

Feeling American: Affect and Notions of (In)Security in Tucker Carlson's Coverage of Derek Chauvin's Trial

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Abstract: This paper examines a segment of *Tucker Carlson Tonight* from 2021 in which Carlson contextualizes the start of the trial against Derek Chauvin, whose killing of George Floyd in 2020 sparked nationwide protests. By employing an analytical framework that includes 'feeling rules' and 'framing rules,' this study argues that Carlson frames Chauvin's trial as an existential threat to the United States' national security, locating notions of (in)security within affective structures of fear. Notions of 'appropriate feelings' are promoted through emotive framing and the visual comparison of protest and terrorism. The study also highlights how mass media shape and negotiate the opposing ideas of 'feeling American' and analyzes how Carlson employs discourses of (in)security to enable the polarization of two distinct 'emotional communities' in the US. This analysis shows that political and cultural divisions in the US might be more deeply entrenched than previously acknowledged, as they constitute fundamentally different experiences of 'feeling American.'

"Security today has become such a powerfully elastic and mobilizing term in part because it has accrued the density of meanings that the word freedom once evoked." (Kaplan 19)

The United States of America seems to be at a crossroads. Once hailed as the oldest liberal democracy of our time, skeptics on both sides of the political aisle fear that recent controversies surrounding issues like abortion rights and the disputed presidency of Donald Trump signal an increasing ideological divide to such a degree that bipartisan political cooperation appears outside the scope of the foreseeable future. Political sentiments heighten a sense of insecurity as the nation remains divided in the government's handling of international crises such as the war in Ukraine and escalating conflicts in the Middle East. With preparations for the 2024 presidential elections under way, it remains to be seen how political stakeholders will overcome their differences and find productive solutions to overcome this state of perceived (in)security.

To many, it not only seems that the United States has become more divided than in the past—it also *feels* like it has (McKown-Dawson; Dimock and Wike). This paper sets out to explore how the political and ideological division within the United States operates as an ‘affective fact’ (Massumi). The analysis in this paper is based on the observation that, depending on political and ideological allegiances, progressive pursuits such as the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement and the ensuing calls to tackle police misconduct and brutality either provide long overdue reforms to an unjust institutionalized policing regime or are perceived to erode the integrity of the US criminal justice system. The personal stance that individual Americans maintain on these issues can subsequently be grouped into distinct ‘emotional communities’ (Rosenwein, *Emotional*), namely those who feel that criminal justice reforms threaten the country’s security and those who view it as a necessary step toward equality within the US American law enforcement apparatus.

The following analysis is situated at the productive yet fairly understudied convergence of political analysis and the ongoing affective turn in the humanities (cf. Hankivsky and Cormier; Pliskin and Halperin). The interdisciplinarity and methodological versatility of American studies allows for an analysis located at the nexus of political and cultural studies that adequately describes increasing notions of (in)security.

Using as a point of departure Rosenwein’s conceptualization of emotional communities as social arrangements held together by ‘systems of feeling’ (“Worrying” 842), this paper explores the role of news media in supporting vastly contrasting experiences of what it means to belong to the ‘imagined political community’ (Anderson 6) of the United States. The paper draws on both Rosenwein and Anderson to analyze how news media perpetuate the idea of ‘collective values’ corresponding to shared affective structures and how political commentator and former *Fox News* host Tucker Carlson evokes notions of (in)security to define two distinct American emotional communities in a *Tucker Carlson Tonight* segment from March 11, 2021. This analysis illustrates how cultural and political divisions in the United States run deeper than expected and, in fact, constitute fundamentally different experiences of what it means to understand oneself as ‘American.’ Additionally, this paper outlines how Tucker Carlson reflects on the beginning of the murder trial against Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin as a moment of growing sociopolitical rupture in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder in 2020. The segment under scrutiny aims to challenge the question of Chauvin’s guilt and white Americans’ complicity by reframing the trial as a question of national security, activating discourses on (in)security that have become deeply entangled with notions of national identity (cf. Kaplan; Grewal).

Carlson frames Derek Chauvin’s trial as an existential threat to the United States’ national security, mobilizing notions of (in)security that situate BLM

Feeling American: Affect and Notions of (In)Security in Tucker Carlson's Coverage of Derek Chauvin's Trial

activists as objects of fear within the affective structures of a distinct emotional community of patriotic US Americans. The emotional community that Carlson speaks to is structured by notions of 'appropriate feelings,' which are promoted through emotive framing and the visual conflation of protest and terrorism. Departing from how Carlson utilizes emotive language to frame BLM protesters and portrays supporters of the trial against Chauvin as terrorists, these framing practices will be contextualized within the corresponding concept of 'feeling rules,' which activate notions of patriotic love to be extended toward Chauvin.

The murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020, shook an already polarized America and broadened public support for the BLM movement while simultaneously escalating discussions in favor of countermovements such as the conservative and pro-police #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter (cf. Duan et al.). While BLM began to organize in 2013 as a response to the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and the acquittal of police officer George Zimmerman the following summer (Tillery), both #BlueLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter emerged as countermovements quickly after (Carney 181). However, the international response to George Floyd's death exhibited a new urgency that manifested in solidarity protests abroad and spawned critical reflections on racist policing practices in countries such as Germany (Safronova).

Various media channels contested the unjust nature of Floyd's killing, the subsequent protests and civil unrest in Minneapolis, as well as Derek Chauvin's trial from March 8 to April 20, 2021 (Duan et al. 681). As *Fox News's* preeminent political moderator at the time, Tucker Carlson's commentary on the matter consistently echoed broader far-right rhetoric in support of distrust against an allegedly corrupt liberal elite (Wallace-Wells). Twisting Floyd's murder into a recurrent example of the perceived negative influence of liberal 'wokeness,' Carlson has stood by the claim that Floyd's death was caused by a fatal fentanyl overdose, effectively framing the criminal charges brought against officer Derek Chauvin to be a sham devised to covertly propagate liberal ideologies about social justice.

On April 20, 2021, the District Court of Minnesota convicted Chauvin on three counts of murder and manslaughter (Allen et al.). Despite the court ruling, Carlson maintained his prior assessments and, at the time of writing, continues to stand by this interpretation of events, effectively promoting an alternative factual situation that deviates from the state-sanctioned ruling. Moreover, Carlson notably adheres to this version of events despite having since been ousted from *Fox News* in the aftermath of a lost defamation lawsuit, largely caused by Carlson's untruthful reporting on the role that the Dominion voting system played in the 2020 US presidential election, costing the network a staggering 700 million dollars (Coster).

Carlson's latest comments on the court proceedings against Chauvin in 2021, which reiterate the framing of a mistrial, aired on October 20, 2023—this time as

part of the web format ‘Tucker on X.’ His fraudulent assertions about autopsy reports claiming to prove that Floyd’s death was “not a killing” but “yet another narcotics [overdose]” (“Ep. 32” 00:02:22-26) have since been disproven as factually incorrect (Norton). Nevertheless, Carlson’s consistent reporting from before, during, and after Chauvin’s trial provides a productive point of departure for analyzing the affective structures that support the far-right rhetoric of his reporting and allows insights into the mechanics through which it speaks to an ‘emotional community’ (Rosenwein, *Emotional*) of far-right US Americans.

The role of emotions presents a challenging field of study. Academic disciplines ranging from psychology to medicine, cognitive science, and cultural studies engage with emotions through distinct methodological and analytical models that complicate terminology and frequently conflate concepts such as ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ (Lünenborg and Maier 2). This paper adopts Sara Ahmed’s understanding of affect as the imprint that emotions leave on social bodies. Affects, then, describe the contact between bodies and emotions. That is, emotions are always relational and circulate between social entities that mold each other’s bodies by directing particular emotions toward one another. According to Ahmed, “emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others” (4). In the context of this paper, affect theory helps to describe how Carlson mobilizes emotions to shape the bodies of protesters and of George Floyd, impacting them in a way that allows negative emotions such as fear to stick to them and mark them as deviant within the affective structures that affirm the emotional community of viewers that Carlson speaks to.

This paper also draws on sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild’s concepts of ‘feeling rules’ and ‘framing rules.’ Feeling rules describe the “social guidelines that direct how we want to try to feel” in accordance with how we think our peers feel. Hochschild views ‘framing rules’ as an interpretive context that attributes crucial definitions and meanings to situations (qtd. in Tonkens 198-99). To put it more concisely, Hochschild defines the relationship between feeling rules and framing rules as “what we imagine we should and shouldn’t feel and would like to feel over a range of circumstances” (qtd. in Tonkens 198). By relating the two concepts, Hochschild’s theoretical approach expands Entman’s understanding of ‘framing’ as “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (164). Hochschild zeroes in on the very interplay of frames and emotions. In a way, feeling rules show how frames dictate how to ‘feel appropriately.’

The following analysis uses these concepts of feeling rules and framing rules as a point of departure to examine how the *Tucker Carlson Tonight* segment offers affective structures that prescribe how viewers ought to feel about the beginning of

Feeling American: Affect and Notions of (In)Security in Tucker Carlson's Coverage of Derek Chauvin's Trial

Chauvin's trial. This approach reveals how Carlson evokes feelings of sympathy for the accused, Derek Chauvin, and undermines expressions of grief about George Floyd's murder by situating protesters as the locus of perceived national (in)security and as the object of fear within the emotional community that his segment addresses.

FRAMING AND FEELING THE PROTEST

Tucker Carlson's coverage of the murder trial against Chauvin stands out for the particular affective experiences it reflects on and, in turn, generates. Carlson's line of argumentation in defense of Chauvin first discredits and subsequently reorganizes the argument that those in favor of conviction misrepresent the person Derek Chauvin as "the physical embodiment of America's institutions" ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:00:39-43). Carlson claims that this framing of events strategically communicates to Black Americans that their lives are under threat, which he argues serves a liberal agenda to reshape how people live in the US ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:00:50-02:56). Repeatedly condemning an indefinite "they" who supposedly demand Americans believe the narrative of the "racist cop," Carlson claims political elites hold white Americans responsible for Floyd's death to make them feel guilty and keep them from posing critical questions about the role of equity measures in America—which he views as a genuine case of racism against white Americans ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:01:30-03:24).

Deflecting notions of (in)security away from police brutality, Carlson suggests it is actually these racial equity measures that pose a significant threat to Americans by submitting them to a disadvantageous racial regime that disproportionately privileges racial minorities. The trial, according to Carlson's logic, therefore presents an unjust case of racism against the white police officer Derek Chauvin—a powerful statement that, in turn, negates the existence of the discriminatory policing apparatus that continues to threaten Black and Brown people in America. One cannot help but notice that Carlson's assessment notably differs from those who call for Chauvin's conviction. Instead of viewing police brutality as a legitimate and ongoing threat and cause of social unrest in the United States, Carlson advances a set of feeling and framing rules that differentiates between two distinct emotional communities in America. He views those made to feel guilty for Floyd's murder—and thus in favor of convicting Chauvin's trial—as a subversive influence on the rule of law and a threat to US national security. Carlson thereby delegitimizes discourses on policing and racial injustice in the United States and objects to public reactions and demands for criminal justice reforms proliferated through networks such as the 'Movement for Black Lives' (M4BL), a movement calling for the

redistribution of taxpayer dollars in support of institutionalizing alternative visions of public safety (“BREATHE Act”).

Put more concisely, Carlson delegitimizes many Americans’ affective experiences of guilt and subsequent frustration and resentment toward the United States’ current security architecture (De Witte) as inappropriate acts of subversion. He bolsters this assessment through a nexus of feeling and framing rules that strategically divert attention away from the disproportionately excessive police violence that continues to present an ongoing threat to Black and Brown Americans (Browne 35). These feeling and framing rules cater to a particular emotional community of Americans who do not view Chauvin’s trial as a step toward increasing social justice but rather understand it as a threat to the well-being of their imagined community.

FRAMING RULES

The following section outlines how Carlson’s use of ‘emotive language’ frames Derek Chauvin’s trial as a threat to the foundations of US American democracy. By exploring Hochschild’s ‘framing rules,’ such a perspective describes the process through which Carlson’s account frames the affective experiences of grief, anger, and guilt in response to Floyd’s death as misplaced and harmful to the civil rights of every American. Moreover, critical engagement with these framing processes reveals how Carlson reorganizes the affective experience of following the trial, which he suggests poses a threat to the United States’ judicial integrity and thus warrants to be regarded as a danger.

Employing emotive language refers to the act of interpreting events by ascribing emotions to them. Emotive language then presents an integral tool for generating an affecting message with the capacity to elicit an emotional response in the message’s recipient (Watson and Hill 44). Carlson uses emotive language to stoke notions of (in)security, which support a framing of Chauvin’s trial that provides an interpretive context for viewers to experience fear rather than guilt, anger, and grief while following the trial. This fear is an important distinction from the experience of those in favor of convicting Chauvin (i.e., grief, anger, and guilt) and operates within the framing of the trial as a threat to the United States’ judicial and constitutional order. William Reddy describes ‘emotives’ as “the process by which emotions are managed and shaped, not only by society and its expectations but also by individuals themselves as they seek to express the inexpressible, namely how they feel” (qtd. in Rosenwein, “Worrying” 837).

Whereas feeling rules are based on unspoken, latent social expectations, emotives unequivocally frame the spectrum of emotions that is to be felt in relation to an object or event. Carlson employs emotives as the verbal expression of feelings to

Feeling American: Affect and Notions of (In)Security in Tucker Carlson's Coverage of Derek Chauvin's Trial

emotionally organize Chauvin's trial and construct a set of framing rules that attributes meaning to the trial as a source of (in)security and hence a foundation for feeling negatively about the trial's outcome. He thereby constructs an alternative telling of events that allows Americans to avoid critically engaging with the pressing questions of widespread police brutality.

Carlson emotionally organizes the trial by narrating an affective experience in which Floyd sympathizers have become so overwhelmed with feelings that they have been rendered incapable of accurately assessing Chauvin's guilt. With Chauvin's future ostensibly in jeopardy and the United States' judicial integrity supposedly under threat should he get convicted, Carlson repeatedly points out that "[e]very American deserves a fair trial. That's the whole point of this country" ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:05:39-47) and that "[y]our civil rights are not suspended when you're accused. This is America" ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:06:25-32). Carlson argues that Chauvin does not receive the fair trial that he—as a US American citizen—deserves. Situating Chauvin as the victim of disenfranchisement in a narrative that emphasizes questions of national identity invites viewers to empathize with the accused Chauvin, who is framed as an unlawfully accused fellow American. Carlson thus displaces notions of (in)security to pertain to a supposedly aggrieved mob rather than to American policing practices.

Carlson's framing reduces Chauvin to his US American citizenship and ignores critical questions of his guilt by accentuating his membership of a distinct imagined community of Americans. Viewers of the segment are instead encouraged to extend the feelings that they may harbor toward their country to Chauvin as the embodiment of American values. In other words, Carlson's framing of Chauvin's alleged disenfranchisement activates notions of patriotism that correlate to the perceived threat of Chauvin's conviction in the service of a 'liberal equity regime.' A concept heavily steeped in affective rhetoric, Stephen Nathanson defines patriotism as a "[s]pecial affection for one's own country," a "sense of 'personal identification' with the country," and a "special concern for the well-being of the country" (34, 34, 35). Looked at through the lens of affect, patriotism hence connotes ways of 'feeling with one's country.' In suggesting that Chauvin's trial destabilizes the social and judicial order of the United States, Carlson effectively argues that those in support of trying Chauvin do not 'feel America' the same way he and other patriotic Americans do.

Carlson advances this argument by asserting that "George Floyd's death was sad" but immediately adding that "[e]very death is sad, as we often point out. But the question is: Was it murder?" ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:02:29-36). Consequently, Carlson describes two distinct emotional reactions to Floyd's death: Americans who feel reasonably sad about it and those he views to be manipulated by liberal elites to

channel their grief into supposedly dangerous political action. Carlson here seems to be reducing Floyd's murder to yet another casualty and condemns any forthcoming emotional response against Chauvin to be misplaced. He goes on to surmise an affective experience wherein the very grief and anger exhibited by parts of the public (i.e., BLM protesters and those calling for Chauvin's conviction) become threatening objects within the affective structures of the imagined community that Carlson caters to.

Within Carlson's line of argumentation, the public's allegedly misplaced state of grief and anger caused by Floyd's murder now interferes with what he deems the lawful way to proceed: acquitting Chauvin and discrediting calls for racial equity in the US American law enforcement apparatus. Carlson's claim is based on the assumption that what he sees as misplaced emotions now prevents the emotionally affected parts of the 'aggrieved' public from "assess[ing] calmly and as honestly as we can what happened to George Floyd on Memorial Day" ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:02:22-28). Juxtaposing an affected grieving and angry public vis-à-vis himself as part of an unaffected 'calm' public, Carlson endorses a Darwinian model of emotions that situates emotionality as a faculty to be overcome by modern societies.

Carlson's rhetoric taps into a persistent discursive tradition that discredits emotions as signs of our prehistoric primitive past, marking 'feeling individuals' as inferior to those who supposedly possess the faculties of thought and reason and are therefore capable of controlling their emotions (Ahmed 3). Within the recurring theme that "[t]o be emotional is to have one's judgment affected," emotionality has historically been linked to marginalized identities such as women, who were seen as closer to nature, as well as the racial Other, who was conceptualized as resembling "a more primitive form of social life, or a 'lower and animal like condition'" (Ahmed 3). Early psychologists and sociologists, among them Gustave Le Bon, studied such phenomena as emotionality in groups, arguing that larger groups of people demonstrate a "heightened affectivity and a lower level of intellectual functioning and regress to the mental life of 'primitive people'" (Brennan 53). Carlson then argues that the supposed affectivity of aggrieved Americans reduces their intellectual capacity to reliably determine the degree of Chauvin's guilt, delegitimizing their concerns about the outcome of the trial.

By denying that George Floyd was murdered and therefore framing Chauvin's trial as unjust, Carlson emphasizes the deterioration of America into two distinct emotional communities: those he claims still in control of rational thought and those weaker-minded whose emotional affectivity and backwardness put at risk the future of Derek Chauvin—and, by extension, that of every American. Consistent with Carlson's earlier claims about a nefarious liberal agenda, this framing suggests that the very narrative of Floyd's murder presents a strategic breaking point in American society and poses a threat to the nation's integrity. In other words,

Feeling American: Affect and Notions of (In)Security in Tucker Carlson's Coverage of Derek Chauvin's Trial

Carlson pathologizes the emotional community of those feeling with Floyd by arguing that their capacity for reasonable judgment has been affected, making them incapable of reason and thus a danger to the metaphorical body of the United States. Deeming those negatively emotionally affected by Floyd's death unfit of rational thought, Carlson contextualizes Chauvin's trial within historic prejudices that frame emotionality as 'impressionability.' Such a framing suggests that those affected by Floyd's death and convinced of Chauvin's guilt only hold this position because they are emotionally vulnerable and therefore easily manipulated by an imagined liberal faction in the first place.

Once deemed irrational, those affected become an easy target for the attribution of additional negative affects, which pathologize their identity and mark their very affectedness as a threat. Carlson frames two distinct emotional communities by situating the community affected by Floyd's death as outside an imagined community of Americans organized around ideals of rationality and social order. Consequently framed as a matter of national security, Carlson effectively provides a frame for how to feel appropriately about Floyd's death and Chauvin's trial. 'Feeling American' within the structures of the emotional community that he organizes translates into being emotionally unaffected by the death of an individual person of color but feeling afraid for the United States' judicial integrity should a white police officer be put on trial.

Carlson ultimately participates in a process of othering as he projects unwanted affects of emotionality outside the emotional community he speaks to—a practice that firmly resides at the center of Western identity construction (Brennan 12). He does this by further expanding a dichotomy between the emotional community of the 'affected' and that of the 'rational,' coupling emotive markers of insecurity with the 'irrational' other and counter-positioning himself and his audience as a bastion of rationality determined to preserve the constitutional order of the US. Following the report of a teacher who was suspended after expressing doubts about Floyd's cause of death, Carlson defiantly declares: "Tonight we'll do what you're not allowed to do in Catholic high schools in Columbus or anywhere else in America" ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:02:17-24). By suggesting that the affective response to Floyd's death is partially constricted by an 'emotional regime' (Reddy) of sorts that supposedly targets free speech in America, Carlson promotes a reading of Chauvin's trial as a First Amendment issue.

Framed accordingly to endanger the nation's founding principles, the emotional community of the affected is rendered 'un-American.' Such a framing of 'un-Americanness' becomes the central point of Carlson's delegitimization campaign. He historically contextualizes those calling for Chauvin's conviction within past histories of insecurity. In line with characterizations from a 2018 segment on affirmative action in higher education, where he claimed that "[t]he average

admissions office is every bit as race-conscious as any institution in the Jim Crow South” (“Affirmative Action” 00:02:08-13), Carlson repeatedly draws on the United States’ traumatic past of racial injustice to evoke a collective sense of insecurity. In his segment on Chauvin’s trial, Carlson refers to activists as “[t]he thugs outside the courthouse [who] don’t want jurors to focus on the evidence” (“Tucker: World Watches” 00:07:39-43). Including BLM activists and protesters within the collective entity of an ‘angry mob’ out to intimidate and cause harm, Carlson evokes the affective remnants of domestic hate groups and terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), whose extremist reactionary politics of intimidation shaped notions of (in)security for designated segments of society (cf. Parsons).

BLM’s distinctly directed anger at structural injustice is misrepresented by framing it as a larger argument about the protesters’ ‘arbitrary’ hate against the American state. Carlson reduces BLM protesters to be solely driven by hate and thus taps into the already existing affective histories and structures of hate groups in America. He applies these by replacing white supremacists with BLM activists and characterizes them as the cause of fear. This rhetoric is only possible because Carlson’s framing practices shaped the bodies of protesters in such a way. Carlson can then be said to create a broader framing that equates the KKK and BLM activists to have seemingly accumulated a similar affective capital over time. Making this emotional and historic conflation clear, Carlson argues that “the jurors are intimidated. That’s the point of mob justice. It was the point of mob justice a hundred years ago in the American South. It’s the point of mob justice in Minnesota today” (“Tucker: World Watches” 07:30-07-39). The fact that such an idiosyncratic comparison continues to reverberate through far-right circles vividly articulates the capacity of emotive language to provide the same affective framing to two distinctly dissimilar historical moments.

FEELING RULES

The following section outlines how the concept of feeling rules brings into conversation the affective responses to Floyd’s death as objects of fear and the patriotic affections that Carlson organizes with the imagined community of Americans that his segment addresses. This allows me to also explore how structures of fear shape the identities of those situated within them. Fear, posits Ahmed, “functions as a technology of governance” by manufacturing consent for the promise of protection (71). In that regard, fear relates to the future by anticipating impending, not yet experienced hurt or injury (65). Moreover, fear is an ambivalent emotion that relates both to an object viewed as fearsome and, according to Freud, an object of love whose disappearance we fear (Ahmed 67). Carlson’s framing practices activate the affective structures of fear by encouraging viewers to

understand the supposed equity crusade of liberals to threaten the emotional community of Americans addressed in the segment. With “fear’s relationship to the potential disappearance of an object [...] more profound than simply a relationship to the object of fear,” Ahmed suspects that “[t]he anxiety about the possibility of loss becomes displaced onto objects of fear” that are to be avoided (66, 67). The experience of fear is hence not only produced through the orientation toward an object that is identified as threatening but also through the orientation toward an object of love whose loss we fear.

Hence, Carlson’s repeated claim that social-equity initiatives are damaging what he views as a just society is projected onto Chauvin’s trial, rendering it and anyone in favor of it into objects of fear within the affective structures of Carlson’s preferred emotional community. As the section on framing rules outlined, Carlson affectively shaped the surface of BLM supporters’ bodies through the circulation of emotives as the articulation of emotions. Carlson positions Americans calling for Chauvin’s conviction as causing the loss of ‘America as we know it’ as the object of love by framing activists as an irrational emotional community that threatens the United States’ constitutional integrity and consequently the imagined community of rational patriotic US Americans.

This idea of the status quo being endangered is emphasized repeatedly throughout the segment. Carlson claims that “George Floyd’s death has been used to *reshape* how we live in this country” (“Tucker: World Watches” 00:02:37-42; emphasis added). Similar evocations to social transformation can be seen when he argues that “[t]he neighborhood where George Floyd died is now *more dangerous* than ever. The whole place was awful. It has *not improved*. Nothing BLM has done for the city of Minneapolis has improved the lives of the people there” (“Tucker: World Watches” 00:04:40-05:02; emphasis added). Carlson furthermore outlines the spatial ramifications of this supposedly impending social transformation when he recounts how white *Fox News* reporters were denied access to the site of Floyd’s murder, declaring that “white people were not allowed in” (“Tucker: World Watches” 00:05:12-20). The image that Carlson constructs in this manner is one of increasing insecurity and limited mobility for white Americans and thus reiterates evocations to the collective memory of racial segregation.

Within the structures of fear, Carlson predicts a future America that will *feel* as unsafe as the formerly racially segregated America of the past. Important to add here is that the felt experience of insecurity during segregation is transferred onto the bodies of white Americans, who at the time were not subjected to but rather perpetrated the very gruesome horrors and abuse of racial segregation that Black Americans were subjected to. Within this architecture of fear, Carlson outlines as fearsome the threatening transmission of the affective experience of Blackness in America. To put it differently, what will be lost in the future is white supremacy and

a moment in which white Americans experience the affective reality of Black Americans.

With the fear of losing ‘America as we know it’ implying the loss of white supremacy and security, Carlson approximates right-wing extremists’ ideologies that, as Durham argues, are organized around the belief that “the white race is under attack, and its only salvation is to fight against those who would destroy it. [The extreme right] is mobilized around deep anger, at the heart of which is race” (i). Fear is thus closely related to anger in that it presents a way of asserting agency in preventing the loss of the object of love. By claiming that Chauvin’s trial is unjust and signifies a forceful transition from the ‘America as we know it’ object of love, Carlson supports the affective structures of an emotional community that may only react to this with fear or anger. Anger furthermore presents a way of coping with the additional fear of not being able to act on one’s fear. This fear causes the feeling of powerlessness, which then creates an additional object of fear. Put concisely, within Carlson’s emotional community, the fear of idly watching Chauvin’s persecution causes even more fear—a loop that can only be broken by the reassertion of agency granted by angry action.

Due to the “affectively self-causing” nature of fear, Carlson is able to turn fear into what Massumi calls the “affective fact of the matter” (191). In this spiral of fear, anger becomes the only means of breaking out of the feedback loop. However, Carlson’s affective depiction of protesters also illustrates how the misrepresented anger of an undesirable out-group can be framed as the very object of an in-group’s fear. As the example of the ‘angry mob’ rhetoric showed, signs of fear become interchangeable, leading to a scenario in which fear of angry white mobs during the Jim Crow era serves as an affective reference point for the fear of Black activists that Carlson stokes today.

This displacement of an affect onto another referent is, as Ahmed reminds us, dependent on the negotiation of past histories with that object (6). A glance at the visual cues that Carlson’s segment employs makes this dynamic quite apparent. The segment’s visual cues ultimately show that it is not only past histories with the same object of emotion but rather past histories of a particular affect that shape identities in such a way that they become filled with meaning. This is to say that Carlson employs strategic visual cues to bring back to life memories of the mob violence that shaped the racially segregated America—drawing on the affective capital of these memories to artificially construct meaning for the protests that followed George Floyd’s murder.

Within US national security discourses, terrorism has become an almost larger-than-life concept with the capacity to mobilize liberal societies and policy makers in the United States as well as abroad. Following the traumatic events of September 11, 2001, many Western governments rushed to pass legislation aimed to prevent

Feeling American: Affect and Notions of (In)Security in Tucker Carlson's Coverage of Derek Chauvin's Trial

events of this kind in the future. Prompted by a global reorganization of national security structures, questions of personal freedom and state sovereignty have since been renegotiated vis-à-vis 'war on terror' narratives that, for example, mobilized support for the passing of the Patriot Act in 2001 and supported claims for an armed conflict in Afghanistan, which stands as the United States' longest war to date. Contextualizing the discursive power of 'security' within post-9/11 America, Kaplan productively outlines how the concept flourished into a key aspect of national identity, having since "accrued the density of meanings that the word freedom once evoked" (19).

Carlson taps into the affective memory of mob violence and terrorism through a series of disorienting video segments that show scenes of destruction during the 2020 protests in Minneapolis. Prefacing the subsequent sequence of rapidly changing imagery by stating that "[t]his is what the city looked like last year," Carlson goes on to show images of two different building structures ablaze ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:03:43-54); part of an Instagram video that shows a group of hooded people in front of the smoldering remnants of a building, interrupted only by the roar of fireworks exploding between them (00:03:55-57); a street intersection with burning structures in the background accompanied by the wailing of sirens (00:03:58-04:00); scenes of demolished stores and hooded people looting and breaking open self-checkout machines (00:04:01-15); and a scene that shows a car driving into a burning barricade, after which a hooded figure emerges from the car and is greeted by the shrieking cheers of hooded bystanders (00:04:16-21). During the remainder of the show's following section about the consequences of Minneapolis's budget cuts in police funding, Carlson displays in the background a still image of a hooded person in front of a wall of flames with an upside-down, almost translucent US flag in hand, as if to mockingly parade it through the streets ("Tucker: World Watches" 00:04:22-05:22).

The rapid speed with which the images transition from one scene to the next leaves audiences disoriented and unable to fully take in the scenery apart from the sight of bright flames and the occasional sounds of explosions, sirens, and yelling crowds. Since it is impossible to make out the faces of those perpetrating these acts of arson, vandalism, and looting, audiences are met with an onslaught of faceless actors of chaos. With only few distinct markers of place, such as the demolished stores, one feels like watching scenes from the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack or, as previously suggested, scenes mirroring the mob violence of the KKK—catering to common visual tropes that evoke fear by showing hooded people whose faces audiences cannot see (cf. Parsons).

With the only markers of place consisting of street intersections, stores, and the dramatic still image of the US flag, Carlson constructs an affective experience in which it is the United States and its very way of living that have come under attack.

With such imagery frequently showing scenes of destruction in faraway battlefields dedicated to the ‘war on terror,’ these images seem to suggest that insecurity and terror have once again arrived within the United States. By extension, this sequence of disruptive moving images seems to imply that the United States are beginning to ‘feel’ as unsafe as during both (foreign and domestic) terrorist attacks and times of racial segregation.

This audiovisual experience paves the way for a twofold profoundly affective experience. On the one hand, it visually conflates scenes of the protest with those of terrorism and mob violence and thus demonizes those participating in the protests, who Carlson indiscriminately identifies as BLM protesters. On the other hand, it supports the subjective experience of fear that viewers are meant to feel compared to the allegedly impending loss of the American way of life. Carlson first constructs a disorienting experience that activates affective memories of mob violence and terror and then presents Chauvin as a victim of this eruption of violence by showing his mugshot, which serves as a focal point following the rapid scenes of chaos. Carlson again emotionally conflates Chauvin with the United States and thereby strategically frames him to be deserving of the same love that Carlson’s viewers might feel toward the nation. In other words, Carlson effectively substitutes the United States for Chauvin as the object of patriotic feelings of love, suggesting that feeling American means ‘feeling for Chauvin.’

The affective structures of fear overshadow the experiences of grief, anger, and guilt that BLM sympathizers professed to feel in relation to Floyd’s death (De Witte). Instead, Carlson’s strategic framing of the protests and trial against Chauvin as sites of burgeoning insecurity elicits fear and serves to divert attention away from scrutinizing the culpability of Chauvin. Sidelining the structural and racial inequities that underlie Chauvin’s trial for the murder of Floyd, Carlson situates Chauvin as a scapegoat servicing the seemingly eroding forces of the racial justice movement. Carlson then equates the fate of Chauvin with the structural integrity of the US law enforcement—and by extension with the ‘American way of life.’

This ‘affective reorganization’ ultimately presents a means of coping with the cognitive dissonance that Chauvin’s trial presents to the emotional community of patriotic US Americans. Whereas the increase of police brutality against and killings of Black Americans at the hands of predominantly white law enforcement agents causes swaths of disillusioned Americans to regard the US legal system as “unjust and inefficient” (Lewis and Usmani 85), Carlson offers viewers a way to uncritically continue loving the US and its institutions. By equating Chauvin with the integrity of the US justice system as such, Carlson’s reading of Chauvin’s trial ultimately allows patriotic US Americans to maintain the love for their people and overcome negative affects of grief and guilt that would otherwise disrupt this positive affective

Feeling American: Affect and Notions of (In)Security in Tucker Carlson's Coverage of Derek Chauvin's Trial

bond between Americans and their legal system. The beginning of the trial then presents a juncture that highlights the contrasting affective structures defining the political realities of two opposing emotional communities: namely those who feel anger, grief, and guilt in response to police officers killing yet another Black American, vis-à-vis an emotional community of patriotic Americans who respond with anger to feeling frightened by BLM protests, Chauvin's trial, and the prospects of the supposed deterioration of the US justice system.

These findings correspond with larger discourses on the power and affordances of various media stakeholders within the field of media studies. Broadly understood as "affect generators" (Reckwitz qtd. in Lünenborg and Maier 1), media institutions shape audiences' emotional states. With mass media's capacity of "creating and changing psychological states, including arousal, emotional, and even aggressive predispositions," Barlett and Gentile suggest that people likely choose what medium to consume based on their perception of how it will accommodate them in enhancing or modifying a desired state (60). Summarizing the relationship between media and audience, Barlett and Gentile ultimately argue that "mass media are designed to affect viewers emotionally, and viewers want to be affected" (60). In other words, audiences are aware of how their emotional states will be altered and seek out media as tools to regulate their personal emotional states. Emphasizing this relationship productively frames the preceding analysis of feeling rules by explaining the appeal of media as devices for coping with changing social and cultural configurations.

CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed how Tucker Carlson emotionally organized a reading of Derek Chauvin's trial that validated fear as the dominant affective experience and appropriate way of feeling about it. Undermining expressions of grief, anger, and guilt about George Floyd's murder, Carlson's affective reading of the trial mobilized notions of (in)security that privileged a framing that situates BLM sympathizers and their emotions as a cause of national (in)security. Exploring Hochschild's 'framing rules' furthermore demonstrated how Carlson's affective account of the trial resonates with discourses of national (in)security and evokes the existence of two distinct imagined emotional communities within America: those convinced of Chauvin's guilt and those seeking to transfer this white guilt onto other social actors. Carlson hence construed a notion of 'feeling American' that translates into being emotionally unaffected by the death of an individual person of color but feeling afraid for the United States' judicial integrity should a white police officer be put on trial. Suggesting that the affective response to Floyd's death is part of an emotional regime that restricts free speech in America, this paper argued that

Carlson reads Chauvin's trial as a First Amendment issue and thus frames emotionality as a threat to the US Constitution.

This study furthermore demonstrates how the concept of feeling rules brings into conversation activists and their affective response to Floyd's death as objects of fear and the patriotic affection for the imagined community of America as an object of love. Conflating Chauvin with the United States as the object of love, Carlson effectively suggests that 'feeling American' means 'feeling for Chauvin.' As outlined in this study, this affective reorganization ultimately presents a means of coping with the cognitive dissonance of loving the United States while American power structures continuously fail to account for the ongoing deaths of people of color at the hands of US police officers. Carlson's framing of Chauvin's trial ultimately allows patriotic US Americans to maintain their love for their nation and overcome the negative affects of grief and guilt that would disrupt this affective bond.

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**Feeling American: Affect and Notions of (In)Security in Tucker Carlson's Coverage of
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