Introduction

"We don't exist and when we do exist, we exist as a threat. This is exhausting."[9] These are the words of Michelle Obama, the former First Lady of the United States. In her podcast, Obama elaborates, "What the white community doesn't understand about being a person of color in this nation is that there are daily slights in our workplaces where people talk over you, or people don't even see you."[10] As an example, Obama told a story about waiting in line with her two daughters and a friend at an ice cream parlor and another customer cutting in line. When she addressed the situation with the customer who jumped in line, Obama observed the following: "The woman didn't apologize, she never looked me in my eye, she didn't know it was me. All she saw was a Black person, or a group of Black people, or maybe she didn't even see that. Because we were that invisible."[11]

Psychosocial stressors are a part of the human condition. For African Americans, however, there are added stressors that impact daily functioning, due to no fault of their own. These stressors include, but are not limited to, discrimination, microaggressions, and police brutality, as well as income, health, and education inequalities. There isn't a debate about the mere existence and the devastating impact of these stressors on African Americans, as illustrated by Michelle Obama. Research has shown that these stressors often have negative effects on physical and mental health outcomes, among others. In fact, Sherman James coined the "John Henryism Hypothesis" (JHH)—which is rooted in the assumption that individuals of lower socioeconomic status, and especially African Americans, frequently face psychosocial stressors that necessitate they expend substantial energy on a daily basis in order to manage the stress that stems from these circumstances—in order to help explain and/or predict the prevalence of high blood pressure within these groups.[12] Importantly, the JHH is also rooted in the assumption that

not all individuals facing routine psychosocial stressors consistently respond with the same amount or level of effort; those who do constantly put forth considerable effort in the midst of stressful, challenging circumstances are engaging in high effort coping (or high John Henryism), while those less inclined to exert consistent energy to manage psychosocial stressors are reflective of low effort coping (or low John Henryism).[13] Inspired by the JHH, and more broadly, the research on John Henryism, this book explores the influence coping has on African Americans' political attitudes and behaviors.

Active Coping Measure

Coping in this book is measured using the John Henryism Active Coping scale, which is extensively detailed in chapters one and two.[14] John Henryism is defined as "a strong behavioral predisposition to cope actively [(vs. passively)] with psychosocial environmental stressors."[15] This measure, developed by Sherman James, taps the type of effort (low or high) one exerts to overcome stressors. High-effort copers are actively (rather than passively) trying to overcome obstacles, and these individuals show sustained, persistent cognitive and emotional engagement in achieving their goal.[16] Similar to the folk legend, John Henry, who inspired the concept, individuals who score high on JHAC (high-effort or active copers) are known to put forth hard work, strenuous effort, relentless determination, and impressive vigor in the midst of challenging circumstances, and they reflect a high level of personal efficacy.[17]

Before we present the outline for this book, the goal in the first part of this introduction is to highlight some of the stressors (in their various manifestations) that African Americans confront, often on a daily basis, and subsequent reactions to these stressors. Due to data limitations, we are not able to attribute the responses to these recent events to active or passive coping; rather, the cases we highlight serve as illustrative examples of stressors, such as discrimination and police brutality, that African Americans face. However, we believe these cases shine light on the need for future studies to consider and incorporate measures of coping, such as JHAC. Using data from the National Study of American Life (conducted in 2001 and 2003), our findings suggest that coping has much to offer in the study of the political sphere. Following the illustrative examples of recent cases of psychosocial stressors, we discuss the purpose of the book and explain our contribution to the literature on coping and specifically, its influence on political attitudes and behavior. Then, we provide a brief outline of the chapters.

Ahmaud Arbery: "A Modern-Day Lynching"[18]

On February 23, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery went jogging. With the temperature in the sixties, in Brunswick, Georgia, it was perfect running weather. Arbery's intent was to stay in shape. So, for this twenty-five-year-old, running was familiar; something he liked to do.[19] Little did he know that a simple jog around a familiar city would cost him his life. Around 1:00 p.m., according to the Glynn County Police Department's report,[20] Arbery was chased, yelled at, physically assaulted, and gunned down by three white men. Much about the encounter is clear, since it was captured on a cell phone video, provided to the police department and subsequently made public. In the video,[21] as Arbery was running, a white truck was parked in front of him. Standing on the back of the truck bed was Gregory McMichael, a former police officer, while Travis McMichael, the son of Gregory McMichael, was standing in front of the open driver's door with a shotgun in a pointed position. Behind him, in another car, was William Bryan Jr., who was filming the incident. According to the police, Bryan wasn't relegated to simply recording the event; he used his vehicle to "confine and detain Arbery without legal authority."[22] As Arbery approached the truck, after being chased for nearly four minutes,[23] he moved to the right side of the road to go around the truck—most likely to avoid the gun-toting Travis McMichael. As Arbery went around the right side of the truck, McMichael ran to confront Arbery. At this point a scuffle ensued between the two, and there was a fight for the gun McMichael was holding. The fight ended with McMichael shooting Arbery three times with the shotgun. Arbery was shot in the "center of his chest, upper left chest around the armpit and his right wrist."[24] Autopsy reports showed that there were no alcohol or drugs in Arbery's system.

Reactions to Arbery's killing varied from peaceful protests, anger, and sadness toward those who committed this despicable act, but also toward a justice system that had initially justified their actions. For African Americans, it was especially difficult both psychologically and emotionally. James Ravenell, an avid runner, explains, "I'm legitimately just tired of it. It's a lot of trauma to constantly know that people see you and they just feel threatened by you, by nothing that you have done."[25] He further says, "Running is a thing that allows us to escape, even just for a little bit, from all the craziness. Here's a thing that so many of us are trying to do . . . just so we can stay physically fit and mentally fit. To have this type of assault on us is just really exhausting."[26] John Piggott, a marathon runner, states, "I saw the video and I can't get it out of my mind. This guy wasn't doing

anything but being himself and that could have been me, that could have been anybody. He did nothing wrong to anyone."[27] Anthony Reed, a cofounder of the National Marathoners Association, "hopes it brings visibility to the fact that . . . Blacks have a different experience when we go for a run. We would like to run to relieve the stress, but in the back of our minds that same run can be stressful."[28]

Similar sentiments were expressed in an article published in *Mic*, wherein Vanessa Taylor asked runners to share their thoughts. Here are some of their feelings.

> I cannot help but feel enraged that my safety is contingent upon my invisibility. . . . It's a grim reminder that your very existence as a Black person in this country puts you in constant danger, and all you can do is continue trying to live the life you want in spite of it. . . . It brings about a sense of frustration, hopelessness, anger, and I find it so sad that I and so many others have to legitimately consider the risks of being outside merely because of the color of our skin and others' perception of it.[29]

These reactions speak to the stress that discriminatory experiences and racial injustices inflict on those involved or observing, whether directly or indirectly, and the physical and psychological wear and tear that such circumstances have on both the individual as well as on groups. These emotions and lived experiences are described as haunting, exhausting, demoralizing, frustrating, and saddening, and they suggest an awareness that requires considerable energy to manage the stress associated with these conditions.

George Floyd: "I Can't Breathe"[30]

On May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, forty-six-year-old George Floyd, an African American man, went into Cup Foods, a grocery store he frequented often, to buy a pack of cigarettes.[31] This mundane activity set the wheels in motion to what would be Floyd's last evening alive. Suspecting the twenty dollars Floyd used to buy his cigarettes was a counterfeit bill, a teenage Cup Foods employee called police to report it, and a transcript of the call to 911 reveals that the employee reported Floyd refused to give the cigarettes back, and the employee accused him of being inebriated and out of control.[32] Minutes later, two police officers arrived and found Floyd

and two other people sitting in a car.[33] One of the officers, Thomas Lane, approached the car, pulled his gun out, and gave Floyd an order to show his hands, which he allegedly repeated around ten times before Floyd was ordered to exit the vehicle.[34]

Following the police officers' arrival, an initially cooperative and apologetic Floyd became distressed as he resisted handcuffs and being put into a squad car, informing the officers—who grew in number over the course of the arrest—that he was claustrophobic.[35] After he was pulled away from the passenger side by another officer, Derek Chauvin, Floyd fell to the ground and lay there in handcuffs face down.[36] The officers restrained Floyd while onlookers started filming the incident.[37] It was at this time that Chauvin "placed his left knee between [Floyd's] head and neck,"[38] an act that lasted eight minutes and forty-six seconds.[39]

During those eight minutes and forty-six seconds, Floyd's last moments alive, he repeated over twenty times to the officers that he could not breathe, begged "Please, please, please,"[40] and called out for his mother.[41] In one gasp, Floyd pleaded, "You're going to kill me, man,"[42] to which Chauvin responded, "Then stop talking, stop yelling. It takes a heck of a lot of oxygen to talk."[43] Floyd went on to say, "Can't believe this, man. Mom, love you. Love you. Tell my kids I love them. I'm dead."[44] It was six minutes into the restraint that Floyd became silent and nonresponsive, while onlookers pleaded for the officers to check his pulse.[45] Officer Kueng, when checking Floyd's right wrist, informed the other officers that he "couldn't find [a pulse],"[46] but no one moved. After Chauvin finally removed his knee from Floyd's neck, a motionless Floyd was put into an ambulance and taken to Hennepin County Medical Center, where "he was pronounced dead about an hour later."[47] The four officers involved in Floyd's arrest were ultimately fired, and the video of his arrest went viral on social media.[48]

Reactions to the killing of Floyd were swift. Demonstrators poured into the streets of Minneapolis.[49] Some marched in peaceful protest of Floyd's unjust murder, while others vandalized police cars and the police station.[50] In the days and weeks that followed, demonstrations spread across the country, with protestors in Atlanta, Memphis, Los Angeles, Portland, and other cities across all fifty states and DC, taking to the streets to protest, with some lying face down, similar to Floyd, with their hands behind them, chanting the words of desperation he uttered repeatedly, "I can't breathe."[51] The police station in Minneapolis, where the officers involved in Floyd's arrest worked, was taken over by protestors and set on fire.[52] For many protestors, who varied in age, race, ethnicity, and gender, it was their first time taking to

the streets, and they felt emotionally compelled to do so after witnessing the viral video of the incident.[53] For other protestors, it was the countless cases of racial discrimination that inspired them to march, including the recent case of Ahmaud Arbery, and that of Breonna Taylor, a twenty-six-year-old African American health worker who was killed in her own home in Kentucky by police officers.[54]

Even with curfews imposed by many US cities, the protests did not come to an end. The outrage continued, and by the eighth night of protests, the number of demonstrators was now in the tens of thousands across the US.[55] While most demonstrations remained peaceful, there were demonstrations that turned violent, with one man driving his car into protestors in Brooklyn.[56] Protests were also seen around the world. Tens of thousands of protestors marched throughout Australia, France, Germany, Spain and the UK.[57] Protestors chanted and held up signs that read, "I can't breathe," "Racism is suffocating us," and "Black Lives Matter."[58] Government officials from around the globe largely expressed their support for what they deemed legitimate demonstrations, and condemned the "abuse of power" and racial violence in the US, as well as President Trump's military threats.[59] The protests, both violent and nonviolent, featured prominently across social media platforms.

The police killing of Floyd took a particularly overwhelming emotional toll on African Americans. Eugene Robinson of the *Washington Post* wrote that he wanted to "throw something" and "scream";[60] Oprah Winfrey expressed that "I haven't been able to get the image of the knee on his neck out of my head";[61] Rihanna wrote, "The magnitude of devastation, anger, and sadness I've felt has been overwhelming to say the least";[62] Kevin Hart expressed that "we deserve the right to feel safe";[63] and Kelly Rowland wrote, "I can't sit still. I'm angry. I'm hurt. At times feeling hopeless."[64]

Breonna Taylor: "Say Her Name"[65]

On March 13, 2020, at around midnight, twenty-six-year-old Breonna Taylor, an emergency medical technician, was sleeping in her Louisville, Kentucky home with her boyfriend when police officers executed a "no-knock" warrant, broke down her door, and stormed into her home.[66] "Believing they were intruders, [Taylor's] boyfriend fired one shot at the officers using a handgun he legally owned. The officers responded by firing 22 bullets, killing Taylor."[67] It was later revealed that Taylor had been shot eight times, and that

police officers had lied to obtain the warrant they used to raid her house, violating federal civil rights laws and leading to her death.[68] While Taylor's family claimed the police had the wrong address, authorities claimed her apartment was raided due to an alleged connection with a suspect believed to be hiding drugs in (or receiving them in packages at) the apartment; however, no drugs were found in her apartment during or after the raid.[69] The incident report revealed numerous errors made by the police, including the lack of body camera footage from the raid and the incorrect assertion that officers had not forcibly entered the home.[70]

The events of that fateful night have been widely disputed by the police officers involved, but following the raid, at least four former and current police officers (at the time of this writing) have been federally charged with offenses ranging from civil rights violations to use of excessive force, conspiracy, and obstruction.[71] Moreover, the city of Louisville agreed to a twelve-million-dollar settlement to be paid to the Taylor family in response to the wrongful death lawsuit they filed.[72] Three months after Taylor was killed, no-knock search warrants were banned in Louisville after city council members passed "Breonna's Law."[73]

Though the killing of Floyd arguably received wider attention given the virality of his murder, people throughout the country and in several places around the world flocked to the streets in 2020 to protest police brutality and racial injustice in the United States, while holding up signs and chanting phrases that also drew attention to Taylor's killing, such as "Say her name."[74] Protestors, and Taylor's family, have demanded police reform and accountability. The reactions to the killings of Taylor, Floyd, and Arbery shine light on the mental, emotional, and physical toll such cases have on African Americans; events that should be rare are unfortunately commonplace, and this reality is something African Americans are forced to grapple with.

Purpose of the Book

The cases mentioned above exemplify one form of psychosocial stressor (discriminatory experiences) that African Americans confront on a daily basis and the emotional reactions elicited by such stressors. However, there are many other types of stressors experienced by African Americans—including, but not limited to, income inequality, health disparities, poor education, and lack of upward mobility in jobs. There is a tremendous amount of research

on African Americans and coping, but this research has been primarily relegated to psychology and public health. The question this book seeks to answer is: If coping mechanisms affect general social, psychological, and health outcomes, why wouldn't they affect political attitudes and behavior? However, we know much less about the ways coping influences actions and attitudes in the political sphere.

Throughout this book, we shed light on the ways in which coping can inform and enrich studies within the field of political science. More specifically, we explore how coping influences reactions to discrimination, the consumption of Black information, support for race-specific policies, attitudes toward American values, intragroup and ideological beliefs, and political participation. We offer theoretical and empirical evidence supporting our argument that coping plays an important role in the study of political behavior and political psychology. Moreover, coping has applicability to studies on public opinion and decision making, among others. We show throughout this book that coping is intertwined with the ways in which individuals react to distressing situations, the types of information they seek and consume, the ideological views and attitudes they embrace, and the types of (race-specific) policies they support. We firmly believe that studying coping within the field of political science is crucial at present and will become even more important in the future.

Book Outline

In chapter 1, we explore coping in its various forms. We trace its theoretical roots and show how scholars have defined and approached it in different ways. Along the way, we make clear through references to previous research that coping plays a significant role in a number of outcomes, including (but not limited to) social, psychological, and health outcomes. We draw from the coping literature the particular form of coping known as John Henryism Active Coping, which we argue is missing from the political science literature. An overview of the literature on JHAC shows its wide application, and sets the stage for us to explore its influence on political attitudes and behaviors.

In chapter 2, we offer a more detailed overview of the JHAC measure and the empirics associated with it. We discuss our data and methods at large, which appear throughout the book in various analyses, and present a series of tables that help to put our findings into perspective.

In chapter 3, we explore the role coping plays in reactions to discrimination. We begin with an example of a recent event that occurred in May 2020 to illustrate the significance and relevance of discriminatory experiences before moving into a brief overview of the literature on reactions to discrimination. We expect to find that individuals who are high-effort copers will be more likely to react to discrimination in a handful of ways (for example, doing something about it, praying about it), and we run a series of models to test our expectations. We find that, controlling for the effects of other variables, high-effort copers are more likely than low-effort copers to pray, to work harder to prove other wrongs, and to try to do something about experiences of discrimination. We discuss the implications of these findings as well as potential explanations for them and offer ideas for future research.

In chapter 4, we explore the relationship between coping and ideological views. More specifically, we explore the relationship between coping and Black nationalism, as well as coping and American values. We begin this chapter, much like the preceding and subsequent empirical chapters, with an example illustrating the modern-day significance of this topic. We expect high-effort copers to be more likely than low-effort copers to embrace ideological views that fall under the umbrellas of Black nationalism and American values and find support for this in our empirical results. We discuss potential explanations for our findings along with implications.

In chapter 5, we explore the role coping plays in policy preferences. More specifically, we explore the effect of coping on African Americans' race-specific policy positions and preferences. We expect high-effort copers to be more likely than low-effort copers to support race-specific policies and find empirical support for this. We discuss implications of our findings and limitations in our study, and we suggest ideas for future research.

In chapter 6, we explore the relationship between coping and Black information consumption. We draw from studies concerning identity, racial orientation, and socialization, as well as from those concerning media consumption and information sources. In doing so, we further expand our argument that coping plays a role in a multitude of contexts: in this case, in the information individuals consume. We expect to find that high-effort copers will be more likely to consume Black information than low-effort copers (and consume them more often), and our empirical results show support for this hypothesis. We offer potential explanations, implications, and limitations of this study.

In chapter 7, we explore the role coping plays in political participation. Based on the political science literature on efficacy, and the literature on JHAC, we expect to find that high-effort copers will be more likely to participate in politics than low-effort copers. However, our empirical results do not align with this expectation. We offer potential explanations for this unexpected finding; most notably, we argue that when it comes to political participation, context matters. While coping and political participation are not strongly related in this study under the years for which we have data available, we argue that more recent years are likely to show a strong relationship between coping and political participation. Importantly, these results, which do not align with theoretical expectations in the ways that those in the preceding empirical chapters do, are a clear illustration of why/ how it is essential to expand the study of JHAC. This measure does not, to our knowledge, appear in recent surveys, but we argue that it would be extremely insightful if incorporated into future studies, given the relevance and rise in significance of coping in a variety of contexts.

In our final chapter, we wrap up the book by briefly highlighting our argument and the theoretical and empirical contribution it makes to the study of coping and the political science literature. We reiterate why studying coping matters, and how the JHAC measure in particular can expand our knowledge and understanding of the role coping plays in the political sphere. We again highlight limitations of our work, implications of our findings, and potential avenues for future research.

Ultimately, it is our goal in this book to start a conversation and advance the incorporation of coping into political science. We strive to make it clear that coping plays an essential role in the political world, including in the study of political attitudes and behavior, and this book offers a first look at how political science and related fields can benefit from including coping in relevant studies. It is our hope that future surveys and studies in political science will take JHAC into consideration and use it, allowing for more data and richer analyses using this measure in the future. We argue that in addition to affecting social, psychological, and health outcomes, coping also affects political outcomes, and future research would be enriched by its inclusion. In presenting numerous cases that highlight the modern relevance of psychosocial stressors and the frequency at which certain groups face (and have to manage) them, along with empirical tests of the role JHAC plays in the political world, we show throughout this book that coping has long been important to the study of politics, and its significance is bound to increase in the polarized era we live in.