The strategic role white victimhood narratives play in maintaining white supremacy: An analysis of the Afrikaner "refugee" phenomenon in the US

Francis-Lynne Raper

Abstract

Since early 2025 the Trump administration has granted Afrikaners refugee status and resettlement in the US. At the same time the administration cracked down on most other types of immigration towards the US and has halted refugee admissions. This article argues that white anxiety and victimhood narratives are employed by far-right political actors, Trump, and Afrikaner organisations such as AfriForum and Solidariteit to maintain an infallibility of whiteness and subsequently white supremacy. Charles Mills's work on white supremacy is used to argue that the idea of the white victim in contemporary politics is crucial for securing whiteness as the norm and the privileged position of white people in society. Further, this article illustrates how white victimhood narratives are crucial for protecting white supremacy and that this is the primary reason Afrikaners have been awarded refugee status in the US.

About the author

Francis-Lynne Raper (she/her) will finish her Philosophy Honours degree in 2025 and will start a Masters in Philosophy in 2026. Her fields of interest are political philosophy, ethics, and decolonial philosophy, focusing on issues of immigration, human rights, and international law. Her Honours thesis criticises the current treatment of asylum seekers in Western Europe through what can be described as a critical, democratic, and decolonial approach. In her spare time (if she gives herself any) she plays the bass guitar and violin and enjoys concerning herself with anything film.

 ⓟ 0009-0009-8270-5736

1. Introduction

South Africa has long been a cautionary tale for current United States (US) president Donald Trump. In the 1990s, when asked about white people becoming the minority in the US by 2050, Trump vouched that he would never allow the US to become "like South Africa" (Kanno-Youngs, Green, Eligon & Wong, 2025). The current Trump administration has initiated a total crackdown on immigration to the United States, deporting undocumented migrants, revoking the residence statuses of non-US citizens, and halting refugee admission (Wu & Sun, 2025). Despite this, Afrikaner "refugees" who claim to be fleeing persecution in South Africa due to racially targeted farm murders have been welcomed to the US. This article argues that white anxiety and victimhood narratives are exploited by political actors such as Trump, far-right groups, and Afrikaner organisations such as AfriForum and Solidariteit as a way to maintain the infallibility of whiteness and legitimise a white supremacist structuring of society.

First, white supremacy and whiteness will be conceptualised and their maintenance strategies — in which victimhood narratives play a key role — will be discussed. The following section looks at the different ways white supremacy and whiteness have been maintained and are still expressed in the US and its politics. Section 4 provides an overview of the importance and manipulation of a white victimhood narrative for Afrikaner identity. Section 5 analyses and critically discusses the discourse around and treatment of Afrikaner "refugees" in the US. I conclude with a personal reflection on the "Afrikaner-victim" phenomenon as a white South African.

2. White supremacy, whiteness, and white victimhood

This section will be drawing on the influential works of Charles W. Mills and Sarah Ahmed and the ways in which they have been able to outline various structural dimensions of white supremacy and whiteness. The former roughly denotes a global political structure of domination and the latter an identity and orientation that accompanies the dominant position within the white supremacist global hierarchy. Before discussing these terms and their effects in more detail, a brief overview of Mills' and Ahmed's uses of these terms is due.

Mills has written at length about the ways Western political philosophy systematically erases the realities of racism, thereby creating a structural blindness that upholds what he terms "the racial contract" and brings about a white supremacist world order in which some are continuously privileged while others are continuously exploited. Ahmed, in her influential 2007 paper "The Phenomenology of Whiteness", focuses on the phenomenological aspect of whiteness. While Mills conceives of whiteness as a political category denoting the standards and characteristics for those who uphold white supremacy and belong to the hegemonic group raced as "white", Ahmed considers whiteness through the lens of bodily and institutional orientation, arguing that the ability to embody whiteness — this hegemonic position within the white supremacist hierarchy — influences the ways in which people are able to move through the world, both in terms of social recognition and institutional inclusion. Whereas Mills outlines the political, economic, and cultural structures that accompany and maintain white supremacy, Ahmed focuses on the lived effects white supremacy has on the creation of a standard of whiteness, which again affects social recognition and institutional mobility. These theorists are highly foundational to the understanding of the institutional racial hierarchies and their subsequent effects which this essay focuses on, such as international law, immigration law, and socio-political movements that are centred on ethnicity, nationality, or race.

Charles Mills argues in his book *The Racial Contract* (1997) that our global political system is one of white supremacy, brought about by the racial contract and continuously legitimised and enabled by whiteness[1]. For Mills, white supremacy is not an extremist political ideology held only by some, but denotes the global domination of white people over those categorised as "nonwhite" (1997:2). It is a racist political system, rooted in European Enlightenment Humanism, in which only Europeans are regarded as "human", while those deemed

[1]Mills capitalises "the racial contract" and "whiteness" but this article does not capitalise these terms for the sake of consistent formatting.

[2]A term Mills derives from the liberal "social contract" and which similarly functions descriptively to explain the current political structuring of the world (1997:3).

"nonwhite" are regarded as less-than-human or "sub-persons". The racial contract[2] has historically been, and still is, the set of formal and informal agreements between those considered white to be regarded as full, free, and equal persons morally entitled to certain rights and liberties, while the opposite is the case for those considered "nonwhite", i.e., people of colour. For Mills, whiteness is a political category centred on a certain way of being in which those considered white uphold structural blindness to the realities of white supremacy, consent to white supremacy by not challenging it, and make this the standard for belonging to the hegemonic category of a "full person", thereby reproducing white supremacy and rewriting the racial contract (1997:18). Others similarly note that the racial hierarchy created renders whiteness the norm and naturalises (neo)colonialism, normalises the position of superiority held by white people, justifies the exclusion and deprivation of people of colour, and prioritises white voices, skills, and experiences (Steyn, 2004:45; Van der Westhuizen, 2018:45; Feola, 2021:532).

2.1. The maintenance of white supremacy

For Mills, whiteness legitimises and enables the global white supremacist order, normalising the privileged and central position those considered "white" have and the differential treatment this creates for "nonwhites". On a phenomenological level whiteness organises different "bodies" towards the world in different ways: the white "body" is the place from where the world unfolds, placing certain objects within its reach such as certain rights and opportunities (Ahmed, 2007:150). Spaces are orientated around the "bodies" that inhabit them, and this is how institutions become white-centred. Institutions reflect the "likeness" of the "bodies" that inhabit them, and as such it is those "bodies" that are at home, that are able to be comfortable as they move at ease through a system that has been created around their likeness (Ahmed, 2007:157). "If the world is made white, then the body-at-home is one that can inhabit whiteness" (Ahmed, 2007:153). From this the importance for white states to maintain their whiteness becomes apparent, as institutional whiteness secures the privileged position of being "at home" whiteness provides to those that are able to embody it. Similarly, Mills argues that the racial contract is continuously re-written, whether implicit or explicit, creating standards for whiteness which in turn maintain and reproduce white supremacy.

One way white supremacy is maintained institutionally is in the application of international law, as Western, predominantly-white states hold disproportional power within the international law regime (Sow, 2022:707). When determining who will be deemed a "refugee", Western states often use their own discretion, excluding refugees of colour (Sow, 2022:700; Tesfai, 2025:11). Racial tiering of immigrants and refugees allows Western states to maintain their dominance and whiteness, while naturalising their efforts through depictions of the global South as illiberal and unstable, undeserving in comparison to white refugees (Sow, 2022:700). This application of international law and the accompanying system of racial tiering became apparent after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as Western politicians and media depicted white Ukrainians as more deserving of asylum because of a shared "likeness" with other Western people (Sow, 2022:698). A journalist in the UK noted that "[t]hey seem so like us … [t]hat is what makes it so shocking. … Ukraine is a European country". Ukraine's deputy chief prosecutor stated even more explicitly that the war was especially troubling because those being killed were "European people with blue eyes and blonde hair" (Sow, 2022:699).

2.2. Visibility and victimhood

Through its inheritance, institutionalisation, and reproduction, whiteness becomes invisible to white bodies for whom their whiteness provides a horizon or point from which the world unfolds (Ahmed, 2007:150). As such, whiteness has often been described as being invisible, "so standard and normal that it often goes unseen" (Falkof, 2023:68). Some theorists argue that there has been a shift in the meaning of whiteness in recent years. Langa and Kiguwa argue that, within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, whiteness has moved from being unchallenged and invisible[3] "to a position of visibility, where it is now critiqued, discussed, debated, and sometimes problematised", in other words, no longer being taken for granted (2025:10). Feola too

[3]Langa & Kiguwa refer to it being invisible and unchallenged to white people. Although this can be contested I believe their general point stands: in post-apartheid South Africa a shift has taken place in which white people have had to re-examine what it means to be white in South Africa (2025:10).

writes that the trend of ethnonationalism in US politics is indicative of a shift in the meaning of whiteness: it has now become "a good to be both celebrated and defended" (2021:530). Some people increasingly experience their whiteness as being under attack, nesting their white identity in victimhood and experiencing feelings of anxiety, loss, and even rage (Feola, 2021:536; Metzl, 2019). Feelings of displacement arise when whiteness can no longer be a sense of pride, when multiculturalism sees the promotion of diversity and successes of those regarded as "outsiders", when some believe they experience "reverse-racism", or when immigration is seen as "excessive" (Sengul, 2022:594; Feola, 2021:536; Falkof, 2023:68). Feola argues that white anxiety about being replaced tends to rise when the white hegemonic power within a state is perceived to be in decline (2021:529). This anxiety centres around the fear that the national "ethnos" will be replaced by "undeserving", "non-white" others, threatening white people's privileged position in society.

According to Mills, one of the ways to "achieve whiteness" is to deny its fallibility, thereby remaining structurally blind to the realities of white supremacy. This perceived infallibility of whiteness is crucial for the legitimisation and preservation of the privileged position of white people. One way whiteness's infallibility is maintained is through the construction of white "victimhood". Victimhood implies innocence, and white anxiety becomes justified through the construction of the white victim, which denies white privilege and its hierarchical position (Steyn, 2004:157). For the idea of the white victim to take shape, whiteness must become "*hyper*-visible" so that "any move towards racial justice or reparation is rewritten as an attack on whites" (Falkof, 2023:68). The idea of the "white victim" furthermore reinstates whiteness by creating a binary in which violence against white people is seen as unnatural or unjustified, as something that is extraordinary, thereby implying the opposite for victims of colour (Falkof, 2023:67).

3. White supremacy and whiteness in the US

The roles played by whiteness and white supremacy in the US cannot be fully understood without also understanding the US's legacy of white settler colonialism. This framework created, as Aziz Rana described it, the "two faces" of American freedom, in which the freedom of white people within the US is predicated on the subordination, displacement, and dispossession of people of colour (Feola, 2021:531). Mills notes how white supremacy in white settler states, such as the US, was accepted as the status quo, and how the global economy continues to be dominated by white capital, thereby privileging white people (1997:27). Mills points out how, in the US, there has been a "growing intransigence and hostility of whites who think they have 'done enough', despite the fact that the country continues to be massively segregated", profits from the racial order in place, and has yet to pay reparations for slavery and discrimination (1997:37).[4]

3.1. The maintenance of whiteness through law

Historically, many have tried to "leverage" their whiteness in the US by conforming to its norms or by requesting to be declared white in order to secure civic rights and liberties that they would otherwise have been denied (Feola, 2021:532; Tinsley, 2022). Since 1790[5], race has been an integral part to US immigration policy, with federal law at the time "limiting naturalisation to free white persons" (Tesfai, 2025:3). Black people only became citizens in 1868, and other racial or ethnic groups did not receive citizenship until 1952, with many attempting to be declared white as a means of gaining access to moral and legal organisations and rights. Alien Land Laws restricted land ownership to white people, and the 1924 Immigration Act limited immigration to those eligible for citizenship, i.e., white people (Tesfai, 2025:3). Perhaps the most well-known examples of racial legislation in the US are the Jim Crow laws and the Black codes. These laws limited access to or excluded Black people from many facets of political, social, and economic life by, for example, restricting their right to vote, their access to education, and their right to

[4]Mills calculates that the estimated total amount needed in the US to compensate African Americans for their socio-economic position and historical suffering caused by "could take more than the entire wealth of the United States" today (1997:39).

[5]This is not to say that race was not integral to US life or policy prior to 1790, but merely that race became officially enshrined in immigration law in 1790.

certain types of private property (National Geographic Society, 2025).

More recent policy continues the racial tiering that is embedded within US attitudes towards immigration. Refugees of the Global South are often given humanitarian aid while refugees from the Global North receive resettlement. In its second term, the Trump administration curtailed many forms of migration by people of colour to the US; it has removed the Temporary Protected Status of about 350 000 Venezuelans and Haitians, and is preparing to do the same for Afghans and Cameroonians (Wu & Sun, 2025). Two other groups of people, however, have received the complete opposite treatment: Ukrainian refugees and Afrikaner "refugees". The administration has paused new applications for refugee status from Ukraine but has so far left in place the status of the roughly 240 000 refugees already in the US (Wu & Sun, 2025). Afrikaners are now welcomed into the US while many African refugees of colour that have been cleared and vetted remain in refugee camps waiting for resettlement (Kanno-Youngs, Green, Eligon & Wong, 2025). Another way white South Africans have received preferential treatment has been through the H-2A visa programme, which the US has made available to South African farmers since 1986 (Hadebe, 2025). The programme has provided economic and immigration opportunities for white South African farmworkers, allowing US employers to hire foreign farmworkers for temporary agricultural work. The programme has been highly controversial, with a surge in white South African farmworkers through the programme in recent years. The controversy has been amplified by the Trump administration since 2024, leading to many black American farmworkers being paid significantly less than their white South African counterparts or losing their jobs entirely.

3.2. Contemporary political movements

Feelings of displacement and victimhood have shaped and continue to shape racial politics and anti-immigration movements in the US through ethnonationalism and other far-right movements (Sengul, 2022:596; Feola, 2021:530). According to Thomson[6], ethnonationalism is the strongest predictor of anti-immigration attitudes among white American voters (2020:32). The important characteristics emphasised to determine who is "truly" American are those of ancestry or a (myth thereof), birthplace, language, and shared customs and traditions (Thomson, 2020:34). However, as is apparent in Thomson's conclusion, those who support anti-immigration policies for ethnonationalist reasons do so due to anxiety about a decline in ethnic homogeneity and a change in the nation's current demographics (2020:41). This not only illustrates how white anxiety about being replaced leads to anti-immigration views, but also emphasises the importance of race for the maintenance of the country's whiteness as seen in the concern for its demographics.

Some white US voters believe that the country's openness to immigrants will mean the loss of the nation's cultural identity, while others fear losing demographic majority status (Bagder & Cohn, 2019). Ayasli finds similar reasons for anti-immigration attitudes in the US, highlighting that some theorists believe cultural identity is crucial to how natives[7] respond to groups of immigrants, with those that share culture, religion, and language being accepted more easily (2024:160). Others argue that natives' immigration attitudes are informed by perceived economic self-interest: they welcome those immigrants who they expect will provide "important" services, contribute more to taxes, or appear as non-threatening competitors in the job market — but reject those who threaten their interests (Ayasli, 2024:160). Ayasli notes that cultural and economic reasons can be inconsistent, weighing differently in different contexts, and that political calculations of how immigration will affect a state's balance of powers ought to be considered (2024:159). Ayasli further notes that

> "[w]hen the stakes of politics are high, the expected political party affiliation of immigrants will help natives calculate the costs and/or benefits of admitting immigrants" (Ayasli, 2024:162).

[6]Using the 2016 American National Election Studies data.

[7]Ayasli uses the term "natives" to refer to US citizens that haves been born in the country, as opposed to those that acquired citizenship at a later point in their life. Although this term can cause issues when considering immigration views of those that became US citizens at a young age I believe the results from Ayasli's study are still useful in determining why US citizens hold certain views on immigration or types of immigrant groups.

3.3. Trump, the far-right, and white victimhood

The far-right is an umbrella term for various right-wing ideologies such as the extreme and radical right, with the populist radical right being the most dominant contemporary ideology (Sengul, 2022:596). Ideas of authoritarianism, nativism[8], and populism are popular within this ideology.[9] Far-right discourses successfully mobilise white anxiety and victimhood narratives by advancing claims of anti-white or "reverse" racism, of a double-standard in expressing cultural pride, or even by creating dangerous conspiracy theories — all while promoting ideas of "cultural superiority and physical strength" (Sengul, 2022:597). Two conspiracy theories which are of particular interest for this article are the theories of "The Great Replacement", and "white genocide". The Great Replacement theory[10] argues that current demographic majorities of Western states — white people — will become a minority at some time in the future (Sedgwick, 2024:549). The idea of "white genocide" is founded on similar fears of white identity being erased due to immigration by people of colour, as well as by policies that promote racial justice or equality (Sengul, 2022:598). Trump's relationship with the far-right groups who advance these conspiracy theories is noteworthy. Alt-right social media figures and far-right platforms such as *The Daily Stormer* and *Stormfront* contributed to Trump's electoral success through public endorsements and financial funding (Barnett, 2017:78). At the same time, they found in Trump someone to articulate many core far-right issues, such as the idea that the US is a "white man's country" (Barnett, 2017:78).

Trump and far-right groups in the US are known for their mobilisation of white victimhood[11] and anxiety. They promote the idea that white people would become the racial minority, that undeserving migrants are "invading" the country, that white people are discriminated against through diversity policies, and that "the nation risks losing its identity because of openness to foreigners" (Badger & Cohn, 2019; Martin, 2025:255; Majavu, 2022:4; Bhambra, 2017:214). Through such fear-mongering, the idea of a national identity under threat of "others" is cemented (Metzl, 2019). The future of the US becomes one to be feared by white people, one in which they will be replaced and become strangers in their "own" country: they will no longer be at home. It is therefore not surprising that anti-immigration sentiments have gained traction in the US. According to Martin, right-wing media normalises the baseline tenets of the white victimhood narrative, while politicians like Trump play into these concerns to win over voters and gain political capital (2025:257). Similarly, Metzl (2019) writes that mobilisation happens through the normalisation of white victimhood narratives, when white voters are reassured that their anxiety is both valid and should steer their vote.

4. White supremacy and whiteness in South Africa

This section will focus on enclave Afrikaners, a group who have defined themselves through non-governmental organisations like AfriForum and Solidariteit as victims of racism in post-apartheid South Africa (Van der Westhuizen, 2018:47). Historically, white supremacy has played an important role in the formation of both Afrikaner identity and the apartheid system. Throughout history, white people in South Africa have used racial categories to legitimise colonial expansion and exploitation (Majavu, 2022:3). Afrikaners, descendants of the Dutch, competed with the English for possession of the ultimate whiteness and, consequently, ultimate sovereignty (Steyn, 2004:147). Afrikaner identity arose from pride over refusing subordination to the English, forming a white identity rooted in resistance and victimhood (Steyn, 2004:148). Adding to their feelings of

[8]Nativism here refers to the political ideology which privileges native-born citizens over other types of citizens or residents in a state.

[9]Nativism is its primary concern while populist rhetoric finds its expressions in the belief that the political elite is corrupt, conspiring against "the people" or "native group" (Sengul, 2022:596).

[10]The conspiracy directly derives from Renaud Camus, but the idea has a long history in scholarship to be found in population replacement theories, which all to various degrees and for various reasons argue that some ethnic majority group in a state will be replaced by a different group.

[11]Such mobilisations of white victimhood and anxiety have had at times lead to damaging effects as with the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, 2017, which led to injuries and one death of counterprotesters (Martin, 2025:255; Falkof, 2023:68). Throughout the Charlottesville riots "you will not replace us" and "Jews will not replace us" were popular slogans, referring to the Great Replacement conspiracy theory.

[12]Also commonly referred to as the "Anglo–Boer War" and sometimes, especially in Afrikaans, "The Second War for Freedom" (Porter, 2000:639–640).

victimhood, the Afrikaners were defeated at the hand of the English in the South African War[12] of 1899–1902. This defeat gave rise to an increase in Afrikaner nationalist sentiments which is thought to have played a role in leading the ethnic supremacist Nationalist Party to institute the regime of Apartheid in 1948 (Steyn, 2004:147). Apartheid was a system characterised by the formalisation and intensification of racial segregation, which lasted until its abolition in 1994 (*South African History Online*, 2022). In addition to a rise in Afrikaner nationalism after the war and independence, another motivation for Apartheid was what the Carnegie Commission labelled the "poor white problem"[13] in the 1930s (Falkof, 2023:68; Majavu, 2022:2). Apartheid was a successful affirmative action scheme, and was able to temporarily make invisible the instability of white supremacy (Van der Westhuizen, 2018:46).

The end of apartheid saw a preference for reconciliation rather than Black liberation, and thus the economic position of white South Africans stayed largely unaltered (Steyn, 2018:28). Since then, white South Africans have remained economically secure with annual income of white households having increased significantly in comparison to that of other racial groups in South Africa (Van der Westhuizen, 2018:45). In response to being asked to take responsibility for apartheid, or in reaction to AA policies, some white citizens have become defensive, denying their part in apartheid or isolating themselves from the rest of South African society (Burton, 2018:40). Although they are in the minority, these white South Africans harbour racist and ignorant views, and often seek to protect their privileged position. Afrikaans enclave nationalists, including neo-Afrikaners, are most vocal in their attempt to secure their privilege (Van der Westhuizen, 2018:46). The enclave nationalists look up to the Global North's whiteness, identify themselves through anti-politics, partake in inward migration to class-based territories, and express nostalgia for the "old South Africa" (Steyn, 2018:29; Van der Westhuizen, 2018:47). Their Afrikaner identity is rooted in consumption of products catered towards them, as is most apparent in the power of organisations like Solidariteit and AfriForum (Van der Westhuizen, 2018:48).

4.1. Victimhood narratives and contemporary Afrikaner identity

In an effort to avoid taking accountability and maintaining the supposed infallibility of whiteness, these Afrikaners distance themselves from the past and the rest of the country by claiming innocence, withdrawing into private spaces, and constructing themselves as victims of AA and the country's general decline in living standards (Steyn, 2018:29). AfriForum and Solidariteit are proficient in using these three tactics to avoid accountability. Solidariteit, or Solidarity Movement, is a trade union turned conglomerate of organisations including educational institutions, private security companies, and news and media channels (Van Zyl–Hermann & Verbuyst, 2022:835). AfriForum, a subsidiary of Solidariteit, describes itself as a civil rights organisation concerned with minority rights, however, it is mostly known for standing up for the rights of Afrikaners through protests, legal actions, social media, and international campaigning (Van Zyl–Hermann & Verbuyst, 2022:835). What is perhaps most important to note is the utility of centring the Afrikaner identity in victimhood. Whiteness becomes an inward-looking process, reproducing itself through white talk when the Afrikaner is cast as the victim — and, with that, as innocent (Langa & Kiguwa, 2025:10; Burton, 2018:40). As Steyn writes, "the victim appropriates innocence" and through this is justified in their feelings and actions, among which villainising those deemed the "victimisers": the ANC government, or at times, Black people in South Africa as a whole (2004:157).

Organisations such as AfriForum and Solidariteit have monetised feelings of white loss and defensiveness in the post-apartheid project (Langa & Kiguwa, 2025:2). They have opposed national efforts at redress by denying Afrikaner complicity in apartheid and by creating a narrative which portrays Afrikaners as victims in modern South Africa (Majavu, 2022:4; Van Zyl–Hermann & Verbuyst, 2022:835). AfriForum has sued politician Julius Malema for singing the protest song "Kill the

[13]Some Afrikaners were living in poverty and this was seen as threatening the racial hierarchy created, which was predicated on white dominance seeming "natural" through white people's "civilised" way of life (Falkof, 2023:69).

[14]Which was written in the context of armed struggle during apartheid but which is now sung symbolically rather than literally (Langa & Kiguwa, 2025:6).

Boer" ("Kill the Farmer")[14] in 2010 and 2022, arguing that Malema's singing of the song constitutes hate speech and has contributed to the phenomenon of farm murders — a phenomenon which they claim involves the disproportionate and racially motivated killing of white farmers (Langa & Kiguwa, 2025:6). They won the 2010 case but lost the 2022 case, with the court finding that it did not constitute hate speech. There has been no proof that "Kill the Boer" has led to any farm murders, and the Institute for Security Studies has found that farm murder rates are not disproportional to the murder rates of the rest of the country (Burger 2018; Langa & Kiguwa, 2025:7).

These organisations encourage restorative nostalgia, reconstructing history by using nostalgia as if it were truth (such as seen in AfriForum's defence of the use of the old South African flag[15]) They proclaim apocalyptic warnings, rooted in racist beliefs of Black incompetence, that land redistribution or expropriation[16] will be disastrous for the country's economy and food security. Narratives of white anxiety, loss, and victimhood are evident in the white apocalyptic futures of which AfriForum and Solidariteit warn (Langa & Kiguwa, 2025:9). Through these provocations, they defend whiteness against the revelation of its fallibility (Langa & Kiguwa, 2025:2), and turn white guilt and shame into white pride (Majavu, 2022:4).

5. Afrikaner refugees and the US

The US and South Africa both have a longstanding history of white supremacy. Both countries are white settler states in which the white polity was differentiated from people of colour, who were deemed "subpersons", and the state was founded on the extermination and displacement of indigenous peoples (Mills, 1997:28). In both countries, the formation of the state was the result of intra-white conflict, the defeated Afrikaners and Southerners saw themselves as victimised by the liberal English or Northerners, and both groups consequently instituted segregationist policies (Majavu, 2022:5; Steyn, 2004:148). For both countries, "white poverty" was seen as a threat to the existing racial order which had to be eradicated by racist laws, and anxieties about demographically being or becoming the minority are prevalent in both (Falkof, 2023:68; Majavu, 2022:4). Jim Crow laws and apartheid were similar systems of legally encoded segregation, and, during the Cold War, the US supported the South African apartheid government and prioritised anti-communist alliances above human rights (Hadebe, 2025).

5.1. The treatment of Afrikaners upholds white supremacy

The Afrikaner lobby, consisting of AfriForum and Solidariteit[17] have successfully made the "white genocide" of Afrikaners[18] a top talking point both internationally and in the US (Poplak, 2025). Since 2018, the now resigned deputy CEO of AfriForum and head of policy at Solidariteit, Ernst Roets, has travelled to the US to raise awareness for white farm murders, appearing several times on Fox Network's Tucker Carlson's shows. He labelled white farm murders and land reform policies as attempts to "crush" the Afrikaner minority, and has criticised diversity policies which do not allow Afrikaner identity to be celebrated (Van Zyl–Hermann & Verbuyst, 2022:840). Carlson has recently summed up his discussions with Roets by stating that "South Africa is shockingly racist against white people — 'far more than apartheid ever was' to Black people" (Poplak, 2025).

The white victimisation of Afrikaners was further apparent when Trump met with South African president Ramaphosa on the 21 May 2025. Trump showed a

[15] AfriForum has argued that the display of the old flag of South Africa during farm murder protests should be protected as freedom of expression, however, Langa & Kiguwa argue that the flag seems to idealise and glorify the apartheid era within the farm murder protest contexts, symbolising a desire for the "good old days" (2025:5).

[16] The Natives Land Act of 1913 seized and reallocated 87% of the land in South Africa to white people, yet AfriForum, in arguing against proposed Land Expropriation Without Compensation argues that no land was disposed from Africans (Langa & Kiguwa, 2025:8).

[17] It ought to be noted that Solidariteit and AfriForum are not alone in doing this. Other movements or organisations include Orania, a white separatist town in the Northern Cape province of the country, the Suidlanders, an Afrikaner survivalist group known for popularising the idea of an ongoing "white genocide" in South Africa against Afrikaners they believe is evident through the phenomenon of farm murders, or individuals such as Steve Hofmeyr, who in 2013 campaigned to "raise awareness" for this supposed genocide (Majavu, 2022:4; Falkof, 2023:71).

[18] AfriForum and Solidariteit do not explicitly call the white farm murders a "white genocide", but their campaigning has still contributed to this narrative (Falkof, 2023:72).

[19] The white crosses in reality were part of a visual protest against farm murders, not an actual burial ground (Kanno-Youngs & Green, 2025).

compilation of videos he claimed demonstrated "white genocide" taking place in South Africa. The footage included scenes of Julius Malema singing *Kill the Boer* at a rally and scores of white crosses supposedly depicting white people murdered on farms.[19] Trump emphasised the race of those killed in the farm murder narrative, often emphasising the absurdity or shock of that particular situation. "These are all white farmers being buried" Trump noted, adding: "if you look at the videos, how does it get any worse?" and "I don't know how you explain that" (2025). Towards the end of the conference, he mentions that he is against the loss of any lives. Yet, his recent policies which deny refugees and immigrants of colour admission or stay in the US, while Afrikaners are welcomed into the country, paint a different picture.

This discourse around and treatment of Afrikaners in the US illustrates the structure of white supremacy both in the US and globally. One example is Carlson's denial of the facts about farm murder rates and the need for AA policies in the country, and his claim that white South Africans now experience more racism than people of colour ever did during apartheid. Another example is how white South Africans are prioritised above black American farmworkers by the H-2A visa programme. The claims of white people are taken more seriously, and Trump's repeated emphasis on the race of the farmers re-affirms white supremacist prioritisation of white people and the naturalisation of whiteness. The rapid acceptance and resettlement of Afrikaner "refugees" — whose racial targeting in the "farm murder" phenomenon has been disproven — while thousands of African refugees are still awaiting their resettlement in the US further highlights the privileging of white people. White Afrikaners are continually being recast as victims, thereby upholding whiteness and white supremacy.

5.2. Why Afrikaners?

Why has the Republican Party and the Trump administration been so inviting to "Afrikaners"? The Trump administration has argued that Afrikaners would be better off in the US than back home, believing they will quickly contribute to the economy, will not challenge national security, and will easily be assimilated. (Kanno-Youngs, *et al.*, 2025). Many of the reasons discussed in Section 3 for anti-immigration sentiment among white Americans might not apply to white South African "refugees"; they are perhaps expected to be culturally compatible, unthreatening to a white ethnos, not economically competitive with white Americans, economic contributors rather than welfare scroungers, and affiliated with Trump or the Republican Party.[20]

However, it is important to address the strategic interest the far-right and Trump have in white Afrikaners for creating a narrative of white victimhood. Far-right groups portray Afrikaners as victims to promote conspiracy theories such as The Great Replacement and "white genocide"[21] and to invalidate a South African government led by the Black majority (Poplak, 2025). Trump is similarly known for mobilising white anxiety and fearmongering, warning that undocumented migration will lead to the "downfall" of the current, "white" US. According to this narrative, the nation is under threat of "undeserving" "others", casting white people as the victims of immigration to the US — an apocalyptic rhetoric which is echoed in the South African context. The future of the US becomes one to be feared by white people, one in which they will be replaced and become strangers in their "own" country. These white victimhood narratives, in their mission to maintain whiteness and white supremacy, inform white voters that their anxiety is valid and that it should determine their vote.

6. Conclusion

It is evident that, in a ploy to maintain the infallibility of whiteness, white victimhood narratives are created in order to appropriate innocence. What we observe in the US and South Africa is a scramble by those trying to secure the privileged position white people have had throughout the countries' histories by producing and reproducing white victimhood narratives. In South Africa, Afrikaner identity continues to be rooted in victimhood for certain groups of Afrikaners who produce such narratives through restorative nostalgia and apocalyptic warnings. In the US, Trump and far-right actors similarly

[20] These are some reasons I have found that might explain the acceptance of Afrikaner "refugees". I do not claim that these are the sole reasons for their admittance, nor should these reasons be taken as an attempt to naturalise the privileging of white Afrikaners. In fact, the norms of whiteness, as should be apparent by now, underpin these reasons.

[21] The idea of "white genocide" is not restricted to South Africa alone, however, white Afrikaners have through the visibility of white crime victims become the face of global white right-wing movements (Falkof, 2023:71).

mobilise white anxiety through apocalyptic warnings that the nation will be "lost" to immigrants if it does not crack down on various kinds of migration. At the same time, white Americans are made out to be the victim of migration to the US, of AA policies, of conspiracies against them, etc. It is perhaps then not surprising that the Afrikaner — "victim" of farm murders, white genocide, and AA and land redistribution policies — has come to embody the face of this white victimhood narrative. Through political discourse and treatment, these political actors ensure American white voters that their white anxiety is warranted, channelling political support for their movements. Through this process white South Africans claiming refugee status in the US become nothing but pawns, if not active players, in the effort to uphold white supremacy and whiteness.

Over the years in South Africa, I have found a deep sense of estrangement. I think many white South Africans, especially those with loved ones that have gone down the "AfriForum–to–white genocide" pipeline, so to speak, can relate. At times, it feels like we live in two different countries. I live in a country that is divided, has troubling levels of crime, corruption, and inequality, and yet I, perhaps naïvely, remain optimistic. I see how many people in the country are still working towards unity — the dream of the "rainbow nation" — and I believe that, if enough people grant this goal the same ideological significance once held by whiteness, that dream will not be lost. But other white South Africans seem to experience South Africa in an entirely different way, as a country no longer structured "in their image". They no longer feel at home, they believe they are racially targeted and discriminated against, and, above all, they seem to believe, implicitly or explicitly, that their privileged position in the country was, and still is, warranted: they still hold onto their whiteness. When I started writing this article, some of my family members had applied for refugee status as Afrikaners in the US. Since then, they have been accepted and have moved to the US, leaving their lives in South Africa behind. While I wish them the best, it saddens me to see the people I care about turned into pawns for political gain[22]. I think Richard Poplak (2025) said it best:

The forgiveness extended to the white minority at the end of apartheid is one of the most exceptionally human and humane moments of our species' bloody history. By turning their backs on this, by accepting refugee status and claiming the mantle of exceptional victimhood, right-wing Afrikaners have become bit players in MAGA's noisy but empty scam. They leave nothing behind them, except their home.

[22]Feelings of white anxiety and displacement, but also trauma from having been a victim of violent crime on a farm or the confusion some might feel about their "new" place in the country are mobilised by political actors and organisations. I am not claiming that these feelings are founded or "rational", but I believe these are things that should have been addressed through self-reflection and open-dialogue. Instead, political actors have monetised these feelings for their own gain only deepening their polarising effects and maintenance of white supremacy.

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