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“Behind the Veil”: Unmasking Anti-blackness in Presidential Discourse and Responses to Racialized Incidents

Kaleb L. Briscoe, Veronica A. Jones & Melvin A. Whitehead

Abstract: Discourses by university presidents in the wake of racialized incidents continues to be a pressing issue for higher education. Presidential rhetoric can harm those who experience racialized incidents, such as Black students. Using critical discourse analysis, we examined the variations of discourse that a president uses to respond to racialized incidents. Explicitly, as issues of anti-

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blackness continue to be prevalent within colleges and universities, we sought to highlight how the president's discourse reinforces anti-blackness narratives perpetuating systemic racism. We center Critical Race Theory and BlackCrit to name how university presidents wrestle with acknowledging anti-blackness. Through a Black liberatory fantasy stance, we offer a framework to engage in radical hope that reimagines what presidential rhetoric should look like, including how university presidents, administrators, and other campus leaders should respond to racialized incidents in meaningful ways that support Black communities and establish equitable policies and practices.

Keywords: anti-blackness, university presidents, discourse, critical race theory, racialized incidents

University presidents' rhetoric continues to be a pressing topic in higher education, especially in the aftermath of racialized incidents (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b; Cole & Harper, 2017; Squire et al., 2019). Within higher education literature, presidential statements have been scrutinized for how university presidents distance themselves from the incidents, rarely addressing groups and individually targeted communities who experience racialized incidents (Cole & Harper, 2017). Additionally, university presidents, through their rhetoric, often hold power in controlling the narrative of campus racism, and use discourse that affirms white ideologies (Jones, 2019). Further, university presidents and other campus leaders, such as communication officers, often fail to address racialized incidents through campus statements, if they acknowledge them at all (Squire et al., 2019). Overall, the campus community and students may deem presidential rhetoric in response to racialized incidents as vague, non-performative, and as anecdotal attempts to address the broader racial climate (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b; Cole & Harper, 2017; Squire et al., 2019).

Ultimately, presidential rhetoric has a unique level of institutional and higher education power more broadly, especially in this sociopolitical climate. Thus far, presidential rhetoric scholarship has primarily included analyses from university presidents who are white men at large research-intensive, predominantly white institutions (Jones, 2019; Cole & Harper, 2017; Squire et al., 2019). These analyses reflect national data from the American Council of Education (ACE) surrounding university presidents' positionality and race, as 72.1% of university presidents are white men, and only one in four are racially minoritized (Melidona et al., 2023). Our work aims to extend previous scholarship by interrogating the rhetoric of a President of Color, Dr. Wallace Loh, a Peruvian/American man born in China, who led the University of Maryland (UMD) of College Park from 2010–2020. His rhetoric should be of great interest to the field of higher education because of his antagonistic responses to anti-blackness at UMD and the severity of racialized incidents that occurred during 2015–2019, including a hate crime, the murder of

2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins III by a white supremacist (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024c). We also recognize that we must understand anti-blackness beyond a Black/White binary (e.g., Critical Race Theorists describe a need to look at race, not just from the experiences of Black and white people but to fully understand that racism is systemic and can be encapsulated by/through other races; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Therefore, this work also describes how even People of Color can perpetuate instances of anti-blackness.

Throughout our work we use Dumas's (2016) definition of anti-blackness as the attitudes, beliefs, and practices that deem, minimize, and devalue Black people. Systemically, Black people have been denied their humanity and dignity (e.g., slavery, access to education, voting rights, and ongoing police brutality; Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Harper et al., 2009). Further, anti-black racism is a specific kind of racial prejudice that Black people perceive (M. Cole, 2020). Racism does not fully capture the specific harm that Black people have endured in society. We use the term anti-black racism, which articulates the systemic and structural harm experienced by Black people, pointing to how anti-black racism messages portray Black people as at fault for inequities rather than connecting these logics to a white supremacist system (Dumas, 2016; Mustaffa, 2017).

Racism is a distinct ideology rooted in strategies of talk and text that reinforce privilege and oppression in ways that are normalized (Rogers & Mosley, 2006; van Dijk, 1987). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) allows for a systematic analysis of the meaning behind language choices, which have causal effects in sustaining certain ideologies (Fairclough, 2003). Scholars have utilized CDA to study how racism is operationalized through discourses of whiteness (Brook et al., 2015; Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017; McIntyre, 1997; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Although several studies have focused on anti-Black rhetoric related to affirmative action and campus policies (Patton, 2014; Sulé et al., 2022), there is a need for research specifically focused on anti-black racism within the power dynamics of presidential rhetoric.

In this article, we expand on previous research to explore how presidential discourse in response to racialized incidents can function as a mechanism for anti-blackness and anti-black exclusion. The following research questions guided this critical discourse analysis study: (1) What are the variations of discourse that a university president uses in responses to racialized incidents? (2) How does a university president's discourse on racialized incidents demonstrate narratives of anti-blackness? Through a Black Liberatory Fantasy stance, we offer a framework to engage in radical hope that reimagines what presidential rhetoric should look like while critiquing "our institutions for reproducing anti-blackness" (Stein, 2021, p. 406). This work offers hope to Black people who are often targeted by racialized incidents while providing university presidents, administrators, and other campus leaders strategies to

respond to racialized incidents in ways that meaningfully engage the experiences of Black campus communities and move toward increasing equitable policies and practices.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understanding Racialized Incidents and Institutional Responses Processes

Within higher education, there is a continued need to understand racialized incidents, campus racial climate, and institutional response processes (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b; Davis & Harris, 2015; Garcia et al., 2011; Hurtado, 1992; Yao et al., 2021). For decades, scholars have interrogated campus racial climate environments, explicitly the “attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity” (Hurtado et al., 2008, p. 205). Scholars have not only demonstrated minoritized populations racist experiences but contested environments that are often overly hostile and unwelcoming. Unfortunately, racialized incidents not only speak to the harm they cause campus constituents, but they also paint a stark picture of the psychological toll these incidents take on individuals (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b, 2022; Davis & Harris, 2015; Garcia et al., 2011).

When administrators fail to respond to racialized incidents, they cause significant and lasting harm to individuals and campus communities. This harm has prompted many scholars to delve into the institutional response processes (Davis & Harris, 2015; Garcia et al., 2011; Squire et al., 2019). It is important to understand the ways institutions have failed in this regard. First, institutions often take reactive steps, treating these occurrences as isolated incidents, if they respond at all (Davis & Harris, 2015; Squire, 2017). Second, they often lack systemic approaches, minimizing racist acts while maintaining their institutional innocence. This ultimately inflicts “additional violence on those whose daily experience forces their empathy with the victims” (Hughes, 2013, p. 129). Finally, the most well-documented issue is the rhetoric within campus statements by administrators (Briscoe, 2024a, 2022; Cole & Harper, 2017).

The most highly cited issue with how institutions respond is the rhetoric administrators use in campus statements (Briscoe, 2024a, 2022; Davis & Harris, 2015; Garcia et al., 2011; Squire, 2017; Squire et al., 2019). The rhetoric used within campus statements is deemed “hurtful...personally damaging...pain-provoking producing emotional distress for students, faculty, staff, and administrators” (Roper, 2019, p. 254). Moreover, it is common that the rhetoric used by administrators in the aftermath of racialized incidents has influenced how students perceive the campus more broadly (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Campus statements often use vague language,

and administrators deflect how systemic racism and institutional harm affect campus constituents' experiences (Annamma et al., 2017). Because campus statements rarely condemn racism, administrators are seen as distancing themselves from the incidents and betraying those harmed by the racist acts (i.e., targeted populations are offended when administrators protect the university's reputation by calling out instances of white supremacy and hate; Davis & Harris, 2015).

Scholars have described how administrators see the institutional commitment or lack thereof when engaged in equity-minded work, as their rhetoric demonstrates "what institution is behind and gets behind," also known as non-performative rhetoric (Ahmed, 2012, p. 114). Non-performative rhetoric demonstrates how universities and administrators can present a commitment to racial equality that exceeds what is dictated in law but boldly declare commitment to opposing racism through speech acts that perform actions, not just words. Many scholars have written about the empty promises that administrators make when racialized incidents occur using language in campus statements that reinforces inaction without condemning racism (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b; Squire et al., 2019). Administrators often use generic diversity language (i.e., we believe in diversity, equity, and inclusion), just stating something without representing what they state (e.g., we will expel those who target minoritized populations through racialized incidents; Ahmed, 2012; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Unfortunately, higher education "still represents the complex relations between race, property, and oppression...and the academy is overwhelmingly white terrain in terms of physical representation of white students and symbolically in terms of curriculum, campus policies, and campus spaces" (Patton, 2016, p. 320). Without administrators' willingness to move towards action-oriented language claiming responsibility for racialized incidents, higher education institutions will perpetuate whiteness and color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017).

Examining Presidential Rhetoric in Response to Racialized Incidents

University presidents have a unique role in responding to racialized incidents on college campuses. Racialized incidents can include white supremacy fliers, racial messaging of the N-word, Blackface photos, and nooses (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Davis & Harris, 2015; Garcia et al., 2011; Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2016; Yao et al., 2021). Only a few studies have described presidents' responses to racialized incidents, such as work by Cole and Harper (2017), which revealed how college presidents' statements "hardly mention the racial incidents, make perpetrators the focal point, and rarely situate racial incidents within larger issues of systematic and institutional oppression" (Cole & Harper, 2017, p. 326). Presidents have used statements to reassure institutions' commitments to diversity, but without naming the racialized acts and condoning the perpetrator, university presidents can perpetuate a

cycle of racial avoidance (Cole & Harper, 2017). Those targeted by racialized incidents often find themselves racially traumatized, which can cause long-term effects (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b; Cole & Harper, 2017; Yao et al., 2021). Additionally, presidents' engagement in "AllStudentsMatter" rhetoric encompasses a desire for 'good' diversity that "inherently connects goodness to all students at the university, and therefore, the university as good" (Squire et al., 2019, p. 130). Unfortunately, university presidents' rhetoric, similar to their actions, often encompasses minimal changes to appease Students of Color (Squire et., 2019).

Indeed, university presidents often reinforce racism through their rhetoric. Jones (2019) evidenced through their study of presidential responses that, although presidents can use affective speech to convey emotion, such narratives often approach racism from a theoretical or symbolic perspective that is rarely followed up with concrete action. Rather than addressing larger issues of systemic racism in campus practices and policies, presidents in the study focused on ideals such as individual racism, color-evasiveness, respect, and civility. A compelling part of this critical discourse analysis on presidential statements was students' responses to presidents' statements on social media (Jones, 2019). A specific example from this work about the University of Maryland described a Black student's response to President Loh's statement about a hate crime that occurred on campus:

President Loh commented that the incident had "shaken" him, a Black student replied, "@presidentloh: How has this shaken you? Why are you so surprised? Ask any Black student and they will tell you this has been going on." Because social media provides interplay between the speaker and receiver, this interchange exemplifies the disconnect of those in power to the pervasiveness of racism experienced by students. (p. 22)

Black students have formed opinions on how university presidents respond to racialized incidents and have scrutinized their rhetoric. More recently, Black graduate students have described how, because of university presidents' untimely and inappropriate responses to these occurrences, they have felt othered, silenced, and marginalized (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b). Unfortunately, the rhetoric used by university presidents in campus statements demonstrates how they often use non-performative and anti-blackness rhetoric without questioning the well-being of those targeted and providing actionable institutional responses. This context leaves Black students to question their leadership and approach to addressing historical, systemic, and institutional instances of racism. However, Bell and Hartmann's (2007) scholarship mentions how leaders rarely ascend to this leadership level as they lack progressiveness in understanding systemic inequality and race politics. While only a few studies have examined presidential rhetoric in

response to racialized incidents, our work calls for a deeper understanding of how specific ideologies, such as anti-blackness, might be embedded in campus statements, which would further describe how administrators need to be held accountable for the rhetoric they use as they are in positions of power. Our work is representative of many university presidents' inability to name anti-blackness and calls for a system analysis of the obscure structural inequities that exist in presidential rhetoric.

Anti-blackness in United States Higher Education

Anti-blackness, which originated from Afro-pessimism stance, often describes the ongoing effects of anti-black racism. More broadly, anti-blackness speaks to how history impacts structural conditions for Black people, which continue to influence their lived experiences (Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016). Afro-pessimism posits anti-blackness as an ideological structure that situates Blackness as inherently opposite a human designation, not simply a *lesser* or *unequal* one (Gordon, 1997; Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2010). Within an Afro-pessimist frame, chattel slavery (e.g., slavery where people were considered property and regularly sold) is an ongoing relational dynamic that renders Black bodies *socially dead* (Patterson, 1982) and as commodities (Hartman, 1997). These views situate the re-justification of violence against Black bodies as things to be possessed as property (Dumas & ross, 2016). In distinguishing *racism* from *anti-blackness*, we point to how Afro-pessimist theorizations elucidate *Black* beyond race to interrogate how enduring, gratuitous forms of violence shape who is and who is not considered human (rather than who is or is not considered equal).

Through these various forms of violence, anti-blackness is endemic in reproducing institutionalized Black suffering within U.S. higher education. Dancy and colleagues' (2018) analysis revealed how deeply entrenched policies and practices within higher education continue to perpetuate the norms and logics of settler colonialism and chattel slavery. They further described how institutions can engage in "plantation politics," including how institutional racism and universities have a history of treating Black people as property (e.g., commodifying Black thoughts and ideas for the institution's benefit). Within higher education, anti-blackness has included the display of nooses (symbols of anti-black violence through their connections to lynching and white domination), white supremacist fliers on campus, institutional exploitation of Black student-athletes, the commodification of Black thoughts and ideas for institutions' benefit, anti-Black themed campus parties, ongoing police brutality, exclusionary admissions practices and anti-Black notions of merit (Dancy et al., 2018; Hughes, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2021; Mustaffa, 2017; Okello, 2022; Smith et al., 2007; Sulé et al., 2022). Given the historical roots of anti-blackness, these manifestations of contemporary anti-blackness on U.S. college campuses point to the enduring *afterlife of slavery* (or the continuing

conditions that imperil Black lives and the possibility of Black humanity; Hartman, 2007). In short, structural anti-blackness (through educational policies and practices) goes beyond a disdain for all that is Black; it renders Black people as not human, and therefore contributes to the exploitation, alienation, violence, and other forms of Black suffering that Black people within U.S. higher education continue to experience today (Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Mustaffa, 2017; Sulé et al., 2022).

Additionally, universities have a legacy of anti-blackness (Anderson, 1988), which includes how university presidents have enacted racism and violence (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b; E. Cole, 2020). University presidents have been known to engage in anti-black practices, as many former university presidents enslaved Black people during their tenures as college administrators (Wilder, 2013). Anti-blackness persists within institutional rhetoric about inclusion, to target and exclude Black people through ideologies of absence (Stewart, 2019), and university presidents' rhetoric can also foster these practices. While few scholars have focused exclusively on anti-blackness within higher education institutional rhetoric, Stewart (2019) framed this rhetoric as a "language of appeasement" that allows administrators to "avoid the more challenging and disruptive discussion of equity and justice" (p. 21). Sulé and colleagues (2022) called attention to the salience of embedded anti-blackness within institutional discourse on merit tied to college admission and affirmative action practices. They found that anti-blackness shapes how universities must be willing "to unpack how anti-blackness is nested within and beyond campus spaces. Faculty and campus administrators have a responsibility to examine and challenge anti-blackness in their individual practices and in campus programming and policies" (p. 416). In this study, we incorporate Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black critical theory (BlackCrit) to illustrate how presidents' discourse reinforces the oppressive social structures Black students experience in higher education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to explore the ways that presidents' responses can reproduce anti-blackness, we employ the theoretical principles of CRT and BlackCrit. CRT serves as a theoretical and methodological tool to make sense of how university presidents respond to racialized incidents on their campuses. CRT originated from critical legal studies (CLS) that challenge the subordination of marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1988). Early CRT scholars critiqued the failure of CLS to specifically analyze race as a key factor in societal structures and thus sought to explicitly name how People of Color were made subordinate (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Through the use of CRT, scholars can explicitly name the inherent racism embedded into U.S. systems and institutions through the following concepts: a) the

permanence of racism; b) challenge of dominant frames such as objectivity, race neutrality, and meritocracy; c) a historical analysis of group privilege and oppression; d) centering the experiential knowledge of People of Color; e) intersectionality; and f) interest convergence (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; Morfin et al., 2006).

Another key concept related to CRT that scholars have explored is the recognition that whiteness as property, the historical exclusion of People of Color and ideological assertion of the superiority of white individuals, is the foundation of inequity (Harris, 1993). Particularly connecting race and property to the inequity that Black people experience, Ladson-Billings (2016) noted that historically, "not only were they not accorded individual civil rights because they were not White and owned no property, but they were constructed as property! However, that construction was only in the sense that they could be owned by others" (p. 22). Harris' (1993) conceptualization of whiteness as a property right was detailed into four areas: rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, rights to reputation and status, and the right to exclude (i.e., a capacity for determining who is white and who can be excluded from the privileges associated with whiteness). We focus in this article on the right to exclude because that ideal is based on myths of white superiority and Black inferiority, a dynamic that positions Black students as outsiders in institutions of higher education (Iverson, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Patel (2015) applied Harris' work on whiteness as property to dominant ideologies within higher education, in that they have done the work of "obscuring the longstanding, pervasive, and intertwined systemic barriers to well-being for nondominant populations" (p. 663). We assert that presidents in the ways they construct race and racism can uphold those oppressive ideologies in ways that protect whiteness and harm Black students.

We also used BlackCrit as a framework for conceptualizing anti-blackness within university presidents' statements. BlackCrit acknowledges the difference between theorizing racism (e.g., CRT) and theorizing Blackness (e.g., BlackCrit), including how Dumas and ross (2016) critiqued CRT for a lack of description of how anti-blackness uniquely positions Black people within the United States education system. Dumas and ross (2016) points to how "BlackCrit intervenes at the point of detailing how policies and everyday practices find their logics in, and reproduce Black suffering?" (p. 429). With this premise, Dumas and ross (2016) offered three framing ideas towards a BlackCrit. First, anti-blackness is endemic and central to how people make meaning of various dimensions of human life. Dumas and ross (2016) position anti-blackness not as simply a form of racism against Black people, but as an antagonistic relationship between blackness and the possibility of humanity; an ideology that constructs Blackness as "a thing despised in and of itself ... in opposition to all that is pure, humane, and white" (pp. 416–417).

Dumas and ross's (2016) second framing idea towards a BlackCrit names Blackness as existing in contention with neoliberalism and multiculturalism. Here, Dumas and ross (2016) argue Black people are frequently framed as impediments to multicultural progress; neoliberal discourse frames racial disparities as problems that Black people (or Blackness) created rather than structural problems that disproportionately target Black communities. A neoliberal multicultural imagination posits that due to the success of People of Color racism has ended and that Black people are the cause of disparities in educational achievements, joblessness, higher incarceration issues, and systemic oppression and violence. Thus, making it seem as if Black people are standing in the way of their own multicultural progress.

Finally, Dumas and ross (2016) call for Black liberatory fantasy (e.g., the creation and manifestation of physical, cognitive, and spiritual spaces that centers Black identity and experiences) through radical hope. Grant et al. (2020) argue that radical hope challenges the world to transform and make space for Black people being enough in society. For Black people to fully exist in their Blackness, one must imagine beyond their current existence to include cultivating spaces such as universities and classrooms into possibility sites (Grant et al., 2020). Additionally, Dumas and ross (2016) acknowledge the need to center anti-blackness in educational research to address Black suffering and resist racist white histories and dominant narratives of Black people, which speaks directly to the focus of our work.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology

In order to examine how presidents discourses revealed narratives of anti-blackness, we utilized critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA, which can be connected to critical social theory in that it critiques domination and oppression, provides a framework to understand the relationship between discourse and the social world (Freire, 1970; Rogers, 2011). Because language has social consequences, it is essential to study the discursive tools of those in power, who through their representation of ideologies determine which social groups gain access to social goods (van Dijk, 1998). The exploration of power through discourse is central to CDA, as power "differentiates and selects, includes and excludes" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 2). Whiteness and its associated ideologies (e.g., the right to exclude) are embedded into society in various forms of language (McIntyre, 1997; van Dijk, 1987). Rogers and Mosley (2006) described discursive frameworks as ways to show "how talk and texts provide artifacts for people to see the ways that social/institutional and cognitive models of racism unfold and have material consequences for their participants" (p. 467). Just as the authors emphasized a lack of studies

that analyzed the form and function of white talk, in this study we address the need to understand discursive frameworks of anti-blackness that have social consequences for Black students in higher education.

Although there are many approaches to CDA, critical discourse studies typically explore the relationship between critique, ideology, and power (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Fairclough (2015) emphasized the role of interpretation within CDA, in that "the analyst is in the position of offering (in a broad sense) interpretations of complex and invisible relationships" (p. 59). In this study, we relied on two distinctive features: intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Intertextuality deals with the connections between different texts, as arguments may be recontextualized when discussed in a new context (Fairclough, 2003, 2015; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Interdiscursivity relates to the ways that discourses in different topical areas are linked to each other. Fairclough's (2003) CDA approach to textual analysis focuses on an interdiscursive analysis of orders of discourse, including genres, styles, and discourses, as three meanings that simultaneously occur within any given text. Genres, ways of acting, refer to the ways that different texts "hang together" (Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 472), in that different types of language interact (e.g., metaphors, repetition, and interruption). Styles, ways of being, represent the characteristics of speech connected to certain identities, evidenced through speech patterns such as passive or active voice, use of pronouns, and affective speech. Discourses, ways of representing, connect speech to larger ideologies that show one's position in the world, revealing macro-narratives such as anti-blackness and race neutrality. Genre, style, and discourse can be described as semiotic categories to explore the relationship between social structures, practices, and events (Fairclough, 2005, 2016; Rogers, 2011). In studying the economic logics of higher education using CDA, Taylor (2020) emphasized the need for an interdiscursive analysis of discourse to identify how ideologies are present within text and how they compete with and resist other ideologies. As hegemony includes a desire to maintain dominance through discourse, making an ideology as common sense and undetected (Fairclough, 2003), orders of discourse allowed us to interrogate the competing presence of whiteness and anti-blackness within presidential responses to racism.

Data Collection

For this article, we focused on the University of Maryland (UMD), College Park, a large, public research institution in the Mid-Atlantic, where we collected presidential statements. Its administrators have a legacy of mistreating Black people and students through acts of racism. Racialized incidents at UMD between 2015 and 2019 were especially harmful to Black students and heightened nationally due to social media and the president Dr. Wallace Loh's responses (Tkacik, 2017), which led us to collect these statements from this

period. Racialized incidents during this time included Black students being pepper-sprayed by campus police, white supremacist fliers posted around campus, nooses found in a fraternity house and in the Black student union, the murder of 2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins III, and the death of Jordan McNair. President Loh's responses have been highly publicized and criticized, prompting Black students to march and hold sit-in protests to highlight racial climate concerns (Limon, 2017), as such we believed that examining this president's discourse was of significant value to higher education. Refer to Table 1 for more details about the president's statements.

Additionally, we aimed to understand Dr. Loh's rhetoric due to his positionality and complicated history with issues of race and racism. Dr. Loh was born in China and moved with his family from Peru. He was born a non-native speaker and recanted stories of what it was like immigrating to the United States, recalling how he persevered despite various obstacles. He previously served as a professor of public policy, where his scholarship and teaching focused on law and social change in criminal justice reform. In 1990, he became the Dean of the University of Washington School of Law and was noted as the first Chinese-American to oversee a law school in the United States. Loh's background as an Executive Vice President and Provost at the University of Iowa, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Seattle University led to his appointment as UMD president. Dr. Wallace Loh served as the president of UMD from 2010-2020. While at UMD, he would rarely use the word "Black people" or "African American," but instead, in the wake of racialized incidents, he often referenced Black issues as broader racial concerns through a lens associated with "People of Color" language (e.g., meaning he would not name how these acts were anti-black but rather how they harmed all racial/ethnic communities). The UMD community often viewed his positionality and personal experiences with race and racism as hindering his ability to address anti-blackness through institutional responses (Briscoe, 2024b).

Data Analysis

To analyze the statements, we used a dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough, 2016). This approach includes a critique of the interplay of structures of power (e.g., campus administrators and others who hold privilege), practices (e.g., policies that reinforce bias), and actions (i.e., physical harm against Black students) to show that these realities cannot be separated. The four steps as outlined by Fairclough include 1) concentrating on a social wrong; 2) identifying barriers to addressing the social wrong; 3) determining if the social order depends on the social wrong; and 4) identifying ways to move past the barriers. In the first step, we focused on the social wrong of administrative reinforcement of anti-blackness, doing a line-by-line reading of each presidential statement to look for points of entry. In the second step, we

TABLE 1.
PRESIDENT CAMPUS STATEMENTS

<i>Title</i>	<i>Date of Incident</i>	<i>Date of Response</i>	<i>Description of Incident</i>
President Loh: Recommendations on Byrd Stadium Naming	September 28, 2015	December 7, 2015	Renaming of football stadium after racial segregationist president
President’s Message	May 21, 2016	May 26, 2016	Black students being pepper sprayed by campus police at an off-campus party (Initial Campus Email)
Courtyards Incident Review Complete: The Path Forward	May 21, 2016	July 14, 2016	Black students being pepper sprayed by campus police at an off-campus party (Update from president/campus police)
True to Our Values	November 17, 2016	January 26, 2017	Coalition of student groups present 64 demands to president/campus leaders after noose found in Black student union
President Loh’s Statement on Fliers	December 12, 2016	March 14, 2017	White supremacist fliers posted around campus
Statement on Hate Incident	April 27, 2017	May 5, 2017	Nooses found in a Phi Kappa Tau fraternity house by a Black chef
Update: homicide investigation by campus, country, and federal law enforcement	May 20, 2017	May 22, 2017	Murder of 2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins III by a student who embodied white supremacist ideologies (Initial Campus Email)
We All Must Fight Racism, Extremism, and Hate	May 20, 2017	June 2, 2017	Murder of 2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins III by a student who embodied white supremacist ideologies (Campus Update)
UMD Senate and president’s office: We must be transparent and work together to fight hate	May 20, 2017	June 20, 2017	Aftermath of Murder of 2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins III by a student who embodied white supremacist ideologies (Campus Update on Hate Crimes Policy)

Table 1, cont.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Date of Incident</i>	<i>Date of Response</i>	<i>Description of Incident</i>
Announcement: Chief Diversity Officer	May 20, 2017	July 6, 2017	Aftermath of Murder of 2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins III by a student who embodied white supremacist ideologies (Campus Update on hiring Chief Diversity Officer)
Making Our Campus More Inclusive and Respectful for All	May 20, 2017	May 3, 2018	President sharing results of task force assessment of campus racial climate
Our Commitment to Student-Athletes	June 13, 2018	September 21, 2018	Death of Jordan McNair, Black football player who collapsed and had heat stroke in front of UMD White Athletics Staff

completed both an interdiscursive and linguistic/semiotic analysis of the texts (Fairclough, 2016). We connected patterns of genre and style to discourse, in that speech attributes can be connected to larger ideologies of inequity reflected through campus events. We created an analytical framework using our theoretical frameworks of CRT, whiteness as property, and BlackCrit (see Table 2) to reflect the presence and relationship of genre, style, and discourse (Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Fairclough 2015; Rogers, 2011; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). This process gave deeper meaning to the ways that those in power can reinforce narratives of the exclusion and inferiority of Black students. We framed the interplay of these textual relationships ultimately within the power that university presidents hold in upholding policies and practices that cause physical and mental harm to Black communities and fail to acknowledge their humanity. In the third step, we considered how anti-blackness rhetoric helps presidents to maintain power and the othered status of Black students in white normed spaces. In the final step, we categorized the major discursive strategies used by the president to think through possible means of resistance to anti-blackness. Several trustworthiness strategies such as memoing and peer debriefing were used during the collection and analysis process. Finally, we acknowledge the transferability of our study’s findings as the interrogation of presidential rhetoric within our research, including our discussion of Black populations, is applicable to many contexts within higher education.

TABLE 2.
ANALYSIS CODEBOOK

<i>Genre (ways of interacting)</i>	<i>Style (ways of being)</i>	<i>Discourse (ways of representing)</i>
Changing the topic	Absence of talk	Anti-blackness
Contradiction	Active vs passive voice	Dehumanizing the Black experience
Counter-arguments	Affective responses	Dominant narratives protecting whiteness and positioned against Black lives
Metaphors	First person vs. third person	Inclusion
Overlapping talk	Objective vs. subjective speech	Politeness
Repetition	Politeness/civility	Power and privilege
Previous discourse	Pronouns to show commonality	Refusal to name racism or racists
Resistance	Pronouns to show distancing	Silencing of Black voices and Whiteness as property

Researchers’ Positionality

As a starting point in our reflective practice and positionality, we borrow Sharpe’s (2016) depiction of how “history and present terror, from slavery to the present, as the grounds of everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies” (p. 37). As Black scholars, we have physically and mentally experienced residual harm as we watch Black people be murdered nationally in churches (e.g., Charleston Church Massacre) and grocery stores (e.g., Buffalo mass shooting), and then come to predominantly white campuses, our places of employment, only to witness Black students being murdered there too. We mourn these lives and wonder when university presidents will take an active stance in their discourse to condemn white supremacy and hate because words have power. Collectively, we all are committed to using critical frameworks and methodologies in our research to reveal the pervasiveness of racism in higher education, and thus bring those commitments to this study as a lens to interpret presidential discourse.

FINDINGS

Through Fairclough's (2016) dialectical-relational approach, we recognized patterns of genre, style, and discourse, which together reveal the social process through which administrators reinforce rhetoric on campus. Ultimately, President Loh's speech supported authoritative power while reducing racism to a broad concept detached from students' realities, evidencing the president's ability to diminish the lived experiences of Black students. Our findings revealed how Loh engaged discourses of whiteness and anti-blackness in response to racialized incidents on campus. First, Loh invoked whiteness as a right to frame historical meanings of exclusion in ways that justified racism and framed Black students' perspectives as inferior or invalid. Second, our findings reveal how Loh evaded contextualizing incidents through historical meanings of privilege and oppression, thus justifying the use of physical force against Black students and downplaying symbols and structures that continuously harm Black students. Finally, we revealed how Loh utilized his power through anti-blackness rhetoric to not only silence Black voices in taking ownership of their demands, but also to position himself as a champion of a commodified notion of diversity.

Invoking Whiteness as Property as a Right to Exclude

In several examples throughout his rhetoric, we found that President Loh exemplified how historical exclusions of the rights and voices of Black people were carried through dominant ideologies reinforcing Black students as outsiders. The president positioned whiteness as a form of property in the ways that he evoked the legacy of former UMD president Harry Clifton "Curley" Byrd (a white segregationist). While announcing his recommendation to change the name of Byrd Stadium to Maryland Stadium in September 2015, Loh asserted, "[Byrd] laid the foundation for today's achievements. He earned his place in our University's history." Loh used the *earned* as indicative of the right of someone in power to find a campus on ideologies of white supremacy—including the right to exclude students deemed to be "not white" from the privileges of whiteness (Harris, 1993), as Byrd was known to reject Black students from admission. Within this context, asserting the right to the use of a racist reputation reinforced the right to exclude the meanings such a decision invoked from the very individuals who were excluded under Byrd's legacy.

In the statement mentioned above, Loh's rhetoric also illustrates how he protected whiteness through the right to exclude, further positioning Black students and alumni as outsiders. In his response to their stance that the name of the stadium—of prominent visibility that served as a "front porch" to the institution—sent a message of racist exclusion, Loh used marginalizing language to frame Black students' and alumni's perceptions of the ra-

cial climate: "for them, this past is more than mere history." Our anti-black analytical framework allows us to show how the words *for them* signify othering language that ostracizes Black campus community members). We further evidenced that Loh invalidated Black campus community members' perspectives:

History is not about the past. It concerns today's debates about the past. We must be wary of "presentism" – judging historical figures based on contemporary moral standards. It is unfair to fault them for not transcending the values of their time, even when we no longer subscribe to those values.

In this passage, Loh reduced racism to a debate, upheld a white normative view of history, and used the word *wary* to dismiss Black students' and alumni's acknowledgement of systemic racism and its impact on today's systems and symbols. In so doing, Loh ignored historical legacies of racist exclusion in understanding current racial climate issues on campus. This discursive framing of history (e.g., justifying the separation of past individual actions from present systemic racism) positions Black individuals as outsiders (Iverson, 2012). The example above exemplifies how a president, even a President of Color, can utilize their position of power to challenge Black individuals' resistance to revisionist histories that exempt white people from their role in racial oppression.

Our analysis shows that President Loh invoked this strategy in several instances across his messages, particularly through his emphases on values as color-evasive and race-neutral. In a statement in May 2018 outlining findings from the Joint President and Senate Task Force on Inclusion and Respect, Loh stated, "the majority of respondents feel welcome at our University, but there are differences based on one's racial or other personal identification." He concluded his recommendations by asserting that the university should develop a more inclusive and respectful culture, "anchored by our core values and principles." First, not only did Loh evade naming which populations (assumed to be Black students and other Students of Color) the findings referred to, he reframed *racism* as difference and foreclosed opportunities for marginalized communities to take agency and name their realities. Further, Loh continued to couch core values as *our* values and principles, negating the reality that Black students' cultural ideologies have been historically excluded from the creation of campus values. Because dominant white ideologies work to reinforce sustained systemic obstructions against People of Color (Patel, 2015), Loh's efforts to establish solidarity around core principles, with no regard for specific lived experiences with oppression, only further reveal Black students' exclusion from those meanings.

In a statement in May 2017, Loh addressed the on-campus murder of Richard Collins III—a Black student at Bowie State University and newly

commissioned second lieutenant in the United States. Army— at the hands of a white student (who exhibited white supremacist ideologies). He declared, “We must all do more to nurture a climate—on campus and beyond— where we stand against hate, we fight against hate crimes.” In a follow-up message about the investigation being conducted by several law enforcement agencies, Loh pointed out their charge to “examine whether racial hatred was a motive, given the suspect’s association with an online white supremacist group; the victim was black.” Here we establish that Loh disconnects the realized products of white supremacy, racial hate and power, from the resulting murder of a Black man. Such a failure to recognize the connection only works to negate his insistence that the campus will “stand” against hate. Further, this separation of white ideologies from racially motivated hate crimes points to his right to exclude historical consequences of white supremacy, namely lynching and violent murders of traumatized Black people as a collective, from the significance of this incident. Thus, the president invoked whiteness as property in shielding the very ideals of white superiority that exclude Black people from human dignity and make them a target for racial violence.

Failure to Contextualize Anti-blackness with Privilege and Oppression

Within several statements, President Loh illustrated how the interconnect-edness between structures, practices, and actions enable those in power to dehumanize Black people at the University of Maryland College Park. In our analysis of May 2016 statements, we discovered that President Loh framed the use of pepper spray by campus police through generic concepts of racism, specifically in refusing to connect their actions with law enforcement’s legacy of anti-blackness. In this sense, Loh practiced what Sexton (2010) called *people-of-colorblindness* [sic], or “a form of colorblindness inherent to the concept of ‘people of color’ ... that misunderstands the specificity of anti-blackness and presumes or insists upon the monolithic character of victimization under white supremacy” (p. 48). In another statement following the investigation, Loh referred to a “charged time in our nation,” yet evaded naming the “charged time” as police brutality and murder of Black individuals across the United States. By not explicitly naming this context of state-sanctioned anti-black violence, Loh minimized the magnitude of the campus police’s actions and normalized anti-Black dehumanization.

In President Loh’s response in July 2016 to the campus police using pepper spray against Black students, we examined how he further erased the historical legacies of anti-blackness by upholding dominant narratives about policing: “[The campus police] are dedicated guardians, sworn to serve and protect. All of us respect and appreciate the difficult work they do, the sacrifices they make in the line of duty. We owe them our support.” Loh’s characterization of the campus police as *guardians* that are *owed* reverence erases the institution of policing from its historical perpetuation of state-sanctioned anti-Black vio-

lence. In a present-day context, Loh's rhetoric also invokes the white normed Blue Lives Matter rhetoric, which has been used to counter and discredit the Black Lives Matter movement's fight for freedom and justice. Further, through the use of *us* and *we*, Loh supplanted power-conscious counter-narratives about policing with hegemonic narratives rooted in white supremacy. This example illustrates how strategic pronoun usage in presidents' statements can serve as tools of domination through creating, controlling, and imposing dominant narratives in ways that uphold white ascendancy (Gusa, 2010).

Yet, in his initial message in May 2016, our analysis reveals his contradictory justification of the power police hold in mistreating Black students through physical violence, by immediately following with a generic discussion of Black oppression:

The investigation focuses on whether the actions of the officers, including the use of pepper spray, was appropriate in this situation... This incident compels us to confront the reality that African-Americans, and other persons of color, experience bias and unequal treatment in everyday life.

In this messaging, Loh used distancing by approving the *appropriate* actions of campus police and then condemning the bias of *African American reality*, as if these are not intertwined. In fact, the actions of the campus police reinforce that very bias and oppression. Loh noted in his response that the investigation of the police department was done internally, another indication of practices of those in dominant power structures to maintain power. Although he described the encounter as an "antagonistic approach," he later asserted that the approach was "deemed justified." Our analytical lens of whiteness as property as the right to exclude shows how Loh invoked an authoritative position in upholding the investigation, divorcing the process from any accountability for those in power who can carry out anti-black sentiment through violence. In addition, Loh treated the lived realities of Black students as separate from his applauding of what he labeled as the "transparency, accountability, and decisiveness" of the police. He reinforced their decision with no questioning while positioning the marginalized Black students as an afterthought:

These students shared their anguish, anger, fear, and trauma. Many others reached out to me on social media. To all affected by this incident, I hear you, I may not be able to respond to each of you individually, but please continue to share with me your thoughts and concerns.

We reveal how Loh exhibited power by presenting the police as an authoritative and unbiased force whose judgements must be addressed, in contrast to the emotionally charged sentiments of students, who he may or *may not* engage with. Our interdiscursive analysis reveals that while outwardly sup-

portive, presidential messaging can position groups against each other in ways that diminish Black voices and deem them as less valuable.

Our analysis shows that Loh's discussion of the completed pepper spray investigation further exhibited bias towards the police by using language that reinforced authoritative power: "The main finding is that deployment of pepper spray, while justified under the circumstances, could have been avoided if the police, upon arrival at the apartment, had been tactful and professional, as prescribed by UMPD policy." Loh's use of *justified* establishes his belief that the officers' physical violence against the Black students was warranted and reasonable. Loh followed this assertion with subjective language, *tactful* and *professional*, which connects to the fact that those with authoritative power have the ability to determine what behavior is appropriate. Loh's justification of the use of excessive force against Black students by campus police is consistent with broader ideologies rooted in anti-blackness that position Black bodies as suspect and targeted for death (Dumas & ross, 2016). Although Loh claimed that community policing, rather than confrontational policing, was "essential to building trust between the police and the policed," his word choice of *police* and *policed* framed Black students as subjects that must be controlled.

Similarly, in September 2018, Loh's statement, in the aftermath of the student-athlete death of Jordan McNair, positioned individual responsibility as more important than addressing an athletic culture that did not value Black life:

I would like to share with you this update following today's Board of Regents meeting on the tragic death of our student-athlete Jordan McNair. In August, Athletic Director Damon Evans and I met with Jordan's parents to apologize personally for the mistakes made in Jordan's care by our athletic trainers.

He later followed up with, "The Board of Regents also assumed control in August of a separate commission investigating allegations surrounding the culture of our football program. The Chair of the Board of Regents announced today that results of this commission will be forthcoming." Ultimately, our analysis indicates that Loh's statement separates the culture of athletics and the training and physician-related components of athletics. In reality, the culture and the value of athletes as people rather than revenue generators determine what medically driven components are upheld. Moreover, Loh's discourse signaled to Black students that Black lives are not seen on campus and further minimized within white hegemonic structures.

Anti-blackness continued to target Black students at UMD and gave rise to another incident in April 2017, in which a noose was found hanging from a fraternity house. This study allowed us to examine how President Loh responded with affective and ambiguous language:

This incident is despicable. A thorough UMPD investigation is underway...I resolutely condemn the use of a symbol of violence and hatred for the purpose of intimidating members of our University of Maryland community.

In his statement, Loh does not even acknowledge which members of the UMD community were targeted through this act of symbolic violence, thereby downplaying the historical significance of the noose for African Americans communities. Through this omission, Loh's statement illustrates how anti-blackness is premised upon "an antagonistic relationship between blackness and (the possibility of) humanity" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 429). Further, Loh in labeling the incident as *despicable*, rather than addressing the racist perpetrators, could be deemed as uplifting whiteness and ignoring the endemic nature of anti-blackness. Rhetoric directly confronting the individuals that acted under the larger context of white supremacy and its symbolic meanings would acknowledge the systemic nature of racism, which Loh failed to do.

Asserting Power as a Form of Anti-blackness

We found through our examination of presidential statements that Loh often relayed his position of power, particularly in how he prioritized hierarchical authority over structural changes to address oppressive policies targeting Black students. A collective of student groups representing minoritized communities on campus (ProtectUMD) presented a list of demands to the administration in response to a noose found in the Black student union. President Loh opened his statement in January 2017 by noting an "us-vs.-them" mindset in the country. His subsequent rationale for rejecting the demands could be filtered by the reader as a reinforcement of this divisive perspective, with *us* being those in power and *them* being marginalized Students of Color. First, Loh personified the student groups as "demonstrating citizenship in action" and "American democracy," invoking the ideal of diversity as a civic responsibility (defined by acceptable standards from a dominant group) rather than resistance from the oppressed as a means to social justice. Second, Loh argued some of the demands "call[ed] for actions that have been undertaken already or are set to be undertaken." With this rhetoric, he commodified demands from the students, situating his authority as more important than their ownership of the demands. In so doing, Loh invalidated marginalized students' voices and positioned himself as an undisputed upholder of social justice and equity. Finally, Loh provides the example that he had already put in place a "multi-year plan to increase the hiring and retention of Faculty of Color" in the university's strategic plan." Such discourse is consistent with the contention by Dumas and ross (2016) that ideals related to diversity and multiculturalism are often positioned over the lives of Black people.

In analyzing his January 2017 statement to ProtectUMD, we discovered the way Loh moved between two ideas: “a rift grows in our nation,” in discussing student demands, and the nation on a “journey to form a more just and inclusive union,” in discussing the pepper spray incident. This dynamic allowed Loh to traverse and exploit the complexities of sociopolitical tensions surrounding increasing dialogue about police brutality and inhumane treatment of Black lives, while avoiding direct engagement with such concepts. Further, he utilized the trauma experienced by Black students as a means to recenter white emotions, such as in stating, “when some members of our community are hurting and feeling vulnerable, the entire University community suffers.” This deflection moved past affective speech to discourse that reinforced structural domination through the preference of policy (in this case an administrative police review) to maintain white interests. Moreover, a false narrative about the entire community suffering further devalues the actual mental and physical anguish of Black students, as white students are often sheltered from the realities of oppression and have the privilege of deciding when to engage with those issues.

In Loh’s campus statement in July 2017, Loh begins with one paragraph that acknowledged the murder of Lieutenant Collins III, followed by 12 paragraphs justifying the internal hiring of a new Chief Diversity Officer, a title that Loh hoped would be elevated to a Vice President position. We found that Loh situated a diversity officer as a symbolic title rather than an avenue to change the structural realities that harm Black students, explaining, “In the coming year, we will develop more fully this new VP position and set forth the process for appointment. Our world has changed since we began this search.” After detailing the pedigree of the selected candidate and the search committee’s rationale, Loh concluded with “I thank all of you for your ongoing commitment to – and your efforts in support of – the core values of inclusiveness and respect for human dignity that define us as an institution and as a nation.” Loh reduced the murder of a Black student (motivated by the suspect’s connection to a white supremacist group) as a justification of hierarchical power structures. He also inserted unauthentic discourse at the end about human dignity that contradicted such an intent focus on structural power and policy implementation throughout the statement, evidencing his inability to fully recognize Black humanity and the trauma of racial violence rooted in anti-blackness.

DISCUSSION

Our findings point to several ways that university presidents can elicit ideological rhetoric that encompasses anti-blackness and anti-black racism. Understanding these discursive strategies is essential in understanding the

role of institutional leaders in transmitting ideologies that sustain power dynamics of domination and exploitation (Fairclough, 2015), and thus, further dehumanize Black communities. Three themes elucidated the variations of discourse utilized by President Loh and the ways those discourses embodied anti-blackness: 1) Loh framed historical meanings in ways that justified racism and invalidated Black viewpoints; 2) Loh downplayed the meaning of oppressive symbols and structures by taking them out of cultural contexts; and 3) Loh asserted his power to silence and commodify Black students' calls for justice. These findings extend the literature about structural anti-blackness within U.S. higher education by illustrating how it is embedded within institutional rhetoric—specifically presidential statements responding to racialized incidents on campus. Additionally, through this study we view presidential responses to issues of race and racism in terms of what Omi and Winant (2015) signified as racial projects, described as interpretations or representations of racial meanings along particular racial lines. The authors detailed how racial projects connect social structures and cultural representations:

Racial projects connect what race means in a particular discursive or ideological practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning. Racial projects are attempts to both shape the ways in which social structures are racially signified and the ways that racial meanings are embedded in social structures. (p. 125)

The theoretical underpinnings of racial projects are important in several ways to our current study of the reinforcement of anti-blackness. First, the concept of intertextuality as a function of CDA shows the connectedness between larger ideological rhetoric in sociopolitical debates and the rhetoric of university presidents. This process can be understood as recontextualization, or the ways that arguments become newly framed (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). In many ways, Loh's rhetoric recontextualized racist rhetoric in the way that he sought to analyze campus symbols and structures from a race-neutral approach. For example, in defining the concept of presentism as "judging historical figures based on contemporary moral standards," Loh admonished the Black community's criticism of the renaming of Byrd Stadium. He did so by situating his rhetoric within larger debates about political correctness that push back against holding individuals accountable for racist histories. Thus, in asserting that *history was not about the past*, Loh labored to recontextualize white dominant narratives condemning accountability, therefore impeding structural changes that would be rooted in *racist realities of the present*. A university president taking such a rhetorical stance is antithetical to scholars who call for historically white institutions to reckon with their anti-black and settler colonial foundations (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013).

Moreover, when university presidents recontextualize oppressive rhetoric, they reinforce what Brunnsma et al. (2013) labeled as walls of whiteness. Presidential rhetoric can represent ideological walls that sustain white supremacy and protect the very institutional symbols and practices that Black campus communities name as dehumanizing.

Next, our findings discursively connect race as a deep contention within the larger sociopolitical context, evidenced in events such as the killing of Trayvon Martin and George Floyd. The subsequent ideological stance of #BlackLivesMatter in social media discourse, which called for more humanizing value of Black bodies, was met with the counter rhetoric of #AllLivesMatter. The resulting rhetoric stood as a tactic to deflect dialogue about anti-black racism back to a race neutral and white normed focus (Linscott, 2017). Many university presidents aligned themselves with this color evasive rhetoric, but as Squire et al. (2019) showed, generic statements only work to diminish important dialogue about racialization and white supremacist campus practices. In discussing the findings from the administrative review of the UMPD's use of pepper spray on Black students, Loh referenced a "charged time in our nation," failing to explicitly contextualize police brutality as the catalyst for the Black community's response.

Further, Loh's framing of campus police as "guardians" that are "owed" support has implicit connections with the discourse of #BlueLivesMatter, a hashtag connected to #AllLivesMatter that mimics the us versus them tension between protesters and law enforcement (Langford & Speight, 2015). Moreover, Loh's reverencing of the police while diminishing Black outcries for justice captures the tensions that Gallagher et al. (2018) described, in that "police officers and protesters are seen as 'enemy combatants' and the protestors are framed as jeopardizing law enforcement lives" (p. 18). Previous research has shown how presidents exert power over narratives of racialized incidents (Briscoe, 2024a, 2024b), obscure context (Davis & Harris, 2015), and use race-evasive discourse (Annamma et al., 2017; Jones, 2019). Our study adds to the literature by showing ways that presidents can exemplify an ideological stance in direct opposition with Black campus communities, particularly in protecting anti-black violence.

Contentions between such color conscious and color evasive ideologies serve as examples of competing racial projects (Omi & Winant, 2015). For example, the current debate about affirmative action serves as an example of the complexities through which racialization plays out in sociopolitical discourses. Historically, Asian Americans have been positioned as the "model minority," in contrast to rhetoric about Black students as undeserving of policy remedies on their behalf (Poon & Segoshi, 2018; Yosso et al., 2004). Poon and Segoshi (2018) offered this example of how Asian Americans are situated in the affirmative action debate as a racial project, further reinforcing

whiteness and ideological power struggles about who has access to higher education. Given the most recent affirmative action case *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* case (2023) which called for race neutral admissions practices, we further recognize the need to move past a Black/white binary to understand the ideological intersections of discourses that are often pitted against each other. These racial projects are embedded into the larger politics of race that enter into institutional environments, making it necessary to call out the ways that leaders enact the politics of whiteness as a property right through anti-Black rhetoric.

Fairclough (2016), in explaining the dialectical-relational approach of CDA, discussed the strategy of depoliticization, which involves excluding individuals or issues from politically driven decisions or discussions. In various ways, Loh's rhetoric across racialized events evidences his attempt to depoliticize issues by decontextualizing and reframing those events to diminish racism. Despite such rhetoric, higher education institutions are undoubtedly spaces of political strife and domination. Squire et al. (2018) referred to the plantation politics of higher education to connect sociohistorical strategies to oppress people of color with repressive practices in education. These practices are rooted in what the authors named as "traditional colonialist logics steeped in anti-Black racism, and utilize violent practices of suppression that do physical, emotional, and mental harm" (p. 4). Plantation politics also point to the logics of white supremacy upon which universities founded, including slave ownership and labor (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013). Our findings evidenced the politics of Black exploitation in Loh's statement addressing the murder of Lieutenant Collins III. Rather than focusing on violence against Black bodies rooted in white supremacy, Loh capitalized on the tragedy to position himself as a champion in hiring a Chief Diversity Officer. This stands as an example of commodification of Black trauma for institutional needs, further pointing to the presidents' role in reinforcing white institutional logics that validate Black violence and inhumanity. Understanding the rhetorical power presidents hold in legitimizing such logics is an essential first step in identifying ways to disrupt anti-black practices to make space for Black liberation.

IMPLICATIONS

We situate our implications through a call to action for university presidents through aims of Black liberatory fantasy and radical hope. Black liberation does not continue to invite Black students into anti-black spaces that dehumanize them (Grant et al., 2020), but rather, through our studies, we call for university presidents to be attentive and accessible to the needs of Black people by reimagining their rhetoric. Unlike previous scholarship,

our work moves from theorization of racism (e.g., CRT) to distinct conversations of Blackness (e.g., BlackCrit). Thus, we call on university presidents and other administrators to make these distinctions in their discourse and responses to racialized incidents. For example, university presidents cannot be afraid to use the “Black people, Black students, Black faculty, and Black communities” when writing presidential statements. The refusal to name “Black people” within presidential statements when faced with hate crimes, nooses, police brutality, and other forms of physical and symbolic violence on campus and nationally reinforces a non-performative, race-neutral, white supremacist logic that Black people suffering does not matter. We provide an example of how university presidents can use CRT and BlackCrit as guides to craft presidential statements by reworking one of Loh’s campus statements:

White nationalist posters have been found on our campus. White nationalism represents white supremacy ideologies that seek to place white people as superior to other racial and ethnic identities. These white nationalist posters were explicitly found in Black campus spaces, and we want to name how white supremacy directly harms Black people through the ongoing continued violence and murdering of Black people. We will not tolerate this display of hate against Communities of Color and Black people, nor do we condone racism and anti-black racism on this campus. We are actively investigating this issue as a hate bias incident and will enforce code of conduct regulations on anyone involved. Additionally, we will launch an anti-black racism working group to bring Black students, faculty, and staff together to provide support and advocacy.

The aim of rewriting this statement is to offer university presidents’ rhetoric that helps them shift the power to Black individuals affected by anti-blackness.

Next, we acknowledge how Black liberatory fantasy calls us to reimagine a world where Black suffering does not exist (Dumas & ross, 2016). Higher education needs university presidents to be brave with their rhetoric and responses to anti-blackness, especially as we see an uptick in racialized incidents targeting Black people (Briscoe, 2024c). Being brave means university presidents and other administrators must lead with empathy, refusing to bend to the dehumanization of Black people’s suffering by curating space, place, and personhood within universities. In this current political moment, there is a need for reimagining the role of university presidents and administrators, including their willingness to protest alongside campus constituents and speak out against external forces.

We call for university presidents to fix everyday practices and policies that reproduce systemic oppression and white supremacy against Black students. For example, our findings demonstrate how Loh labels police as *guardians* in his rhetoric while failing to recognize both the historical legacy of policing and how the traumatic impact of carceral logic (e.g., surveillance, control,

and punishment) causes additional harm to Black students on campus (Taylor, 2019; Vitale, 2017). More broadly, previous research has described the psychological impact of campus policing on Black students and how campus policing reinforces messages of anti-black racist exclusion (Dizon, 2023; Jenkins et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2007). Our work explicitly recommends that university presidents take ownership of their own learning about how social context and racial identity intersect with campus policing rather than dismiss or downplay Black students' concerns about policing. For instance, in presidential statements, university presidents often recommend that police attend town hall meetings after racialized incidents when campus police often use non-performative, anti-black, race-neutral rhetoric. Instead, university presidents could ask that campus police do racial meaning-making themselves by engaging in training that builds their understanding of policing as an institution and how, historically, policing efforts have been weaponized against Black communities.

We also recognize a need for racial meaning-making at the presidential level and how these logics have been left out of presidential rhetoric research. We call for additional research that interrogates rhetoric, including one's positionality and proximity/understanding of race. For example, researchers can explore how one's race influences one's responses to racialized incidents from a presidential stance. These questions directly relate to our work, analyzing the discourse of a President of Color and witnessing how his race and racialization influenced how he perceived and responded to anti-blackness. We call for more scholarship that critiques Presidents of Color rhetoric who can engage in anti-blackness and ongoing violence against Black students because they have little understanding of Black people's ways of knowing and daily experiences with anti-black racism.

Finally, in considering the endemic and permanent nature of white supremacy and anti-blackness, we recognize PWIs will continue to be sites of anti-black violence, exclusion, and surveillance. We embrace Dumas and ross's (2016) third framing idea of BlackCrit that names the imperative of creating space for Black liberatory fantasy. Such implications call for higher education professionals to scale up "Black-led, Black-created, and Black-desired spaces that *already* value blackness and center human needs" (emphasis added; Mustafa, 2021, p. 79). Given the extensive literature about the critical role that Black-centered counterspaces have for Black students at PWIs (Allen & Joseph, 2018; Black & Bimper, 2017; Hypolite, 2022), we point to such spaces as providing a "refuge from the gaze of white supremacy" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 436) for engaging in transformative Black liberatory work. This call for investing support in Black counterspaces and the Black liberatory work within them is consistent with Black UMD students' repeated demands for increased investment in the Nyumburu Cultural Center (Pro-

tectUMD, n.d.)—a demand that, to date, remains unmet. These spaces allow Black students to engage in healing and nourish capacity for resistance in the wake of anti-black abuses on their campuses and presidential statements that downplay or justify these abuses.

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