



The Color of Neoliberalism: The “Modern Southern Businessman” and Postwar Alabama’s Challenge to Racial Desegregation¹

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Prior research on the origins and diffusion of the neoliberal project have emphasized the role of elite economists, yet no explanations have been provided as to why neoliberal reforms were attractive to the broader U.S. population. To fill this gap in the literature, this article focuses on the voluntary sector struggles against desegregation and corporate taxation in postwar Alabama. I examine the emergence of a language of privatization that degraded all things public as “black” and inferior and all things private as “white” and superior, which provided the pretext to attract national white support for the neoliberal turn. Empirically, the article focuses on the construction of the modern southern businessman that emerged from struggles to economically modernize the South, and the construction of a publicly financed private school system that emerged from the struggles to fight school desegregation. These two struggles fused under the George Wallace political umbrella, whose regional and national political career diffused the racial language from its origins in 1950s Alabama to the national level in the 1960s and early 1970s.

KEY WORDS: body/embodiment; economic revitalization; neoliberalism; privatization; race; voluntary sector.

INTRODUCTION

Neoliberalism is the political and economic project defined by (1) deregulation, the removal of all state-mandated rules and guidelines over industry, (2) privatization, the transformation of all public entities into private for-profit entities, (3) low or no corporate taxes, and (4) tax cuts for the wealthy. It views state welfare programs as wasteful and inefficient because they promote laziness and incentives for not working. Public services should be limited to maintain economic and physical security. As Harvey (2005) argued, the effects

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of neoliberalism have grossly enhanced the power of elites and expanded inequality between the rich and the poor.

This article traces the construction of the “color of neoliberalism”: racialized ideas embedded in discourses of privatization and tax cuts, which linked the dying segregationists to the rise of Republican neoliberalism of the late 1970s. The racial meaning of neoliberalism is embedded in the language of privatization. The language of privatization created an association of black with public, and then attached the black/public signifier with government regulation to recode the Democratic Party as the party of struggle, evidenced by its backing/incorporation of blacks, women, and the poor. The other side of this discursive classification was the linking of the white/private signifier that defined everything private and external to the public sector as superior. My argument is that the implicit racial meanings embedded in privatization provided the pretext to attract white support to the neoliberal project by helping whites interpret the racial meaning in racially neutral political discourse.

Explanations of the neoliberal turn in U.S. politics have narrowly focused on the role of expert economists in policy debates (Babb, 2001; Blyth, 2002; Bockman and Eyal, 2002; Campbell, 1998; Dezalay and Garth, 2002; Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Prasad, 2006; Rupert, 2000; Steensland 2009). The focus on expert economists dates the neoliberal turn to the late 1970s and overlooks how other actors influence social policy. This article argues that the neoliberal turn originated in the postwar struggles to revitalize a dwindling agricultural and industrial southern economy and to maintain school segregation after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. I analyze the emergence of the color of neoliberalism through the parallel construction and convergence of the modern southern businessman and the school segregationists’ attempts to construct a publicly financed private school system to maintain racial segregation. Therefore, the neoliberal turn owes more to the development of a normative political culture than to rational policy making or the response to economic crisis of the 1970s.

This article draws from archival data sources and uses as revelatory embedded single case study design (Feagin et al., 1991; Yin, 2009). A revelatory single case study is used to understand research problems that we have only a partial understanding of, problems previously inaccessible due to design, theory, or existing data, or to assess whether an alternative explanation of a phenomenon is more relevant than the existing explanation. The embedded case design means that the study involves multiple units of analysis. The political struggle to revitalize the southern economy and maintain racial segregation in Alabama is the revelatory case, and the Young Men’s Business Club (YMBC), the pro-school segregationists, and George Wallace are units of analysis. The YMBC represents the rise of postwar civic associations composed of southern businessmen that influenced the state’s role in recruiting new industry by offering tax cuts rather than tax subsidies. In addition to the YMBC, other economic civic groups operating in postwar Alabama included the Southern Economic Development Council (1946), the North Alabama

Associates (1949), and the Committee of 100 (1964). The shift from emphasizing tax subsidies to tax cuts was correlated with a shift in the business community's focus from antiunion policies to figuring out how to minimally integrate blacks so as not to jeopardize the flows of federal and northern capital (Hohle, 2009b).

The pro-school segregation groups were important for their role in centralizing the antisegregationist struggles into the key issue of public education. They emerged as important actors after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and the civil rights movement's successes in desegregating public facilities. The school segregationists operated all throughout the South and were the first to use the idea of privatization to challenge federal policy. Wallace emerged as the most important and visible southern politician because of his defense of segregation and opposition to the civil rights movement. He became a national political figure during his 1964 and 1968 presidential campaigns and, in the process, diffused the racialized language of neoliberalism to northern cities, fractured the Democratic Party, and provided the blueprint for Richard Nixon's infamous "southern strategy." In doing so, Wallace served as an embodied carrier for the cultural meanings embedded in the language of privatization. Therefore, I use Wallace's presidential campaign as a proxy to trace the diffusion of the racially embedded meanings in tax cuts and privatization.

My rationale for using Alabama as a single case study is that Alabama was the only state at the epicenter of both major events/processes in the post-war South: the black civil rights movement and the struggle to modernize the southern economy. Mississippi, South Carolina, and Arkansas were active in resisting the civil rights movement's desegregation struggles, but they did not have the business civic groups. Indeed, the first attempt to revitalize the southern economy was Mississippi's Balance Agriculture with Industry (BAWI) plan that used tax subsidies to attract northern industrial expansion. However, because of ideological reasons against state subsidies, a shrinking tax base, and the lack of commitment from northern manufacturers to stay, the business civic groups began to champion tax cuts rather than tax subsidies (Bartley, 1995; Cobb, 1999, 2005; Sale, 1975; Wright, 1986). This approach originated in Alabama.

Other areas, such as Atlanta, Georgia, were able to diversify their economy by expanding the service sector, but they did not have the degree of white resistance to school segregation as experienced by other southern states, nor was the civil rights movement active in Georgia. Alabama, Mississippi, and Virginia all introduced legislation to abolish public schools. Georgia did not. Atlanta desegregated schools with little resistance in 1961, and faced no civil rights protests until 1965. Kruse (2005) has also argued that a link exists between the postwar segregationists and the neoliberal turn. Rather than a language of privatization, Kruse used Atlanta as a single case study to show how the segregationist fight against residential desegregation produced the idea of "homeowners' rights" that resurfaced in the 1970s tax revolts. My

argument is that the color of neoliberalism represented by the Wallace campaign was the pretext that made revisiting segregationist ideas in the 1970s possible. Therefore, the analysis of Alabama as the origin and impetus of coloring neoliberalism is warranted because of its causal effect on regional political discourse.

Lastly, Alabama's economic and geographical diversity produced tenuous political alliances between various groups that allowed the progressive business community and segregationists to influence state policy. While Alabama is generally associated with its agricultural industry, this was only true of the black belt—a region in the middle of the state known for its rich soil. Birmingham, by contrast, was the industrial manufacturing center of the south. The “Big Mules,” the executives who controlled Birmingham's industrial economy, had the most influence over Alabama's state politics (Grafton and Permaloff, 1985). They formed an alliance with the agrarian elites over the shared desire for cheap black and white labor. Alabama's general white population was not supportive of either group (Sokol, 2007). Coupled with the civil rights movement, which nationally exposed a violent and oppressive “Old South” and severed the alliance between the Big Mules and agrarian elites over the desire to create a more positive image of the South, the progressive business groups became very influential in how Alabama proceeded with its economic revitalization.

This article will explain why we saw a pattern develop first in the South, and then spread to North, which drew working- and middle-class whites to an economic and political ideal that eventually matured into our understanding of neoliberalism. Before returning to the struggles of the postwar business and segregationist groups, I will outline an approach to analyzing race within political discourse by synthesizing Joe Feagin's concept of “the white racial frame” with literature on the discourse of civil society.

THE WHITE RACIAL FRAME AND DISCOURSE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The White Racial Frame and Color-Blind Racism

Contemporary race scholars have argued that a “new racism” or “color-blind racism” has replaced blatant forms of racist bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination. Color-blind racism is subtle, institutional, historically contingent, invisible, and presented as “nonracial” by eschewing direct racial statements (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003). Bonilla-Silva characterized the pre-civil-rights-movement era as “Jim Crow” racism because of its overt style. Color-blind racism emerged in the post-civil-rights era of the late 1960s and 1970s. My research argues that this shift was much more gradual and had its origins in the postwar era as southern whites were struggling to modernize their economy and prevent school integration. Although Bonilla-Silva's work showed how color-blind racism operates in a subtle manner, by posting jobs in white

networks or confining educated blacks to jobs with little or no upward mobility, it does not address how color-blind racism is articulated in political and economic policy. Moreover, while it shows how color-blind racism reproduces white privilege by allowing whites to be critical of minorities without explicitly naming them, it does not address why whites would support policies that still harm whites.

An important step in understanding how whites interpret our racialized world order is Feagin's (2010) concept of "the white racial frame." The white racial frame shapes racial interactions, rationalizes and maintains racial oppression and inequality by producing "racial ideas, terms, images, emotions and interpretations" (Feagin, 2010:3). Besides allowing whites to speak of minorities without naming them, the white racial frame produces a collective memory that downplays the role of race while emphasizing America's meta-narrative of equality. Unlike the standard use of frames that provide cognitive and ideological understandings of the world, the white racial frame is highly emotional, visual, and auditory. Whites feel an attraction to positive associations of whiteness. Unlike typical frames that are temporary and specific constructions, Feagin argues that the power of the white racial frame is produced by its constant repetition. Because of its repetition, we can therefore conclude that the white racial frame is materialized in policy, bodies, and cultural practices.

I argue that we should expand the concept of the white racial frame to consider how it is embodied, and the relationship between the race and the role of silence in political discourse. To say a white racial frame is embodied means that whiteness is ritually performed over time through phonology, gestures, styles of dress, and cultural tastes. The study of language involves more than studying talk and rhetoric. Language is a cultural system of socialization and symbolic communication. For social theory, the body links the symbolic and the material aspects of power (see Butler, 1993; Hohle, 2010; Turner, 1996). The body is a cultural object that produces and reproduces specific moral orders. Staying with the civil rights era, blacks embodied "good black citizenship" in their struggle for voting rights. In turn, this limited acceptable styles and images of protest, thus narrowing "the path of acceptable embodied civic practices for subsequent social movement struggles" (Hohle, 2009a:284). Normative embodied representations of "white" allow other whites to identify with and be attracted to the cultural meanings represented by "good white" bodies. In this regard, the presentation and appearance of bodies provides a socializing function at the visual and emotional level rather than the rhetorical or discursive level. Therefore, the construction of the modern southern businessman was more than just a social construct; it was the materialization of a new economic and political way of life that was used to differentiate the business community from New Deal economics and Jim Crow racism.

We also have to understand how embodiment and silence operate together within political discourse and the white racial frame. Foucault

identified the importance of silence in language and sexuality, noting that silence “is less the absolute limit of discourse ... than an element that functions alongside the things said” (Foucault, 1978:27). Thus, the negation and exclusion of blacks from economic discourse functioned alongside the white racial frame. Indeed, McWhorter argued that the progressive southern business community’s failure to address the role of race in economic development was how they articulated their racism and their sense of white entitlement: “progressives had concentrated on business without addressing the ‘Negro Question’. The defect in the businessman’s familiar pledge of ‘we’re taking care of this ourselves’ was the same as in segregation itself: white men ‘taking care’ of race relations” (McWhorter, 2002:251). The absence of race in the progressive business groups’ discourse functioned alongside the pronounced use of race in the school segregationists. The school segregationists unwittingly cloaked the racial meanings in tax cuts with their overt racially charged struggles to privatize public schools.

Discursive Structures and the Voluntary Sector

A limitation of the current research on color-blind racism is that it is confined to everyday attitudes, ideologies, and rhetoric, or is explained as systematic to U.S. politics without providing an explanation of how it is used or activated by whites. Feagin noted how the white racial frame was important for Nixon’s “Southern Strategy,” and how southern whites used it to rationalize whites’ freedom to dominate blacks and other people of color (Feagin, 2010:143). This article extends this line of inquiry by analyzing how an entire political and economic lexicon became organized around signifiers of white and black that made the neoliberal turn possible.

Understudied in political and cultural sociology is the relationship between civil society and the state. Focusing on the overlap between states and civil society allows cultural and political sociologists to analyze how understandings of what constitutes the idealized society emerge outside of the political arena of legislative bodies. Past research on the state and civil society focused on the autonomy of each sphere from the economy and each other (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Seligman, 1992; Skocpol, 1979; Tilly, 1978). The state autonomy perspective emphasizes the power of the state to shape civil society through the decision making of political elites and career state officials. The civil society perspective explains how civil society has its own institutions, such as voluntary associations and the public sphere, which indicates the limits of state power. The difference in state power and civil society can be explained as the difference between legal and moral power. Civil society provides the latter through the “discourse of civil society” that divides the meanings of social life into sacred and profane (or good and bad) categories (Alexander, 1992). The discourse of civil society reproduces and reorganizes moral orders embedded in legal, economic, and political structures that overlap civil society and

the state. It shapes how citizens interpret the motivations and implicit meanings of other citizens, politicians, and policy.

The voluntary sphere is where citizens organize in an attempt to influence government (Eliasoph, 2011; Lichterman, 1996; Putnam, 2001). Voluntary organizations provide both material and symbolic space for citizen/state overlap. The material spaces are actual public meetings, newsletters, organizational stances, and position papers that allow voluntary groups to function like an advocacy and/or lobbying group. The symbolic space is the shared discursive structures that make political exchanges possible and ensure that specific cultural ideals are embedded within policy. Indeed, Jacobs and Sobieraj (2007) have shown how politicians use specific narratives to connect their political interests with the “public interest.” They argued that boundaries between civil society and the state overlap because legislative debates are always situated within larger political narratives and discursive structures. Furthermore, the voluntary sector is a nuanced and complex political field where voluntary organizations struggle to “own” specific topics. In some cases, a single organization like the Komen Foundation can dominate an entire field of breast cancer awareness (Klawiter, 2008). In other cases, voluntary organizations within the same networks can work together. Such was the case in Alabama, where the business groups pushing for tax cuts found an unlikely ally in the school segregationists.

Situating the white racial frame in the discourse of civil society explains how the white racial frame was embedded in southern discursive structures that explicitly linked the white voluntary sphere with the state in order to secure white support for corporate tax cuts and privatization. The key to understanding how the white racial frame became part of the discourse of civil society is found in the semiotic structure of language, where racial categories of white and black are attached to normative political images, sensations, words, bodies, and policy. The business and school segregationists groups drew from the white racial frame and the discourse of civil society to produce an idea that they were good whites. It was important for the business groups to produce a favorable image of whites that supported the new economic policy since many whites were benefiting from the New Deal and welfare state. It was important for the school segregationists to produce an embodied image of whites as good concerned parents who wanted to protect their children not just from blacks, but also from irresponsible and immoral sexual behaviors that polluted good white bodies. In turn, whites began to support these policies based on their identification with the symbolic and material ideal of “good whites” rather than simply political and economic interests.

SOUTHERN ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION AND THE YMBC

In 1963, a local Birmingham magazine titled *Among the Clatter* told a story about how “a small group of men who eat lunch together every Monday

last year changed the course of Alabama history.”³ This group was the YMBC and the reason for the story was their work in preventing the redistricting of Jefferson County, which would have gerrymandered Birmingham into four different congressional districts. Later that year, the YMBC would lead the drive to unseat Eugene “Bull” Connor from office, help with the civil rights negotiations, and secure an “acceptable” level of racial integration. The year 1963 may have been the highpoint for the club as membership dwindled to five in 1968—two years after it admitted its first black member.⁴

The YMBC viewed itself as a progressive alternative to the agrarian elites and pushed for industrial expansion into the South based on tax breaks. It formed in 1946 as an anti-New-Deal business group to promote *laissez faire* capitalism. Advocates of *laissez faire* capitalism and neoliberals share an idealized approach to the economy of no government interference and the sacredness of the free market. For instance, when it formed in 1946, the overarching theme, which remained on its membership form, was “fostering free enterprise with as little government regulation as is absolutely necessary. Advocating ways and means to increase government efficiency.”⁵ The YMBC’s lunch-ins and sponsored talks represent the overlap between the progressive southern business community and political officials. Its weekly lunch-in was not a politically-neutral activity; rather, it functioned as a cultural milieu where the New South business community consciously shaped a normative framework that would guide how Alabama proceeded with economic modernization. The framework defined state involvement and taxation as harmful to the economy.

YMBC was both typical and exceptional to other southern white civic groups. It was typical in that it was advancing a normative worldview and overlapped with politicians/state officials.⁶ It shared this characteristic with the White Citizen’s Council and Ku Klux Klan, who themselves networked through local chapters of the Elks and Rotary Clubs, and counted southern governors, senators, judges, and local common council members among their membership (see MacLean, 1994; McWhorter, 2002). However, the YMBC was exceptional in that it imagined a future-orientated South rather than attempting to revive an Old South based on agriculture and racial segregation. This made it flexible in terms of defining friends and enemies. In the 1940s and early 1950s, the business community viewed the welfare state, high corporate taxes, and unions as the primary detriments to economic growth. By 1963, it softened its stance on economic segregation in response to the civil rights movement, in part, because it perceived the overt racial violence as hampering Alabama’s economic development. The group was also exceptional

³ TU 960.1.12 “Among the Clatter” dated March 1963.

⁴ TU 960.1.13 Interview with Jim Adams conducted by Tony Underwood, dated March 24, 1980.

⁵ TU 960.1.1 “Application for Membership in the Young Men’s Business Club of Birmingham, Inc.”

⁶ TU 960.1 Letters from U.S. Senator Lister Hill (AL) on his antiunion support dated from 1946; TU 960.1.13 “Letter from George Huddleston, 9th district Alabama” dated January 10, 1961.

because its charter mandated strict boundaries between politicians holding political office and members. The charter mandated “expulsion” for any member using the club for his explicit political advantage.⁷ This helped shape the appearance of a politically neutral group that only wanted what was best for the community. The appearance of neutrality masked the group’s normative economic doctrine, which allowed it to position itself between the agrarian-Big Mule alliance and the black movement.

The YMBC’s weekly lunch-ins provided the space for the exchange of ideas between the group and various political and economic leaders. The lunch-in functioned as a ritual that bound performer and audience to produce a shared understanding of the problems that plagued Alabama. The featured speakers were the performers who dispensed knowledge and led discussions. The YMBC lunch-in attracted a range of speakers, including former Alabama governor James Folsom, local sheriffs, and regional CEOs.⁸ The audience members were the YMBC members, who hailed from the urban business and professional class. The lunch-in audience also featured someone from the media to ensure the diffusion of the group’s ideas. The YMBC gave away food in order to secure an obligation of favorable media coverage from the local press. Former member Jim Adams stated: “We had our reporter every week, he was there, we bought him lunch and he gave us a good cover for it.”⁹ The favorable media coverage created a positive image of the YMBC in the public sphere.

The lunch-in was a regular site for conversations about matters of public concern. For the YMBC, economic revitalization—what it meant and how to achieve it—was the most important and commonly discussed topic. For example, one speaker, Walter Emmet Perry Jr., gave a detailed explanation of how a proposed 1% sales tax in Jefferson County would produce an additional \$6 million of revenue.¹⁰ The additional money was targeted for schools and a hospital for the poor. The YMBC voted 12–6 to oppose the tax. Other conversations focused on how increased taxes decreased local revenue. “Paul Friedman discussed the loopholes in the new sales tax law which instead of increasing revenue is actually having the reverse effect and a general discussion followed this point.”¹¹ William Raymonds, a local airline vice-president, spoke against the 7-cent aviation fuel tax in Alabama because it interfered with business and inhibited Alabama’s economic growth.¹² What was best for Alabama meant replacing federal taxes on gasoline (for automobiles) with a state tax, opposing an occupational tax, and opposing a 1% county sales tax.¹³ When a local college, Howard College, could not afford to purchase adjacent property

⁷ TU 960.1.1 “Constitution of the Young Men’s Business Club,” various copies.

⁸ See TU folder 960.1.12, which includes a variety of bulletins on featured speakers.

⁹ TU 960.1.13 Interview with Jim Adams conducted by Tony Underwood, dated March 24, 1980.

¹⁰ YMBC 960.1.3 “Minutes—YMBC Meeting Feb 1, 1960.”

¹¹ YMBC 960.1.3 “Minutes—YMBC Meeting March 14, 1960.”

¹² TU 960.1.3 “Minutes to YMBC Meeting 18 April 1960.”

¹³ TU 960.1.3 “Actions to Keep Taxes Home Asked by YMBC”; “Minutes YMBC Meeting Feb 1, 1960.”

to expand the college, its representatives spoke to the YMBC to secure public support for the sale of a local public park to the college.¹⁴ On the occasions when there were no speakers, the group showed movies, with titles like “Communism on the Map,” to reinforce the market-good/state-bad binary.¹⁵

The group’s original bylaws mandated that all members of the YMBC be white: “Applicants for membership shall be white business or professional men.”¹⁶ The exclusivity of white members helped create the embodied image of the modern southern businessman. The modern southern businessman was a symbolic and material idea of how to facilitate economic growth organized around corporate tax cuts. It provided a visual contrast to the agrarian and antebellum South. Situated within an economic struggle to revitalize the southern economy, their embodied images provided a point of emotional and cultural attraction that distinguished the urban business classes from the industrial and agrarian elites.

The lunch-in, newsletters, and banquets were all mediums to dispense idealized images of the modern southern businessman. While the YMBC advocated for minimal state involvement in the economy, it was part of the New South project that worried about the South’s premodern, violent and racist image. The lunch-in was a site where members of the group could shape the body—its tastes, how it was dressed, and how it spent its leisure time. The YMBC newsletter defined what the modern southern businessman did, drank, and looked like. The newsletter was sponsored by beauty salons advertising “Proper Grooming. A Must for the Career Woman.”¹⁷ At the YMBC’s “man of the year banquets,” it gave out prizes, which included men’s wardrobes, vacations to country clubs and dude ranches, and Old Crow Bourbon. Old Crow Bourbon is considered a moderately priced whiskey and would have been a cultural distinction between the modern southern businessman and agrarians’ higher-priced whiskey and signature drinks, like the “mint julep,” as well as the socially conservative religious community that continued to advocate prohibition. Overall, the ads overtly portrayed a modern idea of sophistication and the appearance of wealth and good taste that defined the modern southern businessman. The effects of these embodied cultural practices created the public image of the modern southern businessman that helped make ideas of tax cuts more attractive to southern whites and the South more attractive to northern business.

The YMBC racialized opposition to tax cuts. While the economic groups were more liberal in racial matters than were the segregationists, it did not mean they were above drawing from an existing racial language to associate their political and economic rivals with “black interests.” The YMBC singled

¹⁴ TU 960.1.4 “Letter to the Members of YMBC, from Chairman AJ Beck.”

¹⁵ TU 960.1.2 “Action—Official Publication of the Young Men’s Business Club of Greater New Orleans—Vol 40. Tues, Jan 10 1961, No. 2.”

¹⁶ TU 960.1.1 “Constitution of the Young Men’s Business Club of Birmingham, Alabama.”

¹⁷ TU 960.1.2 “Action—Official Publication of the Young Men’s Business Club of Greater New Orleans—Vol 40. Tues, Jan 10 1961, No. 2.”

out politicians, like a former Alabama state senate member Ryan Greenfield, as the “hidden negro vote” for voting to “disallow federal income tax deduction from state income taxes [and] supporting raising [the] state income tax rate on corporations to 5%.”¹⁸ Combined with the positive embodied image of white southern businessmen, the YMBC divided the economic debate along racial lines so poor rural whites could identify with the side advocating tax cuts.

The progressive business community created associations between black/public and white/private in its silence on the topic of race. Rather than business leaders strategizing how to link black with public and inferior, we find the link embedded in praxis and silence. When the economic community spoke of race, it was masked in the context of business and politics. It was rarely, if ever, directly stated. For instance, responding to the question of why he supported segregation, Thomas R. Waring, editor of the *Charleston News*, said:

Democracy cannot and will not work indefinitely. Sooner or later in a democracy special interest groups gain control and you have oligarchy. When this occurs there is economic chaos. A strong man—a dictator—emerges and you start all over again. We have always taken a dim view of small “d” democracy. We stand by an older form of government, small “r” republicanism, under which the vote is restricted to those deemed fit to use it.¹⁹

We can identify the linking of black-public-inferior in Waring’s text. The question of segregation provided the racial sign that Waring linked to “special interest groups,” “economic chaos,” a crisis in democracy, and “small ‘r’” government. The silence of black in combination with the degradation of all things public ensured a hegemonic position for the white/private signifier in political and economic discourse. The silence of black ensured that whites “taking care of the community” included whites benefiting from private investment.

The YMBC’s actions always reflected the interests of the white urban business class. During the 1963 negotiations to end the Birmingham Movement, YMBC leaders willingly extended low-level service-sector jobs to blacks while rejecting any actions that would have hurt business, such as stopping bus service during the protests.²⁰ However, they would not back desegregating schools. Club president William Shaw related the YMBC’s stance: “the club is not trying to force a school desegregation plan on anybody ... The fact of integration is not the doing of the YMBC or for that matter any local citizen of Birmingham.”²¹ Whereas the YMBC kept overt racial references out of its economic discourse, its actions to support racial segregation elsewhere

¹⁸ TU 960.1.9 “Newspaper titled ‘The Jeffersonian’ published monthly by the Citizens Press, JD Townes, editor.”

¹⁹ SE 15-2 Article titled “Leaders in South Present Views on Segregation Issue.” December 15, 1956, AP release, written by Bem Price.

²⁰ TU 960.1.13 “Letter to Birmingham Transit Authority.”

²¹ TU 960.1.6 “YMBC disclaims advocating mix, says merely facing it.”

produced a symbolic bridge to attract whites who supported racial segregation but did not want to hinder economic development.

It was in the space between the Old and New South that the language of tax cuts receives its “color.” Southern whites were caught between the Old South/New South tensions over how to restructure local governments, whether or not to attract new industry or revive dying ones, and how to incorporate blacks into the southern polity without making them equals. Business groups like the YMBC gave whites a way to distinguish themselves from blacks and other rural, and often, poor whites associated with the Old South. Whites could now talk of limiting the state’s presence in their life without using discourses of federalism or directly supporting racial segregation. However, the broader cultural power of tax cuts was realized after it was coupled with a language of privatization used by the school segregationists.

PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC: SPACES AND SCHOOLS

The school segregationists used a language of privatization to work around the federal school desegregation rulings. For the segregationists, privatization referred to using public money to establish private educational enterprises to maintain racial segregation. It was not for the purposes of making a profit. The segregationists used a discourse of privatization to degrade all things public as “black” and inferior and all things private as superior, and thus “white,” in their struggles to abolish the existing public school system. The logic was to remove schools from the public realm so that Alabama could legally keep the schools racially segregated through a system of publicly financed private schools.

We find use of privatization in two key bills introduced by the Alabama State Legislature between 1954 and 1955. The first was authored by the pro-business state senator and president of the Alabama White Citizens’ Council (and editor of its periodical, the *Alabamian*), Sam Engelhardt. Engelhardt first proposed a “School Placement Bill” in 1954 that would have assigned students to schools based the school’s existing faculty and facilities, as well as the student’s ability, home life, morals, social environment, and psychological ability (Grafton and Permaloff, 1985:186). The rationale for segregation was not based on overt racial rhetoric, but on the embodied social characteristics of students from “bad” families. This bill did not pass. However, it was Engelhardt’s position in both the business and segregationist communities and his use of a discourse of privatization that made the School Placement Bill important. Engelhardt’s proposed constitutional amendments replaced the word “public schools” with the word “education,” thereby, negating the very word public from the state constitution.²² Engelhardt gave a speech to a

²² SE 3-6 “Amend Alabama Constitution.”

pro-segregationist group where we see the explicit convergence of economic interests with the segregationists' interests.

Private corporations operate every kind of service and business even schools and colleges. The only trouble is that there are not enough privately owned education institutions to accommodate all persons seeking education and those that do lack sufficient capital to expand to the extent necessary TURNING OVER PUBLIC PROPERTY TO PRIVATE INTERESTS: Waterworks and other utilities have been sold to private corporations and been operated efficiently and successfully (Alexandria Virginia Waterworks).²³

Engelhardt defined private as superior to public because the private sector is more efficient than the public and it can be used to legally maintain racial segregation. The language of privatization was also used to define the second bill, Albert Boutwell's "Pupil Placement Act," that did pass. The idea behind the Pupil Placement Act was to give the State of Alabama the right to abolish public schools, allow state aid for private schools, to "gift" public facilities to private owners, and to give parents the choice to send their kids to segregated or desegregated schools. The passage of the "Pupil Placement Act" accompanied two important constitutional amendments. First was the removal of the word "public" from the phrase "public education" and the word segregation from the state constitution.²⁴ The legislature also approved a second constitutional amendment that "authorizes the state, city and county governments to sell or lease public parks to private operators, if necessary, in order to avoid integration by federal edict, as has already happened in other Southern States."²⁵ Privatization linked segregation with economic policy to privatize all public works, while positioning the private corporation in a superior position over government. The race question was used to silence the economic question, since the newspaper and public discussions focused only on school segregation.

Following the logic of the discourse of civil society, the segregationists embraced privatization as sacred as they were polluting its opposite "public." Public meant the federal government. Historically, the South, especially in the era under analysis, approached federal policy as an attack on the white southern way of life. As segregationist Frank Chodorov stated on the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling: "The decision simply means that the Federal government has undertaken to disregard the prevailing sentiment in these communities and to force these people to be 'good'."²⁶ Since the federal government was already the enemy, it was easy to use a discourse of privatization to attach ideas of federal, public, and black into a single discursive category. School desegregation provided the context to transform a "state rights issue"

²³ SE 4-8 "Speech to Support School Bill."

²⁴ MA 9 Sept 1954 "Special Session to Wipe Out Public School Unlikely Now"; MA 1 Sept 1955 "Outlook on School Bills Shaky as Deadline Nears."

²⁵ SE 15-1 "The Alabamian August 1956 volume 1, no. 2."

²⁶ ASRAP 416.1.3 "A Solution of Our Public School Program" by Frank Chodorov—printed in *Human Events*, Vol. XI, no. 20, May 19, 1954. Published at 1835 K Street, NW Wash DC.

into a local issue, and thus, brought the negative associations of black/public closer to home.

The segregationists denigrated black/public in their stories of the venereal body. The segregationists approached school integration as a moral problem, not an educational one. Stories of the body pertained to the imagined embodied effects of interracial schools, including interracial sex, syphilis, “illegitimate” children, and the negative psychological effects racial integration produced on white children. A single story of the Washington, DC school district, originally published in the *Washington Post* in November 1954, made its rounds in various pro-segregationist newsletters and publications. The thrust of the story was: “slightly more than 10 per cent of the gonorrhea cases reported in the District during the first six months of 1954 were youngsters 17 years of age and younger ... Of the 532 cases of school aged and under reported, 363 were female, and 169 male. Of the total, 523 were negro and 9 white.”²⁷ The dangers of moral degradation because of bodily contact simultaneously meant mental degradation. The State’s Rights Association liked to quote psychologist Carl Jung, who claimed:

The causes for the repressions can be found in the specific complex, namely, the living together with lower races, especially with negroes. Living together with barbaric races exerts a suggestive effect on the laboriously tamed instinct of the white race and tends to pull it down. Hence, the need for strongly developed defensive measures, which precisely show themselves in those specific features of American cultures.²⁸

Bodies are the one thing that all social groups can potentially control and understand. Diseases, penetrations, skin tones, postures, and grammars provide normative markers of good and bad. Whereas the modern southern businessman’s body symbolized the New South, the segregationists approached the mixing of interracial blood as the end of the Old South. Whereas the progressive business groups created an embodied white image for whites to aspire to, the segregationists used its opposite, a disgusting embodied white figure to avoid. For the segregationists, the preservation of the white body from imagined threats was about the reproduction of a white Old South moral order organized, in the first instance, on a white/black binary.

White segregationist opposition strengthened in response to blacks securing national civil and voting rights. Taking their cue from Boutwell’s Pupil Placement Act, the local segregationist groups continued to push for the use of public money to fund private schools. In 1963, school segregation groups in Birmingham began to imagine a parallel school system modeled after Prince Edward County, Virginia. A flyer titled “White People Think and Listen”

²⁷ Nearly all segregationist groups distributed this story for many years. See ASRAP 416.1.3 “Memorandum to Members by Olin Norton” and another in ASRAP 416.1.26 dated 1956. This story was retold in the *Birmingham Examiner* on January 27, 1963 not as an editorial, but as a news story. See “DC Schools Appalling,” BULL 268.14.53.

²⁸ ASRAP 416.1.26 Carl Jung quoted from “Memorandum to Members by Olin Norton” dated 1956.

announced a mass meeting on why whites should support private schools. Part of the text read:

The integrationist and Cowards Do Not Dare Mention It But PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, Virginia, Has Had Since 1959 and Still Operates Private Schools For White People. This Same System Can Also Be Put Into Effect Here. Birmingham Can Maintain and Support Private All-White Schools With Our Present White Teachers At A Cost Less Than Our Public Schools Because We Would Not Have To Support The Negro Schools.²⁹

The flyer used discourses of privatization to define black/public as an unfair economic burden on whites to provide an education for blacks. Integrated public schools were costly and inefficient. Public no longer meant open participation and public education no longer implied the collective good. Public was associated with black, with poverty, with shame, with failure. Anything associated with public was inferior to anything private.

Local groups targeted their local school system rather than continue the statewide struggle. In Birmingham, the school segregationists focused on the creation of a single school called Jefferson Academy. A pamphlet describing the need for a publicly financed private school reasoned: "If people of Jefferson County are to continue their traditional way of life, it is up to the people—not the courts or federal officials—to establish PRIVATE SCHOOLS free from political pressure and federal domination."³⁰ Echoing the segregationist sentiments of 1954, the pamphlet made a distinction between those receiving a public or private education, indicating that a private education was a superior education. "And the children of all parents who were determined to fight for freedom of choice and freedom of association are receiving as good or better education than offered by the public schools in this county."³¹ The debate over the quality of schools was not the issue; rather, the idea was to shift white students into a private tier school system that theoretically had the power to screen and judge worthy applicants. Denying black applicants was a given. However, this also opened up space to deny unworthy whites, as Jefferson Academy would accept only students who were: "willing and eager to learn, going to school for the purpose of getting an education, in association with their friends, mental equals and compatible classmates."³² The school drew from positive associations of "white" without naming either race.

In 1965, Selma passed the "Freedom Choice Plan" in response to the admittance of 20 black children into the Selma public school system. The idea behind the Freedom Choice Plan also championed the use of public money to establish private all-white schools in Selma. The plan created the John T. Morgan Academy (1965) and Meadowview Christian Church (1971) and effectively separated the races between public and private schools. The State of Alabama did not implement a broad school integration program until

²⁹ AAH "White People! Think and Listen," located in SG012655-6.

³⁰ VV 91-052 "Announcing Jefferson Academy (n.d) approximately 1963.

³¹ VV 91-052 "Announcing Jefferson Academy (n.d) approximately 1963.

³² VV 91-052 "Announcing Jefferson Academy (n.d) approximately 1963.

1971 (see Thorton, 2002). However, by 1971, the decentralization of southern urban areas enhanced school segregation and ushered in the era of *de facto* segregation.

WALLACE AND THE WHITE RESPONSE

Being a Southerner is no longer geographic. It's a philosophy and an attitude.

—Wallace presidential campaign speech, 1964

The shift from two legendary Alabama governors, James Folsom (1947–1951, 1955–1959) to George Wallace (four separate terms between 1964 and 1987) represented Alabama's transition from the Old to the New South. Folsom was a pro-New-Deal Democrat who used the power of the state to expand Social Security and school funding by increasing business, income, and property taxes. The pro-business associations in Alabama, including the Alabama Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, and Association of Industries, challenged Folsom's economic policy. He also faced opposition in the Alabama state senate from the "antis"—the pro-business/antistate coalition of the wealthy urban classes and black belt farmers who wanted taxes cut. The leaders of the antis were Boutwell and Engelhardt, who wrote the school privatization bills previously discussed. Despite the antibusiness backlash, Folsom won based on the support of rural and working-class white voters (blacks' voting rights were severely restricted in Alabama before the 1965 Voting Rights Act). Between Wallace and Folsom was John Patterson, who was pro-New-Deal and pro-segregationist. Wallace's political move in 1964 was to draw from and synthesize the segregationists with the liberal pro-business classes under a single discursive umbrella: the racial language embedded in tax cuts with the racial language embedded privatization.

Wallace's national popularity provides some evidence that whites interpreted racialized policy "correctly." As noted above, Wallace's importance was his role as an embodied carrier of cultural meanings and ideologies. Wallace became a national political figure with his 1964 and 1968 presidential runs. During the 1964 Democratic primaries, he took many white working-class votes away from Lyndon Johnson in the South and the North. He won 31% of the popular vote in Wisconsin and Indiana, and 43% in Maryland (Rogin, 1969). Rogin's research indicated that Wallace's support in Milwaukee, Wisconsin came from middle-class whites, while working-class whites supported him in Gary, Indiana (Rogin, 1969). A quote from a white Wallace supporter in Gary captures how the black/public association influenced white voters: "Negro housing projects ten years old have to be condemned, white projects twice as old were in fine condition" (quoted in Rogin, 1969:40). The combination of black/public rather than just public or just black made the distinction between white projects and black projects meaningful. Whites in Baltimore, Maryland cited their support of Wallace in relation

Table I. 1968 Presidential Support by Income (CBS Poll)

	Humphrey	Nixon	Wallace
High income	39%	54%	6%
Middle income	47%	43%	10%
Low income	49%	40%	11%

Source: Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report (1968).

to his opposition to a sales tax rather than just his position on race. However, as this article argues, the separation of race from tax cuts is a false distinction. Wallace symbolized the pretext that taxes had a racial component, meaning that blacks benefited more from the welfare state than whites did, and thus gave whites a political framework that was antiblack and antitax.

During his 1968 presidential run on the American Independence Party ticket, Wallace won 13.5% of the national vote and captured 46 Electoral College votes, all in the South. As reported in the November 8, 1968 *U.S. Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reporter*, Wallace's 1968 presidential support came from the middle- and low-income urban whites (see Table I). He surprisingly drew a decent portion of union voters, and not surprisingly, a sizable portion of rural voters. An NBC poll found that 22% of urban Italian neighborhoods, 17.8% of urban Slavic neighborhoods, and 13% of Jews supported Wallace. An NBC poll showed that 18% of households headed by a union member voted for Wallace, while 60% voted for Humphrey. In the South, Wallace garnered more support from middle-income whites than Humphrey, more low-income whites than Nixon, and more rural voters than both. The percentage of the popular vote may have been higher except that he ran as a third-party candidate. Although Wallace was in no position to win the presidency, his showing and support did represent a cultural trend that gradually manifested itself nationally in the subsequent decade. Thus, by 1968, wherever whites looked, they could not help but see a positive image of whites that embodied traditional U.S. liberalism—independent, active, modern, while at the same time see its opposite in blacks and their dependent relationship with the public sector, whether this was spoken in racially-neutral terms or not spoken at all.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article explored the emergence of a racialized language of white/private, black/public that became embedded in political and economic policy, and thus plays an important part of attracting white support for neoliberal policy. The voluntary sector in Alabama led the struggle to revitalize the economy through corporate tax breaks and by directing public money to private entities. The school segregationists produced an inverse relationship between public and private by recoding and then linking meanings of public with black

and private with white to combat school desegregation. This allowed both groups, albeit for different reasons, to define the federal government as an obstacle for Alabama's progress and, therefore, seek to limit the power, or "size" of the federal government, which ultimately benefited the liberal economic groups more than the white segregationists.

The notion of private as "superior" and "white" emerged as the common discursive structure that tied the segregationists with the liberal economic groups. The fusion of these two groups provided the pretext, in the form of the racially coded language of neoliberalism, that helped whites understand their social position in the post-civil-rights era. In *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber (2001) characterized capitalism as an economic system devoid of any moral or cultural orientation. Protestantism, in its tireless work ethic, unwittingly gave capitalism what it lacked and allowed it to spread throughout the Western world. In a similar way, the neoliberals needed the segregationist's attack on government and desire to privatize public schools to give tax cuts and privatization its color, which made it more attractive to whites who probably stood to gain more from well-funded social programs. Absent in this development was the role of expert economists. Both groups' normative idea of the South was organized around a white-private/black-public binary rather than economic theory.

On the flipside of this discursive classification is the deployment of the black/public signifier. Besides using an economic logic to denigrate the public sector in relation to the private sector, the black/public link has excused and excluded the private sector from responsibility in maintaining standards of living and human welfare. Only the public can deal with humanitarian issues, only the public can deal with the health and well-being of the poor. The more the public sector is called on to help the poor, the more the public sector is open to racially embedded neoliberal attacks on its wastefulness, inefficiency, and role in helping create the conditions of poverty that the public sector has been assigned to solve.

The liberal economic groups were neither overt racists nor supporters of black equality. In fact, they were the first to realize the power of a racially-neutral language to describe economic policy that benefited whites. While Bonilla-Silva was correct to note a change in how whites talk about blacks, the emergence of this language was in the 1950s rather than the 1970s. Furthermore, the importance of what is not said is as important as what is said. If we consider how the white racial frame is embodied, then we can understand how idealized images of whites produced positive sensations in other whites and would have had a major impact on how they perceived tax cuts, deregulatory actions, and privatization. Politicians who embody the white racial frame function as political symbols that make broader political-economic projects meaningful. Elites such as Wallace, who embodied the white racial frame, diffused cultural values (including racial attitudes) and ideologies at the level of the body. The neoliberal turn helped silence race in political discourse and hide it in plain sight, in our bodies, so that political identifications

can be interpreted without ever being spoken, which, in turn, has produced negative economic consequences for blacks and whites.

This article also contributes to two related debates on race and politics in the post-civil-rights era. The first is how welfare state social programs became associated with blacks to justify dismantling and restricting the expansion of the U.S. welfare state (Gilens, 1999; Quadagno, 1994). Quadagno argued that social programs associated with white workers, such as Social Security and, to some extent, unemployment insurance, have more or less been protected, whereas subsistence programs generally understood as welfare have become the subject of “wasteful government” rhetoric because of their associations with blacks. Gilens argued that images of urban black poverty replaced images of white rural and white ethnic poverty, which also created support for further dismantling of the welfare state. However, the question remains: Why make the additional move to privatize public amenities like public schooling and attack the expansion of public services like healthcare and old age insurance that have universal appeal to all racial and class groups? The answer is found in how private is linked with white. Privatizing is different from dismantling and produces a different outcome: rather than social programs for the poor, the neoliberal approach maintains them as exclusive rights of the most privileged (i.e., white, wealthy) segments of U.S. society.

The second contribution of this article is its finding of the start of a major political realignment that saw southern whites shift from the Democratic to the Republican Party. Many have already noted that the southern strategy was a thinly veiled use of racism (see Krugman, 2007; Perlstein, 2008). However, we should also understand the southern strategy and political realignment of this period as recoding the Democratic Party as the party of struggle. As whites, especially middle- and upper-class whites fled to the Republican Party, the public image of the Democrats became associated with women, blacks, gays, immigrants, or, quite simply, oppressed groups who are struggling for equality and are in the most need for social welfare programs. Subsequently, the Republican Party was no longer just the party of well-to-do whites, but also of the party of personal responsibility and thus did not need state services.

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