



Are You the Opps or Nah?: Right-Wing Disinformation within the Reparationist Movement

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Abstract

Foundational Black Americans (FBA) have been a rising trend within online spaces, particularly due to their hardline stances on a myriad of social issues and their tactics that potentially result in disengaging Black Americans from the voting process. Along with other Black identity groups such as American Descendants of Slaves (ADOS), Black First (B1) and Freedmen, FBA positions their ideology to be solely concerned with the needs of Black Americans, with owed reparations to Black Americans for the horrors of slavery being at the helm of their goals. They tend to present themselves as nonpartisan and outside of the two-party system. However, based on our research, their tactics tend to suggest a lean toward conservative ideology, much like what was identified in the Mueller report where Russians infiltrated Black spaces to promote Black voter apathy and weaken their support for the Democratic Party. Similarly, FBA seems intent on breaking off Black American support of left-wing politics by making unbalanced arguments on their flaws and omitting the flaws of right-wing politics. Our overall research focus aims to test the influence these Black identity groups have on Black voter behavior overall and compare them to the precedent of foreign adversaries and right-wing political players using similar tactics. Focusing largely on prevailing “leaders” of FBA on their platforms on Twitter and YouTube and their reach through popular Black celebrities and influencers, we plan to also highlight their salient prominence in political discourse to better illustrate the need to invest in continuing to learn about FBA’s reach and possible influence on Black voter apathy.

The first foray into this larger question of the impact of FBA within the larger disinformation landscape and on Black communities was diving into if, in fact, FBA rhetoric is in line with right-wing conservative talking points, particularly those that are the center of disinformation narratives. Between July 2022 and May 2023, we monitored and tracked FBA affiliated accounts on Twitter and YouTube and collected both content data and trend data, and we attended a reparationist meeting with FBA affiliated attendants. We analyzed their talking points against both progressive and conservative ideology to determine if their ideology was in line with one or both of the two major political affiliations. Our analysis resulted in clear amplification of disinformation veiled as cynicism and disillusionment with the current political system that is in line with right-wing, and particularly alt-right, talking points.

Keywords: Misinformation, Disinformation, High Opportunity Voters, Reparations, Foundation Black Americans, Tangibles, Voter Apathy, Intra-community Disinformation