are roach-infested tenements and failing schools, predatory junkies and pitiful bag ladies, hookers and killers, inflation, unemployment, and strikes; things fall apart . . . It ends with Mel’s “Superrappin” verse, chronicling the life and death of a kid who sees that the only people making decent money on his block are “the number book takers, thugs, pimps, pushers.” So he drops out of school, “turns stick-up kid,” gets sent to jail, and ends up swinging from a noose in his cell.⁷⁸

What was so revolutionary about “The Message” was its narrator.⁷⁹ From singers of soul to the eventual gangsta rappers, songs were sung with an outside-looking-in perspective.⁸⁰ “The Message” though, was narrated by a man who lived on those streets and suffered that life every day.⁸¹ The record was the first of its kind but definitely not the last, as it proved to be a guiding light to future introspective and more personal records.⁸² The single’s “priority is not how to make the black nation rise but how to save one man from falling.”⁸³ Just as Robinson expected, the song blew up, and one could argue that hip-hop was never the same after “The Message” was delivered:⁸⁴ “in 2002 it became the only top record in the inaugural intake of the Library of Congress’ National Recording Registry, dedicated to recordings that are ‘culturally, historically, or aesthetically important, and/or inform or reflect life in the United States.’”⁸⁵ Despite their hesitations, the Furious Five are credited with pioneering hip-hop’s positioning as a conductor of social commentary and a leader of change.⁸⁶

⁷⁷ *Id.* at 330–31.

⁷⁸ *Id.* at 336.

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Id.* at 337.

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 339.

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ *Id.*

While countless allusions to “The Message” are noted in songs of every genre, what is less known is the impact the record had on Poland during its political unrest. “The Polish hip-hoppers are mostly males who are as angry with their situation in life as many inner city African Americans are with theirs, even though the issues for each culture are different.”⁸⁷ The vast spectrum of problems plaguing these polar-opposite youths is a perfect example of how the anger expressed in these songs can transcend race, region, and even circumstance.⁸⁸ Rap music similarly emerged in Cuba at the end of the twentieth century, with the country’s government even funding its own rap festivals.⁸⁹

Rap and hip-hop have not limited their commentary to just political and social injustices but have also opened up the conversation about drug use. While many artists are guilty of glorifying the drug life, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five took a different approach in their song “White Lines (Don’t Do It).”⁹⁰ The song is about cocaine abuse and, as the title transparently states, the artists discourage using the deadly drug.⁹¹ “[I]t is interesting to note that this song presaged Nancy Reagan’s ‘Just Say No’ campaign against drug use which she initiated in 1985 in a speech which she gave in Oakland, California at an elementary school.”⁹²

The worlds of music and social activism intersected again with many artists contesting the trial and incarceration of former Black Panther and prominent radio journalist, Mumia Abu-Jamal. Abu-Jamal was sentenced to death for the killing a Philadelphia police officer in 1981.⁹³ Musical groups such as Rage Against the Machine, however, believed Abdul-Jamal was not given a fair trial.⁹⁴ The bands’ continued support culminated in a benefit concert, from which the proceeds were donated to Abu-Jamal’s

⁸⁷ BROWN, *supra* note 37, at 191.

⁸⁸ *Id.* (comparing Polish hip-hoppers to inner city African Americans based on similarities such as perpetual poverty, lack of opportunity, and government housing that combines to create “a culture that lives and breathed discontent.”).

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 191–92.

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² *Id.* at 192.

⁹³ Gil Kaufman, *Best of '99: Thousands Demand Refunds for Rage Mumia Benefit Show*, MTV (Jan. 27, 1999), <http://www.mtv.com/news/511747/best-of-99-thousands-demand-refunds-for-rage-mumia-benefit-show/>.

⁹⁴ *Id.*

defense fund.⁹⁵ The increasing levels of artist outcry also contributed to the overturning of Abu-Jamal's death sentence in 2001.⁹⁶

While the mid-1980s are often remembered as a period of "growing consumer culture, financial greed, and social self-interest," the world of music "became gripped by an omnipresent sense of humanitarianism."⁹⁷ In fact, "by the mid-1980s, hip-hop had crossed racial lines entirely as it began its rapid spread into mainstream American culture."⁹⁸ The Beastie Boys were one of the first breakout bands in this new category of music.⁹⁹ Why hip-hop has continued to so profoundly influence white suburban youth has long been debated, but songs like "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party!)"¹⁰⁰ offer some explanation. This particular track perfectly embodies the Beastie Boys—"silly, funny, obnoxious even, but very self-aware and adroitly satirical."¹⁰¹ The group raps about protesting ordinary acts, such as going to school, but also manages to offer a strong (if clichéd) representation of teenage angst and rebellion.¹⁰² Additionally, the song was subject to controversy because fans did not understand the humor behind protesting the necessity of these everyday acts,¹⁰³ yet it helped advance musical creativity by forcing fans to separate the artist from the art.

"Gangsta rap" entered the scene during the "post-classical period" of hip-hop, following 1993.¹⁰⁴ This genre is still viewed as one of the most verbally violent forms of rap music today.¹⁰⁵ It tends to vulgarize sex, drugs, and violence in such offensive tones and terms that it is no wonder the art form has alienated many listeners and caused uproars on the political scene.¹⁰⁶ Cornell West tried to explain the genre by saying, "the roots of the Afro-American spiritual-blues impulse are based on the supposition that

⁹⁵ *Rockers Celebrate Death Row Decision*, NME (Dec. 20, 2001, 12:21 PM), <https://www.nme.com/news/music/rage-against-the-machine-92-1382077>.

⁹⁶ *See id.*

⁹⁷ HARDEEP PHULL, *STORY BEHIND THE PROTEST SONG: A REFERENCE GUIDE TO THE 50 SONGS THAT CHANGED THE 20TH CENTURY 199* (2008).

⁹⁸ BROWN, *supra* note 37, at 187.

⁹⁹ PHULL, *supra* note 97, at 205.

¹⁰⁰ BEASTIE BOYS, *(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party!)*, on *LICENSED TO ILL* (Def Jam & Columbia Records 1986).

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at 207.

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ *Id.* at 209.

¹⁰⁴ BROWN, *supra* note 37, at 188.

¹⁰⁵ *See, e.g.,* Clay Calvert et al., *Rap Music and the True Threats Quagmire: When Does One Man's Lyric Become Another's Crime?*, 38 *COLUM. J. L. & ARTS* 1, 17–19 (2014) (comparing the "violent lyrics" of gangsta rap to other rap subgenres).

¹⁰⁶ BROWN, *supra* note 37, at 188–89.

somebody—God, Mom or neighbors—cares. Some expressions of black rap music challenge this supposition.”¹⁰⁷

The band Public Enemy was formed with the goal of creating a “hybrid of Run-D.M.C. and the Clash” and with the intention of making a political statement with every lyric they sang.¹⁰⁸ In 1987, Public Enemy released their debut album, *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*.¹⁰⁹ “On the album cover, the group members cluster under the harsh glare of a single bulb like menacing basement conspirators, poised for a revolution rather than a party. At the foot of the image runs a repeated ticker-tape message: ‘THE GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSIBLE.’”¹¹⁰ While their presentation may have succeeded in conveying their political angst, the group still had a long way to go before their music matched this quality.¹¹¹ A year later though, Public Enemy released *Nation of Millions*, and the reaction was tremendous.¹¹² The music cut between speeches by Malcolm X and Khalid Abdul Muhammad; there were “air-raid sirens, jagged bursts of turntable scratching, cries, and grunts.”¹¹³ “These elements didn’t merge so much as collide,” and it was a sound begging to be heard.¹¹⁴ Public Enemy gained enough notoriety even to be watched by the government, with the FBI “creat[ing] a study of rap music and its possible effects on national security in which Public Enemy was referenced by name.”¹¹⁵

As the creative nature erupting from the East Coast boiled over, a movement all of its own began to form on the West Coast.¹¹⁶ “If Public Enemy [was] the Clash, seeking to build something new from the ruins of the older order, then Niggaz With Attitude (“N.W.A.”)¹¹⁷ were the Sex Pistols, bent on dancing amid the debris.”¹¹⁸ Hip-hop was almost exclusively dominated by East Coast artists, especially those from New York City, until the late 1980s.¹¹⁹ “West Coast artists had long been dismissed as inferior imitators who lacked the talent or credibility to

¹⁰⁷ *Id.* at 188.

¹⁰⁸ LYNSKEY, *supra* note 43, at 432.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at 433.

¹¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹¹ *Id.*

¹¹² *Id.*

¹¹³ *Id.* at 434.

¹¹⁴ *Id.*

¹¹⁵ PHULL, *supra* note 97, at 218.

¹¹⁶ LYNSKEY, *supra* note 43, at 434.

¹¹⁷ The group’s name is sometimes spelled as “Niggaz Wit Attitudes.”

¹¹⁸ LYNSKEY, *supra* note 43, at 435.

¹¹⁹ PHULL, *supra* note 97, at 211.

compete, but one group that single-handedly bucked that trend was a five-piece crew from Compton called N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude).¹²⁰ The racial makeup of the Los Angeles area shifted greatly from the 1960s to 1970s, but the soon predominantly black area was hit hard by the subsequent decline of the manufacturing industry.¹²¹ Lynskey described it the following way:

Compton was one of several black working-class suburbs plagued by a crumbling economy, failing infrastructure, and soaring crime rates. After the crumbling of the Panthers in the early 1970s, the power vacuum in South Central Los Angeles was filled by a potent new criminal gang known as the Crips, who inspired a wave of rival gangs, some of whom coalesced under the banner of the Bloods. More like networks than single gangs, the Crips wore blue for identification, the Bloods favored red, and the two groups set about carving up turf throughout black Los Angeles. By the start of the 1980s, with recession ensuring that the only black business booming was crack cocaine, the city was home to 155 gangs with 30,000 members.¹²²

Towards the end of the decade, law enforcement attempted to curb the increasing gang activity by instituting Operation Hammer in 1987.¹²³ This endeavor saw police arresting large numbers of black and Hispanic males on small charges, which only assisted in creating an aura of victimization and police brutality.¹²⁴ This was the environment that birthed Tracey “Ice-T” Marrow, and that inspired O’Shea “Ice Cube” Jackson, Eric “Easy-E” Wright, Andre “Dr. Dre” Young, and Antoine “DJ Yella” Carraby, to begin making music as N.W.A.¹²⁵ The success of the single “Boyz-N-the Hood” with its brutal honesty put N.W.A. in the position to release their 1989 album, *Straight Outta Compton*.¹²⁶ One of its tracks, “Fuck tha Police,” is arguably the song of the record.¹²⁷ The protest song is a direct assault on

¹²⁰ *Id.*

¹²¹ *Id.* at 210.

¹²² LYNKEY, *supra* note 43, at 435.

¹²³ PHULL, *supra* note 97, at 210 (describing Operation Hammer as “a measure designed to curb this urban blight by arresting large numbers of black and Hispanic youths with only minimal evidence to connect them to gang activity.”).

¹²⁴ *Id.*

¹²⁵ LYNKEY, *supra* note 43, at 435.

¹²⁶ *Id.*

¹²⁷ Maeve McDermott, *N.W.A.’s ‘Straight Outta Compton’ Turns 30—and is just as Essential Today*, USA TODAY (Aug. 7, 2018, 2:44 PM),

LAPD chief Daryl Gates and his oppressive tactics towards blacks, especially young black men.¹²⁸ “As protest, *Straight Outta Compton* is blithely uninterested in causes or solutions, only in the reality of ‘street knowledge.’”¹²⁹

On the East Coast, while Public Enemy encouraged their listeners to learn black history and to become socially and civically active, “N.W.A asked only that they make the best of what was available.”¹³⁰ “N.W.A said and did things that they knew would strike an attitude with the demographic that they weren’t necessarily a part of[.] . . . They had a sensibility that really hit street cats but they were not those cats.”¹³¹ Following the release of “Fuck tha Police,” N.W.A. began losing support and even sparked letters from the FBI reprimanding the group.¹³² “N.W.A also drew flak from socially conscious hip-hop DJs who believed the group was confirming every possible negative stereotype about young black men. Hip-hop’s liberal defenders saw it as the music of the oppressed, but in the violent, misogynistic, homophobic work of N.W.A, the oppressed became the oppressors . . .”¹³³

In 1988, following the success of their album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, the members of Public Enemy sat down with film director Spike Lee to discuss the soundtrack to his upcoming movie, *Do the Right Thing*.¹³⁴ The film director needed “an anthem to scream out against the hypocrisies and wrongdoings of the system.”¹³⁵ Public Enemy member Carlton “Chuck D” Ridenhour found his inspiration for the feature song in the 1975 Isley Brother’s hit “Fight the Power.”¹³⁶ Lynskey explains:

[The movie] was a referendum on the civil rights movement. After [a] climactic riot [scene], the movie ended with two competing quotations regarding the validity of violence as a means of dissent, one from Dr.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2018/08/07/nwa-straight-outta-compton-turns-30-and-remains-masterpiece/917888002/>.

¹²⁸ LYNKEY, *supra* note 43, at 435–36.

¹²⁹ *Id.* at 436.

¹³⁰ *Id.*

¹³¹ *Id.* (quoting Carlton “Chuck D” Ridenhour, one of the members of Public Enemy).

¹³² *Id.*

¹³³ *Id.*

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 429.

¹³⁵ *Id.* (quoting Chuck D).

¹³⁶ *Id.* at 430.

King, one from Malcolm X. Each viewer got to decide which one better suited the times.”¹³⁷

Any appeal that Public Enemy had gained at this point though had surely been seized by the toxic commentary given by group member Richard “Professor Griff” Griffin when he gave an undeniably anti-Semitic interview with *The Washington Times* on May 9, 1989.¹³⁸ But as Chuck explained, to a certain extent Griff was expected to be extreme, saying “[f]lavor is what America would like to see in a black man—sad to say, but true—whereas Griff is very much what America would not like to see.”¹³⁹ Chuck, at first, did not condemn his friend for his anti-Semitic comments.¹⁴⁰ He received a lot of flak for this but believed that a person should be able to speak his mind, even if what he was thinking was toxic.¹⁴¹ However, with time and boycotts, eventually Public Enemy and Professor Griff parted ways.¹⁴²

In 1992, Ice-T released his song “Cop Killer” with his group Body Count.¹⁴³ This song was characterized by its angry and revenge-fueled dialogue.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, “Cop Killer” boasts a chorus that is worryingly devoid of remorse for the homicidal revenge taken against police or for their grieving families.¹⁴⁵ A boycott was almost immediately called on Time Warner for producing the record, and Ice-T’s work was compared to slavery and Nazism.¹⁴⁶ Despite his repeated explanations that the song was a fantasy and not an actual plan to assault law enforcement, Ice-T eventually removed “Cop Killer” from the album.¹⁴⁷ In its place, the controversial artist released a new song, appropriately titled “Freedom of Speech.”¹⁴⁸ The incident was the result of the public forgetting that these artists were successful because of their controversy. What started as a statement of protest against police brutality ended up becoming Ice-T’s battle against censorship with the

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 437.

¹³⁸ *Id.* at 430.

¹³⁹ *Id.* at 439.

¹⁴⁰ *Id.*

¹⁴¹ *Id.*

¹⁴² *Id.*

¹⁴³ PHULL, *supra* note 97, at 200.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at 220.

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at 221.

¹⁴⁶ LYNSKEY, *supra* note 43, at 445.

¹⁴⁷ PHULL, *supra* note 97, at 221–22.

¹⁴⁸ LYNSKEY, *supra* note 43, at 445.

rapper even commenting, “‘Freedom of Speech’ is a great concept, it sounds good, but it has never applied and will never apply.”¹⁴⁹

Lynskey contends that “‘Fight the Power’ planted political hip-hop in the mainstream of U.S. culture for three eventful years. After ‘Cop Killer,’ that time had passed, never to come again.”¹⁵⁰ However, over the years, rappers have provided some of society’s most incisive social commentary.¹⁵¹ Included in that bunch is Kendrick Lamar.¹⁵² Of particular note is his song, “How Much a Dollar Cost,” off his album *To Pimp a Butterfly*.

III. LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS OF KENDRICK LAMAR’S “HOW MUCH A DOLLAR COST”

A. VERSE I AND HOOK

1. How much a dollar really cost?
2. The question is detrimental, paralyzin’ my thoughts
3. Parasites in my stomach keep me with a gut feeling, y’all
4. Gotta see how I’m chillin’ once I park this luxury car
5. Hopping out feeling big as Mutombo
6. “20 on pump 6,” dirty Marcellus called me Dumbo
7. 20 years ago, can’t forget
8. Now I can lend all my ear or two
9. How to stack these residuals tenfold
10. The liberal concept of what men’ll do
11. “20 on 6,” he didn’t hear me
12. Indigenous African only spoke Zulu
13. My American tongue was slurry
14. Walked out the gas station
15. A homeless man with a semi-tan complexion
16. Asked me for ten rand, stressin’ about dry land
17. Deep water, powder blue skies that crack open
18. A piece of crack that he wanted, I knew he was smokin’
19. He begged and pleaded
20. Asked me to feed him twice, I didn’t believe it

¹⁴⁹ PHULL, *supra* note 97, at 223.

¹⁵⁰ LYNKEY, *supra* note 43, at 446.

¹⁵¹ *See supra* Part II.

¹⁵² *See* Sagal Mohammed, *10 Times Kendrick Lamar Got Political with His Songs*, GLAMOUR (Apr. 5, 2017), <http://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/kendrick-lamar-humble>.

21. Told him, “Beat it”
22. Contributin’ money just for his pipe, I couldn’t see it
23. He said, “My son, temptation is one thing that I’ve defeated
24. Listen to me, I want a single bill from you
25. Nothin’ less, nothin’ more”
26. I told him “I ain’t have it” and closed my door
27. Tell me how much a dollar cost
28. It’s more to feed your mind
29. Water, sun and love, the one you love
30. All you need, the air you breathe¹⁵³

[Lines 1–3]: Lamar seems to ponder the true “cost” of money—not simply what it buys but also the “loss or penalty incurred especially in gaining [it].”¹⁵⁴ When Lamar speaks of “parasites,” he could be speaking metaphorically of one of two things or both. On one hand, a parasite is “an organism that lives on or in an organism of another species . . . from the body of which it obtains nutriment.”¹⁵⁵ On the other, it is also “a person who receives support, advantage, or the like, from another or others without giving any useful or proper return.”¹⁵⁶ With regard to the former, Lamar could be implying that a failure of some sort is eating away at him. With regard to the latter, he could be foreshadowing that someone who wants something from him and seems to have little to offer is gnawing away at him.

[Lines 4–5]: Lamar articulates that when he steps out of his luxury vehicle, his ego is as tall as former NBA star, center Dikembe Mutombo.¹⁵⁷ In essence, he connects consumerism to confidence, if not narcissism. Studied in relation to many human behaviors, including interpersonal communication and relationships, the trait of narcissism is an individual’s desire for grandiosity in combination with the need for admiration.¹⁵⁸ Those

¹⁵³ KENDRICK LAMAR, *supra* note 1; *Kendrick Lamar - How Much a Dollar Cost Lyrics*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/kendrick-lamar-how-much-a-dollar-cost-lyrics> (last visited Dec. 27, 2018) [hereinafter *How Much a Dollar Cost Lyrics*].

¹⁵⁴ See *Cost*, MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cost> (last visited Nov. 15, 2017).

¹⁵⁵ *Parasite*, DICTIONARY.COM, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/parasite> (last visited Nov. 15, 2017).

¹⁵⁶ *Id.*

¹⁵⁷ See Bloomberg News, *Tall Tales in the N.B.A. Don’t Fool Players*, N.Y. TIMES (June 15, 2003), <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/15/sports/basketball/tall-tales-in-nba-dont-fool-players.html> (stating that Mutombo is 7’2” tall).

¹⁵⁸ Emanuel de Bellis et al., *The Influence of Trait and State Narcissism on the Uniqueness of Mass-Customized Products*, 92 J. RETAILING 162, 164 (2016).

who exhibit narcissism have a propensity for self-enhancement, dominance, and lack of empathy.¹⁵⁹ Narcissists also value exhibitionism and respond to criticism with defense, upholding a sense of entitlement and exploitativeness.¹⁶⁰ In this century, the fixation on self-esteem is increased by the media and has a significant effect on youth in particular, raised to focus only on their own needs.¹⁶¹

Additionally, scholars are now focused on the combination of non-pathological narcissism, or an unjustified conceit that motivates self-enhancement, and how corporations use this trait to their advantage.¹⁶² For example, there was a significant increase in levels of narcissism in college students from 1979 to 2006.¹⁶³ Additionally, men tend to display more narcissistic tendencies than women,¹⁶⁴ and its prevalence is linked to Western culture, with an emphasis on individualism over collectivism.¹⁶⁵ With the increase in narcissism in this era, researchers are interested in what role consumption plays in this trend.¹⁶⁶ Brands can be incorporated as a part of identity formation, which is significant when this identity is based on self-esteem and enhancement.¹⁶⁷ Some studies have identified the importance of a new culture of mass-customization, where individuals can differentiate themselves from others by designing unique products to show their identity.¹⁶⁸ One study noted that material objects are used not only for this expression but also to support an otherwise fragile identity where humans can define themselves by their possessions.¹⁶⁹ Brands provide security for otherwise insecure individuals through the recognition they

¹⁵⁹ *Id.*

¹⁶⁰ Brent McFerran et al., *Evidence for Two Facets of Pride in Consumption: Findings from Luxury Brands*, 24 J. CONSUMER PSYCHOL. 455, 466 (2014) (citing Robert Raskin & Howard Terry, *A Principal-Components Analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and Further Evidence of its Construct Validity*, 54 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 890, 892 (1988)).

¹⁶¹ Alette Lambert & John Desmond, *Loyal Now, but Not Forever! A Study of Narcissism and Male Consumer-Brand Relationships*, 30 PSYCHOL. & MKTG. 690, 690–91 (2014).

¹⁶² de Bellis et al., *supra* note 158, at 163.

¹⁶³ Lambert & Desmond, *supra* note 161, at 691.

¹⁶⁴ *Id.* (citing Joshua D. Foster et al., *Individual Differences in Narcissism: Inflated Self-Views Across the Lifespan and Around the World*, 37 J. RES. PERSONALITY 469 (2003)).

¹⁶⁵ *Id.* (citing FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, *THE GREAT DISRUPTION: HUMAN NATURE AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL ORDER* (Free Press 1999); OLIVER JAMES, *AFFLUENZA: HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND STAY SANE* (Vermillion 2007)).

¹⁶⁶ *Id.*

¹⁶⁷ *Id.*

¹⁶⁸ de Bellis et al., *supra* note 158, at 162.

¹⁶⁹ Lambert & Desmond, *supra* note 161, at 703–704.

create.¹⁷⁰ This concept has been referred to as “terminal materialism,” where consumers acquire goods solely for the status it displays.¹⁷¹

In these early lines Lamar weaves in a self-critique against narcissism that offers a framework for our examination of public policy for the poor. This self-critique creates a path toward a position of benevolence toward the poor that might be drawn from larger themes of the song.

[Lines 6–13]: After parking, Lamar asks the attendant to put gas in his car. Possibly alluding to being teased about his ears when young,¹⁷² the irony of the song is that now Lamar uses his ears to make money. Indeed, he seems to extol the virtues of “economic liberalism”: an economic system created by virtue of economic decisions being made by individuals, rather than by collective institutions or organizations.¹⁷³ It is important to note that the song emerges from Lamar’s actual experiences in South Africa.¹⁷⁴

[Lines 14–22]: As Lamar exited the petrol station, a man of apparently mixed origin begged him for the equivalent of one U.S. dollar. Lamar assumed that the money was for drugs—stereotyping a poor person as being synonymous with a drug user. Accordingly, when the man continued to beg for food, Lamar dismissed the beggar. Stereotypes are generalized judgments about an individual based on membership in a particular social group,¹⁷⁵ such as the lower economic class.¹⁷⁶ Researchers have sought to uncover how the poor are viewed, how people respond to the poor and their situations, and what causes people to hold certain beliefs about poor people.¹⁷⁷ For example, the poor tend to be viewed as less intellectually competent than the rich.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁰ *Id.*

¹⁷¹ *Id.* at 703.

¹⁷² See StillaBlackHippy, *Kendrick Lamar Dumb It Down*, YOUTUBE (Dec. 30, 2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q59G6cYTmfE>; *Kendrick Lamar – Dumb It Down Lyrics*, GENIUS, <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-dumb-it-down-lyrics> (“[A]ll I got is bad credit, big ears and big head.”) (last visited Feb. 26, 2019).

¹⁷³ See IAN ADAMS, *POLITICAL IDEOLOGY TODAY* 25–26 (2d ed. 2001).

¹⁷⁴ KillaKam, *South Africa’s Influence on Kendrick Lamar’s ‘To Pimp A Butterfly,’* OKAYAFRICA (Feb. 11, 2016, 3:31 PM), <http://www.okayafrika.com/audio/kendrick-lamar-south-africa-to-pimp-a-butterfly/>.

¹⁷⁵ Taniesha A. Woods et al., *The Development of Stereotypes About the Rich and Poor: Age, Race, and Family Income Differences in Beliefs*, 34 J. YOUTH & ADOLESCENCE 437, 437 (2005).

¹⁷⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷⁷ *Id.*

¹⁷⁸ *Id.* at 442.

Researchers have investigated the impact of the perceived wealth or poverty of an individual on strangers’ judgments of their character.¹⁷⁹ The results revealed that, as expected, poor strangers received significantly lower overall ratings than did neutral or wealthy strangers.¹⁸⁰ Wealthy strangers were perceived as more intelligent, healthy, likely to be successful, and able.¹⁸¹ However, despite receiving overall lower scores, the poor were rated higher than the other two groups in working hard, trying hard, being generous, and handling money wisely.¹⁸² Furthermore, participants did not assume that poor targets used drugs or alcohol more than the other groups.¹⁸³ Nonetheless, there remains the perception that the poor are stereotyped as being greater abusers of alcohol and drugs than the wealthy under the theory of a “culture of poverty.”¹⁸⁴

Indeed, people develop attitudes, biases, and stereotypes about the poor for a variety of reasons. Groups that are judged as responsible for their own need for financial aid, and those that are less likable, are considered less deserving of aid than groups judged as less responsible for their need for aid and more likable.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, some researchers have studied the theory that a person’s actions are inherently inclined to bring morally fair life outcomes to that person—i.e., belief in a just world.¹⁸⁶ Those who have a strong belief in a just world judge individuals as less deserving of aid than those with a weak belief in a just world.¹⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, in the context of evaluative judgments of the poor, these views are harbored largely by people, such as the middle class, who are separated from the poor out of the desire to justify exclusion.¹⁸⁸

[Lines 23–27]: Lamar alludes to the beggar as one who, like Jesus in Matthew 4:1–11, has been tempted in every way by Satan and overcome it. Though tempted Jesus exhorts Satan not to “put the Lord your God to the test” and, in the end, triumphantly banishes Satan “away” from him before

¹⁷⁹ Dianne Skafté, *The Effects of Perceived Wealth and Poverty on Adolescents’ Character Judgments*, 129 J. SOC. PSYCHOL. 93, 95 (2001).

¹⁸⁰ *Id.* at 96–96.

¹⁸¹ *Id.* at 97.

¹⁸² *Id.*

¹⁸³ *Id.*

¹⁸⁴ Paul Gorski, *The Myth of the “Culture of Poverty”*, EDUC. LEADERSHIP 32, 33–34 (2008).

¹⁸⁵ Lauren D. Appelbaum, *Who Deserves Help? Students’ Opinions About the Deservingness of Different Groups Living in Germany to Receive Aid*, 15 SOC. JUST. RES. 201, 219–21 (2002).

¹⁸⁶ *Id.* at 206–207.

¹⁸⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸⁸ Bernice Lott, *Cognitive and Behavioral Distancing from the Poor*, 57 AM. PSYCHOLOGIST 100, 104 (2002).

being attended to by angels.¹⁸⁹ Hinting at the identity of the homeless man, Lamar reiterates the homeless man's simple request—a dollar—and Lamar's repeated denial of the request. He ends by begging the question, the same way he opened the song: what is true "cost" of money—not simply what it buys but also the "loss or penalty incurred especially in [hoarding it]."¹⁹⁰

[Lines 28–30]: The hook seems to be sung from the perspective of God. "How much a dollar really cost," is given a positive angle—"the amount . . . paid or charged for something."¹⁹¹ Here, the failure to give to "the least of these,"¹⁹² results in a penalty; however, the affirmative giving appears to result in a reward—food for the mind and soul (e.g., air, water, sun, love, and loved ones).

B. VERSE II

31. He's starin' at me in disbelief
32. My temper is buildin', he's starin' at me, I grab my key
33. He's starin' at me, I started the car, then I tried to leave
34. And somethin' told me to keep it in park until I could see
35. The reason why he was mad at a stranger
36. Like I was supposed to save him
37. Like I'm the reason he's homeless and askin' me for a favor
38. He's starin' at me, his eyes followed me with no laser
39. He's starin' at me, I notice that his stare is contagious
40. Cause now I'm starin' back at him, feelin' some type of disrespect
41. If I could throw a bat at him, it'd be aimin' at his neck
42. I never understood someone beggin' for goods
43. Askin' for handouts, takin' it if they could
44. And this particular person just had it down pat
45. Starin' at me for the longest until he finally asked
46. "Have you ever opened up Exodus 14?"
47. A humble man is all that we ever need"
48. Tell me how much a dollar cost¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ *Matthew* 4:1-11 (New International Version).

¹⁹⁰ See KENDRICK LAMAR, *supra* note 1; *How Much a Dollar Cost Lyrics*, *supra* note 153.

¹⁹¹ *Id.*

¹⁹² *Matthew* 25:34-40 (King James).

¹⁹³ KENDRICK LAMAR, *supra* note 1; *How Much a Dollar Cost Lyrics*, *supra* note 153.

[Lines 31–41]: Lamar recounts his perception that the homeless man was incredulous that Lamar would not give him a dollar. However, it is clear that Lamar grows increasingly frustrated and angry with the homeless man. In fact, while the homeless man’s staring may have caused Lamar’s frustration, his perceived lower status may have exacerbated it. The relationship between perceptions of status and hostility and/or aggression has been well studied and documented. First studied by Anthony N. Doob and Alan E. Gross in 1968, researchers examined the relationship between perceived status of a “frustrator” (person causing the frustration) and aggressive behavior or tendencies among drivers.¹⁹⁴ Their study suggests that “the status of the frustrating agent is inversely related to the amount of aggression displayed by the frustrated individual.”¹⁹⁵ Further, the researchers found that low-status automobiles elicited more honking than high status automobiles.¹⁹⁶

Building off of Doob and Gross’s findings, humanities and social sciences professor Andreas Diekmann and colleagues employed an observational approach to the study of aggressive behaviors among drivers.¹⁹⁷ Specifically, they explored the effect of a *frustrated* person’s social status on the tendency to react aggressively, rather than the frustrator’s social status.¹⁹⁸ They varied the status of the frustrated individual’s car, hypothesizing that drivers of high-status cars would exhibit more aggressive behavior than drivers of low-status cars.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, Diekmann and colleagues found that the social status of a frustrator inhibits aggressive responses by frustrated individuals, thereby appearing as if “higher social status not only inhibits others’ aggressive tendencies but also intensifies one’s own.”²⁰⁰

[Lines 42–44]: While Lamar never speaks of political ideology, his attitude in this moment of the song and stereotyping of the beggar seem consistent with conservative ideology, given the social and scientific literature on the topic.

¹⁹⁴ Anthony N. Doob & Alan E. Gross, *Status of Frustrator as an Inhibitor of Horn-Honking Responses*, 76 J. SOC. PSYCHOL. 213, 213–14 (1968).

¹⁹⁵ Lawrence J. Chase & Norbert H. Mills, *Status of Frustrator as a Facilitator of Aggression: A Brief Note*, 84 J. PSYCHOL. 225, 225 (1973).

¹⁹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁹⁷ Andreas Diekmann et al., *Social Status and Aggression: A Field Study Analyzed by Survival Analysis*, 136 J. SOC. PSYCHOL. 761, 761 (1996).

¹⁹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹⁹ *Id.* at 761–62.

²⁰⁰ *Id.* at 767–68.

As outlined by many psychologists, an individual's cognitive responses are a product of inherent positive or negative inherent beliefs about a particular group.²⁰¹ "Attribution theory" developed as a result of this investigation and identifies the connection between thinking, feeling, and action.²⁰² Responses to an environment prompt a cognitive reaction to these situations, which then leads to a reaction contingent upon the positive or negative emotions that were provoked.²⁰³ Attribution theory states that individuals accredit actions to either dispositional or situational causes.²⁰⁴ Humans tend to underestimate situational factors in others and overestimate dispositional causes, a theory referred to as "fundamental attribution error."²⁰⁵ Individuals will view those around them as independent actors responsible for their actions;²⁰⁶ therefore, individualistic causes are more commonly endorsed than situational assumptions.²⁰⁷ For example, an instance of this error occurs in identifying reasons for a person's poverty: dispositional attributions would be race, gender, personality, or lack of effort.²⁰⁸ In contrast, situational causes would include social structure, discrimination, or a poor education system.²⁰⁹ From this research, psychologists have determined that certain ideological groups tend to rely on dispositional attributions more frequently than others.²¹⁰ This supposition implies that when debating social issues, the provision of help depends upon the responsibility and deservedness of the person receiving assistance, an idea guided by the attribution theory.²¹¹ Groups advocating dispositional causes tend to withhold help, while those who attribute others'

²⁰¹ Michael J. Tagler & Catherine Cozzarelli, *Feelings Toward the Poor and Beliefs About the Causes of Poverty: The Role of Affective-Cognitive Consistency in Help-Giving*, 147 J. PSYCHOL. 517, 518 (2013).

²⁰² Gail Sahar Zucker & Bernard Weiner, *Conservatism and Perceptions of Poverty: An Attributional Analysis*, 23 J. APPLIED SOC. PSYCHOL. 925, 927–28 (1993).

²⁰³ *Id.*

²⁰⁴ *Id.* at 926–27.

²⁰⁵ Rez Shirazi & Anders Biel, *Internal-External Causal Attributions and Perceived Government Responsibility for Need Provision*, 36 J. CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOL. 96, 96–97 (2005)

²⁰⁶ *Id.* at 97.

²⁰⁷ Tagler & Cozzarelli, *supra* note 201, at 518.

²⁰⁸ Shirazi & Biel, *supra* note 205, at 97.

²⁰⁹ *Id.*

²¹⁰ Bernard Weiner et al., *An Attributional Analysis of Reactions to Poverty: The Political Ideology of the Giver and the Perceived Morality of the Receiver*, 15 PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. REV. 199, 199–200 (2011).

²¹¹ *Id.* at 199.

actions to situational reasons tend to express the desire to provide rehabilitation.²¹²

In light of attribution theory, Gustav Ichesier, a pioneer in attribution research, stated: “The complete tragic blindness of the privileged concerning the life-situation of the underprivileged is the result of . . . not seeing the invisible factors in the situations of others.”²¹³ This statement insinuates an inability of certain groups to see the environmental factors leading to unsolvable circumstances, like poverty. Ascribing such a theory to Kendrick Lamar should be acknowledged as somewhat paradoxical. As an artist who was raised in Compton, his lyricism exposes the listener to his struggles as being part of a community of degraded or ignored young black males, pushing against attribution theory. In speaking from the experiences of the historically debased, Lamar elsewhere connects with feelings “reserved for strangely indicted people.”²¹⁴ This shared condition of existence reckons with the reality of many in the African American community being taught, as James Baldwin puts it, “to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world.”²¹⁵ As Lamar embodies the privileged in this song, looking upon the beggar with little grace, he does so while embodying his struggles with being viewed similarly by others. Like the beggar in need, Lamar’s body becomes “a source of discursive investigation” regarding its worthiness within a larger framework of the African American experience in the United States.²¹⁶ This irony notwithstanding, Lamar’s character in this song—presumably socially distant from the daily trials of this panhandler—articulates a conservative political ideology that values individual striving and and capitalistic ideals.

From this idea, considerable research developed supposing that political affiliation and ideology affects the perception of social reality.²¹⁷ Ideology underscores values and beliefs that can determine causation of complex events and how to approach these issues.²¹⁸ The political left tends to recognize situational causes for poverty, including the failure of society

²¹² G. Scott Morgan et al., *When Values and Attributions Collide: Liberals’ and Conservatives’ Values Motivate Attributions for Alleged Misdeeds*, 36 PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. BULL. 1241, 1242 (2010).

²¹³ Shirazi & Biel, *supra* note 205, at 96.

²¹⁴ DEREK S. HICKS, RECLAIMING SPIRIT IN THE BLACK FAITH TRADITION 35 (2012).

²¹⁵ *Id.* (quoting JAMES BALDWIN, THE FIRE NEXT TIME 39 (1963)).

²¹⁶ HICKS, *supra* note 214, at 35.

²¹⁷ Janak Pandey et al., *Right-Left Political Ideologies and Attribution of the Causes of Poverty*, 12 EUR. J. SOC. PSYCHOL. 327, 327 (1982).

²¹⁸ Zucker & Weiner, *supra* note 202, at 926.

to provide schooling, high taxes, low wages, and lack of opportunity.²¹⁹ Political conservatives are more likely to use individual attributes to explain poverty, including alcohol and drug abuse, lack of effort or skill, and sickness.²²⁰ This phenomenon is referred to as the “ideo-attribution effect”: identifying conservatives as more likely to attribute poverty to dispositional reasons, and identifying liberals as more likely to recognize situational causes for social problems.²²¹ These identifications are further specified by division into “one of three attributional profiles”: blaming, caring, or ambivalent.²²² Conservatives tend to blame the poor by emphasizing a high internal focus and personal control rather than caring, which would imply the low personal control of an individual living in poverty.²²³

To further indicate that attitudes towards poverty are contingent upon the values of a political group, researchers tested whether it is possible for the ideo-attribution effect to be reversed if the values in the situation do not reflect conservative beliefs but instead motivate conservatives to consider situational explanations.²²⁴ One study investigated factors that shape each group’s attributions and why these values lead differing ideologies to reach separate conclusions about social issues.²²⁵ Conservatives have strong individualistic values, such as belief in self-discipline, so they place more emphasis on dispositional attributions.²²⁶ Attempting to see a reversal of these situational and dispositional norms, researchers presented participants with a survey measuring reactions towards U.S. Marines accused of wrongfully killing Iraqi citizens.²²⁷ The hypothesis suggested that because conservatives emphasize patriotic values, they would attribute the deaths to situational factors.²²⁸ The results upheld this reversal of the ideo-attribution effect, revealing strong situational attributions in conservatives and finding that this group perceived national security beliefs as more relevant in this situation, thereby allowing them to consider external causes.²²⁹ A follow-up

²¹⁹ Weiner et al., *supra* note 210, at 201.

²²⁰ *Id.*

²²¹ Morgan et al., *supra* note 212, at 1241.

²²² Danny Osborne & Bernard Weiner, *A Latent Profile Analysis of Attributions for Poverty: Identifying Response Patterns Underlying People’s Willingness to Help the Poor*, 85 PERSONALITY & INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES 149, 149 (2015).

²²³ *Id.*

²²⁴ Morgan et al., *supra* note 212, at 1242.

²²⁵ *Id.* at 1243.

²²⁶ *Id.* at 1242.

²²⁷ *Id.* at 1244.

²²⁸ *Id.*

²²⁹ *Id.* at 1247.

study was conducted examining the attributions of police officers who wrongfully killed a wild cougar in Chicago,²³⁰ revealing that increased conservatism was consistently correlated with an increased perception that security values were applicable in this situation.²³¹ These studies suggest that conservatives’ tendency to attribute poverty to dispositional causes is a result of the values they hold, such as beliefs in the just world hypothesis—the idea that the environment will reward good and punish bad.²³² Other values, such as belief in self-help and resistance towards increased government involvement, lead to the consistency of conservatives relying on dispositional attributions.²³³ With the comprehension of these beliefs and attributions, researchers can understand the difference between political ideologies, and policy-makers can develop or reform programs that will be accepted by individuals on differing sides of the political-ideological spectrum.

Psychologists emphasize the importance of recognizing that perceiving others as responsible for their own condition can prompt anger towards those individuals, which in turn influences reactions towards the poor.²³⁴ The findings of these studies support the “thinking-feeling-acting motivational sequence” that largely affects how groups, such as conservatives, both perceive the poor and respond regarding assisting.²³⁵ The belief that poverty is “a moral failure on the part of the poor” has implications for the policies established to rehabilitate the poor, particularly when there is a stigma against such legislation.²³⁶ Because of their placement on the attributional scale and the anger prompted by individualistic causation, many conservatives regard welfare with the stereotype that these programs aim to assist those who are personally responsible for their circumstances.²³⁷

This idea implies that political conservatism has a strong role in welfare decisions in relation to both emotions and desires to provide assistance. Because of their sympathy profile and the outlined situational factors, liberals endorse the provision of help for the poor, citing that the individual is not responsible and the government needs to assist in

²³⁰ *Id.* at 1248–50.

²³¹ *Id.* at 1250.

²³² *See* Zucker & Weiner, *supra* note 202, at 927.

²³³ *See id.*

²³⁴ Weiner et al., *supra* note 210, at 205–206.

²³⁵ *Id.* at 207.

²³⁶ *Id.* at 208.

²³⁷ *Id.* at 203, 208.

uncontrollable situations.²³⁸ With the development of national surveys, it is evident that the negative attitudes towards welfare recipients are growing; however, some researchers have found that these negative reactions are toward welfare programs, and not toward poverty in general.²³⁹ Some theorize that welfare elicits ideas of inefficient government, invoke racist beliefs and promotes stereotypes of “lazy welfare queens.”²⁴⁰ Alluding to the attribution theory, social psychologist P.J. Henry and colleagues observed whether assumed controllability of circumstances predicts how an impoverished individual is treated by others.²⁴¹ These researchers hypothesized that the contradictory reactions towards welfare and poverty by political conservatives stems from the amount of controllability associated with welfare and poverty.²⁴² After conducting a survey measuring attitudes towards welfare and the poor as well as policies regarding assistance programs, the researchers found that participants were less likely to respond positively to people on welfare than they were to poor people in general, and that they did not favor increased spending for welfare programs.²⁴³ A follow-up study assessing assumptions in attribution found that participants described the poor as working, while those on welfare were not actively seeking better circumstances.²⁴⁴ People had less sympathy for those on welfare and were more likely to resist government spending for recipients they assumed were in control of their economic condition.²⁴⁵ The researchers also found that racial stereotypes about African Americans play an important role in promoting the heightened negative reactions to welfare programs as opposed to reactions towards the poor in general.²⁴⁶

Accordingly, those who perceive causes for poverty to be internal will withhold support from public assistance in rehabilitation.²⁴⁷ Data from

²³⁸ *Id.* at 203.

²³⁹ *E.g.*, P.J. Henry et al., *Hate Welfare but Help the Poor: How the Attributional Content of Stereotypes Explains the Paradox of Reactions to the Destitute in America*, 34 J. APPLIED SOC. PSYCHOL. 34, 35 (2004).

²⁴⁰ *Id.*

²⁴¹ *Id.* at 37.

²⁴² *Id.* at 38.

²⁴³ *Id.* at 39–40.

²⁴⁴ *Id.*

²⁴⁵ *Id.* at 50.

²⁴⁶ *Id.* at 52 (“One explanation for the difference in the reaction to welfare recipients versus the poor is that the concept of welfare triggers racist thoughts about Blacks . . . the data suggest that the effect of racism directed against African Americans on welfare attitudes was at least partially mediated by attributions that welfare recipients are more in control of and more responsible for their condition in life than are poor people.”).

²⁴⁷ *Id.* at 54–55.

fourteen other cultures revealed this negative relationship between dispositional attributions and the promotion of government spending, especially in politically conservative men.²⁴⁸ This cross-cultural method asked participants to fill out a survey judging their attitudes towards social justice, reported political ideology, and responsibility for the individual citizen versus the government in providing certain needs.²⁴⁹ The results revealed that the more conservative group placed more importance on individual responsibility, and less emphasis on government provision of needs.²⁵⁰ More specifically, left-leaning participants and women promoted government responsibility significantly more than right-leaning participants and men.²⁵¹

When observing the consequences of politically conservative views towards poverty, it is important to comprehend the reasons driving their tendency to use dispositional attributes regarding the poor. Different political orientations imply varying values, and these standards motivate desired attributional conclusions.²⁵² The political right remains resistant to change in governmental policies, contributing to their dispositional attitudes, in contrast to liberals tending to advocate for social change.²⁵³ Additionally, conservatives give the government lower responsibility in developing welfare programs because of the high internal causes they promote,²⁵⁴ as displayed by many researchers upholding conservative dispositional tendencies. If more of an emphasis were placed on situational attributes, such as financial failure, this group would be more likely to hold the government responsible for providing relief.²⁵⁵ Prioritizing self-enhancement values, or views that individuals are capable of improving their own situations, contributes to the dispositional attitudes conservatives display towards the poor.²⁵⁶ Liberals tend to uphold self-transcendence ideas, with the mantra that every individual should work for the whole.²⁵⁷ Attempting to uncover the reasoning behind the relationship between political ideology and the attribution theory reveals the broader question of

²⁴⁸ Shirazi & Biel, *supra* note 205, at 96.

²⁴⁹ *Id.* at 103.

²⁵⁰ *Id.* at 104.

²⁵¹ *Id.* at 111.

²⁵² Morgan et al., *supra* note 212, at 1251.

²⁵³ Robert J. Pellegrini et al., Political Identification and Perceptions of Homelessness: Attributed Causality and Attitudes on Public Policy, 80 PSYCHOLOGICAL REPS. 1139, 1140 (1997).

²⁵⁴ See Shirazi & Biel, *supra* note 205, at 111.

²⁵⁵ *Id.* at 100.

²⁵⁶ *Id.* at 112.

²⁵⁷ *Id.*

whether attributions are tailored to fit a political ideology, or if this ideology is shaped by beliefs about the causes of poverty.²⁵⁸

A held value that tends to differ between conservatives and liberals is strength of religiosity. In many studies, the relationship between religious beliefs and prejudice have been unveiled, with the implications that strongly religious conservatives may promote dispositional attributions because of another factor of their ideology.²⁵⁹ Examining extreme right-wing authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism, researchers observed whether these factors displayed a relationship between general religiosity and racial prejudices.²⁶⁰ Religious fundamentalism was defined as “a closed-minded set of beliefs” relying on the “teachings about humanity and [a] deity,” while right-wing authoritarianism displays “the degree to which these values must be upheld.”²⁶¹ The researchers hypothesized that right-wing aggression and religious fundamentalism would mediate the relationship between general religiosity and racial prejudices, tested with an online survey measuring religiosity, personality, and prejudice among members of different ethnicities and religions.²⁶² The results displayed a strong correlation observed between practiced, internalized religion and racial prejudices that is “mediated by cognitively rigid ideologies.”²⁶³ This data is important in indicating that while it may not be religiosity itself leading to strong prejudices against out-groups, these values are associated with “authoritarian or fundamentalist beliefs held in conjunction with religious beliefs.”²⁶⁴ Conservatives holding religious values may be prompted to have dispositional casual attitudes towards the poor as a result of not only these beliefs, but also the standards of the political group with which they identify.

While embodying the privileged in these lines, Lamar uses his positionality to critique those of privilege vis-à-vis the poor. He simultaneously reveals what he sees as the attributes God values in human beings. Ultimately, this section probed Lamar’s tension with “askin’ for handouts” (line 43) to present a deep consideration of political posturing between conservatives and liberals and the ways both are embodied in

²⁵⁸ *Id.* at 113.

²⁵⁹ *E.g.*, Megan K. Johnson et al., *A Mediation Analysis of the Role of Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Religious Fundamentalism in the Religiosity-Prejudice Link*, 50 PERSONALITY & INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES 851, 851 (2011).

²⁶⁰ *Id.*

²⁶¹ *Id.*

²⁶² *Id.* at 852.

²⁶³ *Id.* at 854.

²⁶⁴ *Id.* at 855.

Lamar’s character in the song. This lyrical section articulates an internal struggle within the main character about benevolence. Lamar internally wrestles with whether it is more appropriate to see the beggar’s plight as an individual issue of poverty or one tied to larger policy issues.

[Lines 45–48]: The beggar asks Lamar whether he was familiar with the story of Moses parting the Red Sea, guiding the children of Israel to safety.²⁶⁵ Implicitly, the beggar notes that all that is needed is a humble man like Moses,²⁶⁶ suggesting that Lamar could be such a man. Here, the beggar, a physical manifestation of God, poses the question “[h]ow much a dollar really cost?,” raising the stakes and suggesting the power that one man can have as an exemplar for his people.

A relationship between Lamar’s political ideology and religiosity begins to emerge.²⁶⁷ The religiosity expressed by Lamar here follows a tactic he has employed in other songs: using an unsung figure to articulate the religious values being promoted in the song. In this song, the listener encounters the beggar. In the song “Sing About Me, I’m Dying Of Thirst” from his previous album, *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, the unsung spiritual leader is a grandmother-like figure who intervenes when several young men are planning to retaliate for a friend’s death.²⁶⁸ She asks them why they are so angry and declares that they are “dying of thirst.”²⁶⁹ Again, this unsung figure, like the beggar, points the listener to issues of greater significance than retaliation or receiving a single dollar. In both songs, religion is addressing deeper matters of the heart and soul. They both get at what it means to be human and what the collective call to impact others in one’s community entails. Lamar weaves in what has been theorized as the “liberative logos” of black religiosity.²⁷⁰ This person functions as the “restorative mouthpiece for a wounded community,” urging others to

²⁶⁵ See *Exodus* 14 (New International Version).

²⁶⁶ “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.” *Numbers* 12:3 (New International Version). In fact, Moses displays his humility when God sends him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt: “But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’” *Exodus* 3:11 (New International Version).

²⁶⁷ E.g., Paul J. Silvia et al., *Blessed Are the Meek? Honesty-Humility, Agreeableness, and the HEXACO Structure of Religious Beliefs, Motives, and Values*, 66 *PERSONALITY & INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES* 19, 19–20 (2014). Religiosity is defined as “people’s interest in and involvement with religion,” and is connected with political ideology dependent on a society’s religion and political understanding. *Id.* at 19.

²⁶⁸ KENDRICK LAMAR, *Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst*, on *GOOD KID, M.A.A.D CITY* (Aftermath Entertainment 2012).

²⁶⁹ *Id.*

²⁷⁰ HICKS, *supra* note 214, at 104.

change their ways.²⁷¹ Emphasis is placed on the power of the words uttered. While the circumstances are different, the liberating words from each unsung figure function to bring the subjects closer to an encounter with the divine to induce “better” behavior. This inducement is intended to encourage the subjects to take required steps to help improve their own social conditions. The theoretical narrative follows a line of religious thought within marginalized communities. Lamar follows the lead of rap artists like Goodie Mob (*Soul Food*, 1995) and OutKast (*Aquemini*, 1998), whose lyrics and, in the case of Goodie Mob, religiosity, call upon individuals in urban communities to be led by something greater than themselves to address what ails the community.²⁷² In this sense, Lamar’s political ideology and religiosity of the unsung savior emerges as a critical arbiter of divine values of benevolence regarding the poor.

C. VERSE III AND OUTRO

49. Guilt trippin’ and feelin’ resentment
50. I never met a transient that demanded attention
51. They got me frustrated, indecisive and power trippin’
52. Sour emotions got me lookin’ at the universe different
53. I should distance myself, I should keep it relentless
54. My selfishness is what got me here, who the fuck I’m kiddin’?
55. So I’mma tell you like I told the last bum
56. Crumbs and pennies, I need all of mines
57. And I recognize this type of panhandlin’ all the time
58. I got better judgment, I know when nigga’s hustlin’, keep in mind
59. When I was strugglin’, I did compromise, now I comprehend
60. I smell Grandpa’s old medicine, reekin’ from your skin
61. Moonshine and gin, nigga you’re babblin’, your words ain’t flatterin’
62. I’m imaginin’ Denzel but lookin’ at O’Neal
63. Kazaam is sad thrills, your gimmick is mediocre
64. The jig is up, I seen you from a mile away losin’ focus
65. And I’m insensitive, and I lack empathy

²⁷¹ *Id.*

²⁷² See GOODIE MOB, *SOUL FOOD* (LaFace Records, 1995); OUTKAST, *AQUEMINI* (LaFace Records 1998).

66. He looked at me and said, “Your potential is bittersweet”
 67. I looked at him and said, “Every nickel is mines to keep”
 68. He looked at me and said, “Know the truth, it’ll set you free
 69. You’re lookin’ at the Messiah, the son of Jehovah, the higher power
 70. The choir that spoke the word, the Holy Spirit
 71. The nerve of Nazareth, and I’ll tell you just how much a dollar cost
 72. The price of having a spot in Heaven, embrace your loss. I am God”
 72. I washed my hands; I said my grace
 73. What more do you want from me?
 74. Tears of a clown, guess I’m not all what it’s all meant to be
 75. Shades of grey will never change if I condone
 76. Turn this page, help me change to right my wrongs²⁷³

[Lines 49–59; 66–67]: While Lamar begins to feel conflicted about his stinginess, he continues to make excuses for why he has not given the beggar the dollar. He recognizes that his selfishness has helped him become wealthy. Ironically, when he struggled financially, he was more inclined to give to the poor, suggesting that the accumulation of wealth has made him increasingly greedy.

Psychology professor Paul L. Wachtel analyzed the correlation between charity and political ideology.²⁷⁴ His work highlights some important facts about political ideology and charity, including political discourse “dominated” by the idea that “[y]ou can’t throw money at problems.”²⁷⁵ Wachtel asks questions about the implications of letting such an idea control social changes such as poverty, drug abuse, crime, and homelessness.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, Wachtel analyzes the opinions of individuals towards taxes.²⁷⁷ He points out that people’s own opinions about authority, whether they are true or not, affect their feelings towards higher tax rates.²⁷⁸

²⁷³ *How Much a Dollar Cost Lyrics*, *supra* note 153.

²⁷⁴ Paul L. Wachtel, *Political Psychology and Economic Psychology*, 12 *POL. PSYCHOL.* 747, 747 (1991).

²⁷⁵ *Id.* at 748.

²⁷⁶ *Id.*

²⁷⁷ *Id.* at 748–49.

²⁷⁸ *Id.* at 749.

For example, when people believe tax rates will not go towards social issues such as homelessness, they do not support higher taxes.²⁷⁹ Along with the ideas about taxes, Wachtel points out that “[i]t has been an article of faith in our society that economic growth holds the key to improving the lot of those in need,” whereas in reality, economic growth makes it significantly harder for those at the bottom to remain “above water.”²⁸⁰ He states that people need to change their political ideology and recognize that the only way to help the poverty in the United States is to change the relative distribution of wealth rather than focus solely economic growth.²⁸¹ Economic growth leads to growth in funding for social programs because it causes an overall increase in wealth.²⁸² On the other hand, it also causes greater feelings of need, so many people do not notice the increase in wealth and do not want to donate more to society.²⁸³

Professors Steven T. Yen and Ernest M. Zampelli’s research explored “charitable giving of time and money” in light of “political ideology, religiosity, [and] political and social involvement.”²⁸⁴ The authors found that there is no evidence that political conservatives are more charitable than liberals; however, they found that liberals volunteer more than conservatives and that the impacts of political conservatism are exacerbated by an increase in religion.²⁸⁵ The authors discovered that when religion is involved, monetary donations are more common among conservative individuals, but liberals donate significantly more time.²⁸⁶ They also found that conservatives and liberals who participate in charitable activities regularly behave similarly when it comes to charitable donations and involvement.²⁸⁷ The authors considered cash donations for religious and non-religious purposes and donation of time.²⁸⁸ They measured participants’ political ideology on a scale of one (“very liberal”) to five (“very conservative”) and also measured how religious participants were as well as how religiously active they were (participation in congregational

²⁷⁹ *Id.*

²⁸⁰ *Id.* at 751.

²⁸¹ *Id.* at 752.

²⁸² *Id.*

²⁸³ *Id.*

²⁸⁴ Steven T. Yen & Ernest M. Zampelli, *What Drives Charitable Donations of Time and Money? The Roles of Political Ideology, Religiosity, and Involvement*, 50 J. BEHAV. & EXPERIMENTAL ECON. 58, 58 (2014).

²⁸⁵ *Id.* at 66.

²⁸⁶ *Id.* at 59.

²⁸⁷ *Id.*

²⁸⁸ *Id.*

activities outside worship services).²⁸⁹ The results showed that “political ideology has a negative and significant impact on the probability of volunteering and on the (unconditional) mean number of times volunteered”: a very conservative individual “is almost 18% less likely to volunteer and is expected to volunteer almost three times less per year” than liberal individuals.²⁹⁰ Even so, “an individual who attends worship services three times a week or more is 14% more likely to volunteer and is expected to volunteer over four times more per year than an individual who never attends.”²⁹¹ Overall, conservative individuals are less likely to volunteer time,²⁹² and a conservative, religious individual is also less likely to give for non-religious purposes.²⁹³

Sociology professors Brandon Vaidyanathan, Jonathan P. Hill, and Christian Smith note that “[e]mpirical evidence points to self-identified political conservatives’ greater financial generosity when compared with liberals”; conservatives typically donate more to charity because their conservative political ideology inclines them to “take individual charitable initiative.”²⁹⁴ In contrast, liberal political ideology leans more towards “higher taxation and redistribution,” which makes people less willing to make individual charitable donations.²⁹⁵ Like the studies previously discussed,²⁹⁶ the authors hypothesize that “[i]f political ideology influences giving, it will largely be contingent on concrete institutional arrangements for the cultivation of cultural habits that, largely unconsciously, sustain generous dispositions.”²⁹⁷ The authors found evidence that the less confidence a person has in the government, the more likely they are to give to religious and non-religious nonprofits.²⁹⁸ Liberals gave less to charities because they “believe that it is the government’s responsibility to care for the poor.”²⁹⁹ The paper also looked at recent studies that question the

²⁸⁹ *Id.* at 61.

²⁹⁰ *Id.* at 64

²⁹¹ *Id.* at 65.

²⁹² *Id.* at 66.

²⁹³ *Id.* at 67.

²⁹⁴ Brandon Vaidyanathan et al., *Religion and Charitable Financial Giving to Religious Secular Causes: Does Political Ideology Matter?*, 50 J. SCI. STUDY OF RELIGION 450, 450–51 (2011).

²⁹⁵ *Id.* at 451.

²⁹⁶ *See supra* pp. 144–47 (discussing how peoples’ perceptions of the causes of poverty influence their attitudes on poverty policy).

²⁹⁷ Vaidyanathan et al., *supra* note 294, at 451.

²⁹⁸ *Id.*

²⁹⁹ *Id.* at 452.

relationship between ideology and behavior.³⁰⁰ It criticized previous studies for being “overly deterministic,”³⁰¹ and claimed that perhaps political ideology only leads to charitable behavior when other factors are in play, specifically religious congregations.³⁰² The study found that “political affiliation is not statistically significant net of religious factors when it comes to giving money to charities that serve the poor and needy”; in other words, “[i]f political liberals who go to church behave like conservatives who go to church when it comes to their financial giving, then the explanation for differences in charitable giving seems to be primarily about the effects of going to church, rather than the influence of political ideology.”³⁰³

Another researcher, Lydia Bean, posed a basic question: “[w]hy is the evangelical subculture linked to economic conservatism in the United States but not in Canada?”³⁰⁴ She mentioned that American churches view welfare negatively because they are opposed to government programs, whereas Canadian churches hold the opposite belief.³⁰⁵ Her study demonstrates that “economic conservatism among American evangelicals is anchored by religious constructions of national identity in ways that previous scholarship attributed to theology alone,” concluding that scholars should broaden “the trinity of belief, belonging, and behavior” to consider how religious groups imagine broader cultural membership.³⁰⁶

Bean’s research showed that differences in American and Canadian beliefs were shaped by power struggles and institutional development, not national values.³⁰⁷ Her study about why evangelical subculture is linked to economic conservatism in the United States but not Canada examined differences in how churches talk about poverty.³⁰⁸ She conducted a one-year observation of two churches in the United States and two in Canada,³⁰⁹ and concluded that “religious visions of national identity were an important

³⁰⁰ *Id.*

³⁰¹ *Id.*

³⁰² *Id.* at 453.

³⁰³ *Id.* at 454.

³⁰⁴ Lydia Bean, *Compassionate Conservatives? Evangelicals, Economic Conservatism, and National Identity*, 53 J. FOR SCI. STUDY RELIGION 164, 165 (2014).

³⁰⁵ *Id.* at 166.

³⁰⁶ *Id.*

³⁰⁷ *Id.* at 167.

³⁰⁸ *Id.* at 170.

³⁰⁹ *Id.* at 166.

mechanism that linked religious participation to civic engagement and political attitudes.”³¹⁰ Overall,

Canadian evangelicals drew on the same tools of accountable individualism as their American counterparts, but drew on different narratives of national identity to define their religious responsibilities towards the poor. Accountable individualism did not motivate them to reject structural solutions to inequality when used in reference to different constructions of religious nationalism.³¹¹

Economic conservatism in the United States among evangelicals seemed anchored by religious constructions of national solidarity, which “linked the growth of the welfare state to the loss of a Christian America.”³¹² Lamar conveys a similar angst in these lyrics. His internal strife and critical self-awareness considers the merits of contributing time versus simply contributing financial resources to the plight of the poor. Should, as conservatives in greater numbers show, his position be to take individual initiative to hand money to the poor or should the tactic require something different? Lamar’s character seems uncertain at this point, even as he continues to shun the beggar.

[Lines 59–64]: Again, Lamar falls back on his stereotypes of the poor, generally, and the beggar, specifically—that the money would be used for alcohol.³¹³ Consequently, Lamar refuses to empathize with the beggar, thus embracing the beggar’s current status. Embracing the status quo, vis-à-vis the current social order is correlated with political ideology and religiosity. System Justification Theory (“SJT”)—an adaptive psychological response that is instigated to reduce sources of stress, threat, and anxiety—helps explain this phenomenon.³¹⁴ The theory leads to the defense of the current social, political, and economic order.³¹⁵ It helps explain the support for religion, social institutions, and conservative ideologies.³¹⁶ While its influence over an individual varies from person to person, it is common for

³¹⁰ *Id.* at 171.

³¹¹ *Id.*

³¹² *Id.* at 180.

³¹³ See *supra* note 184 and accompanying text (addressing the “culture of poverty,” which falls back on the stereotype that the poor are greater abusers of drugs and alcohol than the wealthy).

³¹⁴ Aaron C. Kay et al., *Inequality, Discrimination, and the Power of the Status Quo: Direct Evidence for a Motivation to See the Way Things Are as the Way They Should Be*, 97 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 421, 422 (2009).

³¹⁵ *Id.*

³¹⁶ John T. Jost et al., *Belief in a Just God (and a Just Society): A System Justification Perspective on Religious Ideology*, 34 J. THEORETICAL & PHIL. PSYCHOL. 56, 59 (2013) [hereinafter Jost et al., *Belief in a Just God*].

all Americans.³¹⁷ SJT often manifests itself in poor individuals supporting and defending the very institutions that are hurting them. While there are multiple components to SJT, one component—system dependence—explains that the more dependent an individual is on a system, the more they will defend it.³¹⁸ If an individual views a system as important in influencing the social and economic outcomes in life, then that person will be more likely to justify the results of the system.³¹⁹ For example, if you remind individuals of how dependent they are on the government, they will support public policy and increased spending.³²⁰

If one examines electoral politics, system justification is predictive of political candidate selection, at least in the United States. For example, in the 2008 presidential election, psychology professor John T. Jost and colleagues measured whether individuals planned to vote for John McCain or Barack Obama to show the link between personality and political preferences.³²¹ In the study, Jost and colleagues asked participants questions relating to their party affiliation, political orientation, political system justification, right-wing authoritarianism, and the big five personality dimensions.³²² A key difference between liberalism and conservatism was

³¹⁷ See *id.* (proposing that SJT “may contribute, at least in part” to religious conviction and politics).

³¹⁸ Kay et al., *supra* note 314, at 422–23. The other components consist of inescapability and system threat. *Id.* at 423. System inescapability argues that individuals are more likely to justify a system if it is evidently very difficult to leave or change the social system. *Id.* This manifested itself in women accepting that men were more suited for a job if it was described as the status quo, and that status quo was illustrated as difficult to change. *Id.* at 431. The social order is depicted as difficult to change, which leads to women and minorities accepting their position in it. *Id.* at 431–32. This spurs the feedback loop of inequality in low-status individuals. *Id.* at 432. System threat states that a perceived threat to a social system will increase the likelihood that people will defend the system. *Id.* at 423. For instance, people support that wealthy politicians should maintain power when the politician is threatened. *Id.* at 424–25. Curiously, the wealthy politician is not as strongly supported if there is no threat to his or her power. *Id.* Further, people will engage in more stereotyping to protect system-justifying beliefs. *Id.* at 423. When participants of a study were told that women were highly underrepresented in business positions, the participants were more likely to rate a female business student as less likeable and competent than participants who were told women were well represented in business positions. *Id.* at 430. This illustrates that when participants were informed there could be an incoming change in the business world, they reacted defensively against it.

³¹⁹ *Id.* at 432.

³²⁰ *Id.* at 426.

³²¹ John T. Jost et al., *Personality and Ideology as Determinants of Candidate Preferences and “Obama Conversion” in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election*, 6 DU BOIS REV. 103, 103 (2009) [hereinafter Jost et al., *Personality and Ideology*].

³²² *Id.* The “Big Five” personality dimensions are “[o]penness, [c]onscientiousness, [e]xtraversion, [a]greeableness, and [n]euroticism.” *Id.* at 114.

system justification and how open liberals were to changing unequal aspects of the status quo.³²³

Jost and his colleagues examined SJT and its relationship to religiosity.³²⁴ Their study identified religion as a system justifying belief, which functions to provide ideological justification for the existing social order.³²⁵ As a system of justifying belief, religion forms what sociologist Peter Berger calls a “sacred canopy.”³²⁶ In this sense, religion becomes a human enterprise of world-building by which a sacred communal cosmos is established.³²⁷ As communities conform themselves to this sacred cosmos, they form a protective canopy that protects the community from the winds of doubt while making the task of justifying belief easier.³²⁸ By way of argument, religious texts help to uphold the current social order by validating institutions and conceptions of God as benevolent.³²⁹ People embrace such system justifications to reduce uncertainty, ambiguity, guilt, anxiety, dissonance, frustration, and moral outrage.³³⁰ These factors were divided into three motives in the study.³³¹ The first motive is an “epistemic motive[] to attain certainty, predictability, and control” over one’s life.³³² Religion creates an element of certainty that allows people to put their faith in a benevolent God who will do well by them if they do well by others. The second motive is “existential,” which helps “manage anxiety, fear, and threat.”³³³ Again, religion reduces anxiety by giving individuals a way to live and attain prosperity in the after-life. This curbs fear of the unknown. The third motive is “relational,” which provides affiliation and connection with others through a shared sense of reality.³³⁴ Religion builds communities and support systems; it gives people confidence in their beliefs by bringing together a group of individuals who share common and consistent beliefs.³³⁵ These motives help explain the embrace of religion, as

³²³ *Id.* at 103.

³²⁴ Jost et al., *Belief in a Just God*, *supra* note 316, at 59.

³²⁵ *Id.*

³²⁶ PETER BERGER, *THE SACRED CANOPY: ELEMENTS OF A SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY OF RELIGION* 26–27 (New York: Anchor, 1990).

³²⁷ *Id.* at 26.

³²⁸ *Id.* at 26–27.

³²⁹ See Jost et al., *Belief in a Just God*, *supra* note 316, at 57 (discussing how justice being served reinforces individuals’ belief in a benevolent God).

³³⁰ *Id.* at 59, 75.

³³¹ *Id.* at 75.

³³² *Id.* at 59.

³³³ *Id.*

³³⁴ *Id.*

³³⁵ *Id.* at 61.

it helps people cope with the harshness of the world without having to solve any issues.³³⁶ Religious individuals tend to support system justification, which indicates “obedience to authority, conventionalism, and right-wing orientation.”³³⁷ This manifests itself in an “overt endorsement of ideologies that serve to legitimize social, economic, and political arrangements.”³³⁸ Thus, system justification helps explain why more religious people support capitalism, fair market ideology, opposition to equality, and political conservatism even though such ideas are not necessarily correlated with religious faith.³³⁹

In conclusion, System Justification Theory is a means for some citizens to maintain faith in the system to which they belong. It is simpler for people to assume the system is fair due to the faults of the marginalized rather than incite change and banish inequality. The factors that play into this mind set can come from political ideology and several other personality factors. The above studies work to understand why people think this way and how to change the poverty that occurs every day.

[Lines 65–71]: The beggar goes on to inform Lamar that, just as Jesus informed in the Bible, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”³⁴⁰ He then instructs Lamar about the sacrifice made for money at the neglect of the poor and downtrodden: a place in heaven. These lines also relate to the parable of the sheep and the goats in the Book of Matthew. The parable is one of the Last Judgment and the division of the world’s people into the blessed—the sheep who are welcomed by God to inherit the His kingdom and eternal life—and the cursed—the sheep who are cast into the eternal fire.³⁴¹ The division is based on the acts of kindness and mercy performed by people to others. Jesus identifies such kindness as kindness towards him. Even more, the beggar reveals himself as God, highlighting for Lamar that the cost of the dollar was how Lamar had treated him when it was unbeknownst to Lamar that the beggar was God—i.e., entrance to heaven. As Matthew 25:34–40 instructs:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was

³³⁶ *Id.* at 73.

³³⁷ *Id.* at 69.

³³⁸ *Id.* at 61.

³³⁹ *Id.* at 76–77.

³⁴⁰ *John* 8:32 (NIV).

³⁴¹ *Matthew* 25:31–46 (NIV).

thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'³⁴²

[Lines 72–76]: Lamar notes that he has demonstrated his faith; however, it may not be sufficient to get him into heaven given his greed. He is contrite and asks God what more he must do other than prayer and recognizing his sins. He accepts his flaws and begs God to help him change.

Taking this lyrical analysis together, we find that the beggar ultimately makes the most critical pronouncement: he is God. This lyrical analysis therefore concludes above with the biblical passage that most directly articulates Lamar's aim in the song. The tension Lamar's character embodies carries the weight of both sides of the political spectrum in relationship to the poor. Lamar's final reckoning offers little in the form of reconciliation as it relates to his final position on the matter. The beggar had schooled him with a divine lesson of public policy toward the poor. We are left to pick up the pieces of a complex internal struggle that illumines the challenge of concluding with a neatly fitting political ideology regarding the poor. Yet, Lamar moves the listener to be attentive to a question that individuals of faith will at some point face: how do we account for the poor among us?

IV. THE ELECTION OF DONALD TRUMP

A. PRESIDENT TRUMP: MAN OF THE PEOPLE IF THE PEOPLE WERE THE ONE PERCENT

While a great degree of President Trump's success can be attributed to the votes of the white poor and working class, his policies do not reflect their needs and priorities. Trump's stance on the federal budget, taxes, healthcare, immigration, education, and the federal prison system all

³⁴² *Matthew 25:34-40* (King James).

diverge from these constituents' primary concerns. Despite extensive campaign promises to address the needs of the poor and working class,³⁴³ the Trump administration has repeatedly been criticized for failing to prioritize programs designed to help low-income Americans.³⁴⁴ This disparity between voter support and representative policy has sparked recent inquiries into how Trump gained such popularity among these voters while touting policies that would potentially cause them harm.³⁴⁵

The Presidential budget released by the White House is a numerical reflection of Trump's campaign rhetoric.³⁴⁶ Specifically, his budget cuts funding to the Agriculture, Labor, Commerce, Transportation, and Energy Departments, as well as the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Education, and the Environmental Protection Agency.³⁴⁷ Additionally, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services would be eliminated.³⁴⁸ Finally, major cuts would be made on funding towards "anything that smacks of internationalism, or of a benign and cooperative American presence in the world."³⁴⁹ This budget plan significantly threatens the white poor and working class. Throughout his campaign, Trump vowed to help inner cities; however, his proposed budget would eliminate programs that have aided these communities and would particularly hurt

³⁴³ See Karla Walter & Alex Rowell, *Trump Has Already Broken All of the Promises He Made to Workers During the State of the Union*, TALK POVERTY (Jan. 31, 2018), <https://talkpoverty.org/2018/01/31/trump-already-broken-promises-made-workers-state-union/> (mentioning that when Trump was a candidate, he promised to turn the Republican party into a "worker's party").

³⁴⁴ See Steven Mufson & Tracy Jan, *If You're a Poor Person In America, Trump's Budget is Not for You*, WASH. POST (Mar. 16, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/03/16/if-youre-a-poor-person-in-america-trumps-budget-is-not-for-you/?utm_term=.c8d4a6f81e6b (revealing Trump's budget, which would abolish programs for low-income Americans).

³⁴⁵ See Thomas Frank, *Millions of Americans Support Donald Trump. Here's Why*, GUARDIAN (Mar. 7, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/07/donald-trump-why-americans-support> (addressing the various motivations of Trump's supporters).

³⁴⁶ John Cassidy, *Donald Trump's Voldemort Budget*, NEW YORKER (Mar. 16, 2017), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/donald-trumps-voldemort-budget> (citing OFFICE OF MGMT. & BUDGET, EXEC. OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, AMERICA FIRST: A BUDGET BLUEPRINT TO MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN (2017)).

³⁴⁷ *Id.*

³⁴⁸ *Id.*

³⁴⁹ *Id.*

Americans with the lowest incomes.³⁵⁰ The budget would dismantle programs such as Medicaid and Social Security, benefiting the wealthy at the expense of the poor.³⁵¹ It would cut anti-poverty programs by \$1.7 trillion over the next ten years, cut Medicaid by \$800 billion, and implement work requirements to limit spending and eligibility on government-funded programs.³⁵² These work requirements would allow states to deny health assistance for lack of employment, and would negatively affect the current Medicaid program.³⁵³ The budget is assured to increase the number of uninsured Americans and hurt low-income families, particularly those who rely on government support.³⁵⁴

Trump’s 2017 tax plan provides clear advantages for those in the top one percent of income earners and neglects the poor.³⁵⁵ The first component of the plan is the reduction of the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%.³⁵⁶ Theoretically, this would simplify the tax code, encourage more investment, and discourage multinational corporations from concentrating on revenues earned abroad.³⁵⁷ However, there is mixed evidence from countries outside the United States that such reform substantially stimulates economic growth.³⁵⁸ The second component would cut taxes on small businesses by allowing them to reduce their pass-through income tax to 20%.³⁵⁹ The goal of this would be to even the playing field between small businesses and large corporations.³⁶⁰ However, altering pass-through laws would open the door for large corporations to save millions in taxes, as well as for

³⁵⁰ Alana Semuels, *How Trump’s Budget Would Impact Cities’ Poorest Residents*, ATLANTIC (Mar. 16, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/03/trump-budget-hud/519870/>.

³⁵¹ Derek Thompson, *Things Are About to Get Much Worse for Poor Americans*, ATLANTIC (Nov. 9, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/11/things-are-about-to-get-much-worse-for-poor-americans/507143/> [hereinafter Thompson, *Things Are About to Get Much Worse for Poor Americans*].

³⁵² *Id.*

³⁵³ *Id.*

³⁵⁴ *Id.*

³⁵⁵ Derek Thompson, *A Comprehensive Guide to Donald Trump’s Tax Proposal*, ATLANTIC (Apr. 26, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/04/a-comprehensive-guide-to-donald-trumps-tax-proposal/524451/> [hereinafter Thompson, *A Comprehensive Guide to Donald Trump’s Tax Proposal*].

³⁵⁶ TAX FOUND., PRELIMINARY DETAILS AND ANALYSIS OF THE TAX CUTS AND JOBS ACT 2 (2017), <https://files.taxfoundation.org/20171220113959/TaxFoundation-SR241-TCJA-3.pdf>.

³⁵⁷ Thompson, *A Comprehensive Guide to Donald Trump’s Tax Proposal*, *supra* note 355.

³⁵⁸ *Id.*

³⁵⁹ TAX FOUND., *supra* note 356, at 8.

³⁶⁰ Thompson, *A Comprehensive Guide to Donald Trump’s Tax Proposal*, *supra* note 355.

professionals to shelter their income through pass-through entities.³⁶¹ Finally, the third component cuts taxes on individual incomes and simplifies the tax code but would still reserve most of its benefits for the rich.³⁶² One year after its passage, the tax plan has delivered over \$1 trillion of stock buybacks to corporate America, while wages have collectively risen by just 2 cents an hour.³⁶³

The Trump administration's tax proposal from April 2017 also failed to follow through on campaign promises to provide economic relief to the working class.³⁶⁴ Some critiqued the proposal as a "gift to plutocrats."³⁶⁵ This assessment was based on the fact that the tax cuts would disproportionately benefit the extremely wealthy as opposed to the working or middle classes that Trump promised to assist.³⁶⁶ Cutting the corporate tax rate, as Trump proposed, has not been proven to create the economic and wage growth that Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin insisted; in fact, economic reports from the United Kingdom indicate that lowering the corporate tax rate did not lead to GDP or wage growth, but raising the corporate tax rate did.³⁶⁷ Thus, although the white poor and working class voted for President Trump to regain economic stability and cultural prominence, they instead are more likely to fall victim to policies that directly harm the poor and provide substantial benefits to the rich.

The promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act, also known as "Obamacare," was a major tenet of Trump's campaign and a primary motivator for white working class voters to elect him. According to Trump's plan, the three chief features of the Affordable Care Act—the expansion of Medicaid to all low-income people, the individual mandate, and the subsidy-backed private insurance marketplace—would be among the first to be eliminated.³⁶⁸ The irony is that many of those who most vehemently oppose Obamacare currently benefit from its provisions. Research shows

³⁶¹ *Id.*

³⁶² *Id.*; TAX FOUND., *supra* note 356, at 2–3.

³⁶³ Emily Stewart, *What the Republican Tax Bill Did—and Didn't—Do, One Year Later*, VOX (Dec. 22, 2018, 12:40 PM), <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/12/18/18146253/tax-cuts-and-jobs-act-stock-market-economy>.

³⁶⁴ John Cassidy, *Trump's Tax Plan Looks Like a Plutocrat's Dream*, NEW YORKER (June 18, 2017), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/trumps-tax-plan-looks-like-a-plutocrats-dream>.

³⁶⁵ *Id.*

³⁶⁶ *Id.*

³⁶⁷ *Id.*

³⁶⁸ Vann R. Newkirk II, *Simply Reading Obamacare Will Hurt the White Working Class*, ATLANTIC (Nov. 22, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/trump-healthcare-plan-working-class-whites/508325/>.

that most whites without a college degree have coverage under the Affordable Care Act.³⁶⁹ Many of these individuals who supported Trump in his victory would lose their coverage under the replacement health-care plan.³⁷⁰ White people living in the Rust Belt and in rural areas—Republicans who earn under \$50,000 per year—have been facing a health crisis in recent years and desperately need proper health coverage.³⁷¹ Women would also be impacted by cuts to Obamacare, particularly those struggling to afford birth control.³⁷² Former Secretary of Health and Human Services Tom Price had opposed coverage for birth control without a copay, arguing that requiring birth control coverage infringes upon religious liberties.³⁷³ Among the major concerns over Price’s proposals were whether contraceptives would be covered at hospitals under health insurance plans and whether women would be able to afford them.³⁷⁴ Moreover, in addition to diverting funds from the poor, Trump’s replacement for Obamacare benefits the rich.³⁷⁵ Price’s proposed plan would have not only eliminated the provisions of Obamacare, but also would have scaled back the expansion of Medicaid, much of which has benefitted the white working class.³⁷⁶ While insurers would have still been legally obligated to offer coverage to sick people, they would have been free to “charge much higher premiums to anybody who hadn’t maintained continuous coverage - a loophole that could potentially affect millions.”³⁷⁷ After the House passed the American Health Care Act, Derek Thompson referred to it as “reverse-Robin Hood legislation,” because it took federal funds intended to cover lower and middle class families and redirected it back to the wealthiest one percent in the form of a large tax cut.³⁷⁸

³⁶⁹ Ronald Brownstein, *Trump’s Cuts to SNAP and Social Security Would Hit the Rust Belt Hard*, ATLANTIC (May 23, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/trump-budget-snap-social-security/527799/>.

³⁷⁰ *Id.*

³⁷¹ Newkirk, *supra* note 368.

³⁷² Olga Khazan, *Tom Price: ‘Not One’ Woman Struggled to Afford Birth Control*, ATLANTIC (Nov. 29, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/11/tom-price-not-one-woman-cant-afford-birth-control/509003/>.

³⁷³ *Id.*

³⁷⁴ *Id.*

³⁷⁵ John Cassidy, *The First Victims of Repealing Obamacare Will be the Sick and the Poor*, NEW YORKER (Nov. 30, 2016), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/the-first-victims-of-repealing-obamacare-will-be-the-sick-and-the-poor>.

³⁷⁶ *Id.*

³⁷⁷ *Id.*

³⁷⁸ Derek Thompson, *The GOP Health-Care Bill Is the Ultimate Reverse Robin Hood*, ATLANTIC (May 5, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/ahca-reverse-robin->

Blue-collar workers would have been even more affected by the proposed budget, as they benefit significantly from income-support programs Trump attempts to undermine. For example, in all of Trump's key states, blue-collar white workers were far more dependent on programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP") than were households headed by minorities without college degrees, or any race with college degrees.³⁷⁹ Research also shows that children of low-income mothers with access to prenatal coverage under Medicaid have lower obesity rates, higher incomes in adulthood, higher high school graduation rates, and are less likely to receive welfare payments.³⁸⁰ Another study found that without the help of SNAP, 65% of the receiving mothers would fall below the poverty line.³⁸¹ As such, cutting funds intended for working parents will increase the number of children raised in poverty.³⁸²

Regarding United States immigration policy, in 2017, the Trump administration considered a measure that would have denied "admission [into the United States] to any alien who is likely to become a public charge," meaning anyone that may need benefits such as food stamps, housing assistance or Medicaid.³⁸³ This would have been a continuation of past policies that have led to discrimination. Hidetaka Hirota, a visiting assistant professor at the City College of New York, argues that such restrictive laws target poor immigrants.³⁸⁴ The clause "likely to become a public charge" is highly open to interpretation, which provides officers a great deal of authority to determine the meaning of the word "likely."³⁸⁵ As a result, many officers who deny entry to poor immigrants can disguise

hood/525546/ [hereinafter Thompson, *The GOP Health-Care Bill Is the Ultimate Reverse Robin Hood*].

³⁷⁹ *Id.*

³⁸⁰ KARINA WAGNERMAN ET AL., GEORGETOWN UNIV. HEALTH POLICY INST., MEDICAID IS A SMART INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN 3–6 (2017), <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/MedicaidSmartInvestment.pdf>.

³⁸¹ Derek Thompson, *Trump's Budget Is a Cruel Con*, ATLANTIC (May 22, 2017) [hereinafter Thompson, *Trump's Budget Cut Is a Cruel Con*], <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/trump-budget-proposal-con/527667/> (citing Ron Haskins, *Reflecting on SNAP: Purposes, Spending, and Potential Savings*, BROOKINGS (May 8, 2012), <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/reflecting-on-snap-purposes-spending-and-potential-savings/>).

³⁸² Thompson, *Trump's Budget Cut Is a Cruel Con*, *supra* note 381.

³⁸³ Emma Green, *First, They Excluded the Irish*, ATLANTIC (Feb. 2, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/trump-poor-immigrants-public-charge/515397/> [hereinafter Green, *First, They Excluded the Irish*].

³⁸⁴ *Id.*

³⁸⁵ *Id.*

racial, ethnic, and religious prejudices with technically neutral language.³⁸⁶ This policy “assumes that congressional immigration policy is beyond judicial review for constitutionality.”³⁸⁷ Though this doctrine is less powerful today, it still grants law enforcement a great deal of authority over the entry of immigrants.

The president’s 2017 budget also would have hindered America’s education programs by cutting funds for the Education Department by \$9.2 billion.³⁸⁸ The plan would have removed \$2.4 billion in grants for teacher training and \$1.2 billion for after-school and summer programs for children.³⁸⁹ These cuts would have affected students and educators nationwide, particularly impacting low-income students.³⁹⁰ Along with eliminating need-based aid to approximately 1.6 million low-income undergraduates each year, this plan would have dramatically reduced funds for Federal Work-Study.³⁹¹ It also would have targeted AmeriCorps, a program upon which 80,000 members and numerous schools and communities rely.³⁹² AmeriCorps responded by attempting to persuade Congress that the relatively reasonable investment—just 0.03% of the federal budget—is worthwhile.³⁹³ These cuts to educational programs would have directly affected many working-class voters who supported Trump throughout the election.³⁹⁴

Under Trump, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions established policies that led to greater financial repercussions for impoverished criminal defendants.³⁹⁵ During the Obama administration, a letter was sent to local courts which “advis[ed] them to be wary of imposing stiff fees and penalties

³⁸⁶ *Id.*

³⁸⁷ *Id.*

³⁸⁸ See Alia Wong, *Trump’s Education Budget Takes Aim at the Working Class*, ATLANTIC (May 23, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/05/trumps-education-budget-takes-aim-at-the-working-class/527718/>; see also Cassidy, *supra* note 375.

³⁸⁹ Wong, *supra* note 388; Cassidy, *supra* note 375.

³⁹⁰ Wong, *supra* note 388.

³⁹¹ *Id.*

³⁹² Eric Gorski & Cassi Feldman, *How President Trump’s Federal Budget Would Hinder Poor Students*, ATLANTIC (Mar. 2, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/03/how-president-trumps-federal-budget-could-hinder-poor-students/518274/>.

³⁹³ *Id.*

³⁹⁴ Wong, *supra* note 388.

³⁹⁵ Josh Delk, *Sessions Rescinds Obama-Era Letter to Local Courts on Fines and Fees for Poor Defendants*, HILL (Dec. 21, 2017), <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/366127-sessions-rescinds-obama-era-letter-to-local-courts-on-fines-and-fees>.

on poor defendants.”³⁹⁶ While the Obama administration claimed that its letter prohibited courts from using defendants of any financial situation as a means for monetary gains for their jurisdictions, the Trump administration claims that repealing this letter would impede “the long-standing abuse of issuing rules by simply publishing a letter or posting a web page.”³⁹⁷ Thus, the Trump administration has justified not only the repeal of this protectionary letter, but also the repeal of more than 24 “guidance documents” from the Justice Department, some of which have been followed since the 1990s.³⁹⁸

One such document, crafted under the Obama administration, sought to terminate debtors’ prisons (i.e., a place for those whose financial situation prohibits their ability to pay fines that are overdue).³⁹⁹ The Justice Department had previously investigated and found that using the criminal justice system as a for-profit enterprise which seeks to glean large sums of money from poor individuals is both disadvantageous and unconstitutional.⁴⁰⁰ Policies have subsequently been instituted to reform the justice system to ensure that it protects the civil rights of those of all socioeconomic classes.⁴⁰¹ Nonetheless, former Attorney General Sessions proceeded to eliminate the progress of these reforms via the rescinding of guidance documents such as the one on debtor’s prisons, which both protected civil rights and yielded positive impacts on communities with some poor citizens.⁴⁰² Sessions inadequately justified his rescinding of guidance documents by claiming that they “circumvent the executive branch’s rule-making process and impose novel legal obligations by fiat.”⁴⁰³

The Trump administration has also undermined efforts to reduce the nation’s unprecedented prison population, much of which includes the white poor and working class. Sessions instructed federal prosecutors to seek the strongest possible charges and sentences against defendants.⁴⁰⁴ These guidelines directly repeal former President Obama’s mission to

³⁹⁶ *Id.*

³⁹⁷ *Id.*

³⁹⁸ *Id.*

³⁹⁹ Chiraag Bains, *Sessions Says to Courts: Go Ahead, Jail People Because They’re Poor*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 28, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/28/opinion/sessions-says-to-courts-go-ahead-jail-people-because-theyre-poor.html>.

⁴⁰⁰ *Id.*

⁴⁰¹ *Id.*

⁴⁰² *Id.*

⁴⁰³ *Id.*

⁴⁰⁴ David Parkins, *America’s Prisons are Failing. Here’s How to Make Them Work*, ECONOMIST (May 27, 2017), <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21722642-lot-known-about-how-reform-prisoners-far-too-little-done-americas-prisons-are>.

curtail the harshest sentences for defendants with low-level drug offenses.⁴⁰⁵ Former Obama administration Attorney General Eric Holder described the new policy as an “ideologically motivated, cookie-cutter approach that has only been proven to generate unfairly long sentences that are often applied indiscriminately and do little to achieve long-term public safety.”⁴⁰⁶

B. THE TRUMP VOTER

Despite the potential harm of these policies, nearly 63 million Americans voted for Trump.⁴⁰⁷ These voters are often portrayed as poorly informed and highly influenced by the mass media. Based on demographic breakdowns by gender, race, and age, the average Trump voter has been described as “male, white, and poor.”⁴⁰⁸ Further, four features of Trump’s constituency are people who (1) did not go to college, (2) do not think they have a political voice, (3) want to wage an interior war against outsiders, and (4) live in parts of the country with racial resentment.⁴⁰⁹

A survey in September and October of 2016 of American voters’ political feelings found that financially troubled white working-class voters were more likely to prefer Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton over Trump.⁴¹⁰ Nonetheless, three factors contributed to voters “defy[ing] post-election tropes” and predictors of how the white working class would vote.⁴¹¹ The first factor was “anxiety about cultural change.”⁴¹² Sixty-eight percent of the white working-class voters said that “the American way of life need[ed] to be protected from foreign influence,” while almost half of these voters agreed that “things have changed so much that I often feel like a stranger in my own country.”⁴¹³ 79% of the white working class voters

⁴⁰⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁰⁶ Matt Ford, *Jeff Sessions Reinvigorates the Drug War*, ATLANTIC (May 12, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/sessions-sentencing-memo/526029/>.

⁴⁰⁷ See Gregory Krieg, *It’s Official: Clinton Swamps Trump in Popular Vote*, CNN (Dec. 22, 2016, 5:34 AM), <https://www.cnn.com/2016/12/21/politics/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-popular-vote-final-count/index.html>.

⁴⁰⁸ Derek Thompson, *Who Are Donald Trump’s Supporters, Really?*, ATLANTIC (Mar. 1, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/who-are-donald-trumps-supporters-really/471714/> [hereinafter Thompson, *Who Are Donald Trump’s Supporters, Really?*].

⁴⁰⁹ *Id.*

⁴¹⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹¹ Emma Green, *It Was Cultural Anxiety that Drove White, Working-Class Voters to Trump*, ATLANTIC (May 9, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/white-working-class-trump-cultural-anxiety/525771/> [hereinafter Green, *It Was Cultural Anxiety that Drove White, Working-Class Voters to Trump*].

⁴¹² *Id.*

⁴¹³ *Id.*

who demonstrated these anxieties voted for Trump, while only 43% of white working class voters “who did not share one or both of these fears cast their vote the same way.”⁴¹⁴ These statistics demonstrate that these two variables were strong indicators of support for Donald Trump.⁴¹⁵

The second factor was immigration.⁴¹⁶ Only 27% of white working class voters, contrary to popular belief, said they “favor a policy of identifying and deporting immigrants who are in the country illegally.”⁴¹⁷ Among those who did share this belief, however, widely supported Trump with an 87% support in the 2016 election.⁴¹⁸ Lastly, 54% of the white working class claim that “investing in a college education is a risky gamble, including 61% of white working-class men.”⁴¹⁹ White working class voters who held this opinion were nearly twice as likely as their peers to vote for Trump.⁴²⁰ This “sense of economic fatalism” is the third factor that created support for Trump among the white working class voters.⁴²¹ “The enduring narrative of the American dream is that if you study and get a college education and work hard, you can get ahead,” said Robert P. Jones, the CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute (“PRRI”).⁴²² However, “[t]he survey shows that many white working-class Americans, especially men, no longer see that path available to them. . . . It is this sense of economic fatalism, more than just economic hardship, that was the decisive factor in support for Trump among white working-class voters.”⁴²³

The rise of Trump can be largely attributed to economic anxiety and racial resentment.⁴²⁴ In 2009, Samuel Huntington, a well-known political scientist, anticipated this reaction among whites to the growth of minorities.⁴²⁵ He theorized that once a dominant ethnic-racial group feels threatened by the rise of other groups, it could produce a racially intolerant

⁴¹⁴ *Id.*

⁴¹⁵ *Id.*

⁴¹⁶ *Id.*

⁴¹⁷ *Id.*

⁴¹⁸ *Id.*

⁴¹⁹ *Id.*

⁴²⁰ *Id.*

⁴²¹ *Id.*

⁴²² *Id.*

⁴²³ *Id.*

⁴²⁴ Derek Thompson, *Donald Trump and the Twilight of White America*, ATLANTIC (May 13, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/donald-trump-and-the-twilight-of-white-america/482655/> [hereinafter Thompson, *Donald Trump and the Twilight of White America*].

⁴²⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Threat of White Nativism?*, FOREIGN POL’Y (Oct. 28, 2009), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/28/the-threat-of-white-nativism>.

country with increased intergroup conflict.⁴²⁶ *The Atlantic*'s Derek Thompson identifies three major turning points in United States history: the 1968 election of Richard Nixon, the 1979 peak in manufacturing employment, and the 2008 election of Barack Obama.⁴²⁷ With the election of Nixon came the White South's shift to the Republican Party—a demographic that was critical to Trump's success.⁴²⁸ In 1980, when employment in the manufacturing industry began to decline, rising economic anxiety—particularly among white men without a college degree—contributed to a simultaneous rise in racial/minority resentment.⁴²⁹ Finally, according to researchers, the election of the first non-white president signified the rise of the minority population, which was likely perceived as a threat to the relative standing of whites.⁴³⁰ The combination of economic and racial anxiety can explain the electoral victory of President Trump.

Journalist Alec MacGillis expands upon this feeling of resentment, arguing that its roots stem from colonial times.⁴³¹ A strict class system followed settlers from England, with distinctions dependent mostly on the apportionment of land.⁴³² Landlessness became stigmatized across the country, eventually becoming the “white trash” and “trailer trash” of today's society.⁴³³ Moreover, dissatisfaction among the white working class is not entirely racial: “The most painful comparison is not with supposedly ascendant minorities—it's with the fortunes of one's parents or, by now, grandparents.”⁴³⁴ The lower classes have been neglected throughout the United States' history, yet detachment has grown more pronounced in recent years.⁴³⁵ Currently, out-of-wedlock births, male unemployment, opium addiction, and the mortality rate (including suicide) have risen among working class whites.⁴³⁶ MacGillis concludes that, although racial anxiety is still a factor, the experience of watching local economies decay

⁴²⁶ See *id.* (explaining that whites have already reacted negatively to minority groups' interests and will continue to do so).

⁴²⁷ Thompson, *Donald Trump and the Twilight of White America*, *supra* note 424.

⁴²⁸ *Id.*

⁴²⁹ *Id.*

⁴³⁰ *Id.*

⁴³¹ Alec MacGillis & ProPublica, *The Original Underclass*, ATLANTIC (Sep. 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/the-original-underclass/492731/>.

⁴³² *Id.*

⁴³³ *Id.*

⁴³⁴ *Id.*

⁴³⁵ *Id.*

⁴³⁶ *Id.*

has produced bitterness among poor whites—of which President Trump took advantage.⁴³⁷ For many voters that chose President Trump on their ballots as a result of (1) their bitterness regarding their economic situations and (2) then-candidate Trump’s campaign promises to induce economic reform, Trump’s moral shortcomings are excusable.⁴³⁸ That is, as an article in *The Economist* reveals, “there is no reason to conclude that all Trump voters approve of his behavior. For some of them, his flaws are insignificant next to the One Big Truth: that America needs fixing.”⁴³⁹ Thus, Trump’s deplorable actions, such as his mistreat of females or his shortcomings to deliver desired reform, are pardoned because Trump, unlike Clinton, proved to be a President who at least spoke as though he recognized and wished to alter the plight of the lower-class American.⁴⁴⁰

The aforementioned bitterness (or anger), author Joan C. Williams clarifies, is not rooted in individuals of the lower class wishing to become upper class individuals.⁴⁴¹ In fact, members of the lower class, of whose number has grown in the past ten years, mostly do not envy the differing friendships and food tendencies of the wealthy.⁴⁴² Rather, they largely wish to remain in their current, familiar socioeconomic class, but to nonetheless obtain greater amounts of money and thus comfort.⁴⁴³ This, in part, explains why impoverished West Virginians, for example, dislike educated professionals yet are willing to vote for a wealthy individual such as President Trump.⁴⁴⁴ That is, “the ideal is to own your own business, so you no longer have to take orders from anyone, just like the president.”⁴⁴⁵ An infatuation with the economic comfort of the candidate.⁴⁴⁶ Donald Trump largely inspired the poor vote to choose today’s President.⁴⁴⁷

Four days after Trump was elected to office in November 2016, Caleb Crain wrote an article for *The New Yorker* discussing the population that

⁴³⁷ *Id.*

⁴³⁸ *America’s New President: The Trump Era*, *ECONOMIST* (Nov. 12, 2016), <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21709951-his-victory-threatens-old-certainties-about-america-and-its-role-world-what-will-take>.

⁴³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴⁴¹ *America’s Urban-Rural Divides*, *ECONOMIST* (Jul. 1, 2017), <https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21724129-mutual-incomprehension-between-urban-and-rural-america-can-border-malice-americas>.

⁴⁴² *Id.*

⁴⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁴⁷ *Id.*

elected Mr. Trump into power: working or lower class whites.⁴⁴⁸ Trump targeted these voters by appealing to their anger towards their economic situation as well as their social fears of those who are different than them.⁴⁴⁹ Crain believes that the Trump’s supporters will lose faith in him “soon enough,” as Crain does not believe Trump will be able to follow through on promises to improve the economic situation of the poor, white working class.⁴⁵⁰ However, Crain also suggests that Trump will be able to maintain his voter base by continuing to cast blame for failures off of him and onto groups of people that are “non-white[], non-Christian[], and non-native[].”⁴⁵¹ Although Crain, like many Democrats, finds it hard to have sympathy for the voters who elected Trump, he explores the reasons why they decided to cast their votes the way they did.⁴⁵² The loss of factory jobs hurt the working class, which led many to have to find income in other ways.⁴⁵³ Many middle-aged men began to accept social security to stay afloat, and there is also a correlation between the population that was most directly affected by the closing of factories and an increase in suicide and drug and alcohol poisoning.⁴⁵⁴ This population is not keen on receiving welfare benefits, as they view them as handouts.⁴⁵⁵ When a candidate like Trump came along that stood out, this population got behind him. Crain argues that Trump will not be able to solve the issues that plague the white working class, but is unsure if their support will waver.⁴⁵⁶

Trump’s presidency has far-reaching implications, even for local government officials. A December 2016 article in the *The New Yorker* by Jennifer Gonnerman profiles New York City Councilman Ritchie Torres of the Bronx District.⁴⁵⁷ Torres became the youngest person to be elected to the New York City council and is the chair of the Committee of Public Housing.⁴⁵⁸ As a progressive, gay, Afro-Latino man attempting to protect the welfare and public housing his constituents depend on, the election of

⁴⁴⁸ Caleb Crain, *On Choosing Trump and Being Bad*, NEW YORKER (June 19, 2017), <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/on-choosing-trump-and-being-bad>.

⁴⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁴⁵¹ *Id.*

⁴⁵² *Id.*

⁴⁵³ *Id.*

⁴⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁵⁷ Jennifer Gonnerman, *Fighting for the Poor Under Trump*, NEW YORKER (Dec. 12, 2016), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/12/fighting-for-the-poor-under-trump>.

⁴⁵⁸ *Id.*

Trump created cause for concern.⁴⁵⁹ In particular, Torres worries that the New York City Housing Authority is vulnerable as its funding is directed through Housing and Urban Development.⁴⁶⁰ The housing developments in Torres's district could be under threat if President Trump's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Ben Carson, makes good on his promise to decrease reliance on public housing.⁴⁶¹

C. TRUMP AND WHITE EVANGELICALS

Although many Christians are opposed to President Trump's policies and rhetoric, white evangelicals are among his strongest supporters.⁴⁶² Throughout polls during the election, Trump remained the top pick for president among evangelical Christians.⁴⁶³ In a 2016 survey, two-thirds of white evangelicals indicated their excitement and satisfaction with the election results, compared to less than half of white mainline Protestants

⁴⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁴⁶¹ *Id.*

⁴⁶² See generally JOHN FEA, BELIEVE ME: THE EVANGELICAL ROAD TO DONALD TRUMP (2018) (describing the motivations behind the 81% of white evangelicals who voted for Trump); Emma Green, *Why White Evangelicals are Feeling Hopeful About Trump*, ATLANTIC (DEC. 1, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/trump-white-evangelicals-communities/509084/> [hereinafter Green, *Why White Evangelicals are Feeling Hopeful About Trump*]. It is important to highlight the divide, here, between black and white evangelicals. In recent decades, the evangelical churches have been working to better integrate African-Americans into the historical white evangelical church. The results were increasingly positive, especially from larger churches; however, that all changed with the 2016 presidential election. Campbell Robertson, *A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches*, N.Y. Times, (Mar. 19, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>. While black church goers had begun to feel uneasy after the pastors failed to discuss the police shootings of blacks, it was the 2016 election that caused most black members to disaffiliate with their churches. *Id.* Not only were the pastors, specifically Pastor Robert Morris, preaching to the congregation to elect Mr. Trump, but more telling, "white evangelicals voted for Mr. Trump by a larger margin than they had voted for any presidential candidate." *Id.* Many white evangelical church goers believed that Trump was "prophesied" to be the next president. *Id.* Furthermore, Reverend Dwight Makisic attended Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix and proposed a resolution condemning alternative right (white supremacists/white nationalists). *Id.* The convention would not even hear the resolution believing that "racism wasn't a problem in their church;" however, when this news got out to the public, the convention re-voted and passed the resolution overwhelmingly. *Id.* Overall, the African-American members of the evangelical church felt that they were not only not addressed, but when they were the church failed to discuss the structural legacy of racism that President Trump facilitates. *Id.*

⁴⁶³ E.g., Trip Gabriel, *Donald Trump, Despite Impieties, Wins Hearts of Evangelical Voters*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 27, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/us/politics/donald-trump-despite-impieties-wins-hearts-of-evangelical-voters.html?r=0> (describing various polls across the country demonstrating Trump's lead among evangelical voters over presidential candidates such as Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio).

and Catholics and less than one-third of the religiously unaffiliated.⁴⁶⁴ Ironically, white evangelicals were more likely than any other group to identify hunger, poverty, and concerns about drugs.⁴⁶⁵ They also indicated concerns that America is becoming weak, and, in a separate study, “too soft and feminine.”⁴⁶⁶ Finally, compared to white Americans affiliated with other religious groups, white evangelicals were more likely to be among the working class earning less than \$50,000 annually, and less likely to have a college degree.⁴⁶⁷ While these findings do not refer directly to religious views, they do suggest that white evangelicals comprise a distinct demographic group with certain shared characteristics.⁴⁶⁸

Since President Ronald Reagan’s era, evangelicals have mostly supported presidential candidates who are socially conservative.⁴⁶⁹ Much of that has been driven by a desire to gain control of the United States Supreme Court, especially where it comes to the possibility of overturning *Roe v. Wade*.⁴⁷⁰ In a 2015 poll, 64% of evangelicals indicated that a candidate’s stance on abortion greatly impacted their presidential decision.⁴⁷¹ However, their support of Trump has puzzled many individuals, as evangelical values and beliefs do not align with the president.⁴⁷² For example, Trump’s positions on abortion, same-sex marriage, and immigration before his campaign were at odds with evangelical ideals.⁴⁷³ In the past, Trump claimed to be “very pro-choice”,⁴⁷⁴ he went back on this position during his presidential campaign. This similar “flip-flopping” on key positions was seen in the 2004 election by Democratic nominee John Kerry, whom evangelicals attacked for this exact reason.⁴⁷⁵ Somehow, despite Trump’s similar swayed beliefs, evangelicals continue to support him. Additionally, President Trump now claims to oppose same-sex marriage, a stance that

⁴⁶⁴ Green, *Why White Evangelicals are Feeling Hopeful About Trump*, *supra* note 462.

⁴⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁶⁹ Jonathan Merritt, *Why Do Evangelicals Support Donald Trump?*, ATLANTIC (Sep. 3, 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/why-do-evangelicals-support-donald-trump/403591/>.

⁴⁷⁰ FEA, *supra* 462, at 29. *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973) affirmed the constitutional right of a pregnant person to choose abortion.

⁴⁷¹ Merritt, *supra* note 469.

⁴⁷² *Id.*

⁴⁷³ *Id.*

⁴⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Id.*

many evangelicals have.⁴⁷⁶ However, Trump's opposition to LGBT rights has not always been the case. In the past, he had supported an amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act that would outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation, a stance almost half of evangelicals oppose.⁴⁷⁷ In fact, his support of LGBT rights even motivated MSNBC to consider him "2016's most LGBT-friendly Republican."⁴⁷⁸ Finally, Trump has repeatedly stated his position on immigration and proposes mass deportations and the construction of a separation wall along the southern border.⁴⁷⁹ This proposal does not perfectly align with evangelicals, as 62% of them support solutions that will allow unauthorized immigrants to stay in the United States.⁴⁸⁰ Trump has also favored legalizing all drugs, a position most white evangelicals strongly oppose.⁴⁸¹ Despite these discrepancies between political values, white evangelicals continue to support Trump.⁴⁸²

Historically, evangelical voters sought to elect candidates who presented themselves as people of character; however, the question then arises as to why evangelicals support Trump in overwhelming numbers.⁴⁸³ In past elections, candidates knew that in order to win the evangelical vote, they had to present the country's moral fabric as unraveling through the use of political fear.⁴⁸⁴ Trump did this well. Trump "rode this wave of fear all the way to the White House."⁴⁸⁵ Trump's approach dovetailed nicely with traditional triggers among evangelicals. In times of change, such as an election, fear is prominent. This fear conditioned evangelicals to vote for Trump, in response to the cultural changes. For example, cases such as *Engel v. Vitale*⁴⁸⁶ and *Roe v. Wade*⁴⁸⁷ began to threaten the way evangelicals understood their educational and familial structures. As time progressed, this cultural shift and "changes in demographics, and progressive policy

⁴⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁷⁹ *Id.*; FEA, *supra* note 462, at 8.

⁴⁸⁰ Merritt, *supra* note 469.

⁴⁸¹ *Id.*

⁴⁸² FEA, *supra* note 462, at 8.

⁴⁸³ *Id.* at 12.

⁴⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁸⁵ *Id.* at 13.

⁴⁸⁶ *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962) (holding that a school policy establishing the recitation of a prayer before class violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment).

⁴⁸⁷ *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973) (affirming the constitutional right of a pregnant person to choose abortion).

shifts”⁴⁸⁸ created great concern among evangelicals. In response to these changes created Moral Majority, an organization which raises money for conservative politicians with agendas similar to those of the evangelicals.⁴⁸⁹ Their biggest goal is to gain control of the Supreme Court.⁴⁹⁰ Soon enough the playbook of the Christian Right was adopted by evangelicals in order to vote for conservative policies and candidates.⁴⁹¹ Two ways Trump utilized this playbook was to choose Mike Pence, a very religious man, and to release names of potential very conservative Supreme Court judge options for the vacant seat.⁴⁹² However, even in the face of his “locker-room talk” or accusations of assault, his “character simply didn’t matter as much as the opportunity to seize a seat on the supreme court.”⁴⁹³ Their fear was so prominent that voters still doubt Obama’s citizenship and religion, regardless of documentation otherwise.⁴⁹⁴ With Obama supporting immigration, abortion, and same-sex marriage, the “evangelicals felt marginalized and even threatened by the social progressivism they witnessed under Obama’s administration.”⁴⁹⁵ Contrarily, Trump defended traditional marriage, presented strong policies against immigration, and voiced bringing back American jobs.⁴⁹⁶ Furthermore, along with having support from multiple high-power evangelicals, Trump “presented himself as an embattled outsider—as many evangelicals now saw themselves.”⁴⁹⁷

This phenomenon is unsurprising, as it has deep American cultural roots. Accordingly, Trump appeals directly to the deeply rooted fears and beliefs that have guided white evangelicals throughout the United States’ history.⁴⁹⁸ For example, during the American Revolution, the demand for freedom from overpowering central government became inextricably linked

⁴⁸⁸ FEA, *supra* note 462, at 28.

⁴⁸⁹ *Id.* at 29.

⁴⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁴⁹¹ *Id.*

⁴⁹² *Id.* at 31.

⁴⁹³ *Id.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Id.* at 14.

⁴⁹⁵ *Id.* at 18; see also Amy Sullivan, *Democrats are Christians, Too*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 31, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/31/opinion/sunday/trump-evangelicals-christians-easter.html> (explaining that white evangelicals’ hostility to gay rights precludes many of them from voting for Democrats, a party consistently seen as being champions of gay rights).

⁴⁹⁶ FEA, *supra* note 462, at 18.

⁴⁹⁷ *Id.* at 22.

⁴⁹⁸ Molly Worthen, *A Match Made in Heaven: Why Conservative Evangelicals Have Lined Up Behind Trump*, ATLANTIC (May 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/05/a-match-made-in-heaven/521409/>.

to religious freedom.⁴⁹⁹ Then, during the time of the Great Depression and the New Deal, the migration of African Americans and the immigration of Catholic, Jewish, and Eastern Europeans threatened evangelicals' feeling of control over the nation's culture.⁵⁰⁰ The New Deal itself also posed a major threat "by redistributing wealth to the poor—including so many foreign-born arrivals and blacks—the New Deal threatened to undermine that authority even further. Opposition to Soviet Russia provided a perfect rallying cry: the country represented the godless, totalitarian end toward which the New Deal might lead."⁵⁰¹

In the 1950s, Billy Graham, a prominent evangelical leader, combined this fear of cultural change with anticommunist hysteria to create an extremely powerful ideology: the Christian free-market.⁵⁰² As a result, Trump's promises to 'drain the swamp' and restrict immigration appealed directly to long-standing fears of tyrannical government and infringement on the power of the Christian right.⁵⁰³ Furthermore, Trump's leadership style is reminiscent of a "long evangelical tradition of pastor-overlords" who bestow upon themselves absolute power and unfailingly receive forgiveness from God for occasional moral lapses.⁵⁰⁴ Having been raised with the ideals of the "prosperity gospel," Trump reflects this evangelical philosophy that material wealth is a blessing from God, and is given or taken away based on one's righteousness and donations to one's church.⁵⁰⁵

Trump's popularity among white evangelicals also points to a desire to preserve their once prominent cultural and economic standing.⁵⁰⁶ For this reason, these voters may be seen as "nostalgia voters" rather than "value voters."⁵⁰⁷ It is this nostalgia that enabled "Make America Great Again" to resonate so deeply with white evangelicals.⁵⁰⁸ In essence, white evangelicals harbor feelings of disaffection, particularly due to anxiety about the rise in minorities' power. This is evinced by a survey indicating that "two-thirds of white evangelicals say that immigrants are a burden to

⁴⁹⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Id.*

⁵⁰¹ *Id.*

⁵⁰² *Id.*

⁵⁰³ *Id.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁰⁶ Robert P. Jones, *How 'Value Voters' Became 'Nostalgia Voters'*, ATLANTIC (Feb. 23, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/the-trump-revelation/470559/>.

⁵⁰⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁰⁸ *Id.*

the country because they take American jobs, housing, and healthcare.”⁵⁰⁹ Also, a significant portion of respondents indicated that they are bothered by immigrants who speak little or no English, that the values of Islam conflict with American ideals, and that discrimination against whites has become a serious problem.⁵¹⁰ Additionally, white evangelicals have lost recent political battles such as the legalization of same-sex marriage; this is something that they are staunchly opposed to, and this judicial defeat is a clear sign of their depreciating power in American politics.⁵¹¹ Furthermore, Trump’s appeal to nostalgia has galvanized consolidation among white evangelical voters, the Tea Party, and voters influenced by the southern strategy.⁵¹²

Moreover, evangelical voters have historically supported candidates who share their same beliefs.⁵¹³ President Trump was aware of this throughout his electoral campaign and greatly boosted his religious rhetoric throughout the campaign trail. During the President Eisenhower and Nixon eras, evangelicals often invoked the saying “One Nation Under God.”⁵¹⁴ Trump repeatedly employed this phrase during campaign rallies, on posters, and on T-shirts.⁵¹⁵ During his time, Eisenhower attempted to use this rhetoric to bring Americans together.⁵¹⁶ Nixon, instead, used the phrase as a partisan club.⁵¹⁷ This same dynamic is what evangelicals see reflected in Trump’s campaign. Rather than promoting unity, the phrase represents the exclusion of those beyond the United States’ borders.⁵¹⁸

Not only do these evangelicals value religious beliefs, but they are also firm traditionalists who feel as though their values are being diminished by modern society. In a fashion reminiscent of calls to “return to the fundamentals” during the early twentieth century, contemporary evangelicals require another cultural reset framed on theological terms. They feel as though they are not given a fair share in the media, so when a candidate like Trump “stands up” to the media, evangelicals are drawn to

⁵⁰⁹ *Id.*

⁵¹⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹¹ *Id.*

⁵¹² *Id.*

⁵¹³ Merritt, *supra* note 469.

⁵¹⁴ Emma Green, *Why Donald Trump Appeals to Evangelicals*, ATLANTIC (Aug. 8, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/donald-trump-christian-libertarianism/494843/> [hereinafter Green, *Why Donald Trump Appeals to Evangelicals*].

⁵¹⁵ *Id.*

⁵¹⁶ *Id.*

⁵¹⁷ *Id.*

⁵¹⁸ *Id.*

him. Evangelicals appreciate someone like Trump who does not apologize for politically incorrect rhetoric because they believe society is intolerant of many of their own beliefs.⁵¹⁹ Others have argued that evangelicals support Trump simply because he is a businessman. Throughout history, there has been an alliance between white, evangelical Protestants and wealthy elites. After the Great Depression, big businesses joined forces with pastors and ministers, “pushing back against the New Deal with a kind of ‘Christian libertarianism.’”⁵²⁰ Today, one of the prime examples of the paradoxical alliance between evangelicals’ and Trump is the case of Franklin Graham. During a recent interview, Graham repeatedly cited the Trump Administration’s arguments about refugees.⁵²¹ He constantly enforced the model of good guys versus bad guys.⁵²² In this framework, Graham considered Christianity the “good guy,” and Islam, the “bad guy.”⁵²³ He continued to oppose organizations such as Boy Scouts, by saying they have lost their foundation since they now welcome LGBT kids and allow gay men to lead troops.⁵²⁴ However, the most puzzling moment throughout the interview was when Graham stated that Trump “has done everything wrong politically,” and then went on to say there’s “no question that God is supporting Trump.”⁵²⁵ As for those who have been personally attacked by Trump’s discriminatory and derogatory comments, Graham has advised them to “talk to God about it. . . . I believe Donald Trump’s there because God put him there.”⁵²⁶

⁵¹⁹ Merritt, *supra* note 469. In fact, evangelicals support Trump’s message in a hope that he will return culture to reflect their “Judeo-Christian values.” This was especially illustrated in the Values Voter Summit, where both Donald Trump and Roy Moore, Alabama Senate candidate, were big hits. In the summit, Trump referenced how in recent times societies lack of using the word “Creator” in government documents, such as used the Declaration of Independence, is quickly reverting. This point aligned with Tony Perkins’s, president of Family Research Council, belief that Trump allows individuals to stand up for traditional values disregarded in current society. Evangelicals are “betting on a brash street bawler to win the culture battles they had been losing for generations.” Tim Alberta, *Donald Trump and the Dawn of the Evangelical Nationalist Alliance*, POLITICO (Oct. 14, 2017), <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/10/14/trump-evangelical-nationalist-alliance-215713>. The other hit of the summit, Roy Moore, addressed how the government is turning back to God and how he will always place “Christianity above the Constitution.” *Id.* Placing this focus on Christian values and immigration has united evangelicals and nationalists in overwhelming support of Trump. *Id.*

⁵²⁰ Green, *Why Donald Trump Appeals to Evangelicals*, *supra* note 514.

⁵²¹ *Id.*

⁵²² *Id.*

⁵²³ *Id.*

⁵²⁴ *Id.*

⁵²⁵ *Id.*

⁵²⁶ *Id.*

The intertwining of Christianity and Trump’s beliefs seem to cause evangelicals to support the newly-elected president.⁵²⁷ This contradiction is further amplified by Trump’s ability to invoke some of the techniques of “prosperity preachers” within his speeches.⁵²⁸ He credits his success and the promise of a “totally brilliant future” to “major help from God” with an enthusiasm similar to that of renowned preachers such as Joel Osteen.⁵²⁹ This use of prosperity preaching may have helped Trump’s message to resonate with evangelicals as such believers tend to speak of their confidence in God with such passion. Furthermore, the emphasis on monetary prosperity in Trump’s message is of value to evangelicals that follow prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel is one that emphasizes God’s desire for his followers to be “wealthy and healthy.”⁵³⁰ Trump’s financial success is seen as “the truest sign of God’s blessings” for prosperity believers.⁵³¹ This may have allowed evangelical Trump supporters to forgive his shortcomings that they would usually denounce. Believers may see Trump’s policies as a way to achieve their prosperity. Additionally, Trump has formed relationships with many influential prosperity preachers who have spoken (and tweeted) highly of him and opened his campaign rallies. One particularly influential preacher is Jentezen Franklin, who spoke to his 3,000 worshippers in Georgia of the prosperous future Trump would bring, saying “I prophesy that God will open big doors for his people in 2017.”⁵³²

In conclusion, Trump’s ability to exploit the long-standing fears and anxieties of white evangelicals allowed him to secure a strong voter base. “Make America Great Again” appealed to their desire to reclaim greater cultural and economic power, and therefore was a powerful motivator to stand behind Trump, rather than a candidate that embodied the evangelical Christian faith. Their support of him raises an interesting question: why would Christians support a presidential candidate whose policies are

⁵²⁷ *Id.*

⁵²⁸ *Why Evangelicals Love Donald Trump*, *ECONOMIST* (May 18, 2017), <https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21722172-secret-lies-prosperity-gospel-why-evangelicals-love-donald-trump>.

⁵²⁹ *Id.*

⁵³⁰ Elizabeth Dias, *Donald Trump’s Prosperity Preachers*, *TIME* (Apr. 14, 2016), <http://time.com/donald-trump-prosperity-preachers/>.

⁵³¹ *Id.*

⁵³² *The Political Beliefs of Evangelical Christians*, *THE ECONOMIST* (July 1st, 2017), <https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21724130-personal-morality-politics-negotiable-political-beliefs-evangelical>.

anathema to their attitudes toward what Jesus refers to as “the least of these”?⁵³³

V. CONCLUSION

Evangelicals’ support of President Trump cannot be summed up as cleanly as we might think. Evangelicals continue to be a more complex group. A recent conversation with a prominent evangelical leader reveals a great discontentment with blind support of President Trump exhibited by other evangelicals.⁵³⁴ Even still, evangelical theological ideology notes that everyone has fallen and is subject to an abounding grace from God. Such notions square with the blind support we find often among white conservative Christians. Yet, a paradox reveals itself: evangelicals who live according to a biblically-driven puritanical ethic or within a “Lordship Salvation” framework must cautiously align with President Trump, given his widely reported moral misdeeds.

Further complication is the evangelical ideology regarding poverty and the extent to which the evangelicals need to be involved in the work to eradicate it. Many evangelicals are unwavering in their position that Jesus Christ’s sole instruction to the believer was to satisfy the Great Commission; the instruction given by the resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples to spread his teachings. It is therefore not surprising to find some tension within the evangelical community regarding issues such as social justice and institutional or systematic racism. Understood as a cultural phenomenon, evangelicalism produces noteworthy ambiguities. For example, some evangelicals align with conservative political positions like smaller government or decreasing perceived overreach of state and federal government. Conversely, some evangelicals are calling for their faith communities to critically examine the insider-outsider mentality that evangelical Christianity perpetuates.

In an era of heightened political tension, evangelicals are making their voices heard. As the midterm elections of the Trump’s first presidential term approached, evangelicals expressed opinions that are not always in agreement with one another. For instance, many evangelicals agreed with senate Republicans that the hearings to confirm Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court dragged on too long, even in the face of allegations of sexual

⁵³³ See *infra* Part V.

⁵³⁴ See *supra* notes 521–526 and accompanying text.

misconduct against him.⁵³⁵ Rather than decry to potential immorality of now-Justice Kavanaugh’s alleged actions, this group of evangelicals turned their attention to questioning the morality of the confirmation process and the timing of the allegations.⁵³⁶ In short, they saw Kavanaugh as politically victimized. Ironically, Kavanaugh being seen by evangelicals as a victim neutralizes his possible moral flaws. Accordingly, evangelicals emphasize what they consider the meaning of grace in the Gospel. One cannot help but also see that, for evangelicals, this grace gives space for the extension of their desired social conservatism as well. Ultimately, the lifetime appointment of Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court secures a long-term proponent, perhaps even an advocate, of their social concerns.

While this political saga follows what many would consider a standard evangelical script, we should be cautious lest we assume all evangelicals toe the same social conservative lines. The most fascinating element of America’s current political saga is that it comes at a time when evangelicals are also expressing diverging views on formerly deemphasized issues. Some evangelicals are pushing for a broadened ideological perspective to care for the least, othered, and outsider in more public ways. Therefore, to reduce the debate about evangelicals and social justice issues to a preoccupation with personal salvation misses the fact that evangelicals are increasingly saying more to address issues of systemic racism or justice for the poor. We grapple with this reality in light of the fact that Trump inspired a significant number of the poor to vote for him. Among this voting bloc, few would believe that systemic racism still exists or that eradicating poverty requires federal government involvement. But if Christianity carries with it a theo-ethical space to care for and serve the poor, how do we square the challenge of an evangelical electorate that seems to deemphasize that message in matters of policy? The crux of this article found space in much of the contradictions.

In the end, the seeming theological and cultural contradictions highlighted throughout this analysis are less related to evangelical support of President Trump. With respect to political party line issues, conservative-leaning evangelicals were likely to support a Trump administration given the high stakes. The larger challenge, then, is associated with the ways in which evangelicals’ political ideology fails in robust ways to address poverty policy on the societal level. Kendrick Lamar’s words and message over and against a Trump presidency colors this narrative in interesting

⁵³⁵ Ken Thomas, *Evangelicals Push Senate Republicans to Confirm Kavanaugh*, AP (Sept. 21, 2018), <https://apnews.com/73d6bf49463045e0a4dce215b1b020c7>.

⁵³⁶ *Id.*

ways. To utilize Lamar's ideas about the image of the poor was all the more challenging while wrestling with the complex religio-political ideology of evangelicals. We tried to consider the possibility of white evangelicals finding the value of poor people beyond evangelizing them. Ultimately, the cause of the "least of these" must be taken up by the entirety of the Christian faith and its members, regardless of political allegiance. Evangelicals are a shifting community with a significant voice in this cultural and political struggle. Perhaps messages like those found in Kendrick Lamar's "How Much A Dollar Cost" can compel some evangelicals to action, or at least toward a reconsideration of the *Imago Dei*.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁷ *Imago Dei* ("image of God"), PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/theogloss/imago-body.html> (last visited Nov. 19, 2018). (explaining that *Imago Dei* or "image of God" is "a theological term, applied uniquely to humans, which denotes the symbolical relation between God and humanity.").