

De-legitimation of the Black Lives Matter movement: a critical discourse analytic study of
Tucker Carlson Tonight

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which the American cable news host Tucker Carlson criticizes the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in his show *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. BLM is a social movement founded in 2013 that opposes racial discrimination and police brutality in the United States. By analysing Carlson's legitimation strategies with critical discourse analysis and Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework for analysing legitimation, this thesis aims to find out how the BLM movement is being criticized and delegitimized in the frames of post-racial discourse. The data for this study consists of two video clips from *Tucker Carlson Tonight* where Carlson specifically focuses on the BLM movement and his criticism of it. By representing different social actors in specific ways and using personal authority, analogy and mythopoesis as legitimation strategies Carlson seeks legitimation for his own argumentation and de-legitimation for BLM as well as others who seemingly support the movement. Much of Carlson's argumentation and criticism of the BLM movement relies on the reproduction of post-racial discourse, which is based on a belief that racism no longer exists. This belief and the reproduction of post-racial discourse connect with an ideology of the United States where racial equality has been achieved in 'the greatest country in the world'.

Tiivistelmä

Tässä kandidaatin tutkielmassa tarkastellaan amerikkalaisen uutisshowjuontajan Tucker Carlsonin tapoja kritisoida Black Lives Matter (BLM) -liikettä ohjelmassaan *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. BLM on vuonna 2013 perustettu yhteiskunnallinen liike, joka vastustaa rodullista diskriminaatiota ja poliisiväkivaltaa Yhdysvalloissa. Tämä tutkielma pyrkii selvittämään, miten BLM-liikettä kritisoidaan jälkirodullisen (*post-racial*) diskurssin kehyksissä analysoimalla Carlsonin kielellisiä strategioita legitimaation luomiseksi hyödyntäen kriittistä diskurssianalyysia sekä Van Leeuwenin (2007) viitekehystä legitimaation analysointiin. Tämän tutkielman data koostuu kahdesta videoklipistä *Tucker Carlson Tonight* -ohjelmasta, joissa Carlson yksinomaan keskittyy BLM-liikkeeseen ja sen kritisointiin. Esittämällä eri yhteiskunnallisia toimijoita tietyin tavoin ja käyttämällä henkilökohtaista auktoriteettia, analogiaa ja 'myytinrakennusta' (*mythopoesis*) legitimaation luomisessa Carlson puolustaa omaa argumentaatiotaan ja pyrkii mitätöimään sekä BLM-liikettä sekä muita tahoja, jotka näennäisesti tukevat liikettä. Huomattava osa Carlsonin argumentaatiosta ja BLM-liikkeen kritisoinnista tukeutuu jälkirodullisen diskurssin reproduktioon, mikä perustuu ajatukseen siitä, että rasismia ei enää ole olemassa. Tämä ajatus ja jälkirodullisen diskurssin reproduktio ovat yhteydessä sellaiseen ideologiaan Yhdysvalloista, missä rodullinen tasa-arvo on saavutettu 'maailman mahtavimmassa valtiossa'.

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1. Introduction

On May 25, 2020, the social and political atmosphere in the United States experienced a radical shift when a black man was killed by a white police officer in an arrest situation. The man getting killed was George Floyd, whose name became known to all of America because the situation ended up on tape, providing it a worldwide audience and attention and raising issues related to racial discrimination and police brutality in the US. The Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), which began in 2013, gained significantly more popularity with large protests demanding justice for black lives all around the US. In June 2020, the BLM movement was heavily criticized by Tucker Carlson in his cable news show *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, which is one of the most viewed cable news shows in the United States. Carlson's criticism towards BLM in the show caused a reaction where several companies pulled their advertising from the show due to the general sensitivity around BLM, which Carlson did not account for in his criticism of the movement. This social and political atmosphere around BLM and Tucker Carlson signifies the purpose of this study, which is to provide a critical analysis of Carlson's language in relation to legitimation and the reproduction of post-racial discourse, which assumes that racism and racial discrimination are over in the US.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyse Carlson's legitimation strategies in relation to his argumentation and his criticism towards BLM. The interest is in how the findings of this study contribute to the reproduction of post-racial discourse in the American society and how is BLM being delegitimized inside it and based on it. The reproduction of post-racial discourse can be considered a social issue worth addressing because achieving racial equality, which the US has long been trying to do, cannot truly happen if problems concerning equality are not being seen. Not seeing racial inequality makes it rather difficult to solve and only believing that something is solved does not make it true, however. By addressing the issue of post-racial discourse this thesis aims to make it more visible.

This thesis first describes the research materials and provides a detailed account of BLM as well as *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. Second, it establishes the theoretical and methodological framework for this study by introducing critical discourse analysis and post-racial discourse as well as Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework for analysing legitimation. Third, the research materials are analysed and findings presented and discussed in more detail in relation to the reproduction of post-racial discourse. The thesis finishes with some concluding remarks and possible topics for further research.

2. Background and research materials

Black Lives Matter has been a burning topic in the US since May 2020, when the death of a black man George Floyd sparked protests all over the country, giving BLM considerable media attention. Tucker Carlson gave his opinion on the movement and their current actions in his show *Tucker Carlson Tonight* with an emphasis on criticizing the movement. Some of his statements on the show received a negative response including actions from the show's advertisers as they were perceived questionable and even racist (Hsu, 2020).

2.1. Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter is a social movement that opposes the discrimination and discriminatory structures, especially police brutality, against black people. The movement began in 2013 when a black teenage boy, Trayvon Martin, was shot and killed, and the man who shot him, George Zimmerman, a white neighbourhood watch volunteer, was acquitted from his charges after claiming self-defence. The incident gained wide attention from the media as well as from the public. In 2020 the death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, resulted in heavy protesting against police brutality and increased the worldwide support for BLM. George Floyd was killed by a white police officer in an arrest situation in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020. The situation was filmed by several bystanders and the videos spread worldwide both in social media and news media. The incident gained wide attention and raised a number of questions about structural racism and police brutality in the US.

The incident began when Floyd was arrested for allegedly paying with counterfeit money. When the police arrived and Floyd refused to enter the police car, the officers pinned him to the ground with his hands cuffed behind his back. One of the officers, Derek Chauvin pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for over eight minutes, which is against the police regulations of Minneapolis. The other three officers, Tou Thao, Thomas Lane and J. Alexander Kueng, stood by and prevented others on the scene from interfering the situation. This resulted in Floyd losing his consciousness and being taken by paramedics for treatment. Floyd was pronounced dead in a hospital a few moments later, and two autopsies stated the cause of death being a result of compression on his neck. All four officers involved in the situation were fired from their positions, and Chauvin has been charged with second- and third-degree murder as well as second-degree manslaughter (Allen & Borter, 2021). On April 20, 2021 Chauvin was found guilty on all three charges (Tyystjärvi & Berner, 2021).

The incident sparked protests around the country demanding justice for George Floyd. The protests began in Minneapolis but quickly spread across and beyond the US. Protesters demanded action from the state to defund the country's police departments in response to the unprofessional and fatal actions of the four officers involved in George Floyd's arrest and death. The so-called George Floyd protest have been estimated to be the largest protests in the history of the US (Allen & Borter, 2021).

BLM has been widely discussed in the media, and Banks (2018) has studied the media representations of BLM in America. In her study she discovered that advocacy and non-violent protests were reported in the US news media as 'riots' and the group itself was called 'racist' and 'anti-law enforcement' (Banks, 2018). She identified rhetorical patterns in American news media that were used to delegitimize BLM and their goals and purposes. For instance, her study examined post-racial discourse and ideology, and discovered how they were reproduced in American media by claiming that racism does not exist in the American society and therefore BLM and their concern over structural racism is delegitimate.

2.2. *Tucker Carlson Tonight*

The focus of this study is on the linguistic and rhetorical strategies of the cable news host Tucker Carlson from *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, centring around the Black Lives Matter movement. Tucker Carlson is one of the most viewed cable news hosts in the US with an average of four million viewers in total audience. The show airs on weeknights on Fox News Channel, which is a popular right-leaning news channel in the United States, where most medias position themselves on a right-left political continuum. The left is generally associated with the Democratic party and liberal values, whereas the right with the Republican party and more conservative values. The topics covered in *Tucker Carlson Tonight* are mainly Carlson's political opinion-oriented commentary on current events in the United States, and one episode typically contains more than one topic of discussion.

The research material for this study consists of two video clips from *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, a total of approximately 42 minutes in length. The clips are from two separate episodes which aired on June 9, 2020 and June 16, 2020. The clip from the June 9 episode is 25 minutes and 26 seconds long, and the clip from June 16 episode is 17 minutes and 17 seconds long. The videos are retrieved from the Youtube-channel of Fox News and they are public and open access (Fox News, 2020). Fox News publishes similar clips from the show regularly on their Youtube channel and they typically include a single topic of discussion. Generally, the topics of the show focus on one thing at a time, and these

two clips were selected for this study based on their main topic of discussion: criticism towards BLM, which resulted in the show losing a number of advertisers such as The Walt Disney Company, T-Mobile and Papa John's due to the sensitive nature of the general BLM discussion (Hsu, 2020). In these clips Carlson makes arguments such as that BLM is a dangerous political party, and that the Democrats and the left are using the politics around BLM to only further their own agenda and gain more power. In section 4. Analysis and findings, some examples of Carlson's criticism are displayed and analysed in more detail. The examples are retrieved from written transcripts of the show which are publicly available on the website of Fox News (Carlson, 2020, June 9; 2020, June 16).

3. Theoretical and methodological framework

This section introduces critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the basis of the theoretical framework for this thesis. Then it examines the concept of post-racial discourse and what it means for this thesis. Lastly, it introduces Van Leeuwen's (2017) framework for analysing legitimation and explains how it is applied in this thesis to examine Carlson's criticism of the BLM movement.

3.1. Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a form of discourse analysis that focuses not only on the language and discourse itself but also accounts for social relations in discourses. Whereas discourse analysis might ought to find meanings in texts, CDA is also interested in how these meanings are constituted and reproduced in social contexts that often include dimensions of power, such as hegemony. According to Fairclough (2010), CDA should fall under these three guidelines:

1. It is not just analysis of discourse (or more concretely texts), it is part of some form of systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process.
2. It is not just general commentary on discourse, it includes some form of systematic analysis of texts.
3. It is not just descriptive, it is also normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them. (p. 10-11)

Discourse itself is a social process that can be linked to other social processes, such as power relations or in the case of this thesis, the process of legitimation. The concept of legitimation is further defined in section 3.3. but in simple terms, it means providing some form of justification for something, and this process can be examined and analysed as a part of discourse where the two are intertwined. Legitimation can be studied for example, in the context of opposing discourses to investigate the reasoning and justification for opposing points of view, as was done in Tiainen (2017), where the media coverage of the so-called Snowden revelations was studied by examining how electronic surveillance was legitimized or delegitimized in opposing discourses that either supported or opposed electronic surveillance. In Tiainen (2017), legitimation was examined as part of specific discourses, and this thesis as well aims to examine the two processes, discourse and legitimation, through their interrelations. Social processes that are formed in language can be examined and analysed through different forms of texts, which is the basis of any discourse analysis. Text is therefore the concrete subject matter that can be placed under analysis and it forms the data of a discourse study.

Following Fairclough's (2020) guidelines, this thesis aims to discover connections between the data (text), post-racial discourse (discourse) and legitimation strategies (social process) in order to examine and understand how post-racial discourse emerges in the data via varying legitimation strategies and how it contributes to a larger post-racial ideology. The analysis of Carlson's language on the show is a systematic analysis of the data (text), which is examined by utilizing Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework for analysing legitimation. The third of these guidelines is what separates CDA from regular discourse analysis; addressing a social wrong, or a social issue is what makes this method of analysis critical. This thesis considers the de-legitimation of BLM through the reproduction of post-racial discourse as a social issue which this thesis aims to address. CDA is used in this thesis to analyse post-racial discourse in the data and how that discourse is being reproduced to delegitimize BLM and their actions – as well as their goals. The level of discourse is introduced in section 3.2. by discussing post-racial discourse and ideology, and section 3.3. examines the social process of legitimation by introducing legitimation analysis. The reproduction of post-racial discourse as a social issue is addressed in more detail in section 5.

3.2. Post-racial discourse and ideology

To clarify the meaning of discourses, this section first explains the concept of discourse and then introduces a specific discourse, post-racial discourse, and how it ties with post-racial ideology. In simple terms, discourses are a form of communication; they are constructions of shared ideas in different social contexts. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines discourse as "a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Discourses are ways for people to comprehend and conceptualise different ideas or ways of thinking through language and texts. People make sense of the world around them by forming different discourses that organize the world into shared ways of talking about something. Van Dijk (1998) provides a useful definition of discourses:

-- discourses are forms of social action and interaction, situated in social contexts of which the participants are not merely speakers/writers and hearers/readers, but also social actors who are members of groups and cultures. Discourse rules and norms are socially shared. -- discourse and its mental dimensions (such as its meanings) are multiply embedded in social situations and social structures. And conversely, social representations, social relations and social structures are often

constituted, constructed, validated, normalized, evaluated and legitimated in and by text and talk. (p. 6)

The notion that discourse rules and norms are socially shared means that they are shared among the social actors who belong to the same group or culture in which that discourse is shared and reproduced. If a discourse can or can be used to constitute, construct, validate, normalise, evaluate and legitimate for example, a social structure, it means that the social structure is to a certain extent defined by that discourse. This is important in understanding post-racial discourse and its meaning for this thesis.

Post-racial discourse is based on the assumption that racism is over and that “those identifying structural racial inequalities are blaming a system for ‘their problems’ instead of taking personal responsibility” (Banks, 2018, p. 718). In post-racial discourse the existence of racism can be completely denied, and the existence of racial inequalities can be dismissed and transferred on the shoulders of an individual instead of a society. Banks (2018) argues that denying race as a system of oppression allows disregarding discussions about the material effects of racism. Reproducing post-racial discourse provides a strategy for delegitimizing issues related to racism or racial discrimination; the very issues that BLM are protesting against.

Post-racial discourse can then contribute to a post-racial ideology in a given society. Ideology as a concept requires some definition here. Van Dijk simply defines ideology as the “basis of the social representations shared by members of a group” (1998, p. 8). Fundamentally this means that ideologies are shared ideas of what is right or wrong for the groups of people who share them. Ideology is shared mainly through discourses which can relate to social practices and power relations in a society. Van Dijk (1998) suggests that discourses are the most crucial tools in formulating and representing ideologies since they are typically expressed through language and discourse: “if we want to know what ideologies actually look like, how they work, and how they are created, changed and reproduced, we need to look closely at their discursive manifestations” (p. 6).

3.3. Legitimation and de-legitimation

Legitimation is a concept that is often used in the field of CDA. According to Van Dijk (1998): “legitimation is related to the speech act of defending oneself, in that one of its appropriateness conditions is often that the speaker is providing good reasons, grounds or acceptable motivations for past or present action that has been or could be criticized by others” (p. 255). In this study,

legitimation is considered as the act of defending one's opinions and claims, in other words, what is being said. In his framework for analysing legitimation in discourses, Van Leeuwen (2007) further divides legitimation into four key categories: 1) *authorization*, referencing to an authority of some domain; 2) *moral evaluation*, referencing to discourses of value; 3) *rationalization*, referencing to specific goals of action; and 4) *mythopoesis*, referencing to a narrative whose outcome legitimizes or delegitimizes an action. He argues that these categories "can be used to legitimize, but also to delegitimize, to critique" (p. 92), which are both applicable in the case of Tucker Carlson. The criticism towards BLM in Carlson's show can therefore be considered a form of de-legitimation.

This thesis utilizes three categories, *authorization*, *moral evaluation* and *mythopoesis*, and investigates how they emerge in the data. The categories include several useful concepts that are used as tools in the analysis of the data. For instance, the category of *authorization* includes a concept of *personal authority*. According to Van Leeuwen (2007), personal authority can be associated to a person who holds legitimate authority based on their position or role in society or a specific institution. Carlson's role as a popular cable news host can therefore grant him personal authority in the eyes of his audience. This means that he can argue for himself by relying on his personal authority to convince his viewers that what he says is legitimate.

The concept of *analogy* as a form of *moral evaluation* can also be applied in this thesis. Analogy provides legitimation based on a comparison between two different things; one thing being used to value another. Van Leeuwen (2007) further conceptualizes analogy as a strategy in which "an activity that belongs to one social practice is described by a term which, literally, refers to an activity belonging to another social practice, and the positive or negative values which, in the given socio-cultural context, are attached to that other activity, are then transferred to the original activity" (p. 99). In simple terms, one might for example, transfer values from the animal kingdom to refer to the activity of a person by saying that someone is busy as a bee. This analogy draws from the common understanding that bees tend to fly in a restless manner that makes them seem active and busy. This characterization, or value, that is attached to bees is transferred to describe a person in order to explain how they behave in a particular manner.

Another useful concept for this study is *mythopoesis*, so legitimation through narrative effect. Van Leeuwen (2007) introduces a useful subcategory of mythopoesis: *a moral tale*, which aims to legitimate or de-legitimate through a narrative based on morals and values where the outcome of the narrative suggests that something is either right or wrong. Another subcategory that serves the purpose of this study are *cautionary tales*, which "convey what will happen if you do not conform to the norms of social practices" (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 106). A cautionary tale often includes some

sort of an unhappy ending, suggesting that the protagonist's actions were undesired. For example, if person A tells person B that person C was fired from their job for a specific action they did, person A is warning person B not to do the same because of what happened to person C. Whatever person C did is delegitimized by person A through the narrative effect of a cautionary tale.

4. Analysis and findings

This section focuses on the analysis of the data and presents selected examples of Carlson's speech. It begins by examining the general way that Carlson positions and represents different social actors and how it affects the image his viewers might receive of them. Here social actors are defined as people or groups of people who are a part of a specific social context or discourse. These representations can also have an impact on the legitimacy effects of Carlson's arguments, which is why they are discussed first in section 4.1. Then this section moves on to investigating legitimation through Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework by first identifying legitimation practices in the data and then analysing the effects they have on Carlson's overall argumentation. This latter part of the analysis takes place from section 4.2. to section 4.4.

4.1. Othering discourse and representation of social actors

Othering is a common linguistic strategy that is used to distance people or groups of people, in other words social actors, from one another. Pandey (2004) describes othering as "the manner in which social group dichotomies are represented via language" (p. 155). This effect is very commonly achieved by referring to different groups of people with for example distancing pronouns, which is what Carlson does by continuously using the words 'we' and 'they' when referring to different social actors. He uses 'we' to refer to himself and his audience as well as anyone else who agrees with his statements. 'They' on the other hand is used to refer to BLM and the Democratic party or anyone with opposing opinions to the ones Carlson presents. The dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' is a linguistic device for othering a specific group of people and to create space between 'our group' and 'their group'. In Carlson's case, othering is used to distance the people supporting BLM from the audience of the show, enabling Carlson to argue for what is beneficial for 'us' and how 'they' might threaten 'our' position.

Example 1: This may be a lot of things, this moment we're living through, but it is definitely not about black lives, and remember that when they come for you. And at this rate, they will.

Using othering creates an image for the audience that there is a group called 'we' which is being threatened by another group: 'them'. In Example 1, Carlson poses 'them' as a threat to 'us' and uses the word choice 'you' to directly address the viewer and his audience as a part of the larger 'we'. In

a rhetorical sense, this strategy unifies Carlson and his audience against others who disagree and makes it easier for viewers to accept what Carlson is saying because they can feel like they are a part of the same group.

The group of people that Carlson distinguishes as ‘others’ are referred to by specific word choices. These word choices contribute to the way in which these groups of people are being represented. One way of doing this is that Carlson continuously refers to protesters and supporters of BLM as ‘rioters’ or ‘the mob’. These word choices imply negative connotations, such as being violent and causing trouble, towards the group of people in question and represents them as such. This makes it easier to argue against them and perhaps delegitimize their actions as well as their point of view. Examples 2 and 3 below serve as comparisons between the representations of different social actors in the data.

Example 2: the mighty NYPD, the biggest police department in our nation – the most sophisticated police department in the world

Example 3: A small group of highly aggressive emotionally charged activists took over our culture.

In Example 2 Carlson is explaining how the NYPD (New York Police Department) responded to the protesters’ demands to defund police stations by abolishing its plainclothes division. Here Carlson juxtaposes BLM, who he has criticized throughout the entire video, against NYPD, which he presents as mighty and sophisticated, both of which being adjectives with positive connotations. Glorifying the NYPD might make it seem more radical that the group that Carlson criticises is getting what they want from ‘the mighty NYPD’. On the other side of this, Carlson represents BLM as according to Example 3, as a group of ‘highly aggressive’ and ‘emotionally charged’ people, who are also ‘taking over our culture’. In this example Carlson refers to BLM with these words at the beginning of the video as he explains what has been happening, referring to the BLM protests in Minneapolis. Firstly, this representation gives a negative image of the movement with words like ‘aggressive’ and ‘emotionally charged’, which both give the impression that these people are out of control and dangerous. It is also important to note how Carlson describes BLM as taking over ‘our’ culture. Neglecting the fact that the culture he refers to, which is presumably the American culture, includes BLM a part of it. Here he positions BLM as ‘them’ against the ‘us’ who can be interpreted as the show’s audience. This contributes to the aforementioned othering discourse, where two groups are pinned against each other to create an illusion of isolation for ‘them’ and a sense of inclusion for ‘us’.

The next examples demonstrate how Carlson argues that BLM is a political party and chooses to represent and treat them as such in his criticism.

Example 4: The media -- usually described Black Lives Matter as an activist group or a protest movement. But that's deception by understatement. -- It is working to remake the country and then to control it. It's a political party.

Example 5: If the leaders of Black Lives Matter are political actors – and they are

In both of these examples Carlson is simply making a statement about the agency of the BLM movement. According to Carlson, because BLM is a political party they should be made accountable in the same way as politicians in accordance with social norms and rules. He uses this, as well as other previously examined representations to justify and legitimate his criticism of the movement. This also allows him to build a narrative of fear by questioning the political agenda of BLM, claiming that they are ‘working to remake the country’ and ‘control it’, which displays an image of threat to the assumed conservative audience of the show. So, the criticism towards BLM in these examples relies on Carlson’s representation of them as a political party and is based on the threat that Carlson poses based on this representation.

4.2. Legitimation and de-legitimation through personal authority

Personal authority is used in the data in a number of instances, to either legitimize Carlson’s own argumentation or to delegitimize others who oppose what he is saying. Carlson’s personal authority derives from his role as a popular cable news host with millions of viewers. Personal authority can be established as well from any position or status of credibility, for example an officer of law enforcement or a politician. With the help of examples, this section analyses the different uses of personal authority in the data. The first examples of this section demonstrate Carlson’s use of personal authority to question the agenda of BLM by criticising the Democratic Party for supporting BLM.

Example 6: Democrats do not relinquish power voluntarily, ever. Period. Republicans frequently do. Democrats never do.

Example 7: This has to be an attempt to increase the power of the Democratic Party because every policy they push is always.

Van Leeuwen (2007) argues that someone who possesses personal authority does not need to justify themselves by any other means than ‘because I say so’ (p. 94). In the examples above, Carlson uses his own personal authority to make direct statements with no other justification than because he says so. In Examples 6 and 7 Carlson questions the political agenda of the Democratic Party, because they support BLM and defunding police departments. Carlson argues that because Democrats own the police departments this makes no sense, and therefore must be a political play to increase their own power. He claims that this is what is happening and that this is what they always do, only based on his word. The word choices ‘ever’ and ‘period’ also demonstrate Carlson’s positioning of himself as the authority. Example 6 also demonstrates another instance of placing two groups against each other to create othering; Democrats being ‘they’ and Republicans being ‘us’ or ‘the ones we support’. This strategy is supposed to alienate the Democratic Party from the assumed audience of the show, making Carlson’s arguments feel or seem more believable and valid. In other words, this strategy relies on the right-leaning attitude of the show as well as the entire Fox News Channel, assuming their audience support the Republican Party and their conservative values. The following examples also indicate how Carlson makes direct claims and statements while relying on personal authority without other supporting justification. This time he uses this strategy to argue for his country to support the delegitimation of BLM.

Example 8: Tell the truth -- and the truth is, this is a good country. Better than any other.

Example 9: They're not coming because America is a racist country. They're coming because it's not. That's all true.

In Examples 8 and 9 Carlson argues for America and that it is a good country where racism does not exist. These arguments again rely on Carlson’s personal authority since they are not justified in any other way than his word. In Example 9 Carlson is referring to immigrants who come to America, claiming that they come because America is not a racist country; the most obvious example of the reproduction of post-racial discourse in the data. Representing the United States in this way also delegitimizes the BLM movement since they are calling out the racial inequalities and discrimination

in America. By claiming that these issues do not exist and presenting the argument of America being a good country as a truth instead of an opinion leaves no room for negotiation.

Whereas in the previous examples Carlson used his personal authority to justify his claims, he also uses personal authority to delegitimize the actions, words and statements of other people. The next example demonstrates how Carlson delegitimizes BLM by questioning the personal authority of a single person whose actions Carlson connects with the BLM movement.

Example 10: "This is just one step on a long journey," Kraus wrote, sounding more like a therapist than a cop.

In Example 10, Carlson is arguing against the Texas city police chief Ed Kraus, who announced dropping charges against demonstrators who had been in a conflict situation with the city's police. According to Carlson, Kraus issued a statement saying that the officers involved would be held accountable for their actions, but no more information was given regarding what they had done. So, what Kraus wrote according to the example is referring to holding police officers accountable for their actions, which is one step closer to a more equal and fair society. Carlson argues against this and defends the police officers, while expressing concern regarding the influence of BLM because according to Carlson, BLM is the reason behind this and that they hold too much power. In this example Carlson characterizes Kraus, as "sounding more like a therapist than a cop". This characterization relies on personal authority in the sense that a therapist has less authority than a cop regarding this situation. Therefore, Kraus's statement and professional opinion is being delegitimized by Carlson questioning his credibility and personal authority. In a bigger picture this example is also meant to delegitimize BLM because Carlson connects Kraus's actions and statements to the demands of BLM protestors, who, according to Carlson, are behind this. The next example provides a similar instance where Carlson questions someone else's authority in order to delegitimize their point of view.

Example 11: Ellison is now the chief law enforcement officer in Minnesota. He is the attorney general.

Example 12: Ellison has long been a crazy person who was once attached to the Nation of Islam. Back then, he called himself Keith Hakeem. More recently, Ellison endorsed Antifa.

In Examples 11 and 12 Carlson is commenting on the statement of Keith Ellison, who is shown speaking against guns and advocating for more strict gun control in America, which becomes clear as a separate video of Ellison is shown to the viewers before Carlson argues against him as he does in the examples above. Carlson first establishes Ellison's personal authority through his position as the attorney general, suggesting he has valid personal authority. Later he lowers, or even dismisses, this authority by labelling Ellison as 'a crazy person' and pointing out his connection with Islam and Antifa, which is an anti-fascist movement. This de-legitimation again relies on the assumed audience of the show, who presumably perceive both Islam and Antifa as something negative since neither of them can be associated with the conservative values of the assumed audience. Since conservative values are generally not that open to multiculturalism and foreign religions, the attitude towards Islam can be rather negative in the eyes of conservative viewers. A similar value structure might explain the unpopularity of Antifa inside this conservative atmosphere. The liberal values of Antifa are generally opposing conservative views and therefore, Antifa is presumably being perceived as something negative the same way as Islam by the audience of Carlson's show.

4.3. Legitimation and de-legitimation through analogy

Analogies are a part of the category of *moral evaluation* in Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework. An analogy can be used to legitimate something by associating it with another thing that has positive or negative values, depending on whether the analogy is used to legitimate or de-legitimate. Van Leeuwen (2007) reminds that "comparisons in discourse almost always have a legitimatory or de-legitimatory function" (p. 99). Comparing one thing to another creates an opportunity to transfer chosen values in a chosen way in order to create some level of legitimation or de-legitimation.

Example 13: Bad ideas are like cancer. When you ignore them, when you pretend they're not there, when you just assume, just ride it out, they spread.

Example 14: Black Lives Matter is getting exactly what they want and that is the most basic sign of strength. Strength is the most appealing quality to voters, and to people, and to animals.

In Example 13, Carlson expresses his concern regarding the 'idea' of defunding the police, which is what the BLM protesters have been calling for. He refers to defunding the police as a bad idea and compares bad ideas with cancer. Carlson seems worried about the fact that not everyone is agreeing

with his concern but seems to believe that his concern is nonetheless valid. Through this analogy he suggests that the idea of defunding the police could spread fast like cancer if no one addresses his concern. Cancer can easily be considered negative since it is a disease that can be fatal to people, which makes this comparison rather serious and even grim. Because cancer is generally considered a serious disease that can at its worst cause death, comparing defunding the police with cancer suggests that the consequences of the spread of this idea are severe and should be avoided at all costs. By using analogy to transfer the negative values of cancer into defunding the police Carlson delegitimizes the action itself as well as the BLM protestors who are calling for it.

In Example 14 Carlson claims that BLM are gaining more and more power because they are getting what they want and that this is ‘the most basic sign of strength’. Carlson then compares voters and people in general to animals in order to legitimate his argument about the appeal of strength. He claims that BLM generates its popularity through strength and power instead of for example, from the public’s concern over racial discrimination in America or the structural issues that have negative impacts on the lives of black people in the country. Creating this string of comparisons suggests that voters behave in the same way as animals, and this comparison relies on the notion that voters are people and people can be considered as animals. It is a rough comparison and perhaps relies on its simplicity; after all it is very easy to understand and does not generate complicated interpretations. The comparison is not abstract, nor does it require the audience to give it much thought in order to understand what it means. This certainly can make it harder to question whether this comparison is even valid, but because it is so simple and easy to accept it has some level of legitimacy effect in Carlson’s argumentation.

4.4. De-legitimation through mythopoesis

Mythopoesis is a legitimation strategy that relies on the narrative effect of a story (Van Leeuwen, 2007). In the data Carlson uses this strategy to de-legitimate points of view he does not agree with or to de-legitimate BLM in general, which seems to be a repeating theme in this analysis. These narratives are mainly based on exaggeration and loose interpretations of what someone else has said, and how this is done is demonstrated through three examples. The first two examples indicate instances where Carlson speaks with an imaginary voice to act out a specific narrative that is mainly used to delegitimize BLM. The quotation marks that appear in the examples indicate that Carlson is speaking as someone other than himself.

Example 15: "Hello, police? Armed men are breaking into my home. Help!" "Shut up, racist. Click."
That's the world Lisa Bender is calling for.

Example 16: "Sorry, mom. I know you're old and alone and miss your grandchildren. But we are shunning you until you send more money to Black Lives Matter."

Example 15 is a collection of turns where Carlson speaks as someone else and then himself. In the first turn he speaks as someone who is calling the police, in the second one he speaks as the recipient of that phone call who hangs up the phone, and the third turn is Carlson speaking normally as himself. The first and second turn form a narrative which Carlson then comments on. The person appearing in the example, Lisa Bender, is the president of the Minneapolis City Council, which is the city where George Floyd was killed. In Example 15, Carlson uses mythopoesis to delegitimize Bender's opposing opinion about defunding police departments and the concern she raised on television about the unequal treatment that black people may face when dealing with the police. Before the speech situation that is displayed in Example 15, the viewers are shown a video clip where Bender is interviewed on television about defunding police department. In the example Carlson is acting out an imaginary phone call that takes place in 'the world Lisa Bender is calling for', which is Carlson's interpretation of what Bender said. However, Bender did not claim that calling the police means that you are racist, she merely stated that calling the police means different things to white people than black people in America. She argues that it is a sign of white privilege to be able to call the police and trust that you are safe and being treated fairly. This short ironic narrative serves as an exaggeration of what Bender said and serves as some kind of a *moral tale* (Van Leeuwen, 2007) where the outcome is supposed to prove that her opinion is morally wrong. The outcome of the narrative being morally wrong aims to delegitimize Bender and her concern regarding white privilege and the police treating people unequally based on their racial appearance. The fact that Carlson disagrees with Bender regarding the unequal treatment of racially profiled people is another sign of the reproduction of post-racial discourse in the data.

The narrative in Example 16 also relies on exaggeration and suggests an outcome that can be considered ridiculous and therefore, de-legitimate. In this example Carlson is once again playing or acting out a narrative with an imaginary voice, and it is based on his own interpretation of what someone else has said. In this instance he is responding to a New York Times opinion article (Sanders, 2020) in which a black author is expressing his feelings about the vague text messages he receives from his white friends, who are now reaching out to him to soften the 'white guilt' that they are feeling after hearing about incidents like the death of George Floyd. He calls out the people who are

feeling guilty about the unequal treatment of black people by urging them to take actions other than sending ‘positive vibes’. He suggests that these people can try to demand their relatives and loved ones to support black lives via protests or donations, as one way among other suggestions, if they truly wish to help. Carlson interprets this suggestion in his show to be meant for everyone instead of the people that the author is referring to as feeling guilty and wanting to do something. By drawing this conclusion, he can construct a rather exaggerated story of what the author of this opinion article is suggesting in order to once again delegitimize the BLM movement. As a matter of fact, however, the author does not mention BLM at all in his opinion article. Yet, Carlson is able to use the author’s words detached from their context and through mythopoesis, delegitimize BLM based on those words. The next and final example displays Carlson creating another narrative but this time without any imaginary voices behind it.

Example 17: Black Lives Matter wants to run the country; therefore, you can freely criticize Black Lives Matter -- Imagine a world where you are punished for questioning the behavior of the president or for insulting your local mayor.

In Example 17 Carlson again builds a narrative that suggests undesired outcomes which are in this example related to some sort of a totalitarian authority. Here he implies that because (according to him) BLM is a political party, anyone should be able to freely criticize them. He claims a few sentences later that this is however not the case, and that criticizing BLM is not allowed. This claim might simply derive from the sensitivity that surrounds BLM since the movement’s current popularity draws from a serious and fatal incident; the death of George Floyd. Sensitivity however does not mean the same as ‘immunity for criticism’. This conclusion is drawn nonetheless, and it builds the ground for the narrative of this example. With this narrative Carlson is suggesting that BLM has power and authority comparable to the president, and that the current position of BLM is alarming and might lead to such a world he is describing. This type of exaggeration seems like a repeating pattern in Carlson’s narratives as it is also evident in both of the previous examples of mythopoesis in the data. One notable difference in this example is that here Carlson is addressing his audience directly: by encouraging his viewers to imagine living in the story he is narrating he places his audience inside it, which brings the story even closer to the viewer giving it a more pressing effect. All in all, in this example Carlson delegitimizes BLM and their social agenda through mythopoesis by suggesting that their political power includes immunity for criticism, which is generally perceived negative and a sign of totalitarianism.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the analysis of the data. In addition to a general discussion, it also discusses how those findings contribute to the reproduction of post-racial discourse and represent a post-racial ideology of the American society.

Many different strategies for legitimation were evident in the data of this study. In the legitimation of Carlson's own argumentation, the use of personal authority was the most common of the used legitimation strategies. Arguably, for someone who possesses personal authority it is quite natural to rely on it, especially if the ones they are trying to convince, in this case the audience of Carlson's show, are already somewhat agreeing with them. A conservative news channel naturally draws more conservative audience, and this might make it rather easy for Carlson to rely on personal authority in his own argumentation, since at least based on the extensive audience of the show, it is probably enough to achieve legitimation for his arguments in the eyes of his audience.

The de-legitimation that Carlson pursues by lowering or dismissing someone else's personal authority is interesting. In comparison to Carlson's personal authority as a popular cable news host, the personal authority of the people he aims to delegitimize can be objectively considered more valid. The authority of an attorney general or a chief of police is presumably more valid than the authority of a TV celebrity, but nonetheless this strategy is applied by Carlson in order to delegitimize their points of view.

The use of analogy and mythopoesis as legitimation strategies is less frequent in the data of this study. The instances where Carlson uses analogy are perhaps not that significant for further discussion, but they are examples of another legitimation strategy and how it is being used in the data. It is however noteworthy that this strategy is being used because of the general legitimatory nature of comparisons. Understanding that comparisons most often function to legitimate or delegitimize, the use of analogies can be considered a relevant finding in a study such as this. Carlson's use of mythopoesis in the data was aimed at de-legitimation, and all examples of mythopoesis contained narratives with implied negative outcomes that were supposed to delegitimize BLM in general or more specifically some of their aims and goals, such as defunding the police. All the narratives relied on exaggeration and their narrative effect seemed to be largely based on it. All narratives also served as some sorts of *cautionary tales* (Van Leeuwen, 2007) of what would happen if BLM would get what they want according to Carlson.

Another interesting finding in this study is Carlson's reproduction of post-racial discourse as one way to criticize the BLM movement. Carlson directly claims that America is not a racist country with the

help of his personal authority in Example 9. His overall argumentation against BLM relies on this and becomes relatively easy when the underlying assumption is that the issues behind BLM do not exist. This also allows Carlson to propose his own interpretations of what BLM is trying to do and trying to achieve because their main goal of ending racial discrimination in the US has been made invalid within post-racial discourse. Making claims about BLM being a political party or that their goal is to take over and control the country instead of advocating for racial equality is Carlson's own interpretation of what the purpose of BLM is. Arguing that this is the true purpose of BLM is essentially supposed to delegitimize the entire movement and it is based on denying the actual purpose of the movement, to fight racial inequalities. Hence, the reproduction of post-racial discourse in the data of this study is the underlying tool for a wide scale de-legitimation of the BLM movement. This discovery is in line with Banks (2018), who found post-racial discourse in American medias in relation to the BLM movement, which according to the study was being delegitimized through post-racial discourse as well.

It could be argued that post-racial discourse stems from a larger post-racial ideology of the US by presenting a land that has overcome racism, and the issues related to racism have been solved. This ideology is somewhat blind to the concerns and demands for racial equality because it believes it has already been achieved. A post-racial ideology in its turn can be considered a part of a wider greatest-country-in-the-world ideology, which has been alive in the US for as long as the country has existed. Since the discovery of America and the promise of a new life behind the ocean, the United States of America have been represented as the greatest country in the world, at least by the people living in the country. Freedom and the American dream have been the cornerstones for the country's 'identity development' that has shaped the still prevailing ideology of what America is. Carlson is not alone when he says that America is "a good country" and "better than any other" (Fox News, 2020, June 9). This idea is somewhat common knowledge in the world we currently live in because it has been repeated over and over again for such a long time. Even though recently the greatest-country-in-the-world ideology has been questioned, the findings of this thesis suggest that it still prevails at least in the form of denying racial inequality in America.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyse legitimation strategies in Carlson's language on *Tucker Carlson Tonight* in relation to his criticism of the BLM movement. This thesis discovered that the language of Tucker Carlson in the data of this study consists of a number of varying strategies that are used to legitimate Carlson's arguments and his criticism of the BLM movement as well as to delegitimize opposing points of view. These strategies form an interesting whole that is largely meant to delegitimize in general the BLM movement in the frames of post-racial discourse. The social issue of reproducing post-racial discourse is made visible in this thesis, and it is important to note that understanding how a social movement such as BLM can be delegitimized by denying the existence of the issues they raise enables recognizing this type of discourse and perhaps choosing not to further reproduce it or even challenge it.

It is worthy to mention that there are some limitations to this thesis. For instance, the small set of data that has been used for this study does not qualify for drawing too strong conclusions. However, the large-scale audience of *Tucker Carlson Tonight* justifies the findings and discussion of this study because for example, the earlier discussed reproduction of post-racial discourse has met millions of viewers and that is why it is also worth addressing.

For further examination into Carlson's use of legitimation strategies it would be worthwhile to study how effective these strategies are in practice. A possible topic for future research would be to investigate how the audience of Carlson's show perceives these legitimation strategies and whether they accept their legitimacy value and if they do, to what degree do they accept them. So, investigating whether Carlson is actually convincing his audience with these legitimation strategies could add a new perspective into this topic. It is one thing to identify legitimacy elements in someone's language and another to investigate whether the desired legitimation is actually achieved and how effective it is.

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