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**Dramatic Catharsis: Barack Obama's
Rhetoric of Redemption**

Chris Marshall

Submitted to Swansea University in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

2017

Summary

The 2008 election of Barack Obama as America's first African American president was popularly held to represent a fulfilment of Martin Luther King's *Dream* and led to speculation about the implications of an Obama victory for a post racial America. This thesis argues that race was a recurring theme of Obama's election campaign, and that his rhetoric referred frequently to America's history of racial inequality. It explores how Obama constructed a racial identity that connected him to the African American struggle for civil rights and which placed him within a national progress narrative, and it argues that an important feature of Obama's campaign was the articulation of a rhetoric of redemption.

Academic debates focussing on Obama's racial identity and the extent to which he spoke about race have been supported either by textual analysis of his speeches or by applying a historical perspective to the campaign. This thesis incorporates both approaches as it combines discourse analysis of a reference corpus of 172 speeches with intertextual and extralinguistic analyses facilitated through contextual knowledge of African American history and culture. The methodology embraces Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach, consideration of Obama's appropriation of the Exodus narrative, and the application of Kenneth Burke's *dramatistic pentad* to explore the construction and representation of racial identity in Obama's rhetoric.

The approach identifies an analytic corpus of 41 speeches which focus on race. This is used to identify how Obama presented his personal history within the context of the civil rights struggle and how he positioned his campaign to neither confront nor accommodate white America about racism and inequality. The results reveal Obama's desire for a national catharsis in repudiation of America's history of racial injustice; a redemptive moment made possible through unity, atonement and the collective effort encapsulated in the campaign slogan, "yes, we can".

Declarations and statements

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed (candidate)

Date

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed (candidate)

Date

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed (candidate)

Date

Contents

Page

i	Summary
ii	Declarations and Statements
iii	Contents
iv	Acknowledgements
v	List of tables
vi	List of figures
vii	Publications, conference and seminar papers
ix	“The burdens of our past”
1	Headlines from the front pages of America’s newspapers, 5 November 2008
4	Chapter 1 Introduction
21	Chapter 2 Literature Review
48	Chapter 3 Methodology
68	Chapter 4 Obama and Race
118	Chapter 5 Obama and Civil Rights
166	Chapter 6 Obama and Redemption
223	Chapter 7 Conclusions
240	Epilogue
245	Appendix 1 Corpus of speeches
246	Appendix 2 Table of results: the analytic corpus
254	Appendix 3 Table of results: sub-topics in the topic of race
260	Bibliography

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Wendy Marshall, who knew I’d started and presumed I’d finish.

CM, 2016

List of tables

Page

39	Table 1	States with less than 30% of white Americans voting for Obama
40	Table 2	Candidate preferences by race, 2004-2008
57	Table 3	Fields of action and genres
58	Table 4	Extract from Appendix 2 (speech selection process)
61	Table 5	Sub-topics in the topic of race

List of figures

Page		
91	Figure 1	Senator Barack Obama takes time out of his campaign in North Carolina to play basketball.
92	Figure 2	Michelle and Barack Obama fist bump at the 2008 Democratic National Convention.
93	Figure 3	Cover of the <i>New Yorker</i> , 14 July 2008, depicting the Obamas as radical, flag-burning, militant Muslims, in the White House.
158	Figure 4	Barack and Michelle Obama on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the “We are one” inauguration celebration concert.
159	Figure 5	Obama, Hillary and Bill Clinton lead the march over the Edmund Pettus Bridge to commemorate the Selma Voting Rights Marches.
161	Figure 6	Barack Obama gives his <i>A More Perfect Union</i> speech at the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia.
200	Figure 7	Obama’s campaign logo.
202	Figure 8	US presidential campaign logos, 1988-2008.
204	Figure 9	Obama in Metropolis.
205	Figure 10	HOPE by Shephard Fairey.
207	Figure 11	<i>Time Magazine</i> cover, 10 December 2007.
208	Figure 12	Representative selection of pictures from media coverage generated during the 2008 campaign, featuring Obama with a halo.
209	Figure 13	<i>Rolling Stone</i> magazine cover, March 2008.
209	Figure 14	<i>Der Spiegel</i> magazine cover, July 2008.
210	Figure 15	<i>The New Republic</i> magazine cover, January 2008.

Publications

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Conference and seminar papers

- 1 *From Gettysburg to Grant Park: Echoes of Lincoln in the Campaign Rhetoric of Barack Obama*. ("Texting Obama" conference, Manchester Metropolitan University, 7-10 September 2010)
- 2 *"The world on a split screen": Du Bois, Obama, and the problem of the color-line* (AHRC Barack Obama Research Network Symposium on "Obama and the Race Question in the United States", Edge Hill University, 27-28 January 2011)
- 3 *From Gettysburg to Grant Park: Echoes of Lincoln in the Campaign Rhetoric of Barack Obama*. ("Languages of Power and Protest in the United States" workshop, Leeds University, 17 March 2011)
- 4 *The life and lies of Barack Obama*. ("Telling the truth" Arts and Humanities Postgraduate Conference, Swansea University, 14 October 2011)
- 5 *"The world on a split screen": Du Bois, Obama, and the problem of the color-line* (Paul Robeson Seminar Series, Swansea University, 9 November 2011)
- 6 *The debt: Barack Obama and those who came before*. (Pecha Kucha competition, Swansea University Research Week, 23 November 2011)
- 7 *Crossing the line: race and identity in the 2008 Obama campaign*, ("Borders and Boundaries" Arts and Humanities Postgraduate Conference, Swansea University, 12 October 2012)
- 8 *The Promised Land? Barack Obama and Martin Luther King's 'Dream'* (Lecture given during Swansea University's Festival of Research, 28 February 2013)

- 9 *The Promised Land? Barack Obama and Martin Luther King's 'Dream'* (Research Institute for Arts and Humanities Public Lecture, Swansea University, 21 October 2013)
- 10 *"Who among us would be content?": Kennedy's Civil Rights Legacy and Obama's "Yes We Can"* ("John F Kennedy: Alternative Perspectives", Swansea University, 20 November 2013)
- 11 *Invisible Man and the spectre of Black Nationalism in Obama's Dreams From My Father.* ("The Self and the Other" Arts and Humanities Postgraduate Conference, Swansea University, 10 October 2014)

But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America - to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality. The fact is that the comments that have been made on the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through - a part of our union that we have yet to perfect. And if we walk away now, if we simply retreat in our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care, education, or the need to find good jobs for every American. Understanding this reality requires a reminder of how we arrived at this point. As William Faulkner once wrote, "The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past." We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. Segregated schools were, and are, inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them, fifty years after Brown v. Board of Education, and the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students. Legalized discrimination - where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions, or the police force, or fire departments - meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations. That history helps explain the wealth and income gap between black and white, and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persists in so many of today's urban and rural communities. A lack of economic opportunity among black men and the shame and frustration that came from not being able to provide for one's family, contributed to the erosion of black families - a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened. And the lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods - parks for kids to play in, police walking the beat, regular garbage pick-up and building code enforcement - all help create a cycle of violence, blight, and neglect that continue to haunt us. This is the reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up. They came of age in the late fifties and early sixties, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically restricted. What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but rather how many men and women overcame the odds; how many were able to make a way out of no way for those like me who would care after them. But for all

The burdens of our past - Chris Marshall

(Runner-up, Swansea University Research as Art competition, 2011)

An extract from Obama's campaign-defining discussion of race and collective guilt, *A More Perfect Union* (18 March 2008), is used to create a textual representation of President Obama's official photograph. The image recognises the place of Obama's 2008 election victory in the context of America's history of segregation and racism.

Headlines from the front pages of America's newspapers, 5 November 2008

"Obama makes history."
Anchorage Daily News (Alaska)

"Obama shatters barrier to become 1st black president."
The Arizona Republic (Arizona)

"Decisive victory makes history."
Los Angeles Times (California)

"Change has come."
The San Diego Union Tribune (California)

"Obama. Colorado key in electing first black president."
Rocky Mountain News (Colorado)

"Landslide for first black chief executive."
The Washington Times (Washington DC)

"Obama makes history. US decisively elects first black president."
The Washington Post (Washington DC)

"Yes, we can. Obama elected first black president."
The News Journal (Delaware)

"1st black president makes US history."
The Miami Herald (Florida)

"US elects 1st black president in 'victory of faith over fear.'"
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Georgia)

"Obama. Hawaii's own makes history. Overcomes racial barrier to become president-elect."
The Honolulu Advertiser (Hawaii)

"Change has come. Hunger for healing in US, Idaho fuelled interest in presidential election."
The Idaho Statesman (Idaho)

"Obama. America makes historic choice for change."
The Des Moines Register (Iowa)

“US elects first black president.”

Lawrence Journal-World (Kansas)

“Obama triumphs. Election of black president is ‘defining moment’.”

The Wichita Eagle (Kansas)

“Obama turns historic page.”

The Courier-Journal (Kentucky)

“First black president.”

Herald-Leader (Kentucky)

“It’s Obama. Democrat gains historic victory, will be the nation’s first black president.”

The Baltimore Sun (Maryland)

“Obama elected nation’s first African-American president in a romp.”

The Boston Globe (Massachusetts)

“The Democrat scores a convincing win as voters hungry for change elect the first black president.”

Portland Press Herald (Maine)

“Change has come. Obama sweeps to victory, becomes first black president.”

Springfield News-Leader (Missouri)

“President Obama. ‘The dream of our founders is alive’.”

The Clarion-Ledger (Mississippi)

“Obama’s time. Nation’s voters resoundingly elect 1st black president.”

Billings Gazette (Montana)

“Obama wins. He heralds ‘a new dawn of American leadership’.”

Lincoln Journal Star (Nebraska)

“Change is coming to America.”

Las Vegas Review-Journal (Nevada)

“Obama triumphs. Illinois senator becomes first African-American president.”

The Cincinnati Enquirer (Ohio)

“Barack Obama elected first black president.”

The Plain Dealer (Ohio)

“Change has come to America.”

The Oklahoman (Oklahoma)

“Obama’s time. America votes for historic change.”

The Oregonian (Oregon)

“Historic win.”

The Philadelphia Inquirer (Pennsylvania)

“History: nation elects first black president.”

The Greenville News (South Carolina)

“Obama wins big, shatters White House color barrier.”

The Dallas Morning News (Texas)

“Obama makes history. America elects first black president.”

The Burlington Free Press (Vermont)

“First African-American elected president.”

Seattle Post-Intelligencer (Washington)

“Senator triumphs, will be first black US president.”

The Herald-Dispatch (West Virginia)

“A new dawn. Obama elected first black president.”

Journal-Sentinel (Wisconsin)

“Dream fulfilled.”

Wyoming Tribune Eagle (Wyoming)

Chapter 1

Introduction

Perhaps it was inevitable that, after all the anticipation and adulation sparked by the young senator from Illinois whose soaring rhetoric of hope and change promised a fresh brand of politics, Barack Obama's election on 4 November 2008 as the forty-fourth president of the United States of America was heralded as an historic moment of change.

It was also inevitable because the election would have yielded change regardless of whether the electorate had voted for Barack Obama or his Republican opponent, John McCain, with sitting President George W Bush unable to seek office for a third term. Obama's victory returned the Democrats to the White House after eight years in opposition, but even a Republican victory could have been presented as change with McCain, the self-styled maverick, frequently seeking to distance himself throughout his campaign from the Bush administration's legacy of two wars and an economy in crisis. The scale of the Democrat's success, however, was not particularly historic. Although Obama won 52.9 percent of the national vote, compared to McCain's 45.7 percent, the most decisive electoral victory in the country's history is Franklin D Roosevelt's 1936 win over Governor Alf Landon, in which Roosevelt gained 60.8 percent of the national popular vote.

The historic nature of Obama's victory, like his election campaign, is defined by its context. As the front pages of America's newspapers on 5 November 2008 show, Obama will be remembered not as his country's forty-fourth president but as the first African American to be elected to the presidency. The most defining characteristic of the 2008 election was the colour of Obama's skin, and the reason why many describe his victory as historic is that his election marked a milestone in African American politics. The context cannot be ignored; we cannot appreciate the significance of Obama's success without understanding the social, political, historical and cultural narratives against which it is framed.

After all, despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing the segregation of public places and discrimination based on race, gender, religion or color, and despite the Voting Rights Act of 1965 enabling African Americans to vote on equal terms with white Americans, Obama was just the third African American to serve as a Senator in the United States Congress in the modern era, after Edward William Brooke III (1967-1979) and Carol Moseley Braun (1993 -1999). A significant proportion of the electorate would be old enough to remember at first hand the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, when the prospect of an African American president was almost inconceivable; old enough to recount where they were when they learned of the assassinations of President John F Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, and Dr Martin Luther King Jr, whose murders threatened to extinguish any hope for meaningful progress towards racial equality.

The press' insistence on referencing Obama's ethnicity demonstrates that the 2008 US presidential election was in large part framed against America's history of racial discord, civil rights, segregation and slavery. Obama's victory prompted headlines recalling Martin Luther King's 1963 dream that people would be judged by the content of their character and not the colour of their skin (e.g. *Wyoming Tribune Eagle*, Cohen and Greenburg, 2009: p129), or hailing an end to W E B Du Bois' "color line", the racial barrier to equality and high office (e.g. *Dallas Morning News*, *ibid*: p122). The American media were not alone in finding themselves caught up in the historic nature of Obama's victory. Canada's *Globe and Mail* wove memories of the civil rights movement's struggle for racial equality in the 1960s into its headline, announcing "Obama overcomes". The *South China Morning Post* described "Obama's American Dream"; the *Calcutta Telegraph* noted that Obama's election represented "a dream alive in our time", whilst the UK's *Daily Telegraph* stated that "the dream comes true" (*ibid*: pp134-155). Barack Obama's ethnicity and his place within the civil rights movement were therefore as much a part of the international news reports as his victory.

The common narrative to emerge is that Obama's success represents a fulfilment of the aims of the civil rights movement, perhaps even a redemptive

moment in American history. Could it not be said that, in electing an African American to the country's highest office, Americans had delivered a symbolic act of atonement for the country's historical wrongs, proving that racism was a distant, ugly memory and absolving white America of its guilt for slavery and segregation? This thesis explores whether the rhetoric of Obama's 2007/08 campaign encouraged precisely this interpretation. It considers whether his campaign speeches worked within a rhetorical framework that promised to redeem America's "original sin of slavery" (Obama B H, 2008i) and deliver a renewal of American society through appeals for national unity and collective effort, and through the messages of hope and change promoted by the Obama campaign.

Perhaps the most unequivocal demand that Obama's success be seen in the context of the struggle for civil rights, as opposed to a sweeping victory for the Democrats over an unpopular Republican party, is evident in Senator Dianne Feinstein's welcome address at President Obama's inauguration on 20 January 2009. Senator Feinstein said:

Those who doubt the supremacy of the ballot over the bullet can never diminish the power engendered by nonviolent struggles for justice and equality like the one that made this day possible.

No triumph tainted by brutality could ever match the sweet victory of this hour and what it means to those who marched, and died, to make it a reality.

Our work is not yet finished. But future generations will mark this morning as the turning point for real and necessary change in this nation.

They will look back and remember that this was the moment when the Dream that once echoed across history from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial finally reached the walls of the White House.

(Feinstein, 2009: n.p.)

These four short paragraphs represent more than forty percent of Feinstein's address. That they are laden with references to the civil rights movement reveals Feinstein's insistence that the world sees Obama's election first and

foremost as a defining moment in America's struggle for civil rights. Feinstein includes references to Malcolm X's *The Ballot or the Bullet* speech of 1964, in which he called for African Americans to exercise their right to vote whilst cautioning that armed resistance might be required to ensure that African Americans were not denied equality (X, 1964). She also refers to the civil rights marches and sit-ins ("non-violent struggles for justice and equality", "those who marched") and to Martin Luther King's 1963 *I Have a Dream* speech with "the Dream that once echoed across history from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial". The address therefore presented Obama's inauguration as a seminal moment in his country's national quest for the liberty and equality of opportunity promised by the civil rights movement; a fulfilment of its aim to secure equal rights for all.

As Bonnie Greer has noted, "Barack Obama is not a new beginning. He is the end of a long arc from Rosa Parks to Martin Luther King to Johnson's Bill for the Great Society. He's not the future. I'm not sure he's the present, but he is the past" (Greer, 2010: n.p.). For Greer, the history of the African American struggle for civil rights is embodied in Obama's identity and in his quest for the presidency. Partly this is because Obama invested significant effort in persuading his audiences that his life and success are inextricably bound to the civil rights movement, and partly it is because he represented the hopes and aspirations of an African American community whose own efforts over the decades had made Obama's campaign possible.

Feinstein's welcome address also provided a neat counterpoint to the moment Obama first achieved national recognition, at the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston. Obama, who gave the Convention's keynote speech, arrived on stage to Curtis Mayfield's civil rights anthem, *Keep on Pushing*, a Chicago soul record released in 1964. Forty years on, Barack Obama would ask the American people to recognise that his success and his future were rooted in the country's past, telling the Convention that "I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me" (Obama, 2004).

The past that Obama called to mind acknowledged the generations of African American leaders whose contributions to the national conversation on race made his eventual election to the presidency, if not probable, then at least more likely. Figures such as Frederick Douglass and Booker T Washington, for example; Fannie Lou Hamer and Shirley Chisholm; Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson; Malcolm X and Al Sharpton. Richard Wolffe relates a conversation with Obama in which the candidate articulated his belief that he is “a direct outgrowth of the civil rights movement” (Wolffe, 2009: p158). He is certainly indebted to the movement; without those efforts to move America towards racial equality, it is doubtful that the America of 2008 would have entertained the idea of a black man seeking election to the country’s highest office.

Obama was not the first African American to seek election to the White House, although he is the first to be successful. Bruce Glasrud and Cary Wintz note that more than fifty African American candidates have sought the presidency or vice-presidency since Frederick Douglass was asked to stand as the Political Abolitionist Party’s vice-presidential candidate in 1856, and again in 1872 (Glasrud and Wintz, 2010: pXIV). The first African American to be recognised by a major political party was Mississippi senator Blanche K Bruce, who secured a small number of votes for the Republican Party’s vice-presidential nomination in 1880 and 1888, whilst the first African American to be nominated for the presidency was George Edwin Taylor, who represented the (all-black) National Liberty Party in 1904.

Other African American politicians whose efforts paved the way for Obama include: Charlotta Bass, vice-presidential nominee for the Progressive Party (1952); Angela Davis, the Communist Party’s vice-presidential candidate in 1980 and 1984; Andrew Pulley, the Socialist Workers’ Party vice-presidential candidate in 1972, and Shirley Chisholm who, also in 1972, became the first woman to seek the presidential nomination on behalf of a major political party (the Democratic Party). That she was also African American unquestionably compounded her difficulties in seeking the electorate’s acceptance, even

though she was determined that her election should not be defined by gender or race. Chisholm commented that:

When I die, I want to be remembered as a woman who lived in the twentieth century and who dared to be a catalyst for change. I don't want to be remembered as the first black woman who went to Congress. And I don't want to be remembered as the first woman who happened to be black to make a bid for the presidency. I want to be remembered as a woman who fought for change in the twentieth century. That's what I want.

(Glasrud and Wintz, 2010: p75)

Chisholm also noted that “the next campaign by a woman or a black must be well prepared and well financed; it must be planned long in advance, and it must aim at the building of a new coalition” (ibid, p74). In many ways this is prescient of the Obama campaign's approach to building an intricately planned campaign rooted in organising grassroots supporters with ideals of hope, change, national unity, and the collective affirmation “yes, we can”.

It is therefore possible to identify certain traits of Shirley Chisholm's approach to political campaigning in the Obama campaign, but her influence was also felt twenty years before Obama's 2004 keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention. James Smallwood suggests that Chisholm “set the stage” for the campaigns undertaken by Jesse Jackson, arguably the most successful and most recognisable African American candidate before Obama (Glasrud and Wintz, 2010: p113). Jackson, who marched with Martin Luther King in the 1960s, sought the presidency in 1984 and 1988. His campaigns, particularly his 1984 campaign, laid the foundations on which Obama would subsequently build the core proposition for his own campaign nearly 25 years later. Jackson's speech to the Democratic National Convention in 1984 centred on his vision for the “Rainbow Coalition”, which can also be seen as a prototype for Obama's calls for national racial unity. Jackson said: “Even in our fractured state, all of us count and fit somewhere. We have proven that we can survive without each other. But we have not proven that we can win and make progress without each other. We must come together” (Jackson, 1984: n.p.). Jackson's vision can be seen as a precursor to Obama's

assertion that “[t]here is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America - there’s the United States of America” (Obama, 2004), which lies at the heart of his appeal for audiences to look beyond racial labels.

Jackson received 3,283,431 votes and came third behind Gary Hart (6,504,842) and Walter Mondale (6,952,912). Four years later, the Jackson campaign was better organised and he finished second, behind Michael Dukakis, with 6.9 million votes and having won primary elections in eleven states. Despite his strong showing, however, Jackson was not offered the chance to run as vice-president on a Dukakis-Jackson ticket. Smallwood argues that, amongst other reasons, “the Democrats assumed the black vote would go to Dukakis anyway, so why put Jackson on the ticket?” and “Jackson was perceived as divisive, primarily a race man” (Glasrud and Wintz, 2010: p123). In elucidating the redemptive framework proposed by this thesis, attention will be given to how the Obama campaign was careful to present the candidate as anything but “a race man” and how Obama owed much of his success to the fact that he was too young to have marched with King and was not seen as an African American firebrand in the mould of a Jesse Jackson or an Al Sharpton.

Jackson was in the crowd at Grant Park, Chicago, for Obama’s victory speech on 4 November 2008. He was filmed with tears rolling down his cheeks, an image that perhaps summed up the magnitude and implications of Obama’s success for African Americans more effectively than any of the headlines and commentary. In an interview with National Public Radio the next day, Jackson explained:

Well, on the one hand, I saw President Barack Obama standing there looking so majestic. And I knew that people in the villages of Kenya and Haiti, and mansions and palaces in Europe and China, were all watching this young African American male assume the leadership to take our nation out of a pit to a higher place.

And then, I thought of who was not there. As mentioned, Medgar Evers, the husband of Sister Myrlie. ...So the martyrs and murdered

whose blood made last night possible. I could not help think that this was their night.

And if I had one wish: if Medgar, or if Dr. King could have just been there for a second in time, would have made my heart rejoice. And so it was kind of duo-fold - his ascension into leadership and the price that was paid to get him there.

(National Public Radio, 2008: n.p.)

Jackson's explanation provides further evidence of the way in which Obama's success has been linked to African American history. Although the reference to Kenya may remind listeners of Obama's family origins, it can be argued that Jackson is more concerned with evoking occasions where Africans have overcome their white 'masters'.

Like many other African nations, Kenya was a victim of the slave trade, with Kenyans sold into slavery across the Arabian Peninsula, India, and China. The country was also subjected to British colonial rule until gaining independence in 1963, in part as a result of the Mau Mau uprising of 1952, which was eventually put down by the British under Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1960. Obama's grandfather was apparently imprisoned, tortured, and tried for sympathising with the Mau Mau, which has led to speculation that this was the reason Barack Obama returned a bust of Churchill to the UK in 2009 (e.g. Bowcott, 2008: n.p., Shipman, 2009: n.p.), although this speculation has since been dismissed by the *Washington Post*.¹

Similarly, Jackson's reference to Haiti recalls the Haitian Revolution of 1791 to 1804, which resulted in the abolition of slavery in the French possession of Saint Dominique, and the establishment of the Haitian Republic on the island.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/01/27/ted-cruzs-claim-that-one-of-obamas-very-first-acts-was-returning-a-bust-of-churchill/>

The Revolution is consequently regarded as a seminal moment in the history of the black Atlantic.² In becoming the world's first independent, post-colonial, black-led country, Haiti became a beacon of hope for the enslaved and fuelled other slave rebellions across America and the European colonies.

The “mansions and palaces in Europe and China” mentioned by Jackson are the estates built with the profits of the Atlantic and Arabian Peninsula slave trade. Jackson's implication is that the people within these palaces who were watching Obama celebrate his success were also seeing the final victory of an oppressed race. It is also hard to miss Jackson's biblical imagery. He describes how Obama's “ascension into leadership” was made possible by the “martyrs”, and that Obama will lift the nation from “the pit” (a euphemism for hell) to a “higher place”. It is apparent that Jackson sees Obama as a redeemer figure symbolic of the African American struggle to overcome the legacy of slavery and segregation.

Although this thesis focuses on questions of racial identity, reconciliation and redemption, it is also useful to highlight briefly the reality of race relations in the United States, as this forms part of the election campaign's context, and to acknowledge that Obama's victory could do little to reconcile communities affected by the much wider and more divisive institutionalised racism that pervades American society. Rogers Smith and Desmond King argue that “the familiar, painful litany of the United States' severe racial gaps in material well-being encompasses virtually every dimension of life, from economic well-being to health to housing to education to the criminal justice system” (Smith and King, 2009: p26) . Smith and King dismiss claims that Obama's election heralds a postracial age, where racial politics are no longer defined by color-

² C L R James' anticolonial history *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (first published in 1938) offers a rich account of the revolution. James views the revolution through the lenses of economics and social class, rather than race. Although he acknowledges that racism existed, he argues that the revolution grew from a desire for economic wealth and social uplift, rather than from prejudice. James argued that “The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental” (James, 1984: p283).

blind or race-conscious approaches, and they provide a range of statistics to highlight the divide between white Americans and African Americans:

- the poverty rate among African Americans reached 24.5 percent in 2007, compared with just 8 percent for whites;
- in 2004, the “black-white median net worth ratio” was 0.10; for every dollar of net worth whites held, African Americans’ net assets were just ten cents;
- 19.5 percent of African Americans lack health insurance, compared with 10.4 percent of whites;
- the infant mortality rate in African Americans is 13.7 per 1,000 births, and 5.7 for whites;
- 48.4 percent of African Americans own their homes, compared with 75 percent of whites;
- in 2000, 12 percent of African American men aged 24 to 30 had graduated from college, compared with 30 percent of white men;
- 4,682 African American men per 100,000 are in US prisons, compared with just 709 white men per 100,000.

(ibid, p26)

Obama’s appeals for racial unity therefore could not easily resolve the disparity between the social conditions of African Americans and white Americans. Neither was the stark reality of racial division in the United States far from the surface during the 2007/08 campaign, which was scarred by racist comments and imagery. In May 2008, for example, the *Washington Post* reported that some of Obama’s “field workers, phone-bank volunteers and campaign surrogates are encountering a raw racism and hostility” that went largely unreported. Anecdotal evidence reveals that campaign staff encountered comments such as “he’s a half-breed and he’s a Muslim. How can you trust that?”, “I’ll never vote for a black person,” and “Hang that darky from a tree!” Three Obama campaign offices in Indiana also received bomb threats (Merida, 2008: n.p.). Racist imagery spread rapidly via the Internet, generally depicting Obama as an ape, a vicious caricature of an African American, or a radical Muslim, whilst anti-Obama campaigners produced

clothing emblazoned with slogans such as “Nigger, please! It’s the White House” and “Obama is my slave”.

Racist imagery and comments also permeated political campaigning, with the McCain campaign releasing two controversial advertisements: *Celeb*, which effectively implied that Obama was an African American bent on the celebrity lifestyle and preying on white women such as Paris Hilton and Britney Spears, and *Disrespectful*, which distorted comments made by the Obama-Biden campaign to imply that Obama was speaking above his station in making remarks about the Republican Party’s vice-presidential candidate, Sarah Palin. Racist comments also surfaced in the campaign for the Democratic nomination, with former President Bill Clinton commenting that “a few years ago, this guy would have been getting us coffee”, and presidential hopeful Joe Biden describing Obama as “the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy” (Preston, 2010: n.p.).

So those who hoped that Obama’s victory would bring about a transformation in racial attitudes will have been disappointed. On 15 November 2008, just eleven days after the election, MSNBC reported that Obama’s election was prompting race crimes:

Cross burnings. Schoolchildren chanting "Assassinate Obama." Black figures hung from nooses. Racial epithets scrawled on homes and cars.

Incidents around the country referring to President-elect Barack Obama are dampening the postelection glow of racial progress and harmony, highlighting the stubborn racism that remains in America.

From California to Maine, police have documented a range of alleged crimes, from vandalism and vague threats to at least one physical attack. Insults and taunts have been delivered by adults, college students and second-graders.

(Associated Press, 2008: n.p.)

Obama's victory did not, therefore, usher in a new era of equality or racial tolerance, and did not mean an end to the racial discrimination manifested in what has been called the color line (the discriminatory racial barrier), even though MSNBC's David Gregory claimed on 4 November 2008 that the "ultimate color line has been crossed" (Kurtz, 2008: n.p.). The reality of the ongoing disparity between white America and racial minorities was made clear in a 2010 NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) report, which revealed that discrimination "remains an integral component of complex and enduring social and political systems that promote racial inequality" (Edney, 2010: n.p.).

Context, then, is key. We cannot read Obama without acknowledging the historical, social, and political contexts of his campaign. We cannot separate Obama's candidacy and success from history, nor can we truly understand him if we do not appreciate his position within the narratives of civil rights, slavery and segregation. Furthermore, we cannot fully appreciate and analyse Obama's campaign speeches without being aware of his engagement with the African American literary, political and cultural canon to inform his approach to race and identity; his use of symbolism, music, and geographic location to reinforce the impact of key speeches; his references to leaders such as Lincoln, Kennedy, or King; or his use of motifs and themes traditionally associated with civil rights to demonstrate his own connections with the movement.

The thesis seeks to assess the social, cultural, and political implications of Obama's campaign rhetoric to understand the extent to which it presented the candidate as a unifying figure capable of offering redemption for America's failure to achieve equality and justice for all; a redemption that can be inferred from Obama's projection of his own personal history and a narrative arc that spans centuries of inequality and racial discord. This proposition is complemented by the notion that Obama's rhetorical strategies, autobiography, and use of history and symbolism contributed to a redemptive narrative that would appeal to broad sections of the American electorate, and particularly to African American voters. The theory of guilt redemption

rhetoric developed by this thesis has its roots in the aims and aspirations of Barack Obama's 2007/08 election campaign. It is not a framework that has been imposed on the corpus of speeches and books but is one that has grown from careful analysis of the material and its contexts.

The thesis considers how Obama presented his biracial ancestry and whether it can be inferred that he used his heritage to reflect his ambition for a racially united America that could be realised with his election as President. The thesis then asks how far such a cathartic promise of redemption was predicated on accommodating white America by underplaying the reality of institutionalised racism and social inequality. The thesis explores the extent to which race and references to America's history of racial inequality featured in the campaign and whether it can be asserted that Obama placed himself within both an African American narrative and a national progress narrative, with the success of his self-described unique story reliant on establishing a connection to the civil rights movement. Under these circumstances, can it be argued that, rather than transcending race, Obama becomes emblematic both of America's past and of an opportunity for collective redemption and racial unity? This debate is effectively a contemporary manifestation of Wilson J Moses' discussion of Black Messianism (1982, reprinted in 1993), in which he charts the roles of integrationist "Uncle Toms" and separatist "Black Messiahs" in the Black Nationalist movement. Moses argues that "the myth of Americans as a chosen people" supported "black nationalism, racial integration, and mainstream American nationalism" (Moses, 1993: p29). This resonates with the thesis' ambition to understand the ways in which Obama's rhetoric seeks to bridge the divide between integration and separatism. This also reflects Moses' description of Black Messianism as an approach that "reconciles the sense of separation black people feel and their fundamental belief they are American" (ibid, pXIII).

Given the social, cultural, historical and political contexts of Obama's election, the research requires an interdisciplinary approach to analysing Obama's rhetoric. Accordingly, the thesis offers a critical synthesis of Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to discourse analysis,

Kenneth Burke's *dramatistic pentad* method of rhetorical analysis, and African American interpretations of the Exodus narrative. This approach, described in detail in Chapter three, enables textual analysis of a defined corpus of Obama's speeches to be complemented by wider contextual knowledge that reveals the intertextual relationships between Obama's rhetoric, African American literature, politics and culture, and the political rhetoric of Lincoln, Kennedy and King. It also facilitates understanding of the extralinguistic context – the music, imagery and venues used by the Obama campaign, for instance – and allows knowledge of the US civil rights movement to inform analytical interpretations.

The principles of Kenneth Burke's *dramatistic pentad* are then applied to Obama's campaign rhetoric to elucidate a rhetoric of redemption that addresses and reconciles white guilt and black anger. The *pentad* provides a toolkit for inferring motive behind rhetorical actions and is applied here to understand Obama as the agent in a redemption drama set against the backdrop of the civil rights movement. The primary reference corpus for this research comprises 172 speeches given by Obama between August 2004 and January 2009, and two of Obama's books, *Dreams From My Father* and *The Audacity Of Hope*.³

The thesis uses Burke's redemption drama to develop a theory of guilt redemption rhetoric dependent on a moment of dramatic catharsis, specifically Obama's election. As far as can be ascertained, this represents original research as no other published work to date has undertaken a detailed evaluation of the full corpus of Obama's campaign speeches to describe how his rhetoric functions as a form of redemption drama that has its origins in race, mediation, reconciliation, and in the history of the Civil Rights movement. It is further believed that there has been no other study of Obama that has combined DHA with Burke's *pentad* to investigate the likely motives and contexts behind the campaign rhetoric.

³ *Dreams* was first published in 1995 but the thesis uses the 2007 editions of both books.

Thesis structure

This project is concerned with representations of race and identity in Obama's campaign speeches and books, and how these can be related to the development of a rhetoric of redemption. In order to inform rich understandings of Obama's rhetoric, the research draws upon a range of sources and ideas from the fields of linguistics, literature, history, popular culture, and politics. The thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter two presents a literature review that demonstrates where the thesis contributes to debates across this work's major themes: the role of Obama's identity and his perceived connections to civil rights in the 2007/08 election campaign, and what Obama's victory might mean for race relations and politics in the USA. The literature review acknowledges the body of research that has applied various approaches to discourse and linguistic analysis to Obama's campaign rhetoric. It also sets out the original contribution that the research makes to broader scholarship about Obama's candidacy and the debate about whether Obama's election heralded a new post racial era.

Chapter three sets out the research methodology, introducing Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as the framework for analysing the discourse and contexts of Obama's 2007/08 campaign. The chapter describes how the DHA is applied to identify an analytic corpus of speeches and how the Approach relies upon the application of contextual knowledge to inform analysis of the data. The chapter highlights the use of Kenneth Burke's *dramatistic pentad* as a method of rhetorical analysis within the Discourse-Historical Approach, and explains how this method provides a means of inferring the motives behind Obama's speeches. The chapter also explains how the Exodus narrative is integrated with the Discourse-Historical Approach and Burke's method.

Chapter four, *Obama and race*, provides analysis of how Obama understands and describes his racial heritage, and how he acquires, or claims, an African American identity. Obama's first book, *Dreams From My Father* (2007), provides much of the source material for this chapter as it

documents how Obama wrestled with concepts of race and identity from an early age, and the memoir can be seen as the primary vehicle by which Obama defines his identity. The chapter discusses Obama's approach to race, African American leadership, and the issue of black nationalism. It also explores how Obama wrote himself into the narrative of African American literature and thought, and demonstrates how he updated Du Bois' concepts of the veil and the color line to inform his understanding of racial identity in the United States, and to position himself as the 'Agent' in a Burkean redemption drama.

Chapter five, *Obama and civil rights*, discusses the rhetorical strategies Obama employs to place himself within the short civil rights movement of the 1960s. It explores how latent memories of civil rights are presented through Obama's rhetoric, and how these memories are integral to the underlying context (or 'scene' in Burke's terminology) of Obama's redemptive narrative. The chapter presents evidence of the language choices Obama makes to evoke the civil rights era, and undertakes analysis of Obama's speeches and two books to show how he calls on the memory and language of figures such as Abraham Lincoln, John F Kennedy, and Martin Luther King to lend credibility to his candidacy. The Exodus narrative and Obama's construction of a 'Joshua generation' are explored in relation to the context they provide to the election campaign.

Chapter six, *Obama and redemption*, relates concepts of black messianism to the analysis of Obama's rhetoric, and examines how guilt is identified and presented in Obama's rhetoric. It explores how Obama defines and responds to white guilt and African American anger, and seeks to identify the aspects of Obama's rhetoric that articulated notions salvation. It also considers the religious and biblical references that underscored the redemption motifs contained within Obama's rhetoric. The chapter further explores whether Obama's vision for unity and atonement was the product of a narrative based on the cathartic purification of the American soul through reconciliation and mediation (the Act, Agency and Purpose of Burke's *pentad*), which in turn aims at a renewal of American society that is in keeping with the Jeremiad

tradition of reinventing America and striving for a more perfect Union, as described by Sacvan Bercovitch in his *American Jeremiad* (1978). Finally, this chapter applies the principles of Burke's redemption drama and David Bobbitt's refinement of it to Obama's campaign, and further develops the theory to encompass mediation as a means of achieving redemption.

Chapter seven, *Conclusions*, draws together the key findings of the research to articulate a theory of guilt redemption rhetoric that arises from the synthesis of the Discourse-Historical Approach, Burke's *pentad* and the Exodus narrative. It concludes with a critical assessment of the methodology and findings, and reiterates the original contribution this research makes to current debates in the field.

Summary

This thesis considers whether the rhetoric employed by Barack Obama in the 2007/08 election campaign presented his candidacy as an opportunity for national redemption, and explores the extent to which race was an important, recurring theme of his campaign. It questions whether Obama presented himself as a purifying agent for change, a candidate whose election could effect a cleansing of the nation's "original sin of slavery" (Obama, 2008i) and who offered a vision of an America that could finally look past skin colour. It documents and unravels Obama's references to the civil rights movement and it also explores whether it can be argued that Obama's racial identity became emblematic of America's history of segregation and racism, and whether he used his position within that narrative to present his election as an unprecedented opportunity for collective redemption.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This election isn't just about the possibility of a black president, but the possibility of a black first family. It asks white voters to see themselves embodied and represented by African Americans, and to vote to be led by black people. This is something bigger than electing a woman leader would be, were that on offer. Race and slavery are America's original sin. The election of Obama would be, beyond question, one of the noblest gestures of historical redemption that Americans have ever been called upon to make. But that is precisely why it may not happen.

(Kettle, 2008: n.p.)

The central hypothesis of this project is that a significant feature of the rhetoric employed by Barack Obama during the 2007/08 US presidential election campaign was the presentation of the election as an opportunity for a national redemption of the United States' history of civil rights; a cathartic moment made possible by the election of the country's first African American president. The thesis questions whether Obama presented his biracial ancestry as a metaphor for an idealised, post racial America; whether his election might represent a moment of redemption, and whether racial identity and racial inequality were important themes in the campaign rhetoric. The thesis also explores Obama's presentation of his candidacy in the context of a narrative of American and African American progress. To enable this research, the thesis makes use of a method of discourse analysis to identify the key themes and motifs of the campaign rhetoric and then sets them in an historical-cultural context to ascertain how Obama's promise of redemption is framed.

The academic literature that addresses the research questions encompasses a range of debates. This review is focussed primarily on two bodies of work: the literature that analyses the way Obama's ethnicity and identity was discussed and interpreted in the 2007/08 election campaign, particularly in

the context of civil rights and America's racial history, and commentary on what Obama's victory might mean for race relations and politics in the USA. The review also acknowledges the substantial body of research that applies various discourse analysis approaches to Obama's campaign rhetoric.

Unsurprisingly, there has been phenomenal growth in the literature about Barack Obama since 2007. In the period 2004 to 2008, 1,263 peer reviewed journal articles were published about Obama. Since his inauguration in January 2009, nearly 11,000 such articles have appeared, with the majority concerned with his presidency and policies, as well as with the impact of his presidency on race relations. These topics necessarily fall outside the scope of the research as the period of interest covered by the thesis is, broadly, from Obama's announcement of his candidacy in 2007 to his inauguration in 2009.

It should be acknowledged that there is a vast amount of online commentary, opinion and debate about Obama's racial identity and the 2007/08 campaign. As the Internet has opened up more spaces and opportunities for individuals and organisations to mediate their opinions, so the number of blogs, social media accounts, and web-based magazines supporting or criticising Obama has proliferated. The online presence of platforms such as the liberal *New Republic* and conservative *National Review* provides a forum for politically biased opinion that coexists alongside the theoretically more balanced journalism of the online versions of *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Guardian*, *CNN*, *BBC*, and other media organisations. Whilst the thesis does draw on the significant and often valuable body of opinion and knowledge available from these online sources, there is a very clear distinction between these unmediated, unvalidated opinions and the peer-reviewed journal articles and book length studies about Obama and his campaign. Online journalism, citizen journalism, and social media commentary are therefore not included in the scope of the literature review due to their lack of academic rigour.

Finally, there is also a body of work concerned with documenting the history of the 2007/08 campaign, from the photographic record of Callie Shell's

President Obama: The Path to the White House (2008) and Deborah Willis' *Obama: The Historic Campaign in Photos* (2008) to the behind the scenes accounts of the election, such as campaign manager David Plouffe's *The Audacity to Win* (2009). There are numerous other accounts of the campaign that provide interesting insights but which offer little of benefit to this thesis in the way of critical thinking about the nature and impact of Obama's candidacy. Examples include: Jill Abramson and Bill Keller's *Obama: the Historic Journey* (2009); John Heilemann and Mark Halperin's *Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime* (2010); Kate Kenski and Bruce Hardy's *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money and Message shaped the 2008 Election* (2010); Ian Leslie's *To Be President: Quest for the White House 2008* (2009); Greg Mitchell's *Why Obama Won: The Making of a President* (2009); Larry Sabato's *The Year of Obama: How Barack Obama won the White House* (2009); Scott Tufankjian's *Yes We Can: Barack Obama's History-Making Presidential Campaign* (2008), and Connie Corcoran Wilson's *Obama's Odyssey: The 2008 Race for the White House* (2015). These texts provide interesting context but hold limited academic value and necessarily fall outside the scope of this literature review.

Race and identity

A principal preoccupation of this thesis is the ambition to understand how Obama articulated his racial identity and to analyse the role this identity played in the election campaign. The thesis considers whether an aim of Obama's campaign rhetoric was to present the candidate as a unifying figure capable of offering redemption for America's failure to achieve equality and justice for all; redemption at once grounded in a projection of his own personal history and in a narrative arc that spans centuries of inequality and racial discord. The thesis therefore investigates Obama's construction of an origin myth that places him firmly within an African American narrative and which is reliant on his connection to the short civil rights movement of the 1960s.

There are numerous books and articles that attempt to explain how Obama's racial identity was presented and received during the presidential campaign. Most do so from an historical perspective, placing Obama's candidacy in the context of civil rights to understand the impact of race on the election. The writers discussed below explore Obama's racial identity principally through biographical and journalistic research, historical scholarship, and the critical application of their cultural experiences and knowledge to Obama's candidacy.

Carl Pedersen's thoughtful *Obama's America* (2009), for example, offers accessible insights into Obama's journey to the presidency, and highlights many of the questions surrounding Obama's identity that this thesis seeks to consider. Pedersen's account views Obama's candidacy in the context of American social and political history and argues that the candidate's biracial identity (and his multiracial extended family) is entirely in keeping with, and representative of, America's changing demographic profile. Pedersen devotes much of his book to how Obama's victory was made possible through an effective grassroots organising movement, and to anticipating the nature of Obama's leadership in a 'post-American' world in which the power and influence of the United States is in decline. He also considers whether the racial unity that Obama expressed hope for is realistic, given the state of race relations in the US, and asks whether a post racial America can ever be realised. However, it is his discussion of Obama's identity that is particularly nuanced and thought-provoking.

Pedersen's contention is that the 2007/08 campaign produced two competing narratives about Obama's identity: the Republican narrative, with its emphasis on portraying Obama as un-American, is stuck in the racial discourse of the past, whereas "Obama's counternarrative is fluid ... and in many respects conforms to the emerging national identity of the twenty-first century" (Pedersen, 2009: p53). Pedersen reveals that the attempts (particularly by Republicans) to "brand Obama as a rootless sojourner, a Muslim, an unpatriotic domestic subversive and a socialist agitator form part of an ongoing debate about American national identity" (ibid, p37) but that

this strategy proved to be a significant contributory factor in the failure of the Republican campaign. Thus, for Pedersen, “Obama, far from being less than American, reflects the social, cultural and demographic developments that are transforming the US in the twenty-first century” (ibid, p1).

Where Pedersen offers a concise, tautly-written overview of Obama’s rise, David Remnick’s deeply engaging *The Bridge* (2010) is a significantly longer and wider-ranging study of Obama’s life story and political campaigns through the lens of race and the civil rights movement; the ‘bridge’ referring to both the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama (scene of the 1965 “Bloody Sunday” march) and Obama’s mediatory approach to politics. Although an authorised biography and consequently less critical than other, independent publications, this is a meticulously researched account of Obama’s ascendancy. Remnick, a journalist and former editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, uses numerous interviews with Obama’s colleagues and friends to provide insights into the candidate’s experiences and political philosophy, and to offer additional commentary on Obama’s *Dreams From My Father*, which is the foundation text for Remnick’s account.

The Bridge is preoccupied with many of the themes of this thesis, specifically the question of how Obama’s biracial identity was perceived by different segments of the electorate and the nature of the approach adopted by Obama to reach out to all Americans, and African American and white American voters in particular. Remnick focuses particularly on whether Obama was ‘black enough’ to appeal to African American voters, given his comparatively privileged upbringing and lack of immediate connection to the civil rights movement. Remnick believes that Obama’s ties to the African American community and cultural traditions are stronger than many claim, and he locates Obama’s life, identity, and political approach firmly within the context of the civil rights movement. Remnick further argues that Obama views the African American struggle for equality as an integral part of the broader American struggle to achieve an ever more perfect Union.

Remnick also contends that Obama’s biracial heritage and upbringing marked him as an outsider for most of his life, whether at school in Hawaii, at

college or university, or through his career in state politics and the Senate. There is also a suggestion that Obama felt himself to be an outsider during his early interactions with religion and Trinity United Church of Christ. However, Remnick argues that it is precisely this biracial heritage, coupled with Obama's experience of listening to and engaging with diverse communities, which enables him to bridge racial divides and to appear as a reconciling figure. Yet, despite this analysis of Obama's conciliatory approach, there is a sense that Remnick's focus on the way Obama seeks approval from African American voters comes at the expense of his strategy to engage with white voters. *The Bridge* goes to significant lengths to trace Obama's connection to the civil rights movement and African American traditions and thought, but does not invest the same effort in understanding Obama's strategy for seeking support from white America.

Richard Wolffe's *Renegade* (2009) also takes a journalistic approach to documenting Obama's rise and, like *The Bridge*, is generally an uncritical account. Wolffe states that the book was Obama's idea, and that he was given regular access to the candidate for interviews and off-the-record conversations. Obama was therefore involved in the development and shape of the publication, which explains why the book rarely offers deeper, more objective insights. Wolffe, like Remnick, uses *Dreams From My Father* as an underpinning foundation for his account and adds additional context gained from interviews with Obama, conversations with others on the campaign trail, and from media coverage of key moments in the election campaign. Whilst *Renegade* contains few surprises and reveals little new about Obama's life and character, it does reinforce the assertions made by others, Remnick included, that Obama traded on his biracial heritage and adopted a conciliatory approach that was not always seen positively by African American leaders.

This is an argument supported by other commentators. Ron Walters (2007), for instance, recognises that Obama's racial identity clearly enabled him to attract African American support but notes that Obama is a political insider who has built his career within the American political establishment. His

campaign grew from within this environment, and not from within the African American community on the fringes of politics in the pattern of previous generations of African American leaders. Walters argues that Obama works to align his campaign to African American interests but that this is balanced with the need to accommodate white voters. This necessarily requires a degree of caution or restraint to avoid the confrontational approach often associated with African American leaders, but also weakens his credibility within the African American electorate. Likewise, Richard Thomson Ford notes that “Obama’s critics and ambivalent supporters among Black opinion leaders understood this fact (Obama was viable because he wasn’t Jesse Jackson). But they also resented it, and they resented Obama for his willingness to distance himself from the symbolic issues that had historically defined Black political activism” (Ford, 2009: p39).

Shelby Steele, a biracial, right-wing writer, also recognises the influence of history on Obama's rhetoric, but from the perspective of the different ways African Americans have sought to secure civil rights. In *A Bound Man: Why We Are Excited About Obama And Why He Can't Win* (2007), Steele argues that race in Obama’s 2007 rhetoric is articulated in looser terms of guilt and innocence related to the country’s history of racism, rather than through the more concrete expressions of inequality and injustice. His proposition is that Obama finds himself stranded between two archetypal roles that Steele says African Americans have always played: bargaining (achieving acceptance from white Americans by not highlighting racial failings) and challenging (directly confronting white America with the reality of inequality). Steele argues that, as Obama claims neither the bargainer’s nor challenger’s mask, he is unable to develop and exploit his own political voice and therefore cannot hope to win the 2008 presidential election. Although Steele does set out clearly the state of racial tensions and inequalities in America, his reading of Obama as a bound man is at odds with those who interpret Obama as the conciliator who is equally comfortable and acceptable to both African American and white audiences.

Whilst not a proponent of the bargaining/challenging dichotomy, Frederick C Harris also argues that Obama's election came at the expense of meaningful progress for African Americans. In his 2012 *The Price of the Ticket: Barack Obama and Rise and Decline of Black Politics*, Harris contends that African Americans have effectively made a bargain that, in return for electing the first African American President, they will not pursue their grievances as forcibly as they may otherwise have done. Harris believes that African American voters recognised the importance of securing the white vote in order to ensure Obama's victory, and consequently accepted Obama's need to avoid the confrontational approach that marked the campaigns of previous presidential hopefuls, such as Jesse Jackson and Shirley Chisholm.

James Kloppenberg (2011) also highlights Obama's commitment to finding common ground and identifies him as an insightful thinker passionate about public debate. *Reading Obama, Dreams, Hope and the American Political Tradition* tracks the candidate's views on major issues, including those that can be viewed through a racial lens, such as slavery, segregation and the civil rights movement, and shows that Obama's familiarity with American history and culture informs his convictions and political position.

Kloppenberg's thesis is that Obama's conciliatory approach is not a simplistic strategy to accommodate a broader electorate, but comes from an informed belief in the pragmatic need to find common ground in order to overcome division. Kloppenberg focuses primarily on Obama's books, although several speeches are also considered, and he argues that Obama is a progressive pragmatist, committed to practical political ideas and not to those that are politically expedient, short-term strategies. Howard Winant (2009) also depicts Obama as a pragmatist whose presidency will be defined by careful intellectual reasoning, rather than by any racial progress gained, and suggests that "the idea that the United States can move 'beyond race' is vacuous" (Winant, 2009: p57).

Although a substantially shorter treatise on Obama's life and education than Remnick's *The Bridge*, Thomas A Sugrue's *Not Even Past: Barack Obama and the Burden of Race* (2009) in many ways provides a more subjective

appraisal of Obama's engagement with the history and legacy of race in America. Sugrue is a civil rights historian and draws on his experience to locate Obama, who he sees as having few roots in the civil rights movement, within the struggle for freedom and equality. He also asserts that Obama is more concerned with reconciliation and compromise than with confrontation and division. The book's three closely linked essays argue that Obama is intent on using America's past to inform his thinking on race and to underpin his commitment to engendering unity, equality and racial harmony. Sugrue also offers an honest appraisal of the reality of race relations confronting Obama's Presidency and is quick to dismiss speculation that Obama's election heralds the dawn of a post racial society.

Sugrue's first chapter discusses the way Obama establishes his identity in the context of the civil rights movement, and notes Obama's use of the Exodus narrative during his campaign. The second essay focuses on the politics of race and class, and the third section discusses the different approaches to tackling race equality that have been taken in America since the 1960s, from the color-blind strategies that appeal to predominantly white Americans, to the assertion of racial identity by African Americans.

Gloria Wekker's (2010) review of *Not Even Past* notes that Sugrue makes a "convincing argument as to why Obama was eventually able to politically appeal to a widely divergent electorate [...] but he manages to do so at the expense of a more complicated, intersectional reading of race" (Wekker, 2010: p2). Wekker argues that Sugrue foregrounds whiteness as the natural order, and blackness as racial difference. There is some validity in this argument, but it does not detract significantly from Sugrue's core proposition that Obama seeks to learn from the past to improve the future. In this respect, Richard W Leeman's *The Teleological Discourse of Barack Obama* (2012) accords with Sugrue's conclusions. Leeman examines some of the speeches from both Obama's campaign and his presidency, focusing attention on the purpose (telos) of his rhetoric and how this is also manifest in his leadership style and personality or public persona. Leeman critiques Obama's rhetorical approach alongside those of figures such as Reagan and

Kennedy, Frederick Douglass and W E B Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr. He argues that Obama's rhetoric nurtures notions of hope, change, and achieving national unity whilst celebrating diversity, and that these notions are encapsulated in the presentation of progress as a journey that acknowledges American history in the future it envisages. Thus Leeman supports the argument that the connections Obama makes with the civil rights movement are integral to his ambitions for unity. Complementing this appraisal of Obama in historical context, Cynthia Fleming (2009) examines Obama's leadership style alongside the styles of 40 African American leaders and activists, from Booker T Washington to Carol Mosley Braun, Jesse Jackson, and Al Sharpton. Fleming offers a subtle exposition of the evolution of African American leadership, culminating in the optimism engendered by the Obama campaign whilst also highlighting the issues that continue to disadvantage African Americans.

As will be noted in the methodology chapter, this thesis can be described as multidisciplinary as each chapter draws on discourse analysis, history, politics, rhetoric and literature. There are currently, as far as can be ascertained, no other academic works that have used this approach. The one text that makes overt use of a range of methodologies and disciplines to analyse Obama's election, and which focuses primarily on the campaign rather than on Obama's presidency, is Heather E Harris, Kimberly R Moffitt and Catherine R Squires' edited collection of seventeen essays, *The Obama Effect: Multidisciplinary Renderings of the 2008 Campaign* (2010).

The Obama Effect sets out to provide "questions and reflections to engage both the problems and promises of the election of Obama" (Harris et al, 2010: pXVI) and to place Obama's candidacy and eventual victory in the context of race and the American experience. It does so through judicious use of a variety of sources, including quantitative data, historical context, biographical accounts, and cultural analysis. Despite failing to provide a clear explanation of what the Obama effect actually is, the book contributes to the conversation about race and racism in America, and recognises that Obama's election represents neither the end of racism nor the beginning of a

post racial era. The *Obama Effect* comprises five sections covering rhetoric, new media, identity, publics, and representations, with each examining the relationship between Obama and the media from a racial perspective. Of these, Sections One (rhetoric) and Three (Identity) are of particular relevance to this thesis.

Section One examines the interplay between power and race, and discusses what the prospect of an Obama victory signified to African American and white voters. Whilst James T Petre examines the rhetoric of change in twelve of Obama's speeches, with particular focus on the notion of American exceptionalism, the standout essay in this section is Dina Gavrilos' study of how Obama's victory exposes whiteness as the dominant power in US politics. Gavrilos argues that interpreting the representation of Obama as a national symbol of racial progress is "hyperbolic" and "regressive for the cause of social justice", and that such interpretations arise from "a deeply ingrained yet powerfully unspoken ideology of whiteness – a racial hierarchy that privileges the norms and perspectives of elite white males in political culture" (ibid, p4). In essence, Gavrilos maintains that Obama's success, although significant, is not in itself a marker of racial progress, as racial progress cannot be measured with the election of just one African American president when the previous 43 have been white.

Section Three offers four thoughtful essays on Obama's identity, including M Cooper Harriss' interesting appraisal of how Obama epitomises the diversity and complexity of American identity. Harriss relates "the constructed identity of 'Barack Obama' as a 2008 presidential candidate" to "the life and literary corpus of Ralph Ellison" (ibid, p117), arguing that consideration of Obama alongside Ellison enables contemporary interpretations of the first African American president as an 'invisible man'. Harriss concludes that Obama became president "by virtue of his ability to recognize and capitalize upon the persistence of Ellisonian invisibility, the recognition that people see in Obama not *himself*, but *themselves* — what they want him to be" (ibid, p129). Harriss takes a similar view to Daniel Stein, who argues that Obama "recognizes the narrative powers of African American literature to shape a

convincing and appealing black self” (Stein, 2011: p14) and that *Dreams* is designed to enable Obama to “create a public story of his life” through engaging “with central concepts of African American selfhood and black male identity, including double consciousness, invisibility, and black nationalism” (ibid, p3).

Of particular note in Harris et al’s section on identity is Suzanne W Jones’ study of *Dreams From My Father*. Jones provides extensive analysis of how Obama reflects on his search for identity and, like Pedersen, concludes that “even as he identifies as African American” Obama is a “twenty-first-century American: a cultural hybrid with racially mixed ancestry, a distinct individual at home in a diverse society” (Harris et al, 2010: p150). Jones also uses *Dreams* to argue that Obama “successfully fashioned an identity that he is comfortable with (an African American willing to speak openly about his biracial ancestry) and a social role that brings him satisfaction (finding common ground among people with diverse backgrounds and ideologies)” (ibid, p151). The latter question of finding common ground supports the claims articulated by Remnick and Wolffe, among others, that Obama adopts a conciliatory approach to politics, striving to reach compromise and accord across political and racial divides.

The literature concerning the analysis and interpretation of Obama’s racial identity is extensive. The key themes, as will be evident from the discussion above, concern the candidate’s articulation and deployment of his racial identity as an essentially American identity; his connection to the civil rights movement; his strategy of finding common ground and building common purpose among his audiences, and the question of whether he chose to downplay the reality of institutionalised racism in order to win white votes. This thesis addresses each of these themes and therefore complements the literature described. It focuses in particular on Obama’s identity and links with the civil rights movement, and examines whether he did adopt a conciliatory approach to building consensus. The thesis further provides evidence to show that Obama did not necessarily avoid the issue of institutionalised racism during his campaign. This project therefore also contributes to

debates about the extent of Obama's willingness to engage in confrontational discussions about race.

A post racial America?

As already demonstrated, Obama's victory in 2008 was frequently presented as a remarkable moment in American race relations (e.g. Dyson, 2008; Frank, 2008; and Herbert, 2008). Commenting on Obama's success on the day of the election itself, the *New York Times'* Adam Nagourney wrote that

The election of Mr. Obama amounted to a national catharsis — a repudiation of a historically unpopular Republican president and his economic and foreign policies, and an embrace of Mr. Obama's call for a change in the direction and the tone of the country. But it was just as much a strikingly symbolic moment in the evolution of the nation's fraught racial history, a breakthrough that would have seemed unthinkable just two years ago.

(Nagourney, 2008: n.p.)

This thesis is interested in the Obama campaign's presentation of the election as a moment of catharsis and it is therefore helpful to identify in this section the literature that considers whether such a moment of catharsis is realistic and how it could be achieved. In particular, it is useful to consider debates about whether a post racial America could be realised with the election of the first African American president. There is, for example, a substantial body of work, which concludes that although Obama's election was frequently presented as evidence of racial progress, his success would actually have little impact on race relations. For instance, Mark Ledwidge et al (2013) take an interdisciplinary approach to examining race in the United States, with emphasis on understanding the extent to which Obama's presidency is effecting change. The authors, through a collection of essays on how and why race remains a divisive issue, argue that Obama's election does not herald the dawn of a post racial America, and that his conciliatory, non-confrontational approach to politics will not enable him to deliver the racial reconciliation and societal change promised by his campaign.

Matthew Hunt and David Wilson (2009) draw similar conclusions from their examination of how different demographic sections of the electorate viewed

the implications for race relations of Obama's campaign. The authors base their assertions on the results of a *2008 Gallop: USA Today* survey, which included questions about the significance of an eventual Obama victory and which revealed that African Americans were more likely to see Obama's victory representing symbolic change rather than meaningful progress towards racial equality. Likewise, Luigi Esposito and Laura Finley (2009) argue that the debates around Obama's victory

point to a type of 'racial progress' that operates within the prevailing racial status quo by, among other things: (1) emphasizing racial accommodation and equal participation rather than social transformation; (2) measuring the worthiness and normalcy of Blacks along standards associated with Whiteness that are presumed to be apolitical and a-historical, thereby reaffirming the hegemonic stature of White privilege, and (3) assuming that an increase in racial tolerance will be enough to challenge racism, thus obscuring further the structural character of contemporary racism.

(Esposito and Finley, 2009: p165).

Paul Street (2008) also believes that Obama's election signifies much but will achieve little in terms of changing the status quo of race relations. Street analyses Obama's positions on class, race, war and empire, and includes an interesting chapter on the nature of and differences between individual and institutional racism. Street is a left-wing writer at odds with the more centrist position adopted by Obama, and with the establishment more generally. He argues that Obama is not truly the candidate of change as he is not liberal enough to bring about the change he seeks, and at the same time is part of the political system and has to conform to its expectations. Similarly, Street's position is that Obama's attempts to bridge America's racial divide are politically motivated rather than being of any practical substance. Street claims that Obama's election will do little to address the institutional racism that tacitly pervades the USA, and which authors such as Walker and Smithers (2009) present as the major obstacle that Obama had to overcome during the campaign, particularly through the *A More Perfect Union* speech.

As David Hollinger (2008) suggests, the media's depiction of Obama's election as heralding a post racial era stems from the candidate's

presentation of his biracial identity and the perception that he rarely talks about race, as well as from the apparent willingness of white voters to vote for him. Yet Julie Novkov wonders whether the “election really [is] about transcending history” and suggests that “to embrace the idea that a successful Obama candidacy marks the end of racial politics in America situates whites simultaneously at the rightful center of American politics and as racial innocents who now stand free and unencumbered by the chains of history” (Novkov, 2008: p650). Novkov’s argument is therefore that, whilst there is hope for national racial progress as a result of Obama’s election, the issue of race is so embedded throughout American culture and society that it is impossible to understand the United States in post racial terms without first acknowledging and addressing institutionalised racism. Novkov encourages consideration of how Obama’s biracial identity was presented and employed during the campaign alongside the recognition of institutionalised racism, and concludes that “white racial innocence” is fundamentally undercut by “showing how contemporary political alignments and institutional manifestations around race continue to contribute to subordination” (ibid, p658).

Andrew J Jolivet takes a similar line. In his edited collection, *Obama and the Biracial Factor: The Battle for a New American Majority* (2012), he appraises the perceived role of Obama’s biracial identity in the 2007/08 election, with insights drawn from the fields of ethnic studies, public policy, politics, and sociology. Jolivet also considers the ways in which race and diversity continue to shape American politics and policy-making, with an emphasis on how Obama’s first term as president approached race and social justice. He suggests that the question should not be whether America can be viewed as a post racial state, or even what the term post racial might mean in the context of an Obama presidency. Rather, he asks whether Obama’s election should be seen in a ‘post racist’ light, differentiating clearly between a society where equality of opportunity exists for people of all races and a society where inequalities and injustices continue to thrive, but in the absence of overt racism.

Obama himself has noted that he had “never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy – particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own” (Obama, 2008i). Even so, there has been substantial debate about what the election of Barack Obama as the first African American president of the United States means for racial politics in America. Since the 2008 election, the term ‘post racial’ has gained currency as an expression of claims that the USA has moved beyond race and that racism has been consigned to history. A 2009 NAACP report described how the term “has become a powerful new buzzword in our social and political lexicon, and its reach has had an enormous impact. By electing an African American to be president, some politicians, judges and media pundits have asserted that America has now officially overcome racism and that the work of the civil rights movement is completed” (Haygood et al, 2009: p2). The same report quotes the *Washington Post’s* Marjorie Valbrun’s claim that “now some people want to look to one solitary black man to just erase the so-called race problem... Call it the I-love-Obama-thus-racism-no-longer-exists phenomenon. If only things were that simple”, and Colin Powell’s view that “no matter what happens in the case of Senator Obama, there are still a lot of black kids who don’t see that dream there for them” (ibid, p4).

Much of the discussion has therefore focussed on whether the USA has moved beyond race, and whether Obama himself can be described as post racial. Yet to accord Obama post racial status is to suggest that he transcends racial division and that his election demonstrates that Americans no longer think of race as a limiting or defining factor in their appraisal of a person’s ability; it is also to suggest that neither individual nor structural racism exists. For these reasons, Obama sought to reject the post racial label, as reported by Richard Wolffe who quotes the then candidate’s comments that: “the impulse may be to write a piece that says Barack Obama represents a ‘post racial politics’. That term I reject because it implies that somehow my campaign represents an easy shortcut to racial reconciliation ... solving our racial problems in this country will require concrete steps, significant investment. We have a lot of work to do to

overcome the long legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. It can't be purchased on the cheap" (Wolffe, 2009: p324). Although Obama's campaign does not offer an "easy shortcut" to reconciliation, this thesis asserts that his rhetoric is fundamentally concerned with securing racial reconciliation by offering to assuage white guilt, acknowledging black anger, and building a bridge between the two communities. Reconciliation, however, is not an automatic route to post racial harmony.

Other commentators agree that Obama's election does not herald an era of post racial politics and argue that his victory actually "reflects the current structure of racial politics in the United States" (Smith and King, 2009: p25). Smith and King argue that approaches to race in the USA are defined by two principal positions: those who favour 'colour-blind' policies and seek to keep race out of the political arena, and those who favour race-based policies but who subsequently find that their espousal of these policies becomes a political liability. They believe that Obama deliberately downplayed the significance of race in his campaign, and adopted a strategy of "not talking about race and minimising its impact on the election" (ibid, p31) in order to appeal to a broad cross-section of the electorate. Christopher Parker et al (2009) support this proposition, noting that "the injection of race almost always damages the Black candidate in a biracial contest" and going on to argue that Obama ran a deracialised campaign, which "permits a Black candidate in a biracial contest to capture more of the White electorate" (Parker et al, 2009: p194). The extrapolation of this argument is that if Obama did indeed run a deracialised campaign, if he neutralised the issue by not talking about it, he cannot be described as post racial. However, as the analysis of Obama's speeches undertaken shows, race and racial issues do feature prominently in the corpus of Obama's speeches, and Parker et al's assertions are flawed.

Lawrence Bobo and Michael Dawson, on the other hand, contend that Obama's success "is as much an achievement defined by race as it is an achievement that signals a potential for the transcendence of race," (Bobo and Dawson, 2009: p4) and they suggest that his campaign relied heavily on

race-based messages and inferences. They argue that Obama's "entire candidacy, and his ultimate success, was premised on the fact of an enormous transformation in racial attitudes and outlooks in the United States" (ibid, p4). A substantial part of Obama's appeal to the electorate could therefore be found in the implicit promise to put an end to racial inequality, which this thesis argues became a hallmark of his rhetoric. Writing in the *New Yorker*, David Remnick acknowledged that race is a "powerful thematic undercurrent of [Obama's] oratory and prose. Not race as invoked by his predecessors in electoral politics or in the civil rights movement, not race as an insistence on tribe or on redress; rather, Obama made his biracial ancestry a metaphor for his ambition to create a broad coalition of support, to rally Americans behind a narrative of moral and political progress" (Remnick, 2008: n.p.). This assertion serves as an effective summary of Remnick's *The Bridge*.

For this metaphor to be effective, Obama's biracial ancestry would have to be acknowledged and accepted by the electorate. The results of a 2006 poll, which explained Obama's parents' race and nationality and surveyed people's attitudes to his racial identity, revealed that 55 percent of white respondents said Obama was biracial, whereas two-thirds of African Americans said he was black (Williams/Zogby, 2006: n.p.). The results contradict John Judis' statement that "in the United States, blackness has always been a social rather than an ethnic category, so that, if someone looks black and has some African blood, he is black, even if one of his parents was white." Obama also believes that biracial people are seen as black first, and white second: "if I'm outside your building trying to catch a cab they're not saying, 'Oh, there's a mixed race guy'" (Judis, 2008: n.p.). There is evidently an underlying tension, an inability to define Obama in terms that both communities can agree on.

When voting patterns in the presidential election are analysed, however, it becomes evident that Obama failed to secure a majority of the white vote. African American voter turnout was 65.2 percent, almost matching the 66.1 percent of eligible white American voters who cast their ballots (Philpot et al,

2009) but, although he won 95 percent of the black vote, 67 percent of the Hispanic vote, and 62 percent of the Asian vote, his support among the white electorate was just 43 percent (Bobo and Dawson, 2009: p4). Although this compares favourably with other Democratic presidential candidates – Democrats John Kerry (2004) and Al Gore (2000) secured 41 percent and 42 percent of the white vote respectively – the results nevertheless demonstrate that, far from reaching out to white Americans, Obama had to rely on a coalition of non-whites to win the election.

The voting patterns in specific states are also of interest, particularly in the traditionally Republican Southern States where the civil rights movement was most active in the 1960s. The table below highlights the six states where less than 30 percent of white Americans voted for Obama. For instance, in Alabama, Obama received only ten percent of the white vote; he was supported by just eleven percent of white Americans in Mississippi, and fourteen percent in Louisiana.

Table 1: States with less than 30% of white Americans voting for Obama

State	Percentage of white vote	Difference from national average of 43 percent	Winner
South Carolina	26	-17	McCain
Texas	26	-17	McCain
Georgia	23	-20	McCain
Lousiana	14	-29	McCain
Mississippi	11	-32	McCain
Alabama	10	-33	McCain

(Haygood et al, 2009, p13)

It is also useful to compare the voting patterns with the results of the 2004 election. Table 2 shows that, broadly, John Kerry enjoyed more popular support from white voters than Obama did, particularly in Alabama and Louisiana where there is a nine and ten point differential in Kerry's favour.

Table 2: Candidate preferences by race, 2004-2008

State	Whites voting for Kerry in 2004 (percent)	Whites voting for Obama in 2008 (percent)	Change in white vote	African Americans voting for Kerry in 2004	African Americans voting for Obama in 2008	Change in African American vote
Alabama	19	10	-9	91	98	+7
South Carolina	22	26	+4	85	96	+11
Georgia	23	23	0	88	98	+10
Louisiana	24	14	-10	90	94	+4
Mississippi	14	11	-3	90	98	+8
Texas	25	26	+1	83	98	+15

(Haygood et al, 2009, p13)

It would appear that the legacy of Jim Crow¹ segregation continues to be felt in the contemporary Deep South, with the white population still reluctant to accept African Americans as equals. Obama's appeals to national unity may well have resulted in broad popular support but the evidence suggests that he failed to capture the white vote as significantly as he perhaps expected, and that race remained a divisive issue on election day. It should also be noted that, whilst Obama failed to capture the white vote, he succeeded in capturing a higher proportion of the African American vote than John Kerry managed in 2004. Table 2 also shows that African American support was significantly higher for Obama in the six states with lowest white voter support than it was for Kerry. Racial issues clearly held major influence over voting patterns in 2008 and, given these statistics, it cannot be said that Obama transcended race.

Donald R Kinder and Allison Dale-Riddle (2012) draw similar conclusions from their analysis of several national surveys to consider the role of race in the election and in American society more broadly. They argue that Obama's identity was a key factor in eliciting support from African American voters (with 95 percent of African Americans voting for Obama), but that his identity also harmed his prospects among white voters who were more likely to harbour racial bias and resentments. Kinder and Dale-Riddle's ultimate

¹ The term "Jim Crow" derives from a blackface minstrel routine, *Jump Jim Crow*, performed by Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice in 1828, and now acts as a shorthand term for segregation.

conclusion is that Obama would have won the election by an even greater margin if he had been a white candidate.

These conclusions demonstrate that Obama's campaign had little positive effect on the country's racial attitudes, and in many respects may have reinforced racial divisions. Although this thesis does not address the wider realities of racial tensions in America, racial division and the history of segregation and inequality certainly contributed to the context for the main focus of the research and its development of a new theory of the rhetoric of redemption that has its foundations in Obama's campaign for the presidency.

Discourse and rhetoric

Chapter three (*Methodology*) describes how a method of discourse analysis (the Discourse-Historical Approach) and a model of rhetorical analysis (Kenneth Burke's *dramatistic pentad*) are used to analyse Obama's campaign speeches and to understand the motives contained in his rhetoric. This thesis consequently also contributes to the scholarship arising from the application of different approaches to discourse and rhetorical analysis to aspects of Obama's campaign. Consideration of the literature concerning the use and results of these approaches is therefore useful.

Since 2009, the scholarship that discusses Obama's rhetoric has been directed primarily at Obama's presidential speeches, and therefore falls outside the scope of this thesis. Examples include Daniel O'Connell et al's (2010) consideration of the opening sections (or start-up rhetoric) in eight of President Obama's speeches, or Bahram Kazemian and Somayyeh Hashemi's (2014) Critical Discourse Analysis of Obama's 2012 speeches. Speeches given at major, international events, such as Obama's 2009 *A New Beginning* address to the Muslim world in Cairo, have also been given significant attention (Amir H Y Salama's 2012 analysis of the discourse of the Cairo speech is particularly insightful).

Although there has also been wide ranging interest in Obama's rhetoric since 2004, the majority of authors have focused on just one or two speeches,

particularly the 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote speech and the 2008 *A More Perfect Union* speech on race. There has been limited analysis of a corpus of multiple speeches, let alone of a full corpus of the speeches Obama gave in 2007/08. Examples of authors concentrating on individual speeches include Babak Elahi and Grant Cos' (2005) analysis of the message of unity in Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention speech; Robert C Rowland and John M Jones' (2007) exploration of Obama's reinvention of the American Dream in the *A More Perfect Union* speech through appeals to hope, common values and shared identity; Robert L Ivie and Oscar Giner's (2009) discussion of Obama's rhetoric of national security and American exceptionalism, and Robert E Terrill's (2009) discussion of double consciousness and duality in *A More Perfect Union*.

Whilst some authors focus on specific issues, such as immigration (e.g. Murphy, 2009) or religion (e.g. Frank, 2009), others consider individual speeches in the context of Obama's message of reconciliation and unity. For instance, Deborah Atwater (2007) focuses her analysis on the 2004 Democratic National Convention speech and Obama's second book, *The Audacity of Hope*, to argue that Obama offers the prospect of a united and inclusive America. Atwater highlights the candidate's aim to encourage his audiences to "believe that we are more alike than we are different with a common destiny and a core set of values" (Atwater, 2007: p123). David Frank and Mark McPhail (2005) also provide analysis of the 2004 speech, with Frank arguing that Obama's post-civil rights rhetoric is intended to reconcile and unify his electorate, whilst McPhail describes this as a "coherence" where reconciliation is possible through fostering mutual understanding of shared inequities and injustices and respect. McPhail argues that Obama's "rhetoric of consilience offers an effective discursive strategy for working through the trauma of slavery and segregation, emphasizing the essential nature of human equality and the need for multiple agencies of responsibility and action. It thus has the potential of moving Americans beyond the complicity of racial division and toward coherent reconciliation" (Frank and McPhail, 2005: p572).

Junling Wang (2010) performs a Critical Discourse Analysis on two of Obama's speeches to reveal some of the linguistic techniques he employs, such as the use of first person pronouns to encourage a closer, more personal connection with his audience, the present tense to articulate challenges, and the future tense to offer solutions, whilst Theresa Catalao (2011) undertakes a semiotic analysis of Obama's *A More Perfect Union* speech to reveal the linguistic techniques (such as the use of metaphors and metonyms) that Obama uses to place himself within the struggle for racial equality and justice. Carlos Andrés Pérez Hernández (2013) analyses the semiotic and rhetorical structure of the *A More Perfect Union* speech to argue that Obama builds a sense of common purpose and identity between African American and white American audiences. Michael S Boyd (2009) also uses Critical Discourse Analysis and passing reference to the use of Ruth Wodak's (2008) Discourse-Historical Approach in recontextualising the rhetoric of this speech.

Although all these examples encompass many of the themes explored by this thesis, such as Obama's calls for unity and reconciliation, and the location of his candidacy within the struggle for equality, the authors base their arguments primarily on the analysis of a limited number of specific speeches. While there is real merit in this approach, it can also be argued that the focus on a narrow selection of Obama's best known speeches does not allow the conclusions reached to be applied across the wider rhetoric of the 2007/08 campaign. Systematic analysis of a larger corpus, such as that used by this thesis, enables broader understanding of the extent to which these conclusions are valid beyond individual speeches.

The authors who have considered a larger corpus of speeches include Felicia R Stewart (2011), who examines five randomly selected campaign speeches in the context of Afrocentric discourse, arguing that Obama is "unhesitant in his use of Black communication" (Stewart, 2011: p276) and that his discourse embraces diverse and multicultural communities, and Marta Degani (2015), who analyses thirty campaign speeches from 2007/08 to identify the principal terms, values and metaphors in Obama's rhetoric.

Degani also highlights Obama's celebration of the American Dream, his self-presentation, and his "preference for the rhetorical strategy of story-telling" (Degani, 2015: p226). The two largest studies of Obama's speeches, however, have been conducted by Kevin Coe and Michael Reitzes (2010), who analyse 183 speeches, and Jacques Savoy (2010), who analyses 150 of Obama's speeches alongside 95 speeches given by the Republican candidate, John McCain.

Kevin Coe and Michael Reitzes' proposition is that "the popular argument that Obama's campaign was heavy on the soaring rhetoric of hope and change but light on discussion of policy – an empirical claim – cannot be tested by looking to the extant literature" (Coe and Reitzes, 2010: p393). The authors subsequently provide the first quantitative, language-based analysis of a large corpus comprising 183 of Obama's speeches (including transcripts of televised debates). They use computer-assisted content analysis techniques (Concordance and TexQuest) to "code more than 11,500 distinct words that Obama used during his campaign" (ibid, p391) against four rhetorical appeals: policy appeals (e.g. security, healthcare, the economy); thematic appeals (hope, change, unity); morality appeals (religion, family, patriotism) and factious appeals (race, immigration, abortion). The category of race includes all references to race relations as well as vocabulary relating to affirmative action, prejudice, segregation, and so on. Coe and Reitzes then overlay these coded results with characteristics (or determinants) such as the location or context of the speech, the candidate's current position in the opinion polls, or the political leaning of the state where the speech was delivered to understand how Obama's rhetoric may have been influenced by external factors. The conclusion is that Obama's rhetoric emphasises primarily policy and thematic appeals, and downplays more contentious issues. Where this thesis will add to Coe and Reitzes' work is in its capacity to provide additional contextual information through the Discourse-Historical Approach, and particularly to the thematic appeals of hope, change and unity. The thesis will also argue that these appeals are closely linked to the issue of race in Obama's rhetoric.

The other major study of a larger corpus of Obama's rhetoric is Jacques Savoy's (2010) comparative lexical analysis of 245 campaign speeches given by Obama and McCain. Savoy's work is included here to demonstrate that researchers are interested in the lexical content of Obama's campaign rhetoric. It captures and compares the vocabulary of the two candidates, using metrics to identify the most overused and underused terms employed by each candidate in relation to each other. Savoy provides some of the hard data that Coe and Reitzes argue has been missing from the literature, but does not include the qualitative analysis that provides context and insight. Whilst this thesis uses a method of discourse analysis to reveal the principal themes and topics across a larger corpus of 172 speeches, the application of contextual and intertextual knowledge adds qualitative analysis to the quantitative results.

As far as scholarship relating to the application of Kenneth Burke's *pentad* to Obama's rhetoric is concerned, there are several Master's and Doctoral-level theses available online that apply the method to different speeches, as well as numerous blogs with posts offering pentadic analysis of individual addresses.² There are, however, very few peer-reviewed journal articles that describe how the *pentad* can be applied to Obama's campaign, with Xiaoyan Liu and Nancy L Street's (2009) analysis of the *A More Perfect Union* speech being a notable contribution. Liu and Street make use of the *pentad's* scene-act ratio to elucidate the political motives of the speech (namely to mitigate the impact of Jeremiah Wright's inflammatory sermons) and the agent-purpose ratio to argue that Obama used the speech as a moment of redemptive opportunity. Again, this is an example of researchers applying methods used in this thesis to particular speeches, and not taking an holistic view of a larger corpus, which this thesis seeks to do.

There is one example of an academic interpretation of the Obama campaign as a redemption drama, in the terms described by Burke. The abstract of

² For instance: <http://brandonbrewerrhetoric.weebly.com/analysis-3-a-pentadic-view-of-obamas-acceptance-speech.html>; <https://hopew.wordpress.com/the-dramatistic-pentad-and-obamas-yes-we-can-speech/>; <http://monicasblog12.blogspot.co.uk/2009/02/president-obamas-inaugural-address.html>; <http://weareforget.blogspot.co.uk/2009/02/words-of-change.html>

Michael G Lacy's paper presented at the 2009 International Communication Association meeting (a full text of which has proved elusive, despite contacting the author on two occasions) indicates that Lacy argues Obama's campaign offered to mediate guilt about "racism, white privilege and the moral ambiguity about the U.S. war and occupation of Iraq, as well as moral ambiguity and neoliberalism linked to the Clinton administration".³ The paper's scope is therefore broader than that of this thesis in terms of its consideration of the Iraq war, neoliberalism, and so on, but it is not possible to ascertain without having seen the full text the extent to which Lacy has considered multiple speeches.

The primary discourse-analytical studies that provide analysis of the rhetoric of the 2007/08 Obama campaign can therefore be described as limited in their scope. The majority focus on single or small numbers of speeches; those that do analyse a larger corpus are concerned primarily with the quantitative investigation of terms, vocabulary and thematic appeals.

Summary

It is evident that the literature that has focused on representations of Obama's identity and what his election might mean for America has been concerned with either interpretation, based on informed contextual, historical and cultural knowledge, or with conclusions based on linguistic evidence derived from individual or small numbers of speeches. This thesis blends both these approaches to offer the first integrated analysis of a major corpus of Obama's rhetoric using the Discourse-Historical Approach, with robust data selection and analysis complemented by contextual and intertextual insights. Further, this thesis is also the first to apply Burke's *pentad* to a corpus of Obama's speeches at this scale.

The thesis' methodology provides a foundation that enables other authors' more subjective claims about aspects of Obama's rhetoric to be tested. It uses this foundation to validate arguments about Obama's conciliatory

³http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/9/9/4/1/p299416_index.html?phpsessid=8a5bd0884ec1e951129dff60d023bfd9

approach, whether he can be classed as a 'bargainer' or 'challenger', and the thesis therefore contributes a unique perspective to the wider academic literature about Obama's 2007/08 election campaign.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter explains how the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is employed to analyse the linguistic and discursive choices made by Obama during the 2007/08 campaign, and their social, historical, and cultural contexts. It justifies the use of this interdisciplinary approach because of its requirement to take these contexts into account at every stage of the research. The chapter also describes the reference corpus, namely the whole set of texts and documents relating to the Obama campaign, and sets out the procedures followed for the selection of a suitable sub- (analytic) corpus for close reading and analysis.

The introductory chapter highlighted the significance of Obama's 2008 victory in the context of African American attempts to win the presidency, and in the context of the struggle for civil rights. The literature review recognised the significant body of literature that discusses Obama's candidacy and campaign through a racial lens. The review also acknowledged that, whilst there is division on the questions of what his election actually means for race relations in America and whether or not he ran a race-neutral campaign, there is consensus that Obama's election does mark a milestone in African American politics, and that his racial identity provided an important context to his campaign. This thesis consequently accepts as its starting point the notion that Obama's success in 2008 must should be understood within the context of a discourse that encompasses African American history from slavery to the modern day, and which over time has informed shifting concepts of racial identity.

A discourse approach

This thesis embraces an interdisciplinary approach to discuss how notions of race and redemption were articulated in Obama's 2008 campaign discourse, with different disciplines each working in dialogue with each other. Its underpinning analytical framework is provided by the field of discourse

analysis, which includes extralinguistic analysis of, for instance, the symbolic resonance of the locations and venues used for Obama's speeches, or the music chosen by the Obama campaign. It also encompasses rhetoric, history, politics and literature. The discourse of the campaign can consequently be described as multimodal and multicontextual, and therefore demands an appropriate multidisciplinary, analytical methodology.

Discourse is understood in a number of ways within and across disciplines. James Paul Gee makes a clear distinction between "little d" discourse (the language in use) and "big D" Discourse (which combines language with social practices). He defines Discourses as "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate works, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities" (Gee, 1996: p127); thus Discourse encompasses spoken and written texts and is shaped by the ideas and traditions that have driven, and which continue to drive, the language used by particular communities. Identities, events, and actions are therefore created through language in concert with a wide range of extralinguistic variables, imageries, conventions and symbols: "the key to Discourse is recognition. If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools and places together in such a way that others recognise you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity), here and now, then you have pulled off a Discourse" (Gee, 2005: p27).

Gee's approach accords with Norman Fairclough's description of discourse as "a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world as meaning", and that discourse "makes the world manifest" (Fairclough, 1992: p64). Discourse is dependent on its social and cultural context and Discourse and context can therefore be said to have a symbiotic relationship in the production of meaning and understanding. Gee defines context as "an ever-widening set of factors that accompany language in use. These include material setting, the people present (and what they know and believe), the language that comes before and after a given utterance, the social relationships of the people involved, and their ethnic, gendered and sexual identities, as well as cultural, historical

and institutional factors” (Gee, 2005: p57). He proposes that texts take on particular, “situated meanings” through the contexts in which they are located. This is the understanding of discourse used throughout this thesis: discourses are fashioned through the interaction of language and context; a text can shape our understanding of the context and, at the same time, how we see the context shapes our understanding of what the text means.

For example, Obama announced his candidacy for the presidency from the steps of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois, the building which also provided the venue for Lincoln’s *“House Divided”* speech, with which he accepted his Party’s nomination as a candidate for US Senate. The symbolism of the location conditions the audience to associate Obama with the president who unified a nation even before Obama begins his speech, and therefore provides historical context to the occasion. In turn, the historical context shapes understanding of Obama’s speech, which touches on national unity and suggests that Obama is following in Lincoln’s footsteps. The key term used to describe this cross-referencing of interactions is intertextuality.

Undertaking Discourse Analysis enables researchers to understand and explain how language use and interaction are integrated, for instance by asking how a community’s attitudes and beliefs might inform the language choices it uses, or by exploring what a community’s language use can reveal about its philosophies or notions of power. Terry Locke defines Discourse Analysis as the “analysis and interpretation of texts as potentially revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonize human subjects through often covert position calls” (Locke, 2004: p2). The process enables researchers to define and understand the nature of a given communicative event through close, systematic textual analysis to reveal how and why a speaker or writer may be using language, to what effect, and within which context. Brian Paltridge provides a useful description of Discourse Analysis as a means of analysing texts in their socio-cultural contexts:

Discourse Analysis focuses on knowledge about language beyond the word, clause, phrase and sentence that is needed for successful communication. It looks at patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. Discourse Analysis also considers the way that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourses.

(Paltridge, 2008:p2)

Discourse Analysis can reveal the significance of what is being said; how language enacts activities, identities, and relationships; what perspectives are being articulated, and how extralinguistic factors (e.g. symbols and imagery) contribute to the discourse. A particular challenge lies in the analysis of spoken texts as, for such analysis to be effective, it needs to take into account the speaker's delivery. Indicators of orality such as pitch, rhythm and volume are, however, harder to analyse, as are behavioural indicators, such as body language and gestures. The analysis underpinning this thesis was conducted primarily on the written transcripts of Obama's speeches but also makes use of extralinguistic analysis to understand aspects of Obama's performance.

Given the wide-ranging sources that Obama's speeches draw upon, and the historical and social contexts in which they are delivered, the research requires an appropriate framework that encourages interdisciplinary working, and which permits analysis of the speeches whilst offering scope to take into account the social, political, cultural, and historical contexts, as well as facilitating analysis of the rhetoric itself. The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to discourse analysis, as developed by Ruth Wodak (2000, 2001), provides an effective framework.

As its name implies, DHA places greater emphasis on the historical context of a particular discourse than other methods or frameworks within the field of discourse analysis. The approach requires the researcher to draw on a range of language, situations, and genres in analysing a given issue, and to make

intertextual and interdiscursive connections between them. Wodak describes genres as “the conventionalized, more or less schematically fixed use of language associated with a particular activity” (Wodak, 2001: p66), which accords with Norman Fairclough’s description of genres as a “socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity” (Fairclough, 1995: p14). Genres are aligned to specific fields of action, which “may be understood as segments of societal ‘reality’, which contribute to constituting and shaping the ‘frame’ of discourse” (Wodak, 2001: p66). The genres relevant to this thesis are described below and align to two of the fields of action proposed by Wodak, which are associated with political communication and rhetoric: 1) formation of public opinion and self-presentation, and 2) political advertising, marketing and propaganda. There are significant intertextual relationships between the two fields that provide additional context to the research. DHA encourages the synthesis of linguistic and extralinguistic or contextual practices to produce insights beyond a purely textual analysis; “to transcend the pure linguistic dimension and to include more or less systematically the historical, political, sociological and/or psychological dimensions in the analysis and interpretation of a specific discursive occasion” (Wodak, 2000: n.p.).

Wodak explains that “in investigating historical, organizational and political topics and texts, the Discourse-Historical Approach attempts to integrate much available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive ‘events’ are embedded” (Wodak, 2001: p65). Wodak goes on to note that “politics is mainly based on discourse, thus the problem¹ immediately implies the investigation of [...] rhetoric in many public and private domains” (ibid). This leads Wodak to introduce a new theoretical concept of “context” that provides a mechanism for researchers to apply to their investigations of discourses.

Wodak’s framework encompasses four levels that facilitate a systematic understanding of the language choices and context. The first level is

¹ In this instance, the problem may be described as ‘does Obama present his candidacy as a moment of cathartic redemption for America?’

concerned with textual analysis and is the linguistic element of the DHA framework. The second level examines the “intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses” (Wodak, 2001: p67). The third level concerns the extralinguistic or sociological factors that influence the discourse, including “formality of the situation, occasion of the commemorative event, the recipients, the political and interactive roles of the participants, their ideological orientation, their sex or gender, age, profession, level of education, as well as their ethnic, religious, national and/or religious affiliation” (ibid, p67). The fourth level is focused on cultural, historical, social, and political contexts. Together, these four levels enable the researcher to take into account wider knowledge and a broader range of variables in constructing the context of the discourse.

A second analytic method complementing this thesis’ deployment of the Discourse-Historical Approach is Kenneth Burke’s *dramatistic pentad*, which provides a means of inferring the motives behind Obama’s speeches on race. An established method of rhetorical analysis, the *pentad* equips researchers with a toolkit for analysing the *act, scene, agent, agency and purpose* of any given rhetorical text, with motive revealed by the interactions of these five elements. The thesis uses Burke’s method alongside the Discourse-Historical Approach, producing a critical synthesis that enables a linguistic-cultural analysis of the aims and aspirations of Barack Obama’s 2007/08 election campaign and which reveals a new, cohesive theory of guilt redemption rhetoric. This represents the research’s original contribution to the discipline as no other study of Obama’s speeches has combined DHA with Burke’s *pentad* to reveal the motives and contexts behind the campaign rhetoric, or to demonstrate the redemptive inferences of Obama’s appeals for racial unity and reconciliation. The application of the Discourse-Historical Approach in this thesis can be described as follows:

Level one: the textual analysis is conducted on an analytic corpus comprising a selection of Obama’s speeches and two of his books (*Dreams From My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*).

Level two: wider contextual knowledge enables discussion of the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between Obama's speeches/books and (for example) the works of W E B Du Bois and Ralph Ellison, and the writings and rhetoric of political figures such as Abraham Lincoln, Booker T Washington, John F Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. Elements of Burke's *pentad* are used to inform and elucidate contextual understanding.

Level three: the extralinguistic, sociological variables provide context to the textual and intertextual analysis in terms of understanding how projections of Obama's race informed his rhetorical choices. Extralinguistic variables explored by this thesis include the songs from the civil rights era that were played at Obama's campaign rallies and the symbolism-laden venues in which Obama gave some of his most important speeches, such as the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Brown Chapel in Selma, Alabama, and the Philadelphia Convention Centre.

Level four: this thesis argues that Obama's 2007/08 campaign is set against the backdrop of race and civil rights. Understanding of the Exodus narrative and wider knowledge of the history of the US civil rights movement of the 1960s therefore provide broader socio-political and historical context to the findings generated through the other levels of analysis.

This, then, is the primary analytic framework used for the programme of research set out in this thesis, and is the framework which enables the selection of its analytic corpus. Whilst described consecutively, the analysis of the four levels is often conducted by moving back and forth between the levels to revisit assertions in the light of the new findings generated by the additional levels of analysis. In this thesis, this can be seen in the way Chapters four, five and six each integrate different elements, i.e race, civil rights and redemption, within the framework, providing additional context to the analysis.

Source data

The core period of interest as far as the scope of this thesis is concerned is the 21 months between 10th February 2007, when Obama announced his candidacy, and 4th November 2008, when he gave his victory speech in Grant Park, Chicago. The 170 campaign speeches given by Obama during this period contribute significantly to the reference corpus. The majority of these speeches were delivered in gymnasias, stadia, or town hall settings, with a small number given in churches, at schools, or in venues chosen for their symbolic value. Given the presence of the local, state or national media on each occasion – all presidential candidates command media interest - every speech given in this period should be regarded as a campaign speech, even those that may be described as policy addresses or college convocations. Also of interest are Obama's keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, the speech that first brought him widespread national attention, and his inauguration speech of January 2009, which effectively closes the cycle begun in February 2007.

Transcripts of these 172 speeches were downloaded from Barack Obama's official campaign website² in September 2010. These speeches have been included for reference on a CD-Rom appended to the thesis as Appendix One. By 2013, the speeches were no longer available on the website, although many do continue to be freely available from other sources.³

Taken together, the speeches represent a substantial corpus of more than half a million words. The majority of these addresses can be categorised as 'stump' speeches, the crowd-pleasing campaign addresses that set out the candidate's core propositions and values and which are delivered several times in different locations over a short period. These speeches may be "modified from day to day ... to reflect the concerns and interests of the particular audience to reflect a changing major theme of the day" (Abrahamson et al, in Coe and Reitzes, 2010: p394) but they are effectively

² www.barackobama.com/speeches

³ E.g. www.obamaspeeches.com

the same speech. Other speeches deal with particular themes, such as energy, the economy, or military service. These are often related to the stump speeches in that they generally set out the candidate's policies in each area. There is also a subset of speeches given to specific audience groups or to mark a specific occasion. Rarely repeated, these speeches explore at length topics not covered in detail in the stump speeches and they can therefore illuminate further the candidate's position and attitudes. From this reference corpus an analytic corpus comprising 41 speeches and two of Obama's books was selected for detailed analysis, based on their direct relevance to the research questions. The data selection procedure is described below.

Corpus building procedure

As is required by the Discourse-Historical Approach, data for the research was obtained from a range of sources, with the corpus drawn from Obama's autobiographical writing and campaign speeches. James Kloppenberg argues that two of the books Obama has authored, *Dreams from my father* (Obama, 2007a) and *The Audacity of Hope* (Obama, 2007b), "should be acknowledged as the most substantial books written by anyone elected president of the United States since Woodrow Wilson ... *Dreams* and *Hope*, taken together, provide not only a window into Obama's nuanced understanding of American history and culture, but also a blueprint for American politics" (Kloppenberg, 2011: p5) *Dreams* is an autobiographical memoir that can be placed within the tradition of African American memoirs; *Hope* explores American political and cultural tradition but also elaborates Obama's opinions on the challenges and issues facing American society. Given the contribution these two works make to Obama's public image and the formation of public opinion about him, it is prudent to include them within the reference corpus.

Obama's books have been subjected to repeated close reading, with *Dreams* being of particular value for its exploration of how Obama wrestled with the concepts of race and identity from an early age. The book, an autobiography that could equally be classed as an African American bildungsroman, also

calls on the canon of African American literature and thought, and specifically on the works of W E B Du Bois and Ralph Ellison, as well as other African American intellectuals. In accordance with the expectations of the Discourse-Historical Approach, works by these authors, including Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) form part of the source material for the research and provide essential contextual evidence, but are not part of the reference corpus.

A combination of techniques was used to identify an analytic corpus of Obama's speeches that referred in some way to issues of race. This process enabled a significant proportion (three-quarters) of the speeches in the reference corpus to be disregarded for close textual analysis, although many speeches were also consulted for context as required. The selection procedure commenced with a close reading of the entire reference corpus. As noted above, the 172 speeches align to two fields of action associated with political communication and rhetoric: 1) formation of public opinion and self-presentation, and 2) political advertising, marketing and propaganda. The speeches were allocated to one of these fields according to the genre they adhere to. Wodak sets out the genres within the fields as follows (genres highlighted by italicized text indicate those relevant to this thesis):

Table 3: Fields of action and genres

Fields of action	
Formation of public opinion and self-presentation	Political advertising, marketing and propaganda
Genres	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases • <i>Press conferences</i> • Interviews, talk shows • Lectures and contributions to conferences • <i>Articles, books</i> • <i>Commemorative speeches</i> • <i>Inaugural speeches</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election programmes • <i>Slogans, speeches in election campaigns</i> • Announcements • Posters • Election brochure • Direct mailings • Flyers, etc

(Wodak, 2001: p68)

The second step entailed manually identifying the themes contained within the speeches and grouping them according to subject. This exercise identified thirteen broad topics as follows:

1. Change
2. The economy/job creation/trade/housing
3. Education
4. Clean energy/energy security/the environment
5. The establishment/the Bush Administration/"Washington" politics
6. Family/the role of mothers and fathers
7. Healthcare
8. Hope
9. Identity/Obama and the American Dream/the American Promise
10. Military issues/national security/veterans
11. Race/Civil Rights/African American and Latino issues
12. Religion
13. Unity/collective effort

Appendix Two sets out the results of this initial research exercise in table form, using the format shown in the table below:

Table 4: Extract from Appendix Two (speech selection process)

No.	Speech	Date	Field	Subject													
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
1	2004 Democratic National Convention	27.07.04	1		x								x		x	x	x
2	Announcement for President	10.02.07	1		x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

The process identified twelve speeches which discuss race within the first field of action (formation of public opinion and self-presentation). These are:

1. 2004 Democratic National Convention (Obama, 2004)
2. Announcement for President (Obama, 2007c)
3. Selma Voting Rights March commemoration (Obama, 2007d)
4. Southern New Hampshire University Commencement (Obama, 2007g)
5. Howard University Convocation (Obama, 2007m)
6. The Great Need of the Hour (Obama, 2008c)
7. A More Perfect Union (Obama, 2008i)
8. Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr (Obama, 2008j)
9. A New Era of Service (Obama, 2008p)
10. The American Promise (Obama, 2008v)

11. Remarks of President Elect Barack Obama (Obama, 2008y)
12. Inaugural Speech (Obama, 2009)

There are also 29 speeches which discuss race within the second field of action (political advertising, marketing and propaganda):

1. Remarks to the California State Democratic Convention (Obama, 2007e)
2. Remarks to the National Conference of Black Mayors (Obama, 2007f)
3. Hampton University Annual Ministers' Conference (Obama, 2007h)
4. Strengthening Families in a New Economy (Obama, 2007i)
5. Take Back America 2007 (Obama, 2007j)
6. A Politics of Conscience (Obama, 2007k)
7. Remarks to the National Council of La Raza (Obama, 2007l)
8. A Challenge For Our Times (Obama, 2007n)
9. A Change We Can Believe In (Obama, 2007o)
10. A Call to Serve (Obama, 2007p)
11. Iowa Caucus Night (Obama 2008a)
12. New Hampshire Primary (Obama, 2008b)
13. Kennedy Endorsement Event (Obama, 2008d)
14. Reclaiming the American Dream (Obama, 2008e)
15. The Past Versus the Future (Obama, 2008f)
16. Super Tuesday (Obama, 2008g)
17. Rebuilding Trust with New Orleans (Obama, 2008h)
18. Building Trades National Legislative Conference (Obama, 2008k)
19. Apostolic Church of God (Obama, 2008l)
20. Remarks with Hilary Clinton in Unity (Obama, 2008m)
21. National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (Obama, 2008n)
22. The America We Love (Obama, 2008o)
23. League of United Latin American Citizens (Obama, 2008q)
24. Joint event with Senator Hilary Clinton (Obama, 2008r)
25. 2008 National Council of La Raza Annual Meeting (Obama, 2008s)
26. 99th Annual Convention of the NAACP (Obama, 2008t)
27. National Urban League Conference (Obama, 2008u)
28. Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Gala (Obama, 2008w)
29. Española (Obama, 2008x)

Selection of these 41 speeches to form the analytic corpus was thus informed by the author's wider knowledge of African American history, culture and tradition. Such contextual understanding is a requirement of the Discourse-Historical Approach. To ensure the validity of this process, a

further exercise was conducted with the support of the *AntConc*⁴ freeware concordance programme. *AntConc* enables users to upload a corpus of text and to produce a range of data including frequency lists (how often individual words appear), collocates (sequences of words that appear together), and keyword lists (words which appear in texts more often than could be expected due to chance alone). The software was used to create a wordlist of certain words related to the thesis' aims (see Table 5 below); the wordlist was then manually disambiguated to enable cross-checking of context, sense and meaning, and to eliminate instances where the selected words were used with different meanings.

For instance, the frequency list shows that the word "race" appears on 109 occasions, but cross-referencing with the concordance and cluster list enables 77 of these to be dismissed, as race is not used in the sense of ethnicity but in terms of the arms race, the presidential race, or the human race. The concordancing exercise supported the results of the primary selection process; where terms proved to be irrelevant to the research (as in the example above), this had no impact on the size of the analytic corpus as the speeches included in the corpus remained valid through their use of other, relevant terms and phrases. No further speeches were identified for inclusion in the corpus. It is possible that not every reference or inference to ethnicity or civil rights was identified but it is nevertheless argued that the screening exercise has enabled the objective selection of a core analytic corpus of 41 speeches (24 percent of the reference corpus).

Having identified the 41 speeches concerned with the theme of race, the data selection process described above was repeated once more to reveal the sub-topics contained within the speeches. Given the focus on race and redemption in this thesis, sub-topics included racial identity, civil rights, African American leadership, and the notion of a "Promised Land" of liberty and equality (the Exodus narrative). The results of this exercise, included as Appendix Three, revealed 18 sub-topics, broadly defined as follows:

⁴ http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html

Table 5: Sub-topics in the theme of race

No.	Topic	Examples of associated vocabulary
1	Obama's identity	Obama's parents and grandparents; upbringing; education; Hawaii; Kenya; Indonesia; Michelle Obama; Father-in-law; Brother-in-law
2	Civil Rights	Civil Rights leaders; Martin Luther King Jr; Abraham Lincoln; Anne Cooper; Jimmy Lee Jackson; Rev Lowery; John Lewis; C T Vivian; Governor Wallace; Thurgood Marshall; Kennedy; Cesar Chavez; Rosa Parks; Jeremiah Wright; Marches; Birmingham; Selma; Montgomery; Alabama; Atlanta; Georgia; Memphis; Mississippi; Little Rock; church bombings; Freedom Rides; billy clubs; fire hoses; nooses; bus boycotts; voting rights; Edmund Pettus Bridge; Arc of the moral universe; the battles of the 60s; Gettysburg; Slavery; <i>Brown v Board</i> ; non-violence; NAACP
3	Equality	US Constitution; the Perfect Union; Founding Fathers; gender equality; Gay rights; Women's rights; liberty; diversity
4	Economy	Economic justice; economic opportunity; the American Dream; the American Promise
5	Education	College education; tuition fees; education to stimulate opportunity
6	Latino	Hispanic vote; Latino organisations
7	Katrina	Hurricane; Katrina; New Orleans; levees; storms
8	Unity	Together; united; "red states, blue states, United States", "black, white and brown"
9	Black anger	Anger; resentment
10	Immigration	Opportunity; Obama's family; perceived threats; border control;
11	Leadership	African American leaders; presidency;
12	Religion	Faith; biblical references; gospel of brotherhood; sin
13	Exodus	The Promised Land; Moses; Joshua; Jericho; Crossing over; Jordan; Mountaintop
14	Crime	Criminal justice; Jena; Louisiana; prison populations
15	Sacrifice	Giving back; sacrifice; responsibility; volunteering; duty; community organising; "my brother's keeper"
16	Health	Healthcare; hospitals; care system
17	Family	Fathers; single mothers; responsibilities; role models
18	Hope	The Audacity of Hope; beacon; light of hope

The results of this exercise provide the underpinning data for the research and are discussed in the following chapters. Sub-topics relevant to how Obama constructed his African American identity; his attitude to race, and his response to institutionalised racism are described in Chapter four. The sub-

topics relevant to the strategies Obama employs to place himself within the civil rights movement are described in Chapter five, and those relating to his projection of racial reconciliation based on appeals to unity and sacrifice are highlighted in Chapter six.

Corpus analysis procedure

Having used wider contextual knowledge to identify the fields of action, genres and themes for selection of the corpus for analysis, and having repeated the process to identify race-specific sub-topics, the next stage is to explore the intertextual and extralinguistic factors that characterised it. This begins to open up the interdisciplinary perspective facilitated by the Discourse-Historical Approach, enabling the other levels of contexts to inform the analysis, filtered by the researcher's informed subjectivity. Examples of the second level of analysis (wider contextual knowledge) include consideration of Obama's racial identity, his co-option of the civil rights movement and evocations of political leaders and African American thinkers, as well as the occasion or location of a particular speech.

An example of the third level of analysis (extralinguistic variables) is Obama's choice of the National Constitution Centre in Philadelphia as the venue for his *A More Perfect Union* speech (Obama, 2008i), which explored notions of race and equality contained within the US Constitution. This is one example of how Obama uses place to build context for his discourse; others are described in the following chapters together with examples of how the music that provided the soundtrack to his campaign and the images that created an iconography of the campaign were also intended to help place Obama's candidacy within the context of a redemptive moment for civil rights and racial equality in America.

The Discourse-Historical Approach therefore provides opportunities for the researcher to acknowledge the cultural, historical, social, and political contexts of the discourse. As far as this thesis is concerned, this allows informed discussion of how African American intellectuals have shaped Obama's approach to race (Chapter four); how Obama's understanding of

civil rights in America and his co-option of the received memories of statesmen such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King provided an underlying narrative to the discourse (Chapter five), and how persistent structural and individual racism created the guilt that requires a national, secular redemption (Chapter six). In undertaking this level of the DHA framework, close reading of the corpus and informed knowledge of the seminal works on African American racial identity by, for example, W E B Du Bois and Ralph Ellison provides cultural context; familiarity with the history of the civil rights movement and its leaders provides historical context (the version of the history of civil rights which Obama has constructed is discussed at length).

Level four analysis arises from an understanding of the ways in which the Exodus narrative contributes to the context of the discourse. The thesis considers Exodus primarily in terms of the message of liberation espoused by Martin Luther King Jr, but also acknowledges the Afrocentric traditions that hold up the achievements of Egyptian civilisation. Exodus and concepts of the messianic phenomenon (particularly the idea of Black messianism) are discussed in more detail in Chapters five (*Obama and civil rights*) and six (*Obama and redemption*), although Chapter four's consideration of African American political leadership also links to the narrative.

Kenneth Burke's dramatisic pentad

The Discourse-Historical Approach facilitates analysis of the content and context of the speeches, and offers some insight into the motives behind the rhetoric. However, as the thesis asserts that Obama's intent was to offer the American electorate a moment of redemption for the country's "original sin of slavery" (Obama, 2008i), an additional layer of analysis to understand this motive is useful. Importantly, the results from the analysis of the four levels of the DHA are used to inform this second analytic layer, which is provided by Kenneth Burke's *dramatisic pentad*. The *pentad* model enables researchers to explore the relationship between symbolic actions and human behaviour in order to reveal the purpose and acts behind rhetorical statements, which Burke terms dramas.

Burke's *A Grammar of Motives* (1969) introduces dramatism as a theory of rhetoric that seeks to answer the question "what is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" His theory is "concerned with the basic forms of thought which, in accordance with the nature of the world as all men necessarily experience it, are exemplified in the attributing of motives" (Burke, 1969: pXV). Dramatism therefore asserts that communication can be interpreted as a dramatic function that provides the means of understanding the message and purpose inherent in rhetoric, and "it invites one to consider the motives in a perspective that, being developed from an analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as a mode of action" (Bobbitt, 2004: pXXII).

Central to this theory is the concept of the *dramatistic pentad*, comprising five constituent elements (*act, scene, agent, agency, purpose*), which interact in different ratios to reveal motives, or what James Herrick refers to as the "dynamics of a particular rhetorical act" (Herrick, 2005: p227). In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke describes his key terms thus:

In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*.... any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose).

(Burke, 1974: pXV)

The *act* is the event that takes place or is expressed through a rhetorical event, whilst the *scene* can be described as the background or context of the act; the *agent* in any particular drama is the person who performs the act, with *agency* describing how the act is performed, or by which means. The *purpose*, self-evidently, is the justification for the act, or the reason why it took place. The thesis asserts that, as the agent in this drama, Obama seeks

to purge the sin of slavery (*act*) through appeals to racial unity (*agency*), within the context of the civil rights tradition (*scene*), leading to a redemption of America's failure to achieve racial equality (*purpose*).

Where the application of the pentad is most useful is in the relationship (the ratios) between the five elements. Whilst dramas or narratives are comprised of a combination of the five elements, the method typically analyses interactions of the two strongest elements, such as agent-to-act, agent-to-scene, act-to-purpose, scene-to-purpose, and so on. For instance, analysing the act-to-purpose ratio can reveal how the speaker's purpose has influenced the act, whilst analysis of the scene-to-purpose ratio can reveal how the scene, or context, has been influenced by the speaker's objectives. The ratios that are of primary interest in this thesis are the scene-to-agent ratio and the scene-to-purpose ratio, i.e. Obama's identity within the context of race and civil rights, and how that context informs the search for redemption.

Within the theory of dramatism, Burke also introduces the concept of a redemption drama, which is founded on a dramatic cycle of guilt-purification-redemption and is one example of how the method combines the pentadic elements to particular effect. William Rueckert describes the redemption drama as "the purgative-redemption function of the creative act", which "is the vehicle whereby every man can move toward the better life" (Rueckert, 1984: p129). Rueckert also describes how this is driven by "the negative and the hierarchy, primarily because they are the principal guilt-producing factors" (ibid, p131). Burke described the redemption drama as a hierarchical psychosis derived from "uneasiness stemming from social order" (ibid, p132), which suggests that the guilt element of the drama is the result of inequalities produced by any ranking system of values. Guilt, however manifested, can be absolved by an act of purification that leads to redemption.

David Bobbitt argues that the redemption drama is an "often overlooked aspect" of Burke's dramatisitic theory, noting that, where studies have looked at the guilt-purification-redemption cycle, they have emphasized victimage and mortification as the means of the purification that leads to redemption. Bobbitt develops aspects of victimage and mortification "not previously noted

by Burke or Burkean scholars” (Bobbitt, 2004: pIX), resulting in concepts of purification through transcendence, and purification through images of change, movement and dramatic catharsis. These are concepts that find clear expression in the speeches of Barack Obama.

It must be recognised that Bobbitt’s thesis represents a limited, drama-specific interpretation of Burke’s theory. However, his discussion of the rhetoric of redemption – particularly the theory of purification as an expansion of Burke’s theory – has direct relevance to the scope of this research. Just as Bobbitt’s use of the guilt-purification-redemption theory leads to his assertion that the form “allowed King to serve his ends by getting whites to accept equal justice for blacks by arousing their latent guilt and then providing them with a way to expiate that guilt” (Bobbitt, 2004: p8), so his development of Burke’s redemption drama supports the analysis and deconstruction of Obama’s rhetoric. Bobbitt’s treatment of Martin Luther King Jr’s *I have a Dream* speech has parallels with the discussion of Barack Obama’s speeches that follows, and his presentation of the speech as a purgative moment in civil rights discourse also resonates with this thesis’ understanding of the rhetorical intent of Obama’s speeches.

The four levels of the Discourse-Historical Approach provide the underpinning analysis of Obama’s linguistic strategies and their contexts, with the Exodus narrative providing important socio-cultural context. The results of this analysis are then used to populate the five elements of Burke’s *pentad* to facilitate understanding of how Obama’s redemption drama is developed and articulated.

Each of the following chapters therefore applies aspects of dramatism to the research questions. In Chapter four (*Obama and race*), the method is used to interpret the results of the discourse analysis (the linguistic and non-verbal realisations of Obama’s discursive strategies) to demonstrate the nature of Obama as agent within the redemption drama. In Chapter five (*Obama and civil rights*), which discusses the context of Obama’s racial appeals, the results will be used to reveal the drama’s scene. In Chapter six (*Obama and redemption*), the discussion of how Obama presents his vision for achieving

redemption will reveal the drama's purpose. Chapter six will also provide analysis of how Obama uses the guilt-purification-redemption cycle to offer a moment of dramatic catharsis for the American electorate.

Summary

The application of Burke's method alongside the Discourse-Historical Approach affords a unique framework for understanding the redemptive appeal of Obama's rhetoric. The Approach's requirement to be mindful of the context of the discourse is supported by the concept of scene in Burke's *dramatistic pentad*; the Exodus narrative also lends context to this analysis. The following chapters apply the methodology as follows:

- Chapter four explores Obamas construction of his racial identity and explores his position as the agent in Burke's Pentad;
- Chapter five seeks to understand the ways in which Obama relates his candidacy to the civil rights movement. This chapter aims to locate Obama within the scene or context of civil rights;
- Chapter six analyses the corpus to understand how the concept of redemption is expressed, with particular reference to the act and the purpose in Burke's method.

Together, the chapters provide a framework to explore how Obama's rhetoric functioned as a redemption drama as described by Kenneth Burke, and within an African American interpretation of the Exodus narrative. It is here that the cathartic redemption contained within Obama's rhetoric will be identified.

Chapter 4

Obama and race

When people who don't know me well, black or white, discover my background (and it is usually a discovery, for I ceased to advertise my mother's race at the age of twelve or thirteen, when I began to suspect that by doing so I was ingratiating myself to whites), I see the split-second adjustments they have to make, the searching of my eyes for some telltale sign. They no longer know who I am. Privately they guess at my troubled heart, I suppose – the mixed blood, the divided soul, the ghostly image of the tragic mulatto trapped between two worlds.

(Obama, 2007a, pXV)

As the introduction to this study demonstrated, Obama's election to the presidency has been described as historic because he is the first African American to become president of the USA. Obama's victory has therefore been defined by the way in which his racial identity has been understood. Yet, as David Remnick states, this identity was "both provided and chosen; he pursued it, learned it. Surrounded by a loving white mother and sympathetic white grandparents, and raised mainly on a multicultural island where the one missing hue was his own, Obama had to claim that identity after wilful study, observation, even presumption" (Remnick, 2010: p13).

This chapter discusses how Obama reached a nuanced understanding of his racial heritage whilst also claiming an African American identity. Textual analysis identifies the campaign speeches and sections of Obama's two books (*Dreams From My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*), which explore the issue of racial identity. *Dreams* in particular provides much of the source material for this chapter as it documents how Obama engaged with the concept of race and identity from an early age. The findings of the textual analysis are then considered against Burke's *pentad*. Specifically, this chapter explores Obama's role as *agent* in the *pentad* to describe how his racial identity is integral to the ethos of his candidacy, and has a complexity that reaches beyond a simple projection of a public persona.

Wider knowledge of the canon of African American literature and thought, and specifically the seminal works of W E B Du Bois and Ralph Ellison, provides intertextual context for Obama's understanding of race and identity, whilst extralinguistic variables such as basketball and 'fist bumps' provide further context for projections of Obama's racial identity. Finally, this chapter situates Obama's approach to leadership within broader debates about African American leadership, connecting his candidacy with the Exodus narrative.

Ethos, identity and Burke's agent

Kenneth Burke said that "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your way to his" (in Herrick, 2005: p223). This is a notion that finds resonance in the way in which Obama establishes his credibility as a speaker, how he identifies with his audience, and how he encourages his audience to identify with him. Peter Dixon argues that the speaker's task in deliberative rhetoric, like all politicians, is "to persuade or dissuade his hearers" and that the role of the audience is, "in Aristotle's phrase, that of a 'judge of things to come'" (Dixon, 1971: p22). Obama's rhetoric was designed to be received by several audiences. His main targets were initially the vote-holding members of the Democrat Party who would decide whether or not Obama will receive the Party's nomination for president, and latterly the American electorate whose votes he aimed to secure. This is, in effect, the rhetorical audience, which Bitzer argues "consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (in Herrick, 2005: p231). It is the rhetorical audience that Obama seeks to transform into the mediators of change who, in electing him, will deliver the cathartic moment that will redeem America of its sin of slavery.

For Aristotle, the reaction of the audience is dependent on the orator's ability to present an effective argument by employing the concepts of logos, ethos and pathos in varying degrees. Logos, "the logic of sound arguments" (ibid, p83), is the use of structure and logical argument to present a case. Pathos,

which Aristotle defined as “putting the audience in the right frame of mind” (ibid, p83), refers to the emotional appeals that speakers make to lend their arguments a stronger psychological impact. Pathos requires the speaker to make appeals to the audience’s emotions, encouraging responses as emotional reactions rather than as the result of logical conclusions.

Ethos, to Aristotle, is the “the sociology of good character” and a study of “the qualities of a trustworthy individual” (ibid, pp84-85). In effect, ethos is concerned with establishing the credibility of the speaker in an attempt to reassure the audience that the orator can be relied upon to speak the truth, and Aristotle noted that it is “potentially the most persuasive” of the three artistic proofs: “when people are convinced that a speaker is knowledgeable, trustworthy and has their best interests at heart, they will be very likely to accept as true what the speaker has to say” (ibid, p85). As Edward Corbett and Robert Connors note, “all of an orator’s skill in convincing the intellect and moving the will of an audience could prove futile if the audience did not esteem, could not trust, the speaker. For this reason, politicians seeking election to public office take such care to create the proper image of themselves in the eyes of the voters” (Corbett and Connors, 1999: p19).

Ethos is consequently also the most important of the proofs for Obama. Whilst logos and pathos are features of his rhetoric, it is ethos that facilitates his appeal to broad sections of the American society, and it becomes apparent that Obama is careful to create an image of himself that resonates with his electorate. The ethos of Obama’s rhetoric has direct correlation with the concept of the *agent* in Kenneth Burke’s *pentad*, defined simply as the “person or kind of person who performed the act” (Burke, 1969: pXV), and it is therefore important to understand how Obama presented his candidacy and the extent to which expressions of his racial identity were integral to this presentation.

After all, the question of Obama’s racial identity was ever-present during the campaign and, for many, remained ambiguous. Juan Williams suggests that the African American community was minded to distrust Obama because he “did not work his way up the political ladder through black politics” (Williams,

2007: n.p.), and Obama has also acknowledged that he has been seen as “not black enough” (Obama, 2008e) to appeal to sections of the African American community. This is perhaps reflected in his initial performance in the Primary campaign: in November 2007, Obama’s share of the black Democrat vote was nine percentage points lower than Hillary Clinton’s (Williams, 2007: n.p.). Nevertheless, Obama went on to secure the Democrat nomination, winning the elections outright in nine of the ten blackest states and seven of the ten whitest states in the USA, suggesting that he had found a way to appeal to both white and African Americans.

History and context

Barack Obama was born in August 1961 to Kansas-raised Ann Dunham (1942-1995), who later became an anthropologist, and Kenyan Barack Obama Senior (1936-1982), who became a government economist in his home country. Obama’s parents had met the previous year whilst studying at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. Ann dropped out of university after one semester, pregnant; the couple were married in February 1961, and divorced in 1964 when Obama Senior took up a scholarship at Harvard University. He subsequently returned to Kenya and Obama Junior would only see his father on one further occasion, when he visited Hawaii in 1971. His mother later married Lolo Soetoro, an Indonesian studying at college in Hawaii. The family moved to Jakarta in 1967, when Suharto came to power and revoked all Indonesian student visas. In 1971, however, Ann Soetoro sent her son back to Hawaii to live with her parents, Madelyn and Stanley Armour Dunham, and to attend a private college preparatory school on a scholarship secured by Madelyn.

Given that Obama is biracial and was raised by his white mother and white grandparents, not his African father, it is interesting to note that he publicly identified himself as “black, African American or Negro” in the 2010 census (Judis, 2010: n.p.), when he could with equal legitimacy have chosen “white”. The census also allows respondents to select more than one category, meaning that Obama could have acknowledged his biracial heritage by choosing both “white” and “black, African American or Negro”. Writing in the

Wall Street Journal, Abigail Thernstrom argues that in self-identifying as African-American, Obama “in effect ... disowned his white mother and, by extension, his maternal grandparents who acted as surrogate parents for much of his boyhood. Mr Obama had hardly ever laid eyes on his father, but that absent parent shaped his own sense of identity” (Thernstrom, 2010: n.p.).

To say that Obama “disowned” his mother and grandparents is inaccurate and unfair, not least because Obama has written or spoken regularly, and with affection, about them. In the preface to the 2004 edition of *Dreams From My Father*, for instance, Obama reflects that, had he known his mother would die shortly after publication of the book in 1995, he “might have written a different book – less a meditation on the absent parent, more a celebration of the single constant in my life. In my daughters I see her every day, her joy, her capacity for wonder. ... I know that she was the kindest, most generous spirit I have ever known, and that what is best in me I owe to her.” (Obama, 2007a: pXII). Analysis of the corpus of Obama’s campaign speeches also shows that the candidate mentioned his mother 114 times during the course of the campaign, compared with 86 references to his father. While references to his mother are overwhelmingly positive, they are clouded by Obama’s depiction of her struggles with cancer and the attendant health insurance issues, which feature as part of his campaign for better, affordable healthcare. Yet, as the premise for *Dreams From My Father* suggests, it continues to be the absent father with whom Obama appears most concerned to connect as he looks to the relationship with his father to help him understand and define his racial identity, and to find meaning in it.

It can be argued that in selecting “black, African American or Negro”, Obama was simply meeting societal expectations by conforming to a longstanding American approach to racial classification that labelled people “black”, “coloured” or “Negro” on the basis of having black ancestry, no matter how far back in a person’s lineage that ancestry may be. In effect, the so-called “one drop rule”, which John Judis describes as the “enduring legacy of American racism” (Judis, 2010: n.p.), was used to enshrine the principle of

hypodescent, whereby anyone with even the smallest trace of black ancestry would be classed as African American. The rule was made law in several US states (predominantly in the South) in the early twentieth century, following the introduction of Jim Crow legislation, which segregated public facilities along racial lines.

Ron Walters suggests that although Obama physically appears to be African American, “the cultural markers to which traditional American Blacks were exposed presented him as someone born of a White American mother and a Kenyan father and raised in Hawaii ... his identity omitted many of the cultural markers with which Blacks are more familiar to the extent that it has promoted a curiosity of ‘cultural fit’ that in turn has become an issue of political trust” (Walters, 2007: p13). The need to engender trust among the electorate is an important motivation behind Obama’s presentation of his identity and belonging to the African American community. Similarly, in her 2007 article, “Colorblind”, Debra Dickerson declares that Obama is not black, because he has no direct connection to the African American experience of slavery, has played no part in America’s racial history, and consequently stands apart from those who have experienced segregation:

“Black,” in our political and social reality, means those descended from West African slaves. Voluntary immigrants of African descent (even those descended from West Indian slaves) are just that, voluntary immigrants of African descent with markedly different outlooks on the role of race in their lives and in politics. At a minimum, it can’t be assumed that a Nigerian cabdriver and a third-generation Harlemiter have more in common than the fact a cop won’t bother to make the distinction. They’re both “black” as a matter of skin color and DNA, but only the Harlemiter, for better or worse, is politically and culturally black, as we use the term.

(Dickerson, 2007: n.p.)

Dickerson therefore defines African American identity as something defined by descent from the enslaved. Stanley Crouch’s 2006 *What Obama Isn’t: Black Like Me On Race* takes a similar position, and there are also resonances with Werner Sollors’ 1986 explorations of definitions of what might be termed Americanness through the language of consent and

descent: “Descent language emphasizes our positions as heirs, our hereditary qualities, liabilities and entitlements; consent language stresses our abilities as mature free agents and ‘architects of our fates’ to choose our spouses, our destinies, and our political systems” (Sollors, 1986: p6). Obama, whilst having neither descent from nor experience of slavery, nevertheless refers to both civil rights and slavery, but also uses the language of consent to stress his ability to effect change.

Obama’s choice in the 2010 census is also entirely in keeping with the narrative of identity he has fostered since the publication of *Dreams From My Father* in 1995, which Ron Walters describes as the story of Obama’s “journey into functional Blackness” (Walters, 2007: p8). The book documents Obama’s self-discovery and the creation and adoption of his African American identity. Whilst still at law school, where he had been elected the first African American president of the Harvard Law Review, Obama was asked by *Times Books* to write an autobiographical account of his success. Obama, “imagining [himself] to have something original to say about the current state of race relations”, agreed, and took a year off after graduation to write the book (Obama, 2007a: pXIII). In the preface to the 1995 edition of *Dreams From My Father*, he admits that he originally planned to include essays on civil rights, community, and grassroots organising, as well as on affirmative action and Afrocentrism, but that he felt himself “pulled towards rockier shores” (ibid, pXIV), inclined to write about his past and to explore how he reconciled his biracial heritage with the African American identity he shaped for himself. In the introduction, Obama notes that the book is “a boy’s search for his father, and through that search a workable meaning for his life as a black American” – hence the book’s subtitle, “A Story of Race and Inheritance” (ibid, pXVI), which draws together Obama’s search for his father’s past with his search for his own identity.

Data selection and textual analysis

Obama’s speeches do not in the main explore how or why he reached an understanding of his racial identity as they are intended to establish his political platform and set out his views on the economy, security, healthcare,

education, and so on; it is *Dreams From My Father* that provides the deeper, more detailed insights into how Obama came to terms with his biracial heritage. Nevertheless, the speeches do provide evidence of how Obama discursively places his candidacy as part of a wider American progress narrative of hope, social mobility, and the opportunity to prosper that is intended to resonate with his audience.

The data selection process filtered the speeches by the topic of Obama's identity, which included themes and vocabulary connected to family and heritage (specifically Obama's parents and grandparents, wife Michelle Obama, basketball-playing brother-in-law Craig Robinson, and father-in-law, Fraser C Robinson III); his upbringing and education; and the places he has a connection to, including Chicago, Hawaii, Kenya, and Indonesia. This process identified 15 speeches that include sections to inform audiences about Obama's heritage, with the intention of reassuring voters that he is a product of the American experience:

1. 2004 Democratic National Convention (Obama, 2004)
2. Selma Voting Rights March commemoration (Obama, 2007d)
3. California State Democratic Convention (Obama, 2007e)
4. Hampton University Annual Ministers' Conference (Obama, 2007h)
5. Strengthening Families in a New Economy (Obama, 2007i)
6. A Politics of Conscience (Obama, 2007k)
7. Kennedy Endorsement Event (Obama, 2008d)
8. Reclaiming the American Dream (Obama, 2008e)
9. The Past Versus the Future (Obama, 2008f)
10. A More Perfect Union (Obama, 2008i)
11. Building Trades National Legislative Conference (Obama, 2008k)
12. The America We Love (Obama, 2008o)
13. A New Era of Service (Obama, 2008p)
14. National Council of La Raza (Obama, 2008s)
15. The American Promise (Obama, 2008v)

(The full table of results is presented in Appendix Three.)

Close reading of these speeches alongside *Dreams From My Father* enables understanding of how Obama understood and constructed his racial identity, and how he articulated it to his audience.

Obama first introduced his family background to a national audience through his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, wherein he expressed gratitude for the diversity of his heritage, “knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible” (Obama, 2004). Linking his family’s heritage, aspirations, and work ethos to the American Dream is a theme he returns to in other speeches, with representative examples including *Reclaiming the American Dream* (Obama, 2008e), in which he declares that “our family’s story is American”, and *The Past versus the Future* (Obama, 2008f), in which he avers that his family story is “the story of America”. *A More Perfect Union*, the speech that most clearly defines Obama’s position on race, provides a representative example of how Obama presents his family history in the context of the American Dream:

We hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction - towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren. This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own American story.

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners - an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.

(Obama, 2008i)

The key points to note here are that 1) Obama’s grandparents are portrayed as patriotic servants of their country, an image which the audience is encouraged to associate with Obama; and 2) Obama feels obliged to claim connections with the African American story, and slavery in particular. As he

himself is not descended from slaves or slave owners but from an African, immigrant, absent father, Obama uses Michelle's family history to generate cultural capital within his African American audience. Similarly, in *Strengthening Families in a New Economy*, Obama establishes a connection with the African American experience of racial discrimination through the family he has married into: "I also think about my father-in-law, Fraser Robinson. He raised his two children with his wife Marian in 1960s Chicago. They faced what other African American families faced at the time – both hidden and overt forms of racism that limited their opportunities and required more effort to get ahead" (Obama, 2007i). The Robinsons are also portrayed as a hard-working family with aspirations for their children, despite Fraser's disability (from Multiple Sclerosis), and these values are again framed against the American story:

It has not been lost on either Michelle or myself that our family's story has been America's story – a story of opportunity, and possibility, and the tireless pursuit of a dream that was always within reach. Our parents and grandparents were given no guarantees, and they certainly had their share of failings and hardship, but theirs was a country where if you wanted it badly enough, and were willing to work for it, and take responsibility, you could provide for your family and give your children the same chance.

(ibid)

In his speech to commemorate the Selma Voting Rights March, which is discussed more fully in Chapter five, Obama also makes a connection between his grandfather, a "houseboy" to the British in Kenya, and the civil rights movement. Obama indicates that he understands servitude, slavery, and inequality. He tells the audience that his "grandfather was a cook to the British in Kenya. Grew up in a small village, and all his life, that's all he was — a cook and a houseboy. And that's what they called him, even when he was 60 years old. They called him a houseboy. They wouldn't call him by his last name. Call him by his first name. Sound familiar?" (Obama 2007d). Obama may not be descended from the enslaved, but it is evident that he used his family history and connections to demonstrate membership of the African American community.

A number of the speeches identified through this iteration of the data analysis process make reference to the experiences that have shaped Obama's character, such as being of mixed race origin (for example, in *The America We Love* (Obama, 2008o)) and of being a troubled teenager struggling to find his identify. In *A New Era of Service* (Obama, 2008p), Obama reveals "I spent much of my childhood adrift ... Growing up, I wasn't always sure who I was, or where I was going", a theme he had previously touched on in a speech he gave at the Southern Hampshire University commencement: "Back then I had a tendency, in my mother's words, to act a bit casual about my future. I rebelled, angry in the way that many young men in general, and young black men in particular, are angry, thinking that responsibility and hard work were old-fashioned conventions that didn't apply to me. I partied a little too much and studied just enough to get by" (Obama, 2007g). Obama's struggle to find purpose and identity is the subject of his first book, *Dreams From My Father*, which provides the primary evidence underpinning this chapter's arguments.

Dreams can be read as Obama's attempt to define his life and origins; to establish an official biographical narrative before the media did so. It was written in 1995 before Obama professed any interest in the presidency, but the autobiography clearly has value as a means of fashioning an origin story for public consumption. The book remains a primary reference source for biographical details about Obama, but it should not be taken as an accurate representation of his life. Obama admits in the introduction that he changed the names of some of the characters (for privacy reasons) and that "for the sake of compression, some of the characters that appear are composites of people I've known, and some events appear out of precise chronology" (Obama, 2007a: pXVII). In other words, the events described in *Dreams From My Father* cannot be presumed to be wholly accurate if they have been attributed to different people or changed for the sake of the narrative. "He may be manipulating the facts in order to wrap raw ambition in the gauze of a larger cause" noted the *Washington Post's* Richard Cohen, who also calls the book "a warning flag" (Cohen, 2007: n.p.).

At this point it is helpful to locate *Dreams From My Father* within the context of “the oldest, and arguably, the richest genre of African American writing, the memoir” (Remnick, 2010: p228). Daniel Stein notes that it is “the birth of ‘black’ literary selves and the willingness to speak autobiographically that has driven African American literature since the early days of the slave narratives” (Stein, 2011: p4), which encompass more than 6,000 texts arising from “the writers’ need to assert their own identity and that of their people as thinking human beings and not, as they were viewed by American law, as the animal possessions of white men” (Remnick, 2010: p229). The structure and themes contained in Obama’s book have much in common with the genre, including self-discovery, the search for family and belonging, and what Robert Stepto articulated in *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* as a “narrative of ascent” (Stepto, 1991: pp164-167). Such narratives take the form of a narrator recognising the constraints placed on his world (e.g. through slavery, poverty, racism), breaking free from the constraints to discover his place in the world, often moving from the South to the North (a physical ascent), and eventually making a contribution to society that he would otherwise not have been able to make (representing a figurative ascent). There are clear parallels with *Dreams From My Father’s* documenting of Obama’s awareness of the limitations of his experiences in Hawaii, his relationship with his absent father, his decision to move to Chicago to become a community organiser and find his place within the African American community, and ultimately his determination to work for the betterment of Chicago (and subsequently American) society.

It should be noted that whilst autobiographies tend to be written by people notable for their achievements, “it is more common among African American writers ... to begin their writing lives by asserting themselves with an autobiography” (Remnick, 2010: p231), i.e. to create a public image in advance of any notable success. Again, this resonates with Obama’s writing of *Dreams From My Father* before he has achieved the success that perhaps under other circumstances would justify an autobiography. After his election as Senator, which prompted the republication of his book in 2004, Obama felt

the need to write a new preface for the new edition to argue that the book's original aim was to articulate a "more interior, intimate effort ... to understand this struggle and to find my place in it has converged with a broader public debate, a debate in which I am professionally engaged, one that will shape our lives and the lives of our children for many years to come" (Obama, 2007a: pXI). The inference is that *Dreams* is no longer simply the story of "a boy's search for his father, and through that search a workable meaning for his life as a black American" (ibid, pXVI); it has become a narrative that reflects Obama's broader political cause and the national dialogue he seeks to have.

Paul Gilroy argues that slave narratives and African American autobiographies facilitate an "act or process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation. The presentation of a public persona thus becomes a founding myth within the expressive culture of the African diaspora", and it is in the context of this tradition that we should read *Dreams From My Father* (Gilroy, 1993: p60).

African American cultural traditions

The second level of the Discourse-Historical Approach makes use of contextual knowledge to highlight and discuss the intertextual relationships between the texts identified in the data selection stage (specifically *Dreams From My Father* and *The Audacity Of Hope*) and some of the major literary and theoretical works that have contributed to debates about African American identity. This analysis reveals how Obama's understanding of race and identity has been conditioned by his personal interpretation of theories articulated by figures such as W E B du Bois and Ralph Ellison. Obama's writing evidences his familiarity with the African American literary canon, which enables him "to create a public story of his life by working through some of the most influential African American conceptualizations of self and society: double consciousness, racial invisibility, and black nationalism" (ibid, p3). In addition to explicit mentions of writers on the politics of race such as James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and W E B Du Bois (Obama, 2007a: p85), there are also numerous inferences and

references that draw on images and themes which have long marked African American thought. For instance, in the introduction to *Dreams From My Father*, Obama writes:

When people who don't know me well, black or white, discover my background (and it is usually a discovery, for I ceased to advertise my mother's race at the age of twelve or thirteen, when I began to suspect that by doing so I was ingratiating myself to whites), I see the split-second adjustments they have to make, the searching of my eyes for some telltale sign. They no longer know who I am. Privately they guess at my troubled heart, I suppose – the mixed blood, the divided soul, the ghostly image of the tragic mulatto trapped between two worlds. And if I were to explain that no, the tragedy is not mine, or at least not mine alone, it is yours, sons and daughters of Plymouth Rock and Ellis Island, it is yours, children of Africa, it is the tragedy of both my wife's six-year-old cousin and his white first grade classmates, it's on the nightly news for all to see, and that if we could acknowledge at least that much then the tragic cycle begins to break down... well, I suspect that I sound incurably naive, wedded to lost hopes. ... Or worse, I sound like I'm trying to hide from myself.

(Obama, 2007a: p XV)

This extract reveals Obama's belief that the way in which America has failed to reconcile its racial differences is a tragedy affecting all Americans, regardless of whether they are descended from the original settlers who stepped off the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock, the European immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island, or the victims of the slave trade, the "children of Africa". It also hints at the work of both Ralph Ellison and W E B Du Bois. "The searching of my eyes" is perhaps a reference to Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), "an eloquent examination of the nature of bigotry and its effects on both victim and perpetrator" (Berger, 2010: p7). Ellison's protagonist claims to be invisible "because of a peculiar disposition to the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality" (Ellison, 1980: p3). *Invisible Man* is narrated by an African American whose name the reader never learns, and who says "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you sometimes see in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only

my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything, anything except me” (ibid, p3). As this chapter demonstrates, Obama’s approach to race and leadership is freighted with linguistic and conceptual debts to *Invisible Man*.

The “troubled heart”, “divided soul”, “ghostly image”, and “tragic mulatto trapped between two worlds” in Obama’s introduction signal his familiarity with Du Bois’ writings – particularly the concept of ‘double consciousness’, discussed below – and we learn from *Dreams From My Father* that Obama turned to Du Bois when trying to construct and come to terms with his African American identity, and how he found few answers, bitterness, and self-doubt (Obama, 2007a: p86). Yet his views on race and his calls for a united, but pluralistic, society have much in common with Du Bois, even though Obama admits that he can’t “hold up [his] experience as being somehow representative of the Black American experience” (Obama, 2007a: pXVI), and that his background has been more privileged than that of many in the black community. The image of himself that he presents to his audience is rooted in an expression of his biracial heritage that allows him to address both black and white voters; at once part of the African American and white communities, yet also removed from them. Again, these ideas owe a debt to the writings of Du Bois and Ellison, and particularly their articulation of the duality of the African American experience.

Richard Yeselson believes that Obama finds “a ‘usable past’ in American ideals of equality, justice and fraternity” and that “these ideals are encompassed in the America of 2008, an America that could elect as president a mixed-race man named Barack Hussein Obama” (Yeselson, 2008: n.p.). Obama embraces this “usable past”, rejecting the implication that his candidacy is “somehow an exercise in affirmative action; that it’s based on the desire of wide-eyed liberals to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap” (Obama, 2008e), and that he is running for office “because it is somehow owed” to him (Obama, 2007g). Instead he argues that it is only possible for him to seek the Democrat nomination because of the people who have campaigned for racial equality throughout America’s history.

He says “the only reason I am standing here today is because someone, somewhere stood up when it wasn’t popular, when it was risky, when it was hard. And because that someone stood up, a few more did. And then a few thousand. And then a few million. And together, they changed the world” (ibid). Race therefore becomes what David Renwick describes as “a powerful thematic undercurrent of [Obama’s] oratory and prose. Not race as invoked by his predecessors in electoral politics or in the civil rights movement, not race as an insistence on tribe or on redress; rather, Obama made his biracial ancestry a metaphor for his ambition to create a broad coalition of support, to rally Americans behind a narrative of moral and political progress” (Remnick, 2008: n.p.). The effect is to place his candidacy both within the context of the civil rights movement, and as a product of it.

In his *Reclaiming the American Dream* speech of 29 January 2008, for instance, Obama presents his background in terms that reflect some of the electorate’s core values: he has received a good education, achieved success on his own merit, and is descended from a family that has its roots in what he holds to be the best traditions of the country. His family have fought and worked for America; his mother has made sacrifices so her children can have an education, and he suggests that this is all possible because America is a “land of boundless opportunity” (Obama, 2008e). The effect of this is to implant in his audience’s minds the notion that Obama is a product of the American experience, and that he is laying claim to the American Dream, the idea that the United States is qualitatively different to other nations, providing substantially superior opportunities for development and success.

Building on his assertion in *A More Perfect Union* that “I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible” (Obama, 2008i), Obama goes on to state that “it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts – that out of many we are truly one” (Obama, 2008i). Obama therefore grounds his calls for unity in the notion that the United States of America is made up of different communities, and he uses his heritage to represent the racial unity that he seeks to achieve across the country. Jack Shafer notes that Obama’s

“rhetoric is designed to bridge the space between whites and blacks where they can occupy a place where common principle reside and the transcendent value of justice can be shared” (Shafer, 2008: n.p.).

There is no doubt that Barack Obama’s biracial heritage was a useful metaphor for the vision of unity and racial conciliation that formed part of the backdrop to his candidacy and his appeals for “Not a Black America and a White America. A United States of America” (Obama, 2004). In apparently crossing the racial boundaries, Obama represents himself as free from the burden of racial division and inequality, and he begins to appreciate that his biracial heritage represents an opportunity to heal the division and make good the promise of America: “As it was, I learned to slip back and forth between my Black and White worlds, understanding that each possessed its own language and customs and structures of meaning, convinced that with a bit of translation on my part the two worlds would eventually cohere” (Obama, 2007a: p76).

Obama’s reliance on a projection of his mixed-race heritage therefore provides the ethos of his rhetoric, but it also enables him to claim an understanding of the two worlds; to recognise and acknowledge both the anger of the African American community and the guilt of the white American community for America’s failure to deliver racial equality and perhaps to act as a bridge between the two worlds to facilitate translation of the concerns of both sides into understanding and acceptance. In doing so, Obama reveals a double-consciousness that calls to mind some of the early work of one of the twentieth century’s most influential African American intellectuals, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.¹

¹ Although Du Bois’ intellectual position changed over the course of his life, this thesis is concerned only with the work he produced in the late 1890s and early 1900s. This is the period that covers Du Bois’ seminal early thinking on race, including his first use of the phrase the “Talented Tenth”, his response to Booker T Washington’s *Atlanta Compromise*, and his introduction of the concepts of the veil and double-consciousness. These ideas all feature in Obama’s rhetoric in ways that Du Bois’ later thinking does not. For instance, Obama’s books and speeches do not embrace Du Bois’ Pan-Africanism (his insistence that all people of African descent should unite in their common cause for liberty) or his separatist and nationalist inclinations (which grew in part from his socialist/Marxist sympathies). Nor does Obama’s rhetoric embrace the disillusionment with the USA that Du Bois came to experience towards the end of his life, when he emigrated to Ghana and rejected his American citizenship.

Like Obama, Du Bois grew up with an absent father, graduated from Harvard, travelled the world, and ran for United States Senate. His biracial heritage and educational attainment also prompted others to question his racial authenticity (Marcus Garvey, for example, described Du Bois as “pure and simply a white man’s nigger. He has no racial self-respect” (Hill, 1983: p630). Obama notes in *Dreams From My Father* that he has read Du Bois’ work and we can assume that he is familiar with the key themes that preoccupied him: African American leadership, the concepts of the veil and double-consciousness, and the assertion that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line” (Gates and Oliver, 1999: p5). The color line refers to both legally enforced Jim Crow segregation, and to the disparity of social, political, and educational conditions between African Americans and white Americans. The image reflects the reality of the struggle for democracy, equality, and civil rights within white supremacist America, and Du Bois uses the concept to argue that America’s vision for liberal democracy cannot succeed as long as race remains a divisive issue.

Du Bois’ notions of the veil and double-consciousness arise from his own experience of racial discrimination, which he documents in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). He writes of the first time he became aware of discrimination, when a classmate snubbed him at school, and how this moment made him reappraise his relationship with the world. The experience leads him to the realisation that he was “different from the others, or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (Gates and Oliver, 1999: p10). That veil falls between the black and white worlds, defining how African Americans see themselves, and are seen by others, and revealing the failure of white America to acknowledge African Americans as free-thinking human beings. Henry Louis Gates and Terri Oliver suggest that the veil represents how “the African American’s attempt to gain self-consciousness in a racist society will always be impaired because any reflected image coming from the gaze of white America is necessarily a distorted one, and quite probably a harmful one as well.” The racial slight he experienced at school is therefore the moment when Du Bois became

conscious of the differences that separate the races, and it leads him to question the nature of African Americans' relationship with early twentieth century America (ibid, pXXVI).

In his 1897 article, "Conservation of the Races", Du Bois makes his first statement on the ambiguity of African American identity, asking "Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a Negro, am I not perpetuating the very cleft that threatens and separates black and white America?" (Gates and Oliver, 1999: p180). This marks the point when Du Bois begins to develop his theory of double-consciousness as related to African American identity. Specifically, Du Bois attempts to reconcile questions of American identity with the need to preserve and promote African American culture as a distinctive contributor to American culture. As Daniel Williams notes, Du Bois takes "the notion of double-consciousness and makes it the basis for black cultural difference" at the same time as double-consciousness "serves as a reminder of the troubling tensions involved in the effort to forge a separate black cultural identity within the context of a wider nation state in which its citizens define themselves as American" (Williams, 2006: p189). This is the dichotomy that Obama seeks to address in *Dreams From My Father* as he struggles to find his own sense of personal identity, African American and American.

As a philosophical term, double-consciousness was already in use by the time Du Bois adopted his more sociological approach. Shamoan Zamir describes it as a "drama of alterity" (Siemerling, 2001: p325) and traces its relationship to Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), which Du Bois almost certainly read during his time at Harvard. The concept has also been related to European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, most notably by Dickson Bruce in his essay "W E B Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness" (in Gates and Oliver, 1999: pp236-244).

The Souls of Black Folk refines Du Bois' 1897 statement, but maintains emphasis on the ambiguity of African American identity. In the essay entitled "Of our Spiritual Strivings", he notes that "One feels his two-ness – an

American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body” (ibid: p11). The essay goes on to ask how African Americans can reconcile the two ideals, his strategy being, as Lucius Outlaw suggests, to “accept difference along with a claim that each group has its part to play, that the white race and its racial other are related not as superior to inferior, but as complementary” (Bell et al, 1996: p22). Du Bois also reflects on the nature of American identity; the chapter entitled “The Sorrow Songs” describes how African American music and culture is at the heart of American culture, regardless of whether or not white Americans choose to recognise the fact.

Although Du Bois does lay claim to both American and African American identities, his demands that African Americans be recognised as having a distinctive identity can also be seen as a challenge to white America, the idea of double-consciousness signifying potential for African American resistance that can be informed by the insight into white America that second sight affords. In documenting African American history and culture in all its diversity, Du Bois demonstrates his belief in the capacity of a unified collective to tear down the veil and challenge the problem of the color line, and *The Souls of Black Folk* concludes with his assertion that “America shall rend the veil and the prisoned shall go free” (Gates and Oliver, 1999: p163). Although Du Bois does not resolve the problem of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* – resolution is impossible given the stark reality of racial violence and inequality in twentieth century America – he does use the book to envisage a culturally pluralistic America in which, one day, each race will be conserved, each race will have equal status, and each race will make a unique contribution to society.

Ellison’s *Invisible Man* reaches a similar conclusion about the ways in which difference and unity between the races can be reconciled. In the novel’s epilogue the narrator questions whether he really must strive “towards colourlessness” and urges the reader to consider “what the world would lose if that should happen” because “America is woven of many strands ... Our fate is to become one and yet many” (Ellison, 1980: p577). This notion is also

espoused by Obama, most notably in his 2004 Democratic Convention speech when he notes that:

It's that fundamental belief - I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper - that makes this country work. It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams, yet still come together as a single American family. 'E pluribus unum.' Out of many, one. ... there's not a liberal America and a conservative America - there's the United States of America. There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America.

(Obama, 2004)

Despite this confident assertion, it evidently took Obama some time to reach this conclusion. In *Dreams From My Father*, for example, Obama admits that he “had no idea who [his] own self was” (Obama, 2007a: p82), describing a growing sense that he doesn’t belong and a dawning awareness of double-consciousness: “I had begun to see a new map of the world, one that was frightening in its simplicity, suffocating in its implications. We were always playing on the white man’s court ... by the white man’s rules. ... In fact, you couldn’t even be sure that everything you had assumed to be an expression of your black, unfettered self – the humour, the song, the behind-the-back pass – had been freely chosen by you.” (Obama, 2007a: p85). He starts searching for a definition of what it means to be African American. De jure Jim Crow may no longer exist, but de facto segregation, the color line, and discrimination do, and he is left with the notion that “the only thing you could freely choose as your own was withdrawal into a smaller and smaller coil of rage, until being black meant only the knowledge of your own powerlessness, of your own defeat” (ibid). He subsequently attempts to ascertain the reality of this notion, writing “I gathered up books from the library – Baldwin, Ellison, Hughes, Wright, Du Bois. At night I would close the door to my room, telling my grandparents I had homework to do, and there I would sit and wrestle with words, locked in suddenly desperate argument, trying to reconcile the world as I’d found it with the terms of my birth” (ibid), which reveals his own gradual understanding of the veil and double-consciousness. He continues:

But there was no escape to be had. In every page of every book, in *Bigger* Thomas and *Invisible Men*, I kept finding the same anguish, the same doubt, a self-contempt that neither irony nor intellect seemed able to deflect. Even Du Bois' learning and Baldwin's love and Langston's humor eventually succumbed to its corrosive force, each man finally forced to withdraw, one to Africa, one to Europe, one deeper into the bowels of Harlem...all of them exhausted, bitter men, the devil at their heels.

(ibid)

Daniel Stein argues that “while Obama appreciates the literature on an aesthetic level, and while he recognizes its emotional urgency, he is unable to fit his own experience into this tradition because it focuses too much on the *problems* of race (anguish, self-doubt, self-contempt, withdrawal), and not enough on potential *solutions* (its redemptive power as well as hopes and dreams)” (Stein, 2011: p5). It becomes clear that Obama is not prepared to withdraw from the debate in the same way that he characterises Du Bois' and Baldwin's withdrawal through their self-imposed exile in Africa and Europe respectively, or in retreating “into the bowels of Harlem” like Hughes, or Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Instead, Obama is determined to find a way forward that will enable him to reconcile his doubts and despair with his hopes and dreams.

David Samuels asserts that, despite the similarities of structure and theme between *Dreams Of My Father* and *Invisible Man*, Obama reaches a different conclusion to Ellison: “Where Obama's narrator provides the reader with a model consciousness, sensitive, responsible, and aware, who moves from triumph to triumph along the road to successfully embracing the fullness of his black identity, Ellison's story ends badly” (Samuels, 2008: n.p.), with the narrator alone, illuminated but invisible”. Samuels goes on to note that “*Dreams From My Father* does not end with the expected discovery that we are all radically alone in the world, but rather with the discovery that [Obama] is a member of a strong and loving black African family” (ibid). This eventual discovery marks the culmination of Obama's search for a racial identity he can accept.

Thomas Sugrue suggests that “it was telling that a young man who has spent his childhood inhabiting an in-between world of race and ethnicity found himself alienated from those writers who themselves struggled with what Du Bois memorably called their ‘two-ness’” (Sugrue, 2009: p20). In *Dreams From My Father*, Obama finds few answers in Du Bois’ writing; the “corrosive force” of self-doubt and self-contempt a stark contrast to his belief that an antithesis to the anguish and doubt can be found. He turns to, and finds hope in, Malcolm X, another biracial, African American leader, but one who rejected his white roots, rejected the idea of “two-ness”, and asserted his African American identity. Accordingly, Obama starts to live out what he describes as a caricature of black male adolescence and he begins to construct his own “black” identity. He plays basketball, chooses to socialise mainly with other African Americans, lives and works in, and eventually marries into, the African American community, and publishes an autobiographical narrative that is part of an African American literary tradition. However, this by no means implies that Obama embraced the politics of Black Nationalism espoused by Malcolm, nor that he rejected his white heritage. (Malcolm X is discussed in further detail in the section on African American leadership, below.)

Extralinguistic factors

The extralinguistic factors that reinforce Obama’s presentation of his racial identity are limited; Obama’s campaign is more concerned with presenting the candidate as a cool, healthy, active, engaged leader who connects with his audience through shared experiences. Race is not explicitly a part of this presentation but Obama’s racial identity is also partly constructed by non-verbal cues that reinforce his “black” identity, and which place him as a comfortable, streetwise member of the African American community. The first, and perhaps most obvious, of these is basketball. During the 2007/08 campaign, Obama regularly found time to play the game with his staff as a means of unwinding from the stresses of the campaign. He also occasionally played with local teams in the towns and cities he visited on the campaign

trail, which provided photo opportunities that the Obama campaign encouraged (e.g. Figure 1).



Figure 1: Senator Barack Obama takes time out of his campaign in North Carolina to play basketball. (20 April 2008, Photo: Jae C. Hong/ Associated Press)

Culturally, basketball is perceived as a sport played predominantly by African Americans – professionally, socially, and in the parks and streets of American cities. It is also in basketball that Obama found belonging in the African American community. In *Dreams From My Father*, he writes that the only pictures he has of himself with his father were taken during the Christmas Obama senior visited Hawaii, when he gave Barack a basketball at “a time when the University of Hawaii basketball team had slipped into the national rankings on the strength of an all-black team” (Obama, 2007a: p78). Obama was drawn to the sport and admits he became a “caricature of black male adolescence, itself a caricature of swaggering American manhood” (ibid, p79), but he also notes that “at least on the basketball court I could find a community of sorts” (ibid, p80).

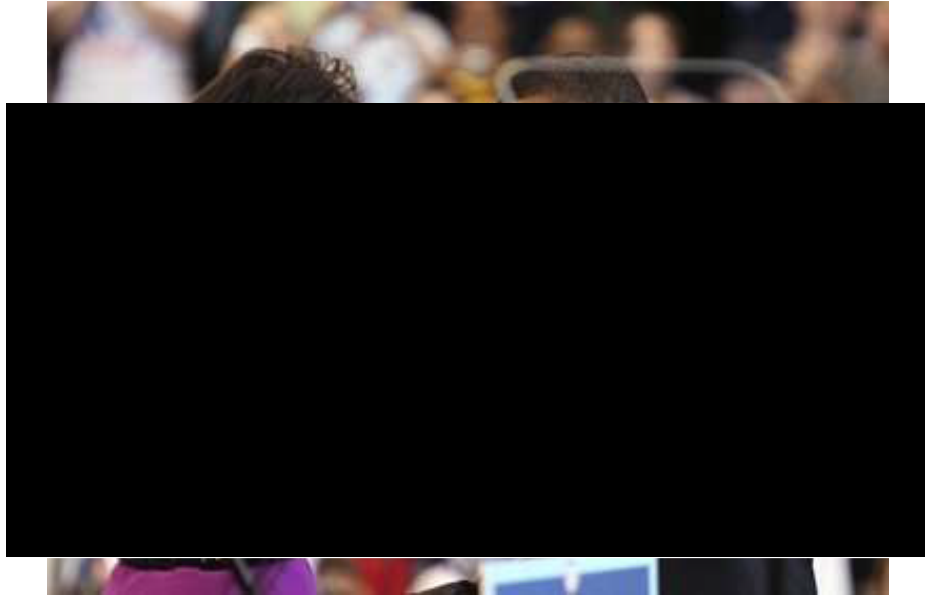


Figure 2: Michelle and Barack Obama fist bump at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. (3 July 2008, Photo: Wikipedia, Creative Commons)

Although not an exclusively African American gesture, the other non-textual, extra-linguistic marker that contributes to Obama's presentation of his African American identity is the "fist bump", a gesture of celebration or respect that is made when two participants lightly bump their closed fists together. The fist bump has its origins in African American street culture, probably evolving as Lawrence Henry suggests "as shorthand for a full-fledged 'soul' handshake" (Henry, 2008:n.p.); Henry also notes that that "this completely ordinary, everyday American gesture now carries no racial or political connotation" (ibid). Yet when Obama fist bumped his wife affectionately on stage at a rally in Minnesota (Figure 2), commentator Ta-Nehisi Coates noted that the gesture "thrilled a lot of black folks ... because it's the kind of gesture that, while commonplace in the African American community, was generally stifled by earlier generations of blacks working their way up into the corporate or political worlds for fears 'about looking *too black*' ... but Obama wears his cultural blackness all over the place" (in Argetsinger and Roberts, 2008:n.p.).



Figure 3: Cover of the New Yorker, depicting the Obamas as radical, flag-burning, militant Muslims, in the White House. (14 July 2008, Photo: Chris Hondros/Getty images)

The gesture also sparked debate in the media. More used to seeing political couples embrace on stage, the media devoted significant print and air time to analysing the fist bump and seeking to understand its roots. Fox News Anchor E D Hill went so far as to declare the gesture a “terrorist fist jab”, implying that the Obamas were terrorists, or at least harbouring sinister, un-American values. Hill subsequently lost her job (Sweney, 2008: n.p.). The front cover of the July 2008 edition of *The New Yorker* (Figure 3) went further, attracting criticism for its (apparently tongue-in-cheek²) depiction of the Obamas as radical Muslims in the White House; Barack Obama, in a Muslim robe and turban, fist bumping Michelle, who is portrayed as an armed militant. The picture also shows the American flag burning in the Oval Office fireplace beneath a picture of Osama bin Laden. Mary Rucker describes the

² David Remnick claims to have printed the cover because he “thought it would have something to say” (Harris et al, 2010: pXIV))

depiction of the Obamas' posture as evoking "fear in white society that white-hating black terrorists would control the White House and destroy all that whites hold dear" (Rucker, 2013: p37). The seemingly insignificant gesture was therefore held to be an indicator of Obama's "blackness", and consequently was seen in some quarters as insidious and not to be trusted. This also plays to notions of Obama as the un-American "other", whose non-whiteness represents foreignness and whose ethnicity and identity is therefore seen as an external threat to American society.

African American leadership

Having demonstrated that Obama engages with some of the principal themes and motifs articulated by African American writers to construct his own racial identity, it is useful to discuss his approach to leadership and to explore how this is situated within broader debates about the nature of African American leadership. This level of analysis relates to the application of the Exodus narrative in that it elucidates the leadership style that Obama adopts as the figurehead who will lead his people into the Promised Land of equality of opportunity and justice.

Obama's questions about identity lead him to appreciate the need for compromise, and he reaches what Thomas Sugrue calls "a sophisticated understanding of the syncretism that defined black politics" (Sugrue, 2009: p24), which sheds light on his approach to leadership and race, and reveals a pattern of doubling that he clearly feels has marked out African American intellectual thought. In a 1988 essay, Obama argued that "from W E B Du Bois to Booker T Washington to Marcus Garvey to Malcolm X to Martin Luther King, this internal debate has raged between integration and nationalism, between accommodation and militancy, between sit-down strikes and boardroom negotiations. The lines between these strategies have never been simply drawn, and the most successful black leadership has recognised the need to bridge these seemingly divergent approaches" (ibid, pp24-25). This idea of bridging divergent approaches to African American leadership reveals much about Obama's own approach to leadership, and it can be argued that he himself bridges two of the most significant theories of

leadership in twentieth century African American thought; those of Du Bois and Booker T Washington. The nature of African American leadership preoccupied Du Bois, who believed that black interests would be best advanced by an intellectual elite among the African American community; a “Talented Tenth” through whom the African American race could achieve uplift.

The concept was in use at least seven years earlier within the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, which established colleges in the Southern states to train African American elites. Henry Morehouse, who served as the Society’s executive secretary on two occasions, used the phrase to “distinguish his liberal arts education programs and their students from the ‘average or mediocre’ black intellect that aligned itself with Washington’s ideology of vocational education for black advancement. ... Morehouse’s Talented Tenth were to provide a racial class buffer zone between unprivileged blacks and white society” (James, 1997: p17).

Obama’s Harvard education and early success within the political establishment may imply that he belongs to this elite group, but his belief in grass-roots, community-led leadership is potentially at odds with Du Bois’ vision, with Obama finding more in common with the ideology of Booker T Washington.

Washington is remembered for his *Atlanta Compromise* address of 1895, which called for White America to secure jobs and education for African Americans in exchange for a relinquishing of demands for equality and civil rights. Washington is widely seen as a gradualist who was prepared to accept social segregation and white supremacy if it meant that African Americans would gain opportunities for economic and intellectual uplift. He urged African Americans to trust white Americans, arguing that conciliation did not have to mean economic disadvantage: “In all things that are purely social” he said, “we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress” (Gibson, 1978: n.p.). Daniel Williams describes Washington’s approach as the “sidelining of political struggle for desegregation for an emphasis on the development of independent

economic, educational and social institutions that would serve the needs of African Americans in the rapidly industrialising 'New South'" (Williams, 2006: p177). This approach was also designed to give the white community confidence that African Americans would not make demands for full equality, with the result that a number of educational institutions for African Americans, including Washington's Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, were founded with white financial support.

Tuskegee, the largest African American college of its time, valued a spirit of enterprise over the liberal arts, self-reliance over dependency, and "material acquisition or economic wealth allied to moral and political leadership" (James, 1997: p22). By advocating the acquisition of property as a means of securing economic uplift, Washington sought to stimulate advancement from below by a broad based community, rather than from above by Du Bois' educated elite, the Talented Tenth. Du Bois initially supported Washington, and went so far as to say that the Atlanta Compromise was a "phenomenal success" (Gates and Oliver, 1999: p167). However, Gibson notes that Du Bois "began to differ with Washington over the impact of liberal arts education when the latter's emphasis on industrial education drew resources away from black liberal arts colleges" (Gibson, 1978: n.p.). By the time *The Souls of Black Folk* appeared in 1903, Du Bois no longer believed that Washington's conciliatory approach could achieve its original objectives. He argued instead that equality and civil rights for all Americans were guaranteed by the Constitution, and that African Americans should not be obliged to relinquish those rights in order to benefit from economic, social and intellectual advancement. *The Souls of Black Folk* therefore attacks Booker T Washington for his accommodation of white supremacy.

Du Bois asserts that "the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men" and that the problem of education is "the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races" (Du Bois, 1903: p189). This reveals his belief in the leadership capabilities of an African American elite. For Du Bois, the absence of such an elite in Washington's

model would leave a vacuum that could only be filled by a white educational elite, thereby maintaining the status quo of African Americans being unable to decide their own destinies. Du Bois encapsulates the debate succinctly:

I believed in the higher education of a Talented Tenth who through their knowledge of modern culture could guide the American Negro into a higher civilization. I knew that without this the Negro would have to accept white leadership, and that such leadership could not always be trusted to guide this group into self-realization and to its highest cultural possibilities. Mr Washington, on the other hand, believed that the Negro as an efficient worker could gain wealth and that eventually through his ownership of capital he would be able to achieve a recognized place in American culture and could then educate his children as he might wish and develop their possibilities.

(in Green, 1977: p362).

As Francis Broderick acknowledges, Du Bois “did not deprecate the importance of industrial training but [saw it as] industrialism drunk with its vision of success” (ibid, p361). Du Bois was also clearly opposed to economic and imperialist exploitation, as the above quotation implies, and yet it can be argued that his insistence on the role of the Talented Tenth to effect social uplift remains at odds with Washington’s view that self-help and self-reliance could secure economic advancement regardless of class. Du Bois asks “was there ever a nation on god’s fair earth that was civilised from the bottom upwards?”, and argues that “it is, ever was, and ever will be from the top downward that culture filters. The talented tenth rises and pulls all that are worth saving up to their vantage ground” (Du Bois, 1903: p193).

His privileged education notwithstanding, Obama does not (on the evidence of his speeches) believe that change can be effected through an educated elite. Like Washington, he stresses the importance of self-reliance and the rewards that can be won through hard work. In this respect, as David T Beito notes, “in many ways, Barack Obama would find a kindred soul in the president of Tuskegee” (Beito, 2009: n.p.). The principal message of Obama’s 2007/08 campaign centred on a quest for national unity that is driven by communities, rather than political elites. His belief in the capacity of

communities, organised at the local level, to come together to bring about change negates the need for leadership by a Talented Tenth, and the Obama campaign's mobilisation of thousands of grass-roots activists to generate millions of votes is not a top down, elitist model. Change would come instead from a well-organised network of enthusiastic campaigners. Ultimately, Obama's insistence on collective uplift and self-reliance would find expression in the repeated affirmation of his campaign's unofficial slogan, "yes, we can".

In *Dreams From My Father*, the section entitled "Chicago" opens with Obama's assertion that "In 1983, I decided to become a community organizer. ... That's what I'll do. I'll organize black folks. At the grass roots. For change" (Obama, 2007a: p133). With this sentence, Obama places himself unequivocally alongside Booker T Washington in his belief that economic, social, and political advancement must be brought about from the bottom up, but he remains mindful of the value of education in stimulating uplift. He goes on to say: "Give that black man some tangible skills and a job. Teach that black child reading and arithmetic in a safe well-funded school. With the basics taken care of, each of us could search for our own sense of self worth" (ibid, p194). Similarly, in *The Audacity Of Hope*, Obama notes that "throughout our history, education has been at the heart of a bargain this nation makes with its citizens: if you work hard and take responsibility, you'll have a chance for a better life" (Obama, 2007b: p159). Obama's approach to leadership therefore favours collective responsibility and self-reliance over the notion of an elite cadre of African American leaders, even if he himself could be classed as a member of the Talented Tenth.

In the chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* entitled "Of Mr Booker T Washington and Others", Du Bois writes that "the attitude of the imprisoned group may take three main forms, - a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the great group; or, finally, a determined effort at self-realization and self-development despite envioning opinion" (Gates and Oliver, 1999: p37). The second form, adjustment, refers to Washington's compromise; the third to Du Bois' vision

of a unified, pluralistic society brought about through the recognition and acceptance of racial groups as equals within a collective. A century later, Obama has clearly synthesised elements of both theories to create a fourth form, which might be described as self-realization through adjustment. Like Du Bois, he sees and understands both sides of the veil, asserts his identity, and recognises that pluralism can help to challenge the color line. And, like Washington, he recognises the need for compromise as a means of achieving meaningful uplift. Drawing on the frameworks articulated by both Du Bois and Washington therefore helps to illuminate Obama's own choices and places them in their historical context.

In the wake of the 1992 race riots in Los Angeles, which were sparked by the acquittal of four white police officers involved in assaulting Rodney King, Cornel West wrote of the "crisis of Black leadership" (West, 1993: pp33-46) and described three styles of leadership in similar terms to Du Bois: the "race-effacing managerial leaders" who attempt to maintain their black constituency whilst opening up a broad white constituency (equivalent to Du Bois' theory of adjustment); the "race-identifying protest leaders" such as Malcolm X, Al Sharpton and Martin Luther King Jr, whose leadership is rooted in the black community and with whom white America must reach accommodation (Du Bois' theory of revolt and revenge); and the "race-transcending prophetic leaders", which relates to Du Bois' theory of self-realization and self-development (ibid, p45).

West notes that "the time is past for black political leaders and intellectual leaders to pose as *the* voice for black America ... To be a serious black leader is to be a race-transcending prophet who critiques the powers that be (including the black component of the Establishment) and who puts forward a vision of moral regeneration and political insurgency for the purpose of fundamental social change for all who suffer from socially induced misery" (ibid, p46).

This thesis proposes that Obama adopts the race-transcending style of leadership, although he does not represent the prophetic tradition. Whilst he makes use of the language of others in the tradition, such as Martin Luther

King, Jr. or Malcolm X, he is first and foremost a politician, constrained by the need to appeal to a broad constituency, to support the party line, and to conform to an expectation of how politicians should behave; he is not free to exhort from the pulpit. Yet, in pursuing his own vision of a united America, Obama exhibits a deeply held commitment to compromise and understanding. His biracialism enables him to bridge both sides of the veil, and he has worked to reconcile both sides of his consciousness so that he becomes what his close friend, former White House Council Cassandra Butts, describes as the “ultimate interpreter” (Remnick, 2010: p190). Henry Louis Gates agrees. He equates Obama with Frederick Douglass, the “mulatto, [who] mediates between white and black, slave and free, between ‘animal’ and ‘man’”, and he argues that “Obama, as mulatto, as reconciler, self-consciously performs the same function in our time” (ibid, p525). It can also be argued that Obama mediates between the leadership styles of Du Bois and Washington, balancing Du Bois’ calls for uplift through an educated elite with Washington’s belief that change should come from the grass roots.

Black Nationalism

Obama finds himself conflicted in his approach to, and understanding of, Malcolm X, and particularly the extent to which he advocated Black Nationalism. Malcolm, who was a leader of the Nation of Islam from 1952 to 1964, promoted the separation of African Americans from white Americans, expressed his belief in black superiority, and called for the repatriation of African Americans to Africa – in complete opposition to the demands of the civil rights movement’s call for equality. Yet Obama notes in *Dreams From My Father* that “only Malcolm X’s autobiography seemed to offer something different. His repeated acts of self-creation spoke to me; the blunt poetry of his words, his unadorned insistence on respect, promised a new and uncompromising order, martial in its discipline, forged through sheer force of will. All that other stuff, the talk of blue-eyed devils and apocalypse, was incidental to that program, I decided, religious baggage that Malcolm himself seemed to have safely abandoned towards the end of his life” (Obama, 2007a: p86). Graeme Abernethy describes this as a “cautious measuring of

Malcolm's legacy" made possible because "only now has his association with racial volatility been sufficiently defused that Malcolm may be openly, if conditionally, assimilated by those invested in mainstream values and institutions" (Abernethy, 2013: p171).

Malcolm was born Malcolm Little and known as Detroit Red before taking the name Malcolm X when he joined the Nation of Islam during his time in prison. He was also known as Malcom Shabazz and El Hajj Malik el-Shabazz during the latter years of his affiliation with the group. These "acts of self-creation" appealed to Obama because they spoke of a determined leader, proud of his heritage and possessing the confidence to speak for his race. The religious fervour that marked much of Malcolm's rhetoric during this time is conveniently (and peremptorily) dismissed by Obama as "that other stuff", but David Remnick notes that Obama admires the Malcolm who "comes to see his faith in a broader, more humanist light, the militant who begins to see the value of a broader embrace." (Remnick, 2010: p233). As Abernethy argues, "Obama can be seen to have adapted Malcolm's bold, articulate African American leadership and his politics of Pan-Africanist unity to a mainstream American political context" (Abernethy, 2013: p226). Cautious to be seen in the same light as Martin Luther King Jr or Abraham Lincoln (as described in Chapter five), and not as a Malcolm X or Jeremiah Wright, Obama nevertheless finds value in Malcolm's acts of self-creation, and he becomes a "potentially conciliatory figure" (ibid, p225) in *Dreams From My Father*.

Even so, Malcolm represents the shadow of militant Black Nationalism in *Dreams*, and as such he represents a troubling question for Obama: how can the author admit to respecting and embracing Malcolm's assertion of his African American identity without being labelled a militant or being viewed as an angry, redress-seeking African American?

Obama finds an answer in his own biracial ancestry. He writes:

And yet, even as I imagined myself following Malcolm's call, one line in the book stayed with me. He spoke of a wish he'd once had, the wish that the white blood that ran through him, there by an act of violence, might somehow be expunged. I knew that, for Malcolm, that wish would never be incidental. I knew as well that travelling down the road to self-respect my own white blood would never recede into mere abstraction. I was left to wonder what else I would be severing if and when I left my mother and my grandparents at some uncharted border.

(Obama, 2007a: p86).

Obama, raised by his white mother and grandparents, would not wish to expunge his white ancestry as to do so would be to deny a defining component of his identity. Consequently, Obama appreciates that his determination to accept his white heritage is what sets him apart from Malcolm and he comes to realise that "nationalism's affirming message – of solidarity and self-reliance, discipline and communal responsibility – need not depend on hatred of whites any more than it depended on white munificence" (Obama, 2007a: pp197-8).

This realisation is brought sharply into focus by his working relationship with Rafiq al-Shabazz, an African American Muslim who Obama introduces in *Dreams From My Father* as president of Chicago's Roseland Unity Coalition, a political organisation rooted in the African American community and cause. Rafiq is portrayed as an anti-white activist who believes in the self-determination of the African American community, but who possesses limited ability to instigate change or secure support at a local level. Obama forms an "uneasy alliance" with him (Obama, 2007a: p196), because, although he was a useful link between the community and the Developing Communities Project Obama worked for, Rafiq claimed to have "soaked up all the poison the white man feeds us" and gave long lectures about "all the black people willing to sell their people down the river." (ibid, p197). Obama describes this as Rafiq's interpretation of the truth, noting that:

his was a Hobbesian world where distrust was a given and loyalties extended from family to mosque to the black race – whereupon notions of loyalty ceased to apply. Black self-respect had delivered the mayor's seat, he could argue, just as black self-respect turned around the lives of drug addicts under the tutelage of the Muslims. Progress was within our grasp so long as we didn't betray ourselves.

(ibid, p197)

Obama's summation of Rafiq is simply that "he was less interested in changing the rules of power than in the color of those who had it and who therefore had its spoils" (ibid, p202).

Given that Internet search engines provide no evidence that Rafiq al-Shabazz actually exists, it is likely that he is one of the composite characters Obama creates to suit his narrative, and refers to in his introduction to *Dreams From My Father*. Dinesh D'Souza (2010, p103) and Avner Falk (2010, p130) suggest that Rafiq is based at least in part on Salim al Nuriddin, a Chicago-based activist who shares a similar background, but Obama gives Rafiq a specific back story, which provides insight into the role he intended Rafiq to play within the narrative. Rafiq is revealed to have been a gang leader formerly known as Wally who turned to Islam under a Muslim leader apparently unaffiliated with the Nation of Islam. The affiliation, or lack of it, is unimportant. What is striking is the names that Obama gives Rafiq; "Wally" being a likely reference to Wallace Fard Muhammad, the founder of the Nation of Islam, and "al-Shabazz" to Malcolm X. Similarly, like "Wally", Malcolm (as Detroit Red) engaged in criminal activity before converting to Islam.

The character of Rafiq consequently becomes a cipher for the pride, anger, and resentfulness of Black Nationalism, and perhaps even a means for Obama to include the spectre of Malcolm X within his narrative. He is certainly a useful foil for Obama's exploration of his own attitude to nationalism. Obama writes: "in talking to self-professed nationalists like Rafiq, though, I came to see how the blanket indictment of everything white served a central function in their message of uplift. ... It was a message that ignored

causality or fault, a message outside history”, and he goes on to state that “Nationalism provided that history ... A steady attack on the white race, the constant recitation of black people’s brutal experience in this country, served as the ballast that could prevent the ideas of personal and communal responsibility from tipping into an ocean of despair” (Obama, 2007a: p198). It can also be argued that the character of Rafiq has its origins in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, and specifically the character of Ras the Exhorter, a Marxist who is opposed to interracial reconciliation and who aims to build a “glorious movement of black people” (Ellison, 1980: p371). By the end of the novel, Ras has evolved into Ras the Destroyer, essentially a nationalist committed to a belief in African American superiority and determined to remove all traces of white America from Harlem. Ras’ philosophy is rejected by the invisible man, who is obliged to go into hiding when Ras demands that he be hanged as a traitor to his race “to teach the black people a lesson” (ibid, p557). Ras fulfils the same function for Ellison, then, that Rafiq does for Obama: both provide the means for the authors to denounce the worst excesses of Black Nationalism. Including Rafiq in his account also allows Obama to call once more on the African American literary canon.

It becomes evident that Obama was careful to distance himself from Black Nationalism and to avoid the confrontational approach adopted by many of America’s most successful African American leaders in the twentieth century. To emulate leaders such as Al Sharpton, Andrew Young or Jesse Jackson would be to invite distrust and potential rejection from a white electorate unwilling to put their faith in what conservative commentator Shelby Steele has described as challengers, the African American leaders who rouse white guilt and accuse white America (Steele, 2008). Adopting this role could also have seeded doubt in sections of the African American electorate suspicious of Obama’s lack of credentials within (or connection to) the civil rights movement.

Mark Street’s *Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics*, is a critical, evidence-based exploration of what Obama represents and stands for, politically and racially. Street, a far-Left Democrat who worked for the rival

John Edwards campaign, explores Obama's approach to race at length. He argues that Obama adopts a conservative and accommodating approach to race and notes that, despite the colour of his skin and the references to Martin Luther King Jr, Obama "has gone to considerable lengths to reassure whites that he will let them feel good about their willingness to vote for a black man and that he will not push defensive white buttons by meaningfully addressing the persistent powerful role white privilege continues to play in the United States" (Street, 2009: p80). This is supported by Glen Ford in a 2008 *Democracy Now* interview with Michael Dyson. Ford rejects the idea that Obama's campaign is designed to bridge the race gap by transcending African American and white guilt, and sees Obama's strategy as accommodating white guilt by promising to "lift white-people-as-a-whole's burden, the burden of having to listen to these very specific and historical black complaints, to deal with the legacies of slavery" (Ford, 2008: n.p.). These assertions support the argument that Obama uses the character of Rafiq to denounce Black Nationalism and consequently to reassure white voters that he will not confront them with the history of slavery and segregation.

It is noticeable that on the occasions Obama does talk about race he avoids the anger that marked the rhetoric of predecessors such as Jackson or Sharpton. He does not talk about African American issues or the legacy of slavery, and he makes no overt demands for equality or reparations. There are few speeches that draw detailed, explicit attention to racial and social inequality, and those there are were given to a predominantly African American audience. As a representative example, Obama's June 2007 speech, *Strengthening families in a new economy*, delivered at the Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Spartanburg, South Carolina, notes:

in the last six years, over 300,000 black males have lost jobs in the manufacturing sector - the highest rate of any ethnic group. In urban areas, more than 50% of black men do not complete high school. 54% of all African American children live in single-parent households, a number that has doubled since 1960 ... Children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and nine times more likely to drop out of school.

(Obama, 2007i).

In the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration speech*, Obama talks about the “health care gap”, claiming that many of the 46 million Americans without health care insurance are African American or Latino, and that consequently “Life expectancy is lower. Almost every disease is higher within minority communities” (Obama, 2007d).

Obama describes “the achievement gap”, which has arisen because “Blacks are less likely in their schools to have adequate funding. We have less-qualified teachers in those schools. We have fewer textbooks in those schools. We got in some schools rats outnumbering computers.” Obama also notes that he established a PhD programme in mathematics and science for African Americans in an Illinois college because

less than 1% of the PhDs in science and math go to African Americans”, but that the Justice Department threatened to sue “for reverse discrimination” unless the college closed the programme. He notes that this “reminds us that we still got a lot of work to do, and that the basic enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, the injustice that still exists within our criminal justice system, the disparity in terms of how people are treated in this country continues.

(Obama, 2007d).

Finally, and perhaps most evocatively, Obama describes an “empathy gap”, manifested primarily in the reaction to the devastation caused to New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina: “There is a gap in terms of sympathizing for the folks in New Orleans. It's not a gap that the American people felt because we saw how they responded. But somehow our government didn't respond with that same sense of compassion, with that same sense of kindness. And here is the worst part, the tragedy in New Orleans happened well before the hurricane struck because many of those communities, there were so many young men in prison, so many kids dropping out, so little hope” (ibid).

A year later, in July 2008, Obama addressed the 99th Annual Convention of the NAACP, promising to “end the outrage of one in five African Americans going without the health care they deserve”, to “ensure that the quality of your health care does not depend on the color of your skin”, and “to fight for all those young men standing on street corners with little hope for the future

besides ending up in jail. We have to break the cycle of poverty and violence that's gripping too many neighborhoods in this country". He also vowed to "provide job training for ex-offenders - because we need to make sure they don't return to a life of crime. And that's why I'll build on the success of the Harlem Children's Zone in New York and launch an all-hands-on-deck effort to end poverty in this country - because that's how we'll put the dream that Dr. King and Roy Wilkins fought for within reach for the next generation of children" (Obama, 2008t).

In not talking about the realities of racial discrimination unless addressing African American communities in Baptist churches or at the NAACP, Obama is open to accusations of pandering to the white community whilst presenting himself as a protector to African American voters. This approach can be related to the central thesis of Shelby Steele's *A Bound Man: why we are excited about Barack Obama and why he can't win*, published somewhat prematurely in January 2008. *A Bound Man* introduces the concept of "masking", a strategy of bargaining and challenging which Steele believes is used by African Americans to engage with the white community. It should be noted that Steele is a conservative writer whose thesis has been described by Darryl Pinckney in the *New York Review of Books* as "a thin and unhappy meditation" that accuses Obama of "presenting himself as a protector to blacks and a unifier to whites. But when he holds that Obama cannot serve the aspirations of one race without betraying those of the other, it is Steele, calling black people blackmailers, who seems out of date and most threatened by Obama's candidacy" (Pinckney, 2008: n.p.). Notwithstanding the limitations of Steele's theory, his concept of bargaining and challenging provides an interesting framework that can be applied to Obama's approach to discussing race.

Bargaining is, according to Steele, "effective because it begins in magnanimity" (Steele, 2008: p75). A bargainer treats whites as inherently innocent of racism, telling them that "I will not use America's horrible history of white racism against you, if you will promise not to use my race against me" (ibid, p74). The bargain is therefore an offer to restore white innocence

and moral authority in return for goodwill and generosity towards African Americans. Challengers, on the other hand, “use their moral authority as blacks to stigmatize whites as born racists. Challengers presume whites to be guilty of racism in the same way that bargainers presume them innocent – as a strategic manipulation” (ibid, p77). Steele places African American leaders such as Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, and Jeremiah A Wright within the generation of challengers who rouse white guilt and accuse white America. Fifty years on since the march on Washington, they maintain that racial inequality remains a major, divisive issue, and is by no means the fading stain on the fabric of American history that Obama would have his electorate believe with his claims that racial equality has been 90 percent realised (See Obama, 2008c: *The Great Need Of The Hour*).

Steele acknowledges that bargaining is still just a mask, and that African Americans “practice it in the *hope* that whites will live up to the racial innocence we ascribe to them. But we don’t know for certain that they will. Bargainers gamble that their own display of good faith will push whites into their better selves” (Steele, 2008: p77). The most successful bargainers – Steele cites Louis Armstrong, Bill Cosby, Colin Powell and Oprah Winfrey as prime examples – find themselves elevated as “iconic negroes” as a result of the “synergy of innocence given and gratitude received”. “Iconic negroes ... bigged up but still bound, unless they see the light of personal responsibility” (Nelson, 2008: n.p.) represent an opportunity for whites to congratulate themselves for having transcended racism, and for blacks they “represent transcendence of the inferiority stereotype” (Steele, 2008: p87). Steele applies the concept of the “iconic negro” as “someone who dispels the sense of ‘otherness’ between the races and replaces it with a feeling of warmth, human familiarity, and racial goodwill” (ibid, p89) to Obama, but notes that absolution of white guilt is contingent on the bargainer’s mask being preserved.

Steele concludes by arguing that “what white Americans deeply long for is a bargaining relationship with black America” and that there is a “profound hunger in whites for bargaining – the chance simply to be given the benefit of

the doubt” (ibid, p104). Jill Nelson takes issue with Steele’s position, dismissing his portrayal of Barack Obama as a bound man as “a result of his own failure of imagination”, and it is not this thesis’ assertion that Obama is the bargainer or bound man beholden to white munificence that Steele makes him out to be. However, textual analysis shows that Obama seems to avoid challenging white audiences, suggesting that Steele’s depiction of bargainers and challengers holds relevance to discussions of Obama. Also, by virtue of the fact that he is a generation removed from the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and because of his mixed race heritage, Obama can be described as “a black man for all people, a black man who *can only* give whites the benefit of the doubt” (ibid, p104), a man who can be accommodated by America.

The gulf between Obama’s approach and that of more established African American leaders was exposed when Jesse Jackson’s unguarded comments were caught on camera before an interview with Fox News on 9 July 2008. Jackson said that he wanted to “cut [Obama’s] nuts off” and criticised him for “talking down to black people”, implying that he was pandering to white America by criticizing black Americans (Baldwin, 2008: n.p.). Jackson also criticised Obama for “acting like he’s white” by not joining a march to protest against a racial conflict in Jena, Louisiana, even though Obama had already spoken out on the issue. Harvard Law Professor Cornel West has also taken issue with Obama’s position, and particularly with his description of America as “a magical place” (Obama, 2004). West dismisses Obama’s vision of America by reminding him that “it’s hard for someone who came out of slavery and Jim Crow to call it a magical place” (Wolffe, 2009: p145). Interestingly, it was Al Sharpton, another challenger, who claimed to understand that “Obama doesn’t come out of the Martin Luther King or Jesse Jackson tradition of activists” (ibid, p145), recognising that Obama does not seek to challenge, but to generate a new debate about race and a new means of providing African American leadership through reconciliation and compromise.

Juan Williams writes of Obama's acknowledgement that "In the history of African American politics in this country, there has always been some tension between speaking in universal terms and speaking in very race-specific terms about the plight of the African American community. ... By virtue of my background, you know, I am more likely to speak in universal terms" (Williams, 2007: n.p.). Williams notes that "the alienation, anger and pessimism that mark speeches from major black America leaders are missing from Mr Obama's speeches" (ibid), suggesting that Obama, as a non-threatening, African American candidate, represented a new approach to black leadership.

This new approach prompted fellow candidate for the Democratic Party's Presidential nomination Joe Biden to remark in an article for the *New York Observer* that Obama was "the first mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy" (Thai and Barrett, 2007: n.p.). Biden subsequently clarified his remarks, which were widely held as racist, and Obama stated that he "didn't take Senator Biden's comments personally, but obviously they were historically inaccurate. African-American presidential candidates like Jesse Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, Carol Moseley Braun and Al Sharpton gave a voice to many important issues through their campaigns, and no one would call them inarticulate" (ibid). Nevertheless, Biden's remarks reflected a propensity of the American public to associate African American politicians with anger and confrontation – a propensity best illustrated by reaction to remarks made by the Reverend Jeremiah A Wright.

Reverend Wright is the former pastor (now pastor emeritus) of Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ, a predominantly African American church with more than 8,000 members. The church has a reputation as a passionate proponent of black liberation theology, which has a focus on black empowerment and on directing anger at America's history of slavery and racial oppression. Wright was Obama's pastor from 1988 until 2008, when he retired from the church in the wake of controversy caused by selective excerpts of his sermons being broadcast by America's ABC News as part of an attempt to reveal what Obama may have heard as a regular member of

Trinity's congregation, and how he may have been influenced by the church's teachings.

In particular, ABC showed video footage of Wright denouncing the treatment of African Americans in 2003, in which he claimed "the government gives them the drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three-strike law and then wants us to sing 'God Bless America.' No, no, no, God damn America, that's in the Bible for killing innocent people. God damn America for treating our citizens as less than human. God damn America for as long as she acts like she is God and she is supreme" (Ross and El-Buri, 2008: n.p.). ABC also broadcast a sermon given by Wright on 16 September, 2001, five days after the Al-Qaeda attack on New York's twin towers. Wright argued that US foreign policy and aggression overseas were to blame for the terrorist attack. Wright used the sermon, entitled "The Day of Jerusalem's Fall", to claim:

we bombed Hiroshima, we bombed Nagasaki, and we nuked far more than the thousands in New York and the Pentagon and we never batted an eye. We have supported state terrorism against the Palestinians and black South Africans, and now we are indignant because the stuff we have done overseas is now brought right back to our own front yards.

(ibid)

Wright went on to say that "America's chickens are coming home to roost" (ibid), a phrase that is significant in that it echoes Malcolm X's comments after the assassination of President John F Kennedy in 1963. Malcolm said that "being an old farm boy myself, chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they've always made me glad," (X, 1963) and would subsequently explain that he meant :

the death of Kennedy was the result of a long line of violent acts, the culmination of hate and suspicion and doubt in this country. You see, ... this country has allowed white people to kill and brutalize those they don't like. The assassination of Kennedy is a result of that way of life and thinking. The chickens came home to roost; that's all there is to it. America – at the death of the President – just reaped what it had been sowing.

(ibid).

(The comments led Elijah Mohammed to expel Malcolm from the Nation of Islam, marking another phase in Malcolm's repeated acts of self-creation as he abandoned his radical Islamic views and pursued a moderate Muslim path.)

Taken out of their full context, the excerpts of Wright's speeches caused some difficulty for the Obama campaign and its determination not to be seen as a race-based campaign fronted by an angry African American. They were shown repeatedly on terrestrial and satellite news channels, and were widely distributed and discussed via social media such as YouTube. The result was a presentation of Wright as a radical, black liberation theologian; a man who would remind many Americans (of all races) of leaders such as Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson and Malcolm X – African Americans whose political careers are defined by their angry confrontation of white America and their calls for redress and reparations. The media were able to use the footage of Wright to question the extent to which Obama had been influenced by his pastor, and whether the candidate's reluctance to talk about race actually masked the same anger that burned in the many African Americans who had campaigned for the Presidency in the past.

“The world on a split screen”

This notion of mediation and reconciliation therefore forms the basis for Obama's own brand of African American leadership. In *The Audacity of Hope*, he sets out his understanding of how the racial divide, or color line, could be resolved: “To think clearly about race, then, requires us to see the world on a split screen – to maintain in our sights the kind of America that we want while looking squarely at America as it is, to acknowledge the sins of the past and the challenges of the present without becoming trapped in cynicism or despair” (Obama, 2007b: p233). This duality is clearly a twenty-first century updating of double-consciousness, with modern technology replacing the imagery of the veil, but it is also a duality that differs from Du Bois' description. Obama's sense of double-consciousness has been necessarily conditioned by the passage of time and his distance from the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and it is therefore not simply concerned with

racial division. It is also about recognising that the debate has moved on, that the past must give way for the future, and the image encapsulates the message of his *A More Perfect Union* speech.

Obama recognises that his firebrand pastor Jeremiah Wright belongs to the generation of black Americans that “came of age in the late fifties and early sixties” and notes that “what’s remarkable is ... how many were able to make a way out of no way for those like me who would come after them” (Obama, 2008i). He also introduces the notion of movement in relation to the progress of civil rights, implying that, whilst the civil rights movement’s second generation is moving towards the future envisaged by activists in the 1960s, the people who began the process are stuck in the past:

The profound mistake of Reverend Wright’s sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It’s that he spoke as if our society was static; as if no progress has been made; as if this country – a country that has made it possible for one of his own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black, Latino and Asian, rich and poor, young and old – is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. But what we know – what we have seen – is that America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope – the audacity to hope – for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

(Obama, 2008i).

He therefore uses the speech to defuse Jeremiah Wright’s incendiary comments by placing the differences between black and white America in the context of American history, employing a rhetorical strategy reliant on fostering an interracial understanding that lies at the heart of his vision of a changed, more hopeful America that no longer judges people by the colour of their skin.

In the *A More Perfect Union* speech, Obama acknowledges that “the anger is real”, and that it also “exists within segments of the white community”. There are echoes here of the poet Frank Marshall Davis, who told a young Obama that “Black people have a reason to hate” (Obama, 2007a: p91), and it recalls Obama’s admission in *The Audacity of Hope* that he too has “tasted the bitter

swill of swallowed back anger” (Obama, 2007b: p233). Similarly, in conversation with Richard Wolffe, Obama says that he came to appreciate the parallels that exist between what his father experienced and what young African Americans still experience; he speaks of “what Du Bois wrote about a hundred years ago, the sense of displacement, the sense of being on the outside, the anger that is bred from oppression and passes its way from generation to generation, the need to overcome that anger or at least to channel it in productive ways, as opposed to having it eat you up inside” (Wolffe, 2009: p151).

Anger is also a recurring theme in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, whose narrator urges restraint, cooperation and understanding in place of anger and confrontation. In the scene where an angry crowd gathers to watch an elderly African American couple being evicted from their home, the narrator tries to placate the crowd by reminding them that “we’re a law-abiding and a slow-to-anger people” and that “we’re angry, but let us be wise” (Ellison, 1980: p275). Whilst the narrator’s words fail to move the crowd as he hoped – the eventual result being violence and the narrator being forced to flee from the police – they do perhaps echo Du Bois’ recognition of the need to channel anger and grievance productively, which becomes a key theme of the *A More Perfect Union* speech. The speech focuses on perfecting the imperfect union “by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren” (Obama, 2008i). He demands that his audiences across all races accept the differences that separate them whilst focusing on the shared goals that unite them. The focus on an as yet unrealised future to be realised by future generations resonates with the themes and content of the speeches discussed earlier in the chapter. In this context, the image of the split screen allows Obama to encourage his audience to see America as it is, and how it can be.

It is also worth noting that, whereas Du Bois’ double-consciousness could be seen as a challenge to white America to acknowledge African American

culture, Obama's split screen is directed at all races and lies at the heart of his vision of a changed, more hopeful America that no longer judges people by the colour of their skin. He uses his campaign rhetoric to present the choice he is giving America as an opportunity to "make good on the debt we owe past and future generations" (Obama, 2007c), as a "moment of great challenge and great promise" (Obama, 2007g), and as "our moment - to restore the simple dream of those who came before us for another generation of Americans" (Obama, 2008d). However, he also argues that the divisions in American society are more pervasive and deeply rooted than imagined. He notes that Americans have "come to believe that racial reconciliation can come easily – that it's just a matter of a few ignorant people trapped in the prejudices of the past" and he calls for a radical "change in attitudes – a broadening of our minds, and a broadening of our hearts" (Obama, 2008c). There is a risk that, without that change in attitudes, racism becomes distanced from contemporary American ideologies and dialogues, and is seen as something that happened only in America's past.

Obama's election does not mean an end to the color line, even though MSNBC's David Gregory claimed on 4 November 2008 that the "ultimate color line has been crossed" (Kurtz, 2008: n.p.). The reality of the ongoing disparity between white America and racial minorities was made clear in a 2010 NAACP report, which revealed that discrimination "remains an integral component of complex and enduring social and political systems that promote racial inequality" (Edney, 2010: n.p.).

Nor does Obama's victory mean that the goal of a post-racial America is within his grasp. But it does, perhaps, mark a new stage in the development of Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness, where the capacity to reconcile the "two warring souls" leads to an understanding of how a unified, pluralistic America might one day rend the veil.

Summary

This chapter has explored Obama's considered approach to his biracial heritage and his attitudes to race and African American leadership in the

USA. Race and identity form an important subtext to Obama's presidential campaign and his understanding of his own place within the narrative of African American history provides the foundation for his ethos, the projection of himself that he presents to the electorate. His first book, *Dreams From My Father*, sheds light on Obama's struggle to define his racial identity, concluding with his realisation that, whilst his white heritage is integral to his identity, he has found a place and belonging within the African American community, and that his is an "American story" (Obama, 2008i). *Dreams From My Father* also demonstrates Obama's familiarity with the canon of African American literature and culture, specifically the genres of slave narrative and autobiography, and can be read as his attempt to write his own story into that tradition.

Obama's biracial heritage subsequently becomes a metaphor for the unified America that he seeks, and which Du Bois also envisaged with his belief in the capacity of the collective to unify and transcend the color line, just as Ellison's *Invisible Man* maintained that "our fate is to become one and yet many" (Ellison, 1980: p577). In turn, this understanding enables Obama to appreciate the roots and causes of Black Nationalism, but also to find a way to move beyond the anger and alienation that has marked African American politics. By embracing his white heritage alongside his African American identity, Obama is able to transcend the politics of Black Nationalism and confront the legacy of leaders such as Malcolm X and Jeremiah Wright. He argues in the *A More Perfect Union* speech that the race debate has moved on whereas the leaders of Wright's generation continue to espouse the attitudes that defined African American politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Central to Obama's view of race is his determination that we see "the world as a split-screen", recognising that debates about race have been conditioned by the passage of time and should no longer be driven by division and alienation.

A review of Obama's campaign speeches shows that Obama is careful not to present himself as an "angry" African American challenger, to use Steele's definition. It also suggests he is apparently reluctant to talk about race and

the issues facing the African American community unless speaking directly to African American audiences. However, the chapter has also argued that Obama is determined to seek new approaches to race, and to provide a new, race-transcending style of leadership that mediates between the leadership styles of Du Bois and Washington.

Obama's projection of his mixed-race heritage provides the ethos of his rhetoric, reassuring his audience that he shares their values and that he represents a credible candidate who is appropriately placed to act as an advocate for their hopes and dreams of an America that fulfills its promise. In doing so, Barack Obama constructs an identity for himself that he holds up as a product of the American experience. To use Burke's dramaturgical model, Obama becomes the agent for change, the means by which purification or atonement becomes possible.

Chapter 5

Obama and civil rights

I'm here because somebody marched. I'm here because you all sacrificed for me. I stand on the shoulders of giants. I thank the Moses generation; but we've got to remember, now, that Joshua still had a job to do. As great as Moses was, despite all that he did, leading a people out of bondage, he didn't cross over the river to see the Promised Land. God told him your job is done. You'll see it. You'll be at the mountain top and you can see what I've promised. What I've promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. You will see that I've fulfilled that promise but you won't go there. We're going to leave it to the Joshua generation to make sure it happens.

(Obama, 2007d)

In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama writes that he has “always felt a curious relationship to the sixties. In a sense, I’m a product of that era: as the child of a mixed marriage, my life would have been impossible, my opportunities foreclosed, without the social upheavals that were then taking place” (Obama, 2007b: p29). Obama evidently makes a connection between his identity and the progress of the civil rights movement, an active engagement which this chapter explores to understand how it provides context to Obama’s candidacy.

Whilst the previous chapter established that Obama’s racial identity contributes to the ethos of his candidacy and locates him as the Burkean agent for change who will bring about a purification or atonement for America’s failure to secure racial equality, this chapter explores how the history of civil rights, particularly the struggles of the 1960s, can be described as the *scene* in the application of Burke’s *pentad*. The scene is the physical or contextual situation in which the act takes place, “the container” (Burke, 1974: p3) that encompasses the *pentad*’s other elements. The scene can be defined by language, event or time, as well as by cultural and societal convention. Burke notes that “the nature of the scene may be conveyed primarily by suggestions built into the lines of the verbal action itself ... or it may be conveyed by non-linguistic properties” (ibid, p3). Consequently, this

chapter examines the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of Obama's rhetoric that enable him to present his candidacy as a product of the civil rights movement and against a backdrop of a much longer struggle for equality. In highlighting the language, intertextual links and non-verbal communication strategies that Obama uses to describe his connection to the movement, it is possible to reveal how the candidate constructs his relationship to the American experience of civil rights.

This chapter makes use of textual analysis to identify the nature and implications of Obama's frequent references to the civil rights movement in his campaign speeches and two books. It explores the role played by the movement (particularly of the King era) in providing the context for his candidacy. Intertextual links are made with key figures in the history of civil rights in America, particularly Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr and John F Kennedy, whilst extralinguistic context is evidenced through Obama's delivery of speeches in locations with recognisable connections to the civil rights movement, and through his use of music evoking the era. Finally, the chapter introduces Obama's engagement with the Exodus narrative in connection to civil rights, the implications of this engagement, and his projection of a Joshua generation who will fulfil the movement's ambition to enter the Promised Land of freedom and equality.

History and context

Obama's relationship to the sixties is at least partly conditioned by his mother, Ann Dunham. In both *The Audacity of Hope* and *Dreams From My Father* Obama notes that the civil rights movement had inspired his mother and that she sought to pass on the movement's values to him. During their time in Indonesia, Ann was determined that Obama should know about the movement, and "would come home with books on the civil rights movement, the recordings of Mahalia Jackson, the speeches of Dr King" (Obama, 2007a: p50). It appears that she was inclined to romanticise the movement, enthusing that "every black man was Thurgood Marshall or Sidney Poitier; every black woman Fannie Lou Hamer or Lena Horne. To be black was to be the beneficiary of a great inheritance, a special destiny, glorious burdens that

only we were strong enough to bear” (ibid, p51). This emotive attachment to the King era shaped Obama’s own view of the sixties and pulled him towards community organising as a means of connecting with the movement.

When he moves to Chicago to work with community-based projects, he acknowledges “I was operating mainly on impulse [...] I would dress up those impulses in the theories and slogans that I’d discovered in books [...] But at night, lying in bed, I would let the slogans drift away, to be replaced with a series of images, romantic images, of a past I had never known” (Obama, 2007a, p134). These images came primarily from the remembered photographs and books his mother had encouraged him to read, and from the documentaries shown every year as part of Black History Month.

Obama’s engagement with civil rights therefore relates primarily to the movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the Montgomery to Memphis time-frame, which “brackets the movement with the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr, 1955-1968” (Fairclough, 1990: p387), and which has “assumed a central place in American historical memory” (Romano and Raiford, 2006: pXII).

This is not unusual. If asked to identify key moments in the United States’ struggle for racial equality, it is likely that many Americans would list the Freedom Rides and sit-ins, the marches and bus boycotts, the Voting Rights Act, and the examples set by figures such as Martin Luther King Jr and Rosa Parks. In part, this is because some of the leaders who took part in the marches and sit-ins still figure prominently in US politics and media – Jesse Jackson and John Lewis for instance – and many Americans have first-hand memories of the movement. Those born after the 1960s are also familiar with the period, thanks to the annual programme of events associated with Black History Month and Martin Luther King Jr Day. The civil rights movement of half a century ago therefore remains vivid in the collective consciousness.

Yet, as Stephen Tuck notes, “the civil rights movement of the King era was not the normative style of protest. There was a long freedom struggle, not a long civil rights movement. The short civil rights movement of the early 1960s was a distinctive, even exceptional, moment. But it was not ‘better’ than what had preceded it, or what would follow” (Tuck, 2010: p8). Jacquelyn Dowd Hall

argues that this “dominant narrative of the civil rights movement distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals” (Dowd Hall, 2005: p1233). To focus attention on the 1960s is to condense four centuries of protest in America since the arrival in 1619 of the first enslaved African into a single moment frozen in the national memory. In doing so, this overlooks the impact and legacies of movements such as the Union League of Freed Slaves (1860s), the Colored Farmers’ Alliance (1880s), the National Association of Colored Women (founded in 1896 and growing to more than 1,500 clubs by 1915), Black Nationalism (post World War I), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, since 1909), the Black Power movement, and grassroots community organising since the 1960s. African American demands for freedom and equality have evolved over time, and there is “no such thing as a black protest agenda because there was no such thing as a single black experience” (Tuck, 2010: p3). Different phases of the struggle have reflected the concerns of their time, from the rebellions of the enslaved and calls to abolish slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through Booker T Washington’s insistence on improvement and uplift through education; the NAACP’s campaign for the right for African Americans to fight in two World Wars; the drive for voting rights and fair housing in the 1950s and 1960s.

The struggle’s most recent phase can be seen in the growth of grassroots activism, organising communities to work together for workplace and housing equality, welfare, and for political progress, and it is in this phase of the long struggle that Obama establishes his civil rights credentials. Born in 1961, the year of the Freedom Rides and the inauguration of John F Kennedy, Obama is a generation removed from the King era. His personal connection to the civil rights movement therefore comes from his work within the community organising tradition (with the Developing Communities Project in Chicago) and subsequently as a civil rights lawyer, rather than from marches and protests. In *Dreams From My Father*, Obama goes so far as to suggest that the civil rights movement is no longer relevant. He describes listening to a speech by Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael, a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and subsequently of the Black

Panther Party) and realising that the civil rights movement “had died years ago, shattered into a thousand fragments. Every path to change was well trodden, every strategy exhausted” (Obama, 2007a: p140). The realisation leaves him “disillusioned with the fragmentation of the civil rights movement and unsure of his future as a community organiser” (Pedersen, 2009: p63) and yet, as this chapter shows, Obama makes a significant effort to establish a firm connection between his candidacy and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall suggests that “by confining the civil rights struggle to the South, to bowdlerized heroes, to a single halcyon decade and to limited noneconomic objectives, the master narrative simultaneously elevates and diminishes the movement. It ensures the status of the classical phase as a triumphal movement in a larger American progress narrative, yet it undermines its gravitas. It prevents one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time” (Dowd Hall, 2005: p1234). The notion of this “halcyon decade” being the “triumphal movement” in a broader narrative resonates with Obama’s belief in the progress that continues to be made in securing justice and equality. As noted in Chapter four’s discussion of the *A More Perfect Union* speech, Obama recognises that the civil rights movement’s second generation is moving towards the future envisaged by activists in the 1960s. This is an image that relates closely to Obama’s use of the Exodus narrative, with Joshua leading his people into the Promised Land that the older Moses was able to see but not reach. However, it is also valid to question why Obama chooses to relate to the civil rights movement of the King era rather than to the much longer struggle for freedom, and to use textual analysis to explore precisely how he interprets its focus and legacy.

Textual analysis

To identify which of Obama’s speeches made reference to civil rights, the analytic corpus was examined systematically in order to reveal those featuring three topics, covering the civil rights movement, Latino/a and

Hispanic issues, and the Promised Land. The topic of civil rights encompasses vocabulary associated with the events of the 1960s, including:

- key figures such as Martin Luther King Jr, Anne Cooper, Jimmy Lee Jackson, Reverend Lowery, John Lewis, C T Vivian, Governor Wallace, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks;
- locations such as Birmingham, Selma, Montgomery, Alabama, Atlanta, Georgia, Memphis, Mississippi, and Little Rock;
- terms inextricably linked to the movement, such as bus boycotts, voting rights, Edmund Pettus Bridge, the arc of the moral universe, Freedom Rides, *Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka*, non-violence, and NAACP;
- vocabulary associated with the violence of the era, including: church bombings, billy clubs, tear gas, fire hoses, dogs, and nooses.

Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy are also included in the topic of civil rights; Lincoln for his role in emancipation and Kennedy for the actions he took in support of the movement, such as ordering the US National Guard to protect two African American students entering the University of Alabama and forcibly remove State Governor Wallace from the entrance. The topic of the Promised Land, which includes references to Moses, Joshua, Jericho, Jordan, the mountaintop, and crossing over, enables identification of the speeches in which Obama draws on the Exodus narrative, which has particular resonance with notions of freedom and justice.

The topic of Latino and Hispanic issues comprises the speeches in which Obama highlights Latino concerns, based on references to Latino organisations, Cesar Chavez, and Hispanic votes. Whilst the focus of this thesis is on the redemptive value of Obama's campaign to African Americans and white Americans, it should be recognised that Hispanic Americans have also long campaigned for equality of opportunity, most notably under Cesar Chavez, the labour leader and civil rights activist who co-founded the United Farm Workers union in 1962. Obama's engagement with Latino and Hispanic issues is an extension of his engagement with the broader civil rights narrative. The Hispanic community also represents a significant electoral

demographic: of the 131 million votes cast in 2008, 12.1 percent were cast by African Americans, 7.4 percent by Hispanics and 2.5 percent by Asians (Lopez and Taylor, 2009: n.p.).

The data analysis process identified 37 speeches relevant to the focus of this chapter (90 percent of the analytic corpus). Of these, 31 included the topic of the civil rights movement, ten included the topic of Latino/Hispanic issues, and five included the topic of the Promised Land. The speeches are:

1. 2004 Democratic National Convention (Obama, 2004)
2. Announcement for President (Obama, 2007c)
3. Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration (Obama, 2007d)
4. Remarks to the California State Democratic Convention (Obama, 2007e)
5. Remarks to the National Conference of Black Mayors (Obama, 2007f)
6. Southern New Hampshire Commencement address (Obama, 2007g)
7. Hampton University Annual Ministers' Conference (Obama, 2007h)
8. Take Back America 2007 (Obama, 2007j)
9. A Politics of Conscience (Obama, 2007k)
10. Remarks to the National Council of La Raza (Obama, 2007l)
11. Howard University Convocation (Obama, 2007m)
12. A Challenge for Our Times (Obama, 2007n)
13. A Change We Can Believe In (Obama, 2007o)
14. A Call to Serve (Obama, 2007p)
15. Iowa Caucus Night (Obama, 2008a)
16. New Hampshire Primary (Obama, 2008b)
17. The Great Need of the Hour (Obama, 2008c)
18. Kennedy Endorsement Event (Obama, 2008d)
19. The Past Versus the Future (Obama, 2008f)
20. Super Tuesday (Obama, 2008g)
21. Rebuilding Trust with New Orleans (Obama, 2008h)
22. A More Perfect Union (Obama, 2008i)
23. Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr (Obama, 2008j)
24. Building Trades National Legislative Conference (Obama, 2008k)
25. Remarks with Hilary Clinton in Unity (Obama, 2008m)
26. National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (Obama, 2008n)
27. The America we love (Obama, 2008o)
28. A New Era of Service (Obama, 2008p)
29. League of United Latin American Citizens (Obama, 2008q)
30. National Council of La Raza (Obama, 2008s)
31. 99th Annual Convention of the NAACP (Obama, 2008t)

32. National Urban League Conference (Obama, 2008u)
33. The American Promise (Obama, 2008v)
34. Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Gala (Obama, 2008w)
35. Espanola (Obama, 2008x)
36. Remarks of President Elect Obama ("victory speech") (Obama, 2008y)
37. Inaugural Speech (Obama, 2009)

(The full table of results is presented in Appendix Three.)

Given Obama's assertion in *Dreams From My Father* that the civil rights movement of the 1960s had been exhausted, it is interesting to note that more than one fifth of all his 2007/08 campaign speeches makes reference to the movement and thereby contributes context to his candidacy. Recurring themes identified within this subset of the speeches are Obama's regular mentions of the violence and dangers faced by the civil rights movement in the 1960s; his recognition of the movement's achievements, and the presentation of Obama's own civil rights credentials. The primary theme, however, is linked to the notion of connecting the successes of the civil rights movement to a broader narrative of progress, with Obama's assertion that he, as president, will ensure progress is maintained. Additionally, two of the speeches, the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* (Obama, 2007d) and *A More Perfect Union* (Obama, 2008i) provide significant insights into Obama's attitude towards the activities and legacy of the King era; these are discussed at length in both this chapter and in Chapter six (*Obama and redemption*). The speeches identified also contain many references to Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr, as well as references to John F Kennedy and Cesar Chavez; these are discussed in the section on intertextual links. Of the 37 speeches, 23 include the topic of equality, which includes references to the US Constitution; gender equality; Gay rights; Women's rights; liberty, and diversity. A significant subset of the speeches which reference the civil rights movement in some way therefore also extends civil rights to other sections of the population who may be discriminated against.

The violence of the period is remembered primarily through references to the tools and methods employed by authorities in the Southern states where the

protests took place, with fire hoses, tear gas, dogs, and billy clubs featuring in seven speeches. Representative examples include the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* (Obama, 2007d), the *Southern New Hampshire Commencement* address (Obama, 2007g), and *Remarks to the California State Democratic Convention* (Obama, 2007e), in which Obama acknowledges “the people who took a risk and changed the world”, and who “every time they were stopped, every time they were knocked down, they got back up, they came back, and they kept on marching”. Obama then argues that commemorating the Selma Voting Rights marches is not a celebration of African American history, but a celebration of American history, with the inference being that the determination to succeed and overcome adversity defines the American story, “that in the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it” (ibid). Obama connects the struggles of the 1960s with the continuing capacity of the American people to effect change, telling his audience in terms that evoke the differences between Booker T Washington and W E B DuBois that he cannot succeed without them “because there are few obstacles that can withstand the power of millions of voices calling for change. That's how change has always happened - not from the top-down, but from the bottom-up” (ibid). It is therefore argued that Obama locates his campaign within the tradition of grassroots activism.

Similarly, in *A Politics of Conscience*, Obama speaks of “all the clear-eyed, straight-backed, courageous young people who'd boarded buses and travelled down South to march and sit at lunch counters, and lay down their lives in some cases for freedom” (Obama, 2007k). These references remind Obama's audience of the trials and dangers faced by those involved in the civil rights movement, and the bravery and sacrifices of those who protested. Whilst the idea of sacrifice in Obama's speeches is discussed in the next chapter in the context of his ambition to redeem America for its failure to achieve racial equality, this notion also supports the argument made above that Obama finds value in the collectivism he sees in the civil rights movement, and which he consequently applies to his campaign.

It is interesting to note that Obama makes no mention of the non-state sanctioned violence meted out by white supremacist groups acting outside the law, implying that Obama is concerned with institutionalised racism and not with confronting those sections of the community, which perhaps accords with the bargaining concept described in the previous chapter. There are, however, three references (in Obama, 2007h, 2007k, and 2008c) to the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church; in each case, the bombing is listed alongside other events of the civil rights movement, suggesting that Obama is simply highlighting key moments from struggle, rather than focusing on white supremacist actions. There are no references to the Ku Klux Klan or lynchings in the campaign rhetoric, and the only four references to hanging (apart from a mention of the punishment faced by the Americans who rose up against British colonialism in 1775) relate to the 2006 case of the “Jena Six”, a group of African American students in Jena, Louisiana, who were charged with attempted murder and conspiracy after a school fight in which a white student was beaten. The fight occurred after three nooses were hung from a tree an African American student had sat under, in a spot normally used exclusively by white students. In his *The Great Need of the Hour* speech of January 2008, in which he talks of a racially defined justice deficit, Obama notes “we have a deficit in this country when there is Scooter Libby justice for some and Jena justice for others; when our children see nooses hanging from a schoolyard tree today, in the present, in the twenty-first century” (Obama, 2008c).

Sections of several speeches are evidently intended to recognise the achievements of the civil rights movement, and to tie Obama’s campaign to them. In his *Remarks to the California State Democratic Convention*, for instance, Obama affirms that “we are the nation ... that won civil rights, and Women’s Rights, and Voting Rights for all our people” (Obama, 2007e), an assertion that is echoed in *Take Back America 2007* (Obama, 2007j). In *A Challenge for Our Times* he again refers to victories such as the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, and to the NAACP, claiming that “I know that I stand on their shoulders, that their courage and sacrifice six decades ago makes it possible for me to run today for President of the United States”

(Obama, 2007n). There are echoes here of Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention address, wherein he remarked "I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me" (Obama, 2004), and to the *Howard University Convocation* speech: "It is because of these victories that a black man named Barack Obama can stand before you today as a candidate for President of the United States of America" (2007m). These examples provide further evidence of the narrative of progress that Obama proposes, with the victories of the civil rights movement of the 1960s laying the foundations for change.

For example, Obama points to Howard University's role in the civil rights movement, with alumni including Walter Washington, the first African American to become mayor of Washington DC, and civil rights lawyer Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP's Chief Counsel best known for his victory in the *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* case. He highlights the Selma Voting Rights march, Martin Luther King Jr's leadership, and the violence faced by protestors. He then expresses his determination to carry on the civil rights tradition, to constitute a Department of Justice with a civil rights Division "actually ... staffed with civil rights lawyers who prosecute civil rights violations, and employment discrimination, and hate crimes" and a "Voting Rights Section that actually defends the right of every American to vote without deception or intimidation". Far from seeing the movement as spent, Obama seeks to reinvigorate it and realise its ambitions. He claims that "it's not enough just to look back in wonder of how far we've come – I want us to look ahead with a fierce urgency at how far we have left to go. I believe it's time for this generation to make its own mark – to write our own chapter in the American story", and that he will be "a president whose story is like so many of your own – whose life's work has been the unfinished work of our long march towards justice" (Obama, 2007m).

Similarly, in the speech given at the 99th Annual Convention of the NAACP, Obama reassures his (African American) audience that "I will stand up for you in the same way that earlier generations of Americans stood for me"

(Obama, 2008t), whilst the speech to the *League of United Latin American Citizens* equates the ongoing African American struggle with that of Hispanic Americans: “Our separate struggles are really one ... The civil rights movement was your movement too, and its unfinished work is still the task of every American” (Obama, 2008q). Obama also emphasises his commitment to Latino civil rights in speeches such as *Remarks to the National Council of La Raza* (Obama, 2007l), which contains references to Martin Luther King Jr, racial injustice, and being a civil rights lawyer, and the *League of United Latin American Citizens*, in which he highlights how he worked with Latino organisations “as a civil rights lawyer to register Latino voters and ensure that Hispanics had an equal voice in City Hall” (Obama, 2008n).

As previously noted, Obama’s exposure to civil rights comes from his experience of community organising and as a civil rights lawyer. The corpus of speeches contains 45 references to his project-based community work in Chicago, and thirteen to his legal career. These are likely intended to reassure the electorate, particularly African American voters, that Obama has a strong connection to the civil rights movement and to disadvantaged communities, and that he is committed to equality of opportunity for all Americans. *A Challenge for Our Times* contains a representative example:

I walked away from a career on Wall Street, and went to work with a group of churches as a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago so I could fight for folks who had lost their jobs when the local steel plant closed. And ever since, I've been fighting to put the American Dream within reach for every American. That's why I went to work as a civil rights lawyer, and as a state Senator and as a U.S. Senator. That's why I expanded health care to 150,000 children and their parents in Illinois. That's why I led the fight to reform a death penalty system that had sentenced 13 innocent men to death. That's why I led the fight to reform racial profiling. And that's why you can trust that I'll fight for you as President.

(Obama, 2007n)

These links to civil rights also contribute to the ethos of Obama’s candidacy, encouraging audiences to associate him with the victories of the past and

with an opportunity to effect change in the future. Obama clearly positions himself as the champion for civil rights, fighting to ensure that the American Dream is attainable for all Americans, regardless of race. Finally, the last two speeches in the corpus place Obama's success in the context of civil rights victories. The *Victory Night* speech (Obama, 2008y) includes a quotation from Sam Cooke's 1963 civil rights song, *It's been a long time coming* ("It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America"). Further analysis of the value of Cooke to Obama is included in the section on extralinguistic factors below. Obama also makes a more explicit connection to the struggle for civil rights through the story of 106 year-old Ann Nixon Cooper,

born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons - because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin. And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America - the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can.

(ibid)

Obama also includes a brief reference to civil rights in his inauguration speech, reminding his audience of how far America has come in electing "a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served in a local restaurant" (Obama, 2009). It is clear that the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s is a prominent feature of Obama's campaign rhetoric, and that it provides context to Obama's candidacy as a narrative of progress. Calls for equality of economic opportunity and economic justice are evident in Obama's rhetoric but are infrequent and therefore have less significance than the more regular allusions to sacrifice and collective effort. These are intended to resonate with popular American values of self-reliance and self-determination but also have the effect of placing Obama's campaign as an opportunity for change comparable to the remarkable events of the 1950s and 1960s.

Intertextual analysis

The intertextual analysis conducted as the second level of the Discourse-Historical Approach was undertaken with contextual knowledge of the history of the African American struggle for civil rights. This knowledge has enabled connections to be made between Barack Obama's campaign rhetoric and the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, Dr Martin Luther King Jr and, to a lesser extent, John F Kennedy.

In *The Audacity of Hope*, Barack Obama reveals his ambition to follow the example set by his role models, describing his visits to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, where he thinks about the "nation's founders, who somehow rose above petty ambitions and narrow calculations to imagine a nation unfurling across a continent. And those like Lincoln and King who ultimately laid down their lives in the service of perfecting an imperfect union ... It is that process I wish to be part of" (Obama, 2007b: p316). This section demonstrates how and why Obama makes use of some of the rhetorical devices and linguistic strategies used by Lincoln and King to illustrate his arguments, thereby establishing points of reference for his audience to connect with.

Abraham Lincoln

Obama's campaign rhetoric reveals a fascination with the life, language, and legacy of Lincoln (1809-65), the Republican president who guided his country through the greatest crisis in its history and became the major figure in its history of emancipation with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation which freed nearly one and a half million enslaved people. Lincoln's assassination ensured his transformation into a national hero; a martyr for the Union, liberty and equality. As Richard Current explains:

Lincoln is both man and myth, sixteenth president and national folk hero. Either way he is superlative. The historical Lincoln appeals because of the grand if not entirely glorious events in which he had a central part. He appeals because of the subtleties of his personality, the echoing vibrations of which still have the power to stir a resonance in all but the most unresponsive. ... Lincoln the legend may be studied

as an entity in itself, apart from Lincoln the man, though it is not always possible to separate the unreal from the real. The two images, the legendary and the historical, overlap.

(Current, 1958: p287)

Obama's fascination with Lincoln culminated in a leitmotif that was inescapable during the days leading up to his inauguration in 2009. On 17 January Obama arrived in Washington by train, having recreated part of Lincoln's 1861 inaugural trip from Illinois. On 18 January he attended a concert at the Lincoln Memorial. A day later he took the presidential oath on the same Bible that Lincoln used for his first inauguration. After the ceremony Obama attended a dinner where some of Lincoln's favourite dishes – seafood stew, duck and pheasant – were served on a dinner service that replicated the crockery Mary Todd Lincoln chose for the White House. The Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies chose "A New Birth of Freedom" as the official theme for the inauguration, taking the phrase from the Gettysburg Address, and the ceremony itself took place in Lincoln's bicentennial year.

There are numerous comparisons that can be made between Obama and Lincoln: both were born in different states before settling in Illinois; both studied law and served in the Illinois state legislature. Both served one term in Congress or the Senate before running for President. Neither came from the established political class, nor had military backgrounds (although Lincoln did have limited military experience) and both were widely seen as outsiders. Both beat senators from New York to the nomination and then went on to appoint them as Secretary of State. Lincoln abolished slavery; Obama is the first African American president. Sean Wilentz describes such comparisons, which in many respects are simple coincidences, as "harmless twaddle" (in Nichols, 2009: n.p.) but the evidence suggests Obama actively sought them.

Obama is hardly the first US politician to invoke Lincoln; Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan also found value in associating themselves with the image of Lincoln that lives on in American memory. Michael Beschloss describes how Theodore Roosevelt hung a portrait of Lincoln above the fireplace in his White House office, claiming that

“so far as one who is not a great man can model himself upon one who was,” he would strive to do “what Lincoln would have done”. Beschloss also records how Truman “saw in Lincoln what *he* wanted to see”, and how even Richard Nixon called on Lincoln’s words during the Watergate Scandal: “If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything” (Beschloss, 2008: n.p.).

A mythic status has been accorded to Lincoln. Whilst myths have their roots in religious narrative and historical legend, they are also created as legacies of exceptional circumstances. The Lincoln myth is rooted in the lasting image of the man who reconciled a divided nation. Richard Current describes the many incarnations of Lincoln in popular memory, from family man and politician to war leader and peacemaker. Lincoln is the emancipator, the healer-president, the frontiersman and, in some readings, the instrument of God, “a martyr to the crusade for human liberty” (Current, 1958: p282). Stephen Oates argues that Lincoln as frontier hero and martyr-saint had by 1909 “begun to blend into a ‘composite American ideal’” (Oates, 1985: p7). Oates also highlights the particular reading of Lincoln as “perfect, personal emancipator” held by African Americans: “to the deeply emotional and religious slave ... Lincoln was an earthly incarnation of the Saviour of mankind” (ibid, p5). Current notes simply that “Lincoln, dead, was deified at once” and that “even in the South ... many mourned him as no ordinary mortal” (Current, 1958: p282).

Oates also describes Lincoln as “democracy’s mythic hero, who rises to the White House from utter obscurity, an all-American president who personifies the American ideal”, but he adds the caveat that this reading of Lincoln is what “Americans wish the man had been, not necessarily the way he was in real life” (Oates, 1985: p10). In the same way that the public memories of John F Kennedy and Dr King have been crystallised by their assassinations into sanitised myths of how they lived, what they stood for and what they achieved, so the Lincoln of American memory is the Saviour of the Union and the Great Emancipator, not the “white man’s President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men,” as Frederick Douglass described him in his

speech at the unveiling of the freedmen's monument to Lincoln in 1876. Douglass went on to acknowledge the difficulty of reconciling Lincoln's status as Great Emancipator with his political ambition to achieve national unity, stating that Lincoln "was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country" (Douglass, 1876: n.p.).

Yet, as Merrill Peterson notes, "the public remembrance of the past ... is concerned less with establishing its truth than with appropriating it for the present," and it is the enduring image of Lincoln as the saviour of the Union, the victorious leader in the Civil War, and the guardian of liberty and equality that has entered the American consciousness (Peterson, 1994: p236). Lincoln is seen as a man of the people, a representative American who overcame humble origins to rise to his country's highest office, and this origin myth is supported by Douglass's descriptions of him as "a son of toil" and "the plebeian" (Douglass, 1876: n.p.). As Peterson continues, "the magnitude of Lincoln's achievement combined with the drama of his death made his memory especially important to the American people. He was a masterpiece, a national treasure to be preserved, loved, revered and emulated" (Peterson, 1994: p236). Similarly, according to Oates, "Lincoln has such staying power because he is a larger-than-life mirror of ourselves, a god we have created in our idealized image of democratic man. As long as we believe in America, we will have towering Father Abraham as our greatest mythical hero" (Oates, 1985: p30).

Likewise, Richard Current argues that "The legendary Lincoln has grown into a protean god who can assume a shape to please almost any worshipper ... He embodies the virtues of the middle class ... He is Old Abe – and a natural gentleman. He is also Honest Abe and a being of superhuman shrewdness and cunning. He is Father Abraham, the wielder of authority, support of the weak. He is also an equal and a friend" (Current, 1958: p286). These are the attributes and character traits that Obama identifies with, and which he seeks to express through his own rhetoric.

It is the version of the myth that presents Lincoln as the man who reconciled a warring nation that resonates with the Obama campaign's appeals for national unity, whilst the self-made Lincoln who rose to the White House from humble origins mirrors Obama's own American story and aspirations. Just as Lincoln "unified a nation and set the captives free," so Obama seeks to "face the challenges of this millennium together, as one people – as Americans" and to become the first African American president (Obama, 2007c). In addition to its close association with civil rights, the Lincoln myth also has value to Obama in its capacity to remind audiences that, for all his success, Lincoln, like Obama, had little executive experience when he announced his candidacy for the presidency.

Writing in *Time Magazine* in 2005 Obama appears to support Douglass's view that Lincoln was first and foremost a "white man's President," claiming that he "cannot swallow whole the view of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator" and that he is "fully aware of his limited views on race. Anyone who actually reads the Emancipation Proclamation knows it was more a military document than a clarion call for justice". Yet he goes on to state that "in Lincoln's rise from poverty, his ultimate mastery of language and law, his capacity to overcome personal loss and remain determined in the face of repeated defeat – in all this, he reminded me not just of my own struggles. He also reminded me of a larger, fundamental element of American life – the enduring belief that we can constantly remake ourselves to fit our larger dreams" (Obama, 2005: n.p.). The effect, as Peggy Noonan swiftly asserted in the *Wall Street Journal*, is that "Obama said that he's a lot like Abraham Lincoln, only sort of better" (Noonan, 2005: n.p.). Obama acknowledged in *The Audacity of Hope* that he had been expertly filleted by Noonan, but he dismissed the idea that he was seriously "comparing [himself] to Lincoln" (Obama, 2007b: p123). Certainly he does not share Lincoln's humble origins, cannot claim to be a "son of toil" and he benefited from an extensive education that was denied to Lincoln. Yet he nevertheless finds value in evoking Lincoln's legacy during his 2007/08 campaign. His reading of Lincoln is selective in that he chooses to disregard the flaws and "limited

views on race” that characterize him as much as his views on equality and liberty, but it serves to provide useful reference points in his rhetoric with which the wider American public can identify.

It is Lincoln’s appeal for national unity in a time of crisis that perhaps speaks loudest to Obama. There are echoes of three of Lincoln’s speeches in particular in Obama’s rhetoric, which uses certain phrases and images to deliberately evoke Lincoln and the values and aspirations that he represents in the American consciousness:

i) The *House Divided* speech, with which Lincoln launched his unsuccessful campaign for the US Senate in 1858, and in which he declared that “a house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free” (Lincoln, 1858: n.p.). The speech “changed the national conversation on slavery” (Rutten, 2008: n.p.) and laid the foundations for Lincoln’s successful bid for the presidency.

ii) The *Cooper Union* speech of 1860 is one of Lincoln’s lesser-known but most important speeches, Harold Holzer (2004) arguing that it was responsible for securing him the presidency. The speech provides a vehicle for Lincoln to argue that the US Constitution originally prohibited slavery.

iii) Obama also borrows from Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address*, which James McPherson describes as “the most eloquent expression of the new birth of freedom” (McPherson, 1996: p185). The address was delivered by Lincoln on 19 November, 1863, at a ceremony marking the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Although the speech lasted fewer than three minutes, its scope encompassed broad themes that spoke clearly to a nation still reeling from the social and political impact of the Civil War. Lincoln invoked the Declaration of Independence to remind his audience of the core values on which the United States had been founded. He then used the address to create a transformative moment, describing the US Civil War as an opportunity for a “new birth of freedom” that would yield equality and justice for all, and which, significantly, would empower a democratic union at the expense of the rights of individual states. The

Gettysburg Address is ingrained in US history as an impassioned call for a democracy that would ensure that “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” (Lincoln, 1863: n.p.).

References to Lincoln, and particularly these three speeches, have been a recurrent feature in Obama’s rhetoric since the speech that first brought him widespread national attention, namely his October 2002 address at the Federal Plaza, Chicago, opposing the Iraq War. Obama concluded by awkwardly paraphrasing the Gettysburg Address, declaring that “nor should we allow those who would march off and pay the ultimate sacrifice, who would prove the full measure of devotion with their blood, to make such an awful sacrifice in vain” (Obama, 2002). Since 2002, Obama’s invocations of Lincoln have become more nuanced, with his *Announcement for President* and *A More Perfect Union* speeches serving as representative examples.

In the first of these, for instance, Obama deliberately references Lincoln’s calls for unity, stating that it was in Springfield “where North, South, East and West come together”, echoing the House Divided speech’s “we gathered from the four winds”, which he later quotes in full (Obama, 2007c). Recycling part of his *Time Magazine* feature to state that “people who love their country can change it. That’s what Abraham Lincoln understood” (ibid), Obama reassures his audience that he too is a patriot who seeks change to overcome division, and therefore binds his candidacy to the image of Lincoln as the nation’s healer.

The closing sentence of his *Announcement for President* speech (“Together, starting today, let us finish the work that needs to be done, and usher in a new birth of freedom on this Earth”) echoes parts of the Gettysburg Address, particularly “the unfinished work” (a reference to the US Constitution) and the idea of a “nation under God” having a “new birth of freedom”. Obama’s deliberate use of these phrases places him once more alongside Lincoln, with “a new birth of freedom” evoking what Carl Pedersen calls “the transformation of the carnage at Gettysburg to a renewal of the American promise” (Pedersen, 2010: p9). The call for renewal resonates with the quest

for national redemption for the sin of slavery and segregation, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Obama concludes that: “The life of a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer tells us that a different future is possible. He tells us that there is power in words. He tells us that there is power in conviction. That beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are one people. He tells us that there is power in hope” (Obama, 2007c). With this assertion, which emphasises Lincoln’s “self-made” success, Obama draws an overt parallel between himself and Lincoln; between Lincoln’s soaring rhetoric, conviction, calls for unity, and belief in “better days ahead”, and his own.

Direct citations from the *Gettysburg Address* can also be found in other speeches given by Obama in 2007 and 2008. Examples include references to the “unfinished work” (2007m, 2008i), the “last full measure of devotion” (2007d, 2008u), the “new birth of freedom” (2007k), and “government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (2008y). The effect of these repeated references to the *Gettysburg Address* is to recall the transformative moment when Lincoln sought to heal the nation’s wounds. By invoking the spirit of Lincoln at Gettysburg, Obama is using the image of Lincoln as the nation’s unifier and healer and encourages his audiences to infer that he promises to deliver a similar healing opportunity for a divided country, a nation at war and in economic turmoil.

The *A More Perfect Union* speech of 18 March 2008 uses a remarkably similar rhetorical structure to Lincoln’s *Cooper Union* speech. Just as *A More Perfect Union* addresses concerns about Obama’s troublesome priest, so Lincoln used the *Cooper Union* address to dissociate himself from the radical abolitionist John Brown, whose armed attempt to free enslaved blacks was seen by the Southern states as an aggressive extension of the Republican Party’s activities. Writing in the *New York Review of Books* in May 2008 Garry Wills acknowledges the similarities in the contexts in which the speeches were made, noting that “the men, both lawyers, both from Illinois, were seeking the presidency, despite what seemed their crippling connection with extremists”, and that “each decided to address [alleged connections with

radicals] openly in a prominent national venue, well before their parties' nominating conventions". (Wills, 2008: n.p.).

Obama commences his speech with a quotation, choosing the preamble from the US Constitution to provide context to his discussion of his interpretation of the Constitution. Specifically, Obama discusses how the Constitution's expressions of freedom and equality have been contradicted by America's history of segregation and slavery, highlighting the tension that has existed since Jefferson and the Founding Fathers between the reality of US race relations and the ideal encapsulated in the nation's founding documents. Lincoln uses a similar strategy in the *Cooper Union* speech by opening with a quotation from his opponent, Senator Douglas: "Our fathers, when they framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now" (Lincoln, 1860: n.p.). The quotation then serves as the springboard for Lincoln to discuss his own interpretation of the Constitution. He discusses how the Founding Fathers viewed slavery, and how neither local federal authorities nor the Constitution prevented the Federal Government from controlling or regulating slavery in the federal territories. Lincoln returns frequently to the Constitution, using his interpretation of it as the basis for his argument. Likewise, Obama uses his interpretation of the Constitution to explore how the reality of race relations in the USA falls short of the Founding Fathers' expectations, although it must also be noted that Obama does not idealise the country's Founders, and recognises the shortcomings of the Constitution. He notes that

The document they produced was eventually signed but ultimately unfinished. It was stained by this nation's original sin of slavery, a question that divided the colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate until the founders chose to allow the slave trade to continue for at least twenty more years, and to leave any final resolution to future generations.

(Obama, 2008i).

Obama's second paragraph opens by recalling the signing of the Constitution, with "two hundred and twenty-one years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple

words, launched America's improbable experiment in democracy". (Note that this phrase also emulates Lincoln's reference to "four score and seven years ago" at Gettysburg as well as Martin Luther King Jr's reference in "*I have a Dream*" to a moment "five score years ago" in Washington. Obama's use of this device places his oratory within a familiar tradition, encouraging his audience to associate him with Lincoln and King as his political role models and predecessors.)

Both Lincoln and Obama use the central section of their speeches to distance themselves from radicals, while signalling an understanding of the context in which the radicals' opinions and actions were forged. They acknowledge the contexts of Brown's and Wright's positions respectively, and neither is prepared to fully denounce those in agreement with them. In a further striking correspondence Lincoln and Obama use the closing section of their speeches to set out their vision of how the Union could be made more perfect, Lincoln asking Republicans to display good faith and understanding while Obama uses the example of Ashley Baia, a young, white woman who had been working to organize an African American community during Obama's campaign. Obama explains that Ashley supported her mother, who had cancer, lost her job and had to file for bankruptcy, and notes that Ashley did not blame her mother's troubles on "blacks who were on welfare and too lazy to work, or Hispanics who were coming into the country illegally". Ashley then asks why the other participants are supporting the campaign. An elderly African American says simply that he is there "because of Ashley". Obama calls this a "single moment of recognition", and he uses the story to encourage Americans to focus on what unites them, rather than on their grievances and internal division (Obama, 2008i). As Garry Wills comments, both Lincoln and Obama "looked for larger patterns under the surface bitternesses of their day. Each forged a moral position that rose above the occasions for their speaking" (Wills, 2008: n.p.). The *Cooper Union* speech therefore provides Obama with a useful template for discussing national unity and the promise of America.

Obama's campaign rhetoric makes several other references to Lincoln. In the *Super Tuesday* speech, for example, Obama speaks of how his campaign was launched with a reaffirmation "of the truth – that a house divided against itself cannot stand" (Obama, 2008g), and he describes how states "North, South, East and West" came together in a display of unity, which is followed with the proposition that "what began as a whisper in Springfield has swelled to a chorus of millions calling for change". Obama therefore traces a line of continuity between Lincoln as a political pioneer and his own announcement as a candidate for the US Presidency, Lincoln starting the "whisper in Springfield" which has grown louder over the centuries, finally reaching the "chorus of millions" in 2008. Here Obama unmistakably identifies himself as the heir of Lincoln.

On election night Obama's Communications Director, David Axelrod, instructed speechwriter Jon Favreau, who was drafting Obama's victory speech, to "lean into bipartisanship a little more", to be humbled by victory, and to "figure out a good Lincoln quote to bring it all together", suggesting lines from the conclusion of Lincoln's first inaugural address (in Thomas, 2008: n.p.). The result can be seen in the section of Obama's speech that calls for a new spirit of patriotism: "Let's remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House, a party founded on the values of self-reliance and individual liberty and national unity. As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours, we are not enemies but friends" (Obama, 2008y). Obama also invokes the Gettysburg Address in his acknowledgement of the role played by the electorate in proving that "more than two centuries later, a government of the people, by the people and for the people has not perished from this Earth" (ibid).

It can therefore be seen that Obama adopts a particular reading of the Lincoln myth to provide cultural reference points at every stage of his campaign. He is less interested in Lincoln the martyr than in the ideal of Lincoln as the saviour of the Union, the President who healed a divided nation. This is the type of presidency that Obama seeks to be associated with

and his many references to the unifying Lincoln provide a framework for his own appeals to national unity, racial harmony and making good the promise of America. In doing so, he begins a mythical presidential self-fashioning which places him firmly within the context of America's long struggle to overcome injustice and inequality, and which presents him as the fulfilment of Lincoln's quest for equality and unity.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, there was a tendency in the print media to equate Obama's victory with a fulfilment of Martin Luther King Jr's *Dream*, and it is inevitably tempting to draw comparisons between the two men. Stephen Tuck's description of King chimes with what we know of Obama in the sense that King "combined genuine intellectual insight with unsurpassed rhetoric. His biography meant that he could speak to the Southern Black church and to white northerners as well" (Tuck, 2010: p267). Tuck also writes of King's "nonviolent confrontational approach, which sought to redeem the oppressor – and purify the oppressed" (ibid), which resonates with the next chapter's focus on redemption. However, as described below, Obama does not seek to present himself as a new King but as his heir; the Joshua to King's Moses within a civil rights narrative of progress. There is also evidence to show that Obama binds his candidacy to a particular reading of King, which favours King's calls for justice and equality over his anti-capitalism and anti-militarism stance. For instance, of the 37 speeches that form the analytic corpus for this chapter, just ten include references to economic justice and economic opportunity.

There are 730 American streets named after Martin Luther King Jr., and countless schools. He is seen as a campaigner for right and is remembered particularly for his non-violent demands for integration and unity, so it is not surprising that Obama would want to tap into this memory and be considered in the same light during his 2007/08 election campaign. This is, however, an idealised memory that overlooks the fact that, in his day, King was considered a dangerous radical who believed in the redistribution of economic and political power, challenged the class system, and was labelled

a Communist. In *A Testament of Hope* (1968) he argued that segregation and racism were just one facet of dysfunctional American society:

The black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws – racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society is the real issue to be faced.

(in Washington, 1986: p315)

He was also a pacifist fiercely opposed to US militarism and imperialism; in his 1967 speech against the Vietnam War, *Beyond Vietnam*, he described the US as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world” (King, 1967: n.p.).

These are hardly the attributes that a prospective president would choose to be associated with, but nor are they the attributes that America remembers King for. Michael Eric Dyson states that “America has forgotten King’s radical legacy. We have banished him to blandness, turning his fountain of rage against injustice into a faucet of polite protest” (Dyson, 2000: p57), also noting that King’s death “radically altered white America’s perception of his life and convinced many to make a real commitment to racial justice” (Newsweek, 2008: n.p.). Edward P Morgan writes that “the public memory’s Martin Luther King Jr has been ideologically sanitized, detached from his own politics and their more radical ... implications” (in Romano and Raiford, 2006: p141), while Romano and Raiford also argue that “the image of Martin Luther King Jr perpetuated in collective memory has been effectively sterilized, made non-threatening and harmless by ignoring King’s struggles against poverty, his critique of capitalism, and his attack on American foreign policy” (ibid, pXVIII). Adam Fairclough, on the other hand, believes that focusing on King’s memory and civil rights legacy distorts the memory of the “struggle on the ground” which was the true driver of the civil rights movement (Fairclough, 1990: p392). Edward P Morgan agrees, noting that the elevation of King obscures the real civil rights movement, which he describes as “a moment built on the courageous and determined efforts of thousands upon thousands of everyday people – a revision of the past that removes the

struggle for justice [...] from the realm of what the people can do” (Romano and Raiford, 2006: p141).

Morgan further argues that King now stands not just as an icon for equality, but one claimed “to support just about any cause justifiable within the boundaries of mainstream ideological assumptions” (ibid, p146) and that “people of all persuasions now have a sense that he challenges them to be at their best and that he is articulating principles they believe in that are larger than race” (ibid, p148). The textual evidence below shows that this is the version of King Obama engages with, although Obama does attempt to reconnect the struggle for justice and equality with the realm of what the people can achieve, through his calls for unity and collective action.

King gave his most famous speech on 28 August, 1963, at the culmination of the civil rights March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Standing at the Lincoln Memorial, King refers to the Emancipation Proclamation, but notes that “one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free” (King, 1963: n.p.). He reminds his audience that America is founded on principles of freedom and justice for all, which he describes as a “promissory note” that America has failed to redeem. He says that “America has given the Negro people a bad cheque” (ibid) and that the March on Washington is about cashing that cheque to secure freedom, justice and racial equality, so that segregation and racism would give way to equality and freedom.

David Bobbitt argues that “*I have a Dream*’ captured the public imagination so completely that it constructed the symbolic syntax from which the nation has drawn its discourse about civil rights” (Bobbitt, 2004: p3). In effect, Bobbitt argues that the speech has defined the way America has approached race and civil rights for 50 years, and the *Dream* consequently acts as a shorthand for racial equality. Congressman John Lewis is the last surviving speaker from the March on Washington. He described the impact of the speech in more emotive terms, saying that “King had the power, the ability, and the capacity to transform those steps on the Lincoln Memorial into a monumental area that will forever be recognized. By speaking the way he did, he educated, he inspired, he informed not just the people there, but

people throughout America and unborn generations” (in Suarez, 2003: n.p.). Some of the images and metaphors associated with King’s rhetoric are evident in Obama’s campaign speeches, and there are also frequent direct references to him, as discussed below. Several speeches have an overt connection with King, such as *The Great Need of the Hour* (Obama, 2008c), *Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr* (Obama, 2008j), the *99th Annual Convention of the NAACP* speech (Obama, 2008t); and the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* speech (Obama, 2007d), which Obama gave at the Brown Chapel in Selma, Alabama at the invitation of Congressman John Lewis in March 2007, to commemorate the march on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on what became known as Bloody Sunday.

In the 1950s and 1960s, attempts to register African American voters in Alabama were blocked by state officials, and white supremacist groups. To be eligible to vote, African Americans were obliged to pass literacy tests, and to answer often unanswerable questions set by the registrars. On 2 January, 1965, in defiance of the laws that prevented speakers from talking about civil rights to more than two people, Martin Luther King addressed a meeting in Brown Chapel. He described Selma as a “symbol of bitter-end resistance to the civil rights movement in the Deep South” (in Remnick, 2010: p5), and the Selma Voting Rights Movement was officially launched. A month later, during a related protest, a state trooper shot and killed protestor Jimmie Lee Jackson in a café as he tried to protect his mother. In response, King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference called for protestors to march from Selma to the state capital Montgomery to confront Governor Wallace about the killing.

The first march took place on 7 March, "Bloody Sunday". Six hundred protestors, led by John Lewis, marched peacefully until they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, when they were attacked by police using clubs and tear gas. Several people required hospital treatment and Lewis himself suffered a fractured skull. Television reports showed marchers left bloodied and injured, which shocked the country and roused more support for the movement. (The leaders of the civil rights movement came to appreciate the

power of images and film footage and “in its campaign for racial equality and justice, would come to equate pictures with weapons” (Berger, 2010: p3)). Two days later, King led around 2,500 marchers out to the Bridge, where he held a short prayer session before turning around in compliance with a court order preventing them from marching all the way to Montgomery. A third march reached the outskirts of Montgomery without major incident on 24 March and 25,000 people marched to the state capital building the next day. King reassured the crowd that the cause would triumph because “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice” (King, 1965: n.p.), a motif that surfaces in several of Obama’s speeches.

In April 2008, for instance, Obama spoke in remembrance of Martin Luther King, noting that “Dr. King once said that the arc of the moral universe is long, but that it bends toward justice. But what he also knew was that it doesn’t bend on its own. It bends because each of us puts our hands on that arc and bends it in the direction of justice” (Obama, 2008j). Similarly, in his victory night speech in Grant Park, he praised his supporters and the voters who decided to “put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day” (Obama, 2008y). This is an image that once again plays to Obama’s calls for unity and collective effort, encapsulated in the chants of “yes, we can”. It reminds us of the ways in which Obama seeks to connect the civil rights movement with the capacity of the American people to effect change; of his belief in the potential for grassroots activism to drive social change from the bottom up, and of the notion that Obama is part of a continuing narrative of progress that has reached another milestone with his election as president.

Bloody Sunday changed public opinion about the civil rights movement, and the marches had a measurable effect in Washington. On 15 March, President Lyndon Baines Johnson presented Congress with a bill that would become the Voting Rights Act, a significant victory for the movement. The marches across the bridge are recognised as one of the most important events in the history of civil rights in America, and are commemorated in March each year.

Three of King's colleagues, John Lewis, CT Vivian, and Joseph Lowery, were in the audience at the Brown Chapel to listen to Obama's speech in 2007. These three prominent members of the civil rights movement were representatives of the people in whose footsteps Obama had to follow, and whose endorsement he sought in order to give his campaign credibility and traction within the African American community. As previously noted, Obama is too young to have marched with King and does not come from the civil rights tradition of the 1960s. His connection to the "halcyon decade" (Dowd Hall, 2005: p1234) is second hand: he is not descended from enslaved blacks, and he is well off, well-educated, and part of the political system. For these reasons it was important for Obama to earn credibility with the African American electorate. As discussed in chapter four, the need to elicit trust from African Americans, particularly those who lived through the 1950s and 1960s, is an important motivation behind Obama's presentation of his identity and ethos.

Obama then uses his Brown Chapel speech to credit the Selma marches with bringing his parents together, suggesting that "there was something stirring across the country because of what happened in Selma, Alabama, because some folks are willing to march across a bridge. So [his parents] got together and Barack Obama Jr was born. So don't tell me I don't have a claim on Selma, Alabama. Don't tell me I'm not coming home to Selma, Alabama" (Obama, 2007d). Obama positions himself as a product of the Selma marches, stating that his biracial heritage is the result of the hope they inspired. However, the marches took place in 1965; Obama was born in 1961, when his parents' marriage was not recognised in more than twenty states. He is therefore being creative with the truth in coopting the Selma movement to meet his own agenda, which further demonstrates the importance he attaches to forging a connection with the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Obama also uses the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* speech to propose himself as the heir to the civil rights movement, as the person in whom the movement could put their faith, and as the leader who will help the

nation to realise Martin Luther King's *Dream*. Taking inspiration from the Exodus story, Obama identifies himself as the leader who will take his people into a Promised Land of justice and equality. He treated the speech like a sermon, and with the blessing and approval of the Reverend Otis Moss Jr, a former co-pastor with Martin Luther King of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. According to Obama, Moss told him that "if there's some folks out there who are questioning whether or not you should run, just tell them to look at the story of Joshua, because you're part of the Joshua generation" (Obama, 2007d). Obama accepts this advice and uses the story of Moses and Joshua in Exodus as the foundation on which to build legitimacy with the African American community. Obama's engagement with this story is explored in further detail in the next chapter but it is useful to introduce the Exodus narrative here to highlight its connection to the freedom struggle.

The Book of Exodus tells the story of the Hebrews' escape to the Promised Land from Egyptian slavery, a story which resonated with enslaved communities on American plantations. Led by Moses, the Hebrew slaves are crowned a chosen people, destined for a promised land where they will act as an example to the rest of the world, a "light unto nations". "Exodus", says Anna Hartnell, "is thus a narrative about freedom, one that speaks to the relationship between master and slave, between land, race and nation, and the idea that a people might be singled out to receive special favour in the eyes of God" (Hartnell, 2011: p1). Hartnell argues that Exodus is a story that has been used to describe the progress of American history, from the arrival of the first settlers fleeing from religious persecution and the later fight for freedom from British rule, but is also a story that has been appropriated by African Americans "to imagine their liberation from the suffering engendered by US slavery and its enduring legacy of racism" (ibid, p2). David Remnick agrees, noting that "from the early black church through the civil rights movement, preachers used the trope of Moses and Joshua as a parable of struggle and liberation, making an explicit comparison between the Jewish slaves in Pharaoh's Egypt and the black American slaves on Southern plantations" (Remnick, 2010: p19). Melani McAlister also describes how "the Exodus story had a long history in black thought well before the rise of the

civil rights movement in the late 1940s. It was central, for example, to mainstream black churches during most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as part of the language through which the political hope of worldly liberation for African Americans was both articulated and contained” (McAlister, 2005: p 68).

In the 1950s and 1960s, African American ministers found that interpreting Exodus to support the objectives of the civil rights movement provided compelling content for protests and speeches. Joseph Lowery, one of the founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and a member of the audience at Selma’s Brown Chapel when Obama spoke in 2007, describes the message of Exodus as central to African American interpretations of the Bible: “the gospel to [African Americans] was a liberating gospel, because when they read about God delivering Moses and the Children of Israel, they saw the parallel between the experience of the Israelites and the black experience. And they figured that God was gonna deliver them” (ibid, p69). Martin Luther King Jr. in particular found value in connecting African Americans’ quest for freedom with the notion of a Promised Land, and he used Exodus to articulate his calls for liberation and a transformation of the African American experience.

Obama therefore sees his campaign at the head of a “Joshua generation” who will succeed where the Moses generation fell short, with his candidacy assuming the role of a natural successor to King. Notions of the Promised Land and Obama’s articulation of this narrative are discussed in detail in the next chapter (*Obama and redemption*), and with particular consideration given to its relationship with Sacvan Bercovitch’s exposition of the American Jeremiad. The next chapter further explores how Obama’s approach to leadership is constructed around calls for unity and sacrifice for the common good, with the goal of effecting a redemption of the country’s “sin of slavery” (Obama, 2008i).

In August 2008, Obama accepted his party’s nomination for the presidency at the Democratic Convention in Denver, which coincided with the 45th anniversary of King’s *Dream* speech (the convention had been scheduled

long before it became likely that Obama would be nominated, but there were many in the media who seized the opportunity to link Obama with King). Perhaps surprisingly, Obama did not refer to King by name during his speech, although he did speak of the promise of America, and how “it is that promise that forty-five years ago today brought Americans from every corner of this land to stand together on a Mall in Washington, before Lincoln’s Memorial, and hear a young preacher from Georgia speak of his dream” (Obama, 2008v). The significance of the occasion evidently affected Obama. David Remnick describes (Obama’s Chief Campaign Advisor) David Axelrod’s memory of how Obama was affected by this passage whilst he was rehearsing the speech: “‘There was a catch in his voice’, Axelrod recalled. Obama excused himself and took a short, calming walk around the room. ‘This is really hitting me,’ he said. Obama told Axelrod and Jon Favreau (Obama’s Chief Speechwriter) that he was coming to realize what a ‘big deal this is’” (Remnick, 2008: n.p.).

Obama also calls Dr Martin Luther King Jr. to mind in other speeches through the use of certain phrases and imagery. For instance, in several speeches (e.g. Obama, 2007m, 2007o and 2008p) Obama explains that he is seeking the presidency “because of what King called ‘the fierce urgency of now’”, a conscious, intertextual link to King’s claim that the March on Washington is to

remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

(King, 1963: n.p.)

In the *Super Tuesday* speech, Obama uses images and phraseology that also evoke King, describing how “the whisper in Springfield” crossed “the corn fields of Iowa”, “the hills of New Hampshire”, “the deserts of Nevada” and the “coast of South Carolina” (Obama, 2008g). The motif is an obvious echo of King’s “hilltops of New Hampshire”, “mighty mountains of New York”, “Alleghenies of Pennsylvania”, “snow capped Rockies of Colorado” and

“curvaceous slopes of California”, a vision of how equality and justice will spread across America (King, 1963: n.p.). Likewise, as King’s *Dream* concludes with his call to “let freedom ring”, so Obama closes the *Super Tuesday* speech with “what began as a whisper ... will ring out across this land...” (Obama, 2008g).

In *The Great Need of the Hour*, given in King’s church in Atlanta on the anniversary of his birthday, Obama asks his audience to walk with him; to march with him against the “politics in this country that seeks to drive us apart – that puts up walls between us” (Obama, 2008c), which can be read as a metaphor for America’s racial, political and economic divisions in America. In calling on his audience to walk with him, which he also does in his *Announcement for President* (2007c) and *A Change We Can Believe In* (2007o) speeches, Obama is referencing King’s “we cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead” (King, 1963). King builds a sense of progression, an impetus that is established through images of movement such as “people come here”, “march ahead”, “a quest for freedom”, and “no turning back”. These collocations are apparently echoed in Obama’s speeches, particularly in his *Announcement for President* speech where he employs images of movement that include “travelled”, “journey”, “converge”, “North, South, East and West come together”, “a new generation has risen up”, “march to freedom”, “a long way to go”, “push us forward”. The effect is to suggest that the civil rights struggle has a forward momentum in a narrative of progress that is maintained by the people, and that Obama is providing the leadership for a reinvigorated civil rights movement.

Michael Eric Dyson argues that “There would be no Barack Obama without King”, such was his impact on the course of the civil rights movement (Newsweek, 2008: n.p.). King, as the iconic campaigner for equality whose nonviolent protests were driven by a groundswell of popular support, is a formative role model for Obama; the pinnacle of African American leadership, to be admired and emulated. It is the urgency of King’s calls for equality and his belief in a collective effort that looks past skin colour to the content of

people's characters that speaks loudest to Obama, not his stance on American foreign policy, unionisation or Capitalism. King, as icon, is therefore a prominent presence in the Obama campaign, held up as a Moses who paved the way for Obama's Joshua generation to reach the Promised Land.

John F Kennedy

Whilst Obama speaks regularly about Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Lincoln, and quotes them regularly, he rarely speaks about John F Kennedy. This is surprising given that Kennedy is held up as the high watermark of Democrat presidents, an ideal against which every Democrat candidate for the presidency, Obama included, has been invariably measured. There is no overt mention of Kennedy in *Dreams from my Father*, although Obama does describe how his father "had been selected by Kenyan leaders and American sponsors to attend a University in the United States" (Obama, 2007a), which refers to the educational programme for young Kenyans established by Tom Mboya, to which the Kennedy family donated money. In the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* speech, Obama tells his audience that the Kennedy's support for the programme enabled his father to come to America, where he would meet Obama's mother, and he therefore implies that his existence is only possible because of the Kennedys:

So the Kennedys decided we're going to do an air lift. We're going to go to Africa and start bringing young Africans over to this country and give them scholarships to study so they can learn what a wonderful country America is. This young man named Barack Obama got one of those tickets and came over to this country.

(Obama, 2007d)

Obama Senior did indeed benefit from the Mboya programme but he arrived in America in 1959, a year before Mboya asked for the Kennedys' support. Despite its factual inaccuracies, the speech does demonstrate Obama's desire to forge a connection with both Kennedy and the civil rights movement.

As is the case with Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr, the collective memory of President John F Kennedy owes a great deal to popular

mythologizing. Kennedy's accomplishments are also limited, particularly in terms of civil rights. Whilst he did avert nuclear war with Russia and set in motion the quest to put a man on the moon, his presidency was cut short before he could effect the legislation that Lyndon Baines Johnson would become known for: the Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, and the Great Society programme. However, Kennedy is perhaps the first president to have been fully in the national gaze through the medium of television, and the idealised image he presented set a benchmark for how voters expect their presidents to look and act: suave, elegant, sophisticated, erudite, and wholesome. Jon Roper argues that Kennedy "attempted to define and personify a style of presidential leadership in an image in which his assassination would both crystallize and mythologically confirm in the popular mind: the president as all-American hero" (Roper, 2000: p1), and Martin Walker suggests that the Kennedy years mark the "last time America felt genuinely good about itself" (Walker, 1993: p14).

It is easy to draw comparisons between Kennedy and Obama. Both are Ivy League graduates, erudite speakers and published authors. Both are seen as suave, polished and photogenic, with equally photogenic young families. Both have broken barriers; in Kennedy's case it was bigotry against his Catholicism, in Obama's it was, and continues to be, race. Kennedy ordered an end to gender discrimination. Obama signed the Lily Ledbetter fair pay act. Both gave speeches to large, adoring crowds in Berlin. Christoph von Marschall's 2007 biography of Obama even describes the candidate as *Der schwarze Kennedy* (the black Kennedy), and Phillip Sherwell records former Republican communications strategist Frank Luntz's appraisal of Obama as "the American dream embodied in a young man running for Senate, a new Jack or Bobby Kennedy" (Sherwell, 2007: n.p.).

These are, however, superficial comparisons and there is just as much that divides the two men as there is common ground. Kennedy was born into wealth, for instance; Obama was not, and whilst Obama has espoused civil rights for most of his adult life, Kennedy was initially reluctant to support the movement. Candace Allen notes that "the Kennedys came into office thinking

of the Negro as little more than an exploitable Democratic Resource and then always with an eye on the votes of the Dixiecrats – those southern Democrats opposed to any movement toward racial equality” (Allen, 2013: n.p.). Yet Kennedy owed his own election in large part to African American voters. When Martin Luther King was arrested in 1960, Kennedy telephoned King’s wife to express sympathy, something his presidential rival, Nixon, did not do. Kennedy capitalised on the call, convincing many African Americans that he was supportive of their cause and persuading them to vote for him. He went on to win the election by a narrow margin, but with overwhelming African American support in places such as Michigan and South Carolina.

As president, though, he was reluctant to intervene in the struggles of the South unless Federal laws had been contravened. If he felt he owed African Americans a debt, Kennedy didn’t show it and privately he urged protest leaders to slow down, and to avoid confrontation. The administration’s initial reluctance to support civil rights can be explained in part by fears of alienating white voters in the South, but it can also be argued that the Cold War and the Cuban missile crisis were perceived to be more pressing issues. However, by 1963 the administration came to realise that it was politically expedient to move towards civil rights, if for foreign policy rather than domestic reasons. Secretary of State Dean Rusk commented that “the issue of race relations deeply affects the conduct of our foreign policy relations”, acknowledging that America’s reputation abroad was being tarnished by violence, segregation, and racism (Young, 2013: p31). The Soviet newspaper *Pravda* ran headlines about the “monstrous crimes among racists in the USA”, whilst China’s Mao Zedong said the Kennedy administration was “the chief culprit for the ruthless persecution of Negroes, champion of racial discrimination, and main source of policy of oppression and aggression throughout the world”. Martin Luther King Jr put it more succinctly: “Mr Kennedy is battling for the minds of men in Africa and Asia ... and they’re not going to respect the USA if she deprives men and women of the basic rights of life because of the color of their skin” (ibid, p31).

On 11 June 1963, the day he sent the US National Guard to protect two African American students entering the University of Alabama and forcibly remove State Governor Wallace from the entrance, Kennedy chose to give an address on the subject of civil rights, against the advice of his administration, and he went on national radio to discuss his actions and to call on America to recognise civil rights as a moral cause. He stated “one hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs ... are not fully free”, foreshadowing the “one hundred years later still the Negro is not free” that King would use in his speech at the March on Washington a few weeks later (Kennedy, 1963: n.p.).

Kennedy also asked white Americans to imagine trading places with African Americans, a technique which King had previously used in his letter from Birmingham Jail. Kennedy asked: “if a negro can’t enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?” (ibid). Kennedy went on to acknowledge the foreign policy implications of not addressing civil rights, noting that “We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is the land of the free except for the Negroes?” (ibid). The speech therefore frames the racial problem as one of a lack of common decency, a problem aimed explicitly at white Americans, not an economic or political issue. He makes a plea for national unity arguing “this is one country. It has become one country because all of us and all the people who came here had an equal chance to develop their talents” (ibid), which echoes Ellison and Du Bois’ vision for a culturally pluralistic America where each race has equal status and makes a unique contribution to society. Quite possibly this also provides the template for Obama’s more memorable “E pluribus unum [...] There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America—there’s the United States of America” (Obama, 2004). However, it should be noted that Obama does not frame the racial problem in the same terms that Kennedy does. In the *A More Perfect Union* speech, Obama refuses to accept Jeremiah Wright’s “profoundly distorted view of this country - a view that sees white racism as

endemic” (Obama, 2008i). Instead he argues that racism is a trait evident in both the black and white communities, and manifested in an anger born of frustration at the “legalized discrimination”, the “wealth and income gap”, the “lack of economic opportunities for black men”, as well as white perceptions that African Americans get “an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college” (ibid).

Kennedy’s civil rights speech is arguably one of the most important given by a president on the subject. Whilst Kennedy’s legislative achievements in this respect are limited and it is Lyndon Baines Johnson who gets the credit for the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, Obama told journalist Richard Wolffe that “the country was profoundly different as a consequence of JFK. It’s fair to say he helped release the energy, that his presidency helped create the space for a whole generation to reimagine civil rights” (Wolffe, 2009: p321).

Given Kennedy’s role in promoting civil rights it is perhaps surprising that there are no immediately obvious references to him in this respect in Obama’s rhetoric or books. Mentions of Kennedy in *The Audacity of Hope* tend to be connected to foreign policy, the space programme, and the courage of voting with your convictions. In the full reference corpus of Obama’s speeches, there is only one direct quote from Kennedy (“we must never negotiate out of fear, but we must never fear to negotiate”) which appears in three speeches not included in the analytic corpus as they do not include the topic of race. These references are used to support Obama’s foreign policy position of reaching out to countries such as Iran and North Korea. There are also numerous references to Kennedy’s ambition to put a man on the moon. Connections with Kennedy’s civil rights legacy are less evident and Obama’s engagement with JFK would therefore appear to be limited to connecting with the leadership example he set as a president prepared to negotiate with his opposition; his ambition to inspire his people to set (and achieve) challenging ambitions, and his call for collective action. Indeed, the phrase for which Kennedy’s inaugural speech is best known (“ask not what your country can do for you, ask rather what you can do for

your country” (Kennedy, 1961b: n.p.)), can also be seen in Obama’s unofficial campaign slogan, “Yes, we can”. For example:

It was the call of workers who organized; women who reached for the ballots; a President who chose the moon as our new frontier; and a King who took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the Promised Land. Yes we can to justice and equality. Yes we can to opportunity and prosperity. Yes we can heal this nation. Yes we can repair this world. Yes we can.

(Obama, 2008b)

Chapter six (*Obama and redemption*) explores this call for unity in detail, but it is useful to highlight here that “yes we can” also has a civil rights pedigree. It echoes the more familiar civil rights refrain “we shall overcome”, but it also has its origins in the motto of the United Farm Workers, whose slogan “sí se puede” (yes, it can be done) was adopted by labour leader and civil rights activist Cesar Chavez. The slogan is closely associated with Hispanic civil rights and although Obama used the English translation, “yes we can” for his Presidential campaign, he also used “Sí se puede” to bring civil rights to the fore in states with large Hispanic populations, such as Texas. In a 2006 article in support of a protest against proposals to adopt more severe penalties for illegal immigrants (which would disproportionately affect Hispanic immigrants), Jesse Jackson linked the protest to the wider civil rights movement: “The earth is shaking as immigrants rise up around the country with their voices singing ‘sí se puede’ - Yes, we can. This uprising is in the best tradition of the American Dream and the civil rights struggle for freedom”; Jackson subsequently writes that *sí se puede* is Spanish for “We Shall Overcome” (Jackson, 2006: n.p.).

Extralinguistic factors

The extralinguistic variables that reinforce Obama’s positioning of his campaign in the context of the civil rights movement are evident primarily in the locations that Obama chooses for his major speeches, and in the music that forms the soundtrack to his campaign. Given Obama’s proven interest in the language and legacy of Abraham Lincoln, it was perhaps inevitable that he chose to announce his candidacy in front of the Old State Capitol building

in Springfield, Illinois, where Lincoln had worked. The building was the site of Lincoln's own announcement of his intention to run for senator, and was also the venue for his *House Divided* speech. Obama explicitly links his campaign with Lincoln, telling his audience that "in the shadow of the Old State Capitol, where once Lincoln called on a divided house to stand together ... I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for President" (Obama, 2007c).

Arguably, Obama's use of "shadow" also contains an echo of Martin Luther King's *Dream*, which opened at the Lincoln Memorial with "five score years ago, a man in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation" (King, 1963), but the intertextual link here is tenuous. What is more certain is that, by using the building as the backdrop to his speech, Obama implies that his candidacy is at once inspired by Lincoln's example and a part of the civil rights tradition. This implication is repeatedly made throughout the 2007/08 campaign and programme of events surrounding the 2009 inauguration ceremony, including the "We are one" inauguration celebration concert which took place at the Lincoln Memorial on the Washington Mall on 18 January 2009.

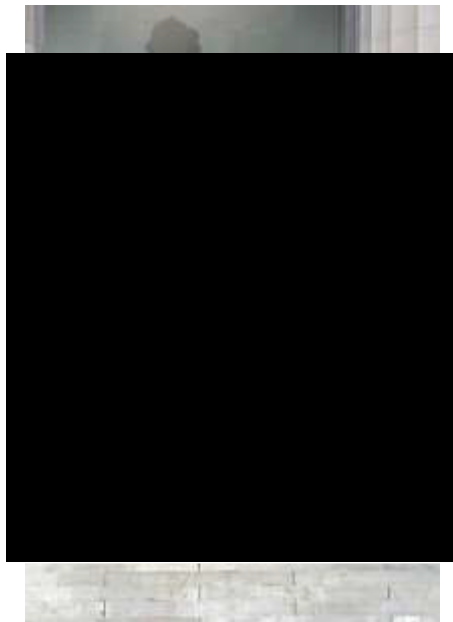


Figure 4: Barack and Michelle Obama on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the "We are one" inauguration celebration concert. (18 January 2009. Photo: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images North America.)

The concert featured celebrities such as Samuel L Jackson speaking of Abraham Lincoln, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King; Ashley Judd and Forest Whitaker referencing John F Kennedy and Faulkner; Tom Hanks reciting excerpts of Lincoln's speeches during a performance of Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, and Jamie Foxx and Steve Carell speaking of Thurgood Marshall and Robert Kennedy. The inauguration celebration's evident determination to connect Obama's victory with the struggles and personalities of the civil rights movement can be seen as part of Obama's commodification of the movement; his attempts to use the imagery, legacy and memory of civil rights as the contextual background to his candidacy.



Figure 5: Barack Obama, Hillary and Bill Clinton lead the march over the Edmund Pettus Bridge to commemorate the Selma Voting Rights Marches. (4 March 2007. Photo: Butch Dill/EPA.)

As discussed, Obama spoke in Selma, Alabama, to commemorate the Selma Voting Rights Marches, connecting his candidacy with the “Moses generation” of leaders who campaigned for civil rights in the 1960s. His main rival for the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton, also spoke in Selma at a separate event that day (highlighting how Voting Rights had made it possible for her to run for the presidency), and former President Bill Clinton was inducted into the National Voting Rights Museum hall of fame. The Clintons and Obama subsequently joined in the re-enactment of the crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which draws the annual commemorations to a close.

Obama and Clinton led the march over the bridge, with the Reverend Lowery and Congressman John Lewis also in the front row. The symbolism of Obama leading a predominantly African American crowd – including many who had participated in the original Selma marches – over the bridge is striking, and was reinforced when he pushed civil rights leader Fred Shuttlesworth’s wheelchair across the bridge; the mantle of leadership passing to the driving force behind a new generation of civil rights leaders.

The venue for Obama’s March 2008 *A More Perfect Union* speech was the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, which has a remit to “illuminate the constitutional debates that affect the lives of all Americans” and “inspire active citizenship by celebrating the American constitutional tradition”.¹ The Center is located near Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence was drawn up and the Constitution debated, and therefore provides a symbolic connection with the *A More Perfect Union* speech’s dissection of the Constitution to explore the concepts of race and equality set out in the document. Flanked by eight United States flags to underscore his patriotism, Obama refers to “a hall that still stands across the street” in which a group of men “launched America’s improbable experiment in democracy” (Obama, 2008i). The speech thereby sets out Obama’s position on race against the backdrop of the US Constitution and the US Declaration of Independence, which proclaims “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”.²

¹ <http://constitutioncenter.org/about>

² A transcript of the Declaration of Independence can be viewed at http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

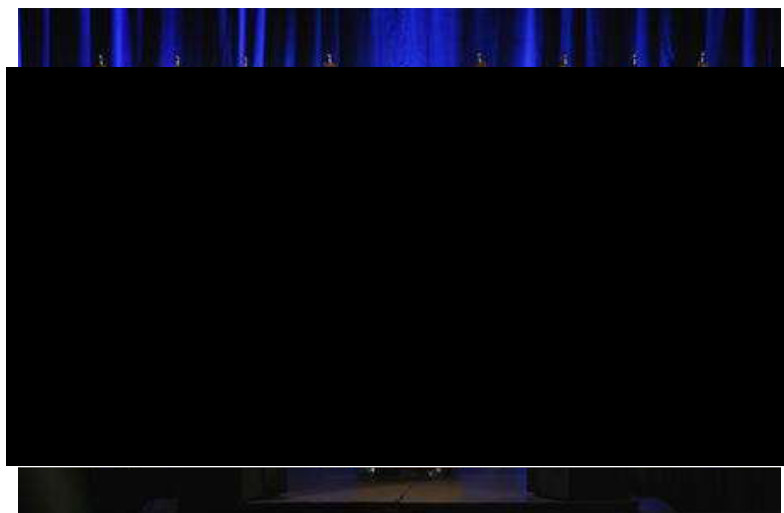


Figure 6: Barack Obama gives his *A More Perfect Union* speech at the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia. (19 March 2008. Photo: Tim Shaffer/Reuters.)

There are two songs that connect Obama's political aspirations with the civil rights movement. The first of these is *Keep on Pushing*, the walk-on track for Obama's address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention.³ Written by Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions, the song includes the lyrics "I've got to keep on pushing / I can't stop now / Move up a little higher / Some way, somehow" and "What's that I see / A great big stone wall / Stands there ahead of me / But I've got my pride / And I'll move on aside / And keep on pushin'" (Mayfield, 1964: n.p.).

The song was released in 1964, the year that President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act and that Martin Luther King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Koos (2012: n.p.) describes Mayfield as "a musician that came to define the music of the civil rights movement" and as "the indisputable forefather of radical soul music", and records Mayfield's assertion that "*we're believing very strongly in equality and freedom for all, but especially we people who are darker than blue... we're not trying to offend anyone, but basically telling it like it is.*" The song's message of self-improvement, ambition and determination has value to political campaigning, but its call for continued struggle until all obstacles have been overcome provides an overt

³ Evidence of *Keep on pushin'* being played at Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention speech can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awQkJNVsgKM>

civil rights context. The audience sees an African American politician walking to the podium and hears a popular civil rights anthem that many will quickly associate with the 1960s. Before Obama has said a word, the audience has been conditioned to make a connection between Obama's career and potential, and the civil rights movement of four decades earlier.

Brian Ward argues that the rise of soul music is intimately associated with African Americans' assertion of their identity: "Many blacks sought an antidote to white assumptions of cultural superiority by self-consciously valorizing their own culture and celebrating peculiarly African American experiences and practices on the critical repositories of identity and worth" (Ward, 1998: p182). He suggests that soul has come to be defined as an African American music form: "It is only really possible to understand soul's significance by placing it within twin historical contexts of change in mass black consciousness generated by an evolving black freedom struggle and the steady secularisation of black culture which culminated in the late 1950s and 1960s" (ibid, p184). However, it cannot be asserted that soul music was a driving force behind the civil rights movement or that the form has a unique civil rights association. As Ward again notes: "the claims that R&B provided some sort of explicit running commentary on the movement, with the men and women of soul emerging as notable participants, even leaders, tacticians and philosophers of the black struggle, have usually depended more on partisan assertion than hard evidence"⁴ (ibid, p290).⁴ Soul singers such as Sam Cooke and Curtis Mayfield may have contributed to the soundtrack of the King era (and later to the Obama campaign), but it is not accurate to say that they took an active role in leading the movement.

For instance, there is no documented evidence to show that Sam Cooke played an active role in the movement before 1964, when his song *A Change is Gonna Come* was published on an album sold in aid of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). However, Ward argues that Cooke was careful to "tiptoe around the sensibilities of his mainstream white

⁴ Brian Ward's 2011 exploration of the ways in which the 2007/08 election mobilised memories of the 1960s offers further interesting insights into Obama's connection to and co-opting of the period.

audience” (ibid, p291) courting “a biracial audience for his singles and an overwhelmingly white audience for his albums” (ibid, p147). In 1965 he released an edited version of the song, removing the verse “I go to the movies / I go downtown / Someone keeps telling me / Not to hang around” in order not to offend white sensibilities. Cooke therefore adopted a non-confrontational approach similar to that which Mark Street believes Obama has taken, going to “considerable lengths to reassure whites” (Street, 2009: p80).

The song that Obama used to close the majority of his campaign speeches serves a similar function. *Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours*,⁵ the single released by Stevie Wonder in 1970, is ostensibly a love song. However, its refrains (“You got my future in your hands” and “Signed, sealed, delivered, I'm yours”) also speak to the ownership of his campaign that Obama sought to foster in his supporters. The inference is that it is in the gift of the electorate to raise Obama to the presidency and, again, that there is a connection with the ambition and determination that was a hallmark of the civil rights movement. Wonder, a known civil rights advocate who also led efforts to recognise the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. with a national holiday, performed the song at the 2008 Democratic National Convention and at one of the inauguration balls in January 2009, whilst Jeff Zeleny reveals that the song was used by David Axelrod as the ringtone on his mobile phone to identify calls from Obama (Zeleny, 2008: n.p.). Wonder also played this song at Obama's second inauguration in 2012.

Summary

This chapter has explored Obama's place within the history of the long struggle for civil rights in America. Using evidence from *Dreams From My Father* and Obama's speeches, the chapter has argued that Obama's connection to civil rights is primarily through the more recent grassroots, community-centred campaigns that characterise the latest phase of the long

⁵ Footage of Stevie Wonder singing *Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours* at Obama campaign events can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvvTO9tATBk> (at the 2008 Democratic National Convention) and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rL9AIW9TzEI> (inauguration ball).

freedom struggle, and that his connections with the exceptional civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s are tenuous.

However, it has also been shown that Obama is concerned to strengthen his links to the struggles of the 1960s in order to reassure African American constituencies that he is a product of that era and that his candidacy is only possible because of the efforts made by previous generations to secure equal rights. This definition of how Obama relates to civil rights provides the context to Obama's campaign and can therefore be identified as the *scene* in the application of Burke's *dramatistic pentad* to the analysis of Obama's rhetoric. Burke's theory of Dramatism is founded on how the ratios between the different elements of the *pentad* can elucidate the motives behind human responses, with rhetoric seen primarily as a means of inciting action and debate. The audience's shared experiences of history, literature, culture and conflict provide a social context that can stimulate emotional responses to the speaker and subject matter. In this respect, discursive and non-discursive cues can shape thought and motivation. Thus Obama's linguistic and intertextual references to civil rights, Lincoln and King, together with the symbolic value to his candidacy of his racial heritage, reinforce his position as a "direct outgrowth of the movement" (Wolffe, 2009: p158), and create the scene-agent ratio that underpins the notion of redemption (the *purpose* in Burke's model), which is explored in the next chapter.

Data analysis has revealed that the campaign speeches that cover civil rights in some way encompass four primary themes: the violence of the struggles of the 1960s; the achievements of the civil rights movement; the debt Obama owes to the past and his experience of community organising. The most important speeches that tie Obama to the civil rights movement are the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* (Obama, 2007d), the *Southern New Hampshire Commencement Address* (Obama, 2007g), the *Howard University Convocation* speech (Obama, 2007m), and *A More Perfect Union* (Obama, 2008i). These speeches are intended to place Obama firmly within the context of the civil rights tradition as the figurehead who will take on the mantle of leadership to fulfil the work previous generations had started. Other

speeches provide evidence of Obama's determination to connect with Hispanic civil rights (e.g. Obama 2007l, 2008n, 2008q, 2008w).

It has also been shown that Obama's rhetoric incorporates intertextual links with figures such as President Abraham Lincoln, President John F Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr. Lincoln and King, in particular, are two of the leaders Obama admires most and whose examples he seeks to emulate. Obama makes use of the language and imagery once employed by Lincoln and King to connect his candidacy with the beliefs and aspirations now popularly associated with particular readings of them. In particular, Obama chooses to associate his campaign with the popular image of Lincoln as the healer president who united a divided nation, and with the King who led the nonviolent protests for justice and equality, rather than the King who railed against imperialism, militarism and capitalism. The contextual and intertextual findings are supported by the assertion that Obama made effective use of the symbolic value of music and location during his campaign.

The chapter has also noted that Obama positions himself as the leader of the Joshua generation of civil rights activists, a role that resonates with the Exodus narrative and the notion of Dr King being a Moses figure who was able to see but not enter the Promised Land of equality and freedom. It has therefore been demonstrated that Obama establishes a connection with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and that he acknowledges the debt he owes to previous generations who marched and sacrificed in the pursuit of equality. It has also been shown that Obama's campaign made use of the nation's collective memory of the civil rights struggle to provide a historical-cultural context for his candidacy, and particularly his for role as an African American leader and the heir to Dr King.

Chapter 6

Obama and redemption

My job this morning is to be so persuasive ... that a light will shine through that window, a beam of light will come down upon you, you will experience an epiphany, and you will suddenly realize that you must go to the polls and vote for Barack.

Barack Obama, Dartmouth College rally,
7 January 2008¹

Type the words “Obama” and “Messiah” into an Internet search engine and more than 1.3 million results will be returned, the majority linking to satirical, often right-wing, anti-Obama websites mocking the candidate for having what the authors describe as a Messiah complex. Many link to articles reporting Louis Farrakhan’s claim that Obama is a herald of the Messiah, or actor Jamie Foxx’s apparently tongue in cheek proclamation of Obama as “our God and our lord and saviour”.² Whilst none should really be taken seriously as there is no evidence to indicate that Obama believes himself to be the Son of God, this chapter demonstrates that aspects of Obama’s oratory, imagery and campaign encourage his elevation from presidential candidate to Redeemer figure or Messiah.

The following therefore explores the communicative, or discursive, aspects of Obama’s rhetoric that articulate notions of guilt and salvation. It makes use of textual analysis to identify and define the nature of the guilt that Obama seeks to redeem (the country’s history of racism and segregation), and to

¹ This speech, given to 300 students at Dartmouth College, has been widely reported. However, a transcript of the address does not appear to be available in print or online. The speech is therefore not included in the reference corpus and this extract is used simply to introduce the chapter. References to this quotation can be found at:

- <http://nypost.com/2008/06/07/looking-to-obama-for-redemption/>
- www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/dominic-lawson/dominic-lawson-obama-must-beware-of-turning-into-a-cult-787298.html
- www.cnet.com/news/obama-no-warrantless-wiretaps-if-you-elect-me/
- www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/seeing_the_light_in_south_caro.php
- <http://obamamessiah.blogspot.co.uk/2008/01/obama-to-disciples-you-will-experience.html>

² e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlyYTYMHWYw>

describe the mechanisms that Obama offers as a means of bringing about the national unity and reconciliation which will effect this redemption. Textual analysis and intertextual links also reveal the religious and biblical references contained within Obama's rhetoric, underscoring the importance of redemption motifs within the corpus. Extralinguistic analysis focuses on the imagery and iconography of the Obama campaign, with particular attention paid to the campaign logo, posters, and the use of light and halos. The chapter then returns to Obama's particular engagement with the Exodus tradition, relating the narrative to his leadership as well as to questions of redemption and salvation. In the terms of Burke's *pentad*, Obama is the *agent* who will deliver atonement for America's failure to secure racial equality (the *act*), whilst his intent to redeem the nation of this failing can be described as the *purpose* in Burke's model. The primary focus of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate how atonement and redemption are articulated in Obama's rhetoric, and why they are integral to his appeal for national unity and to his ambition to fulfil the promise of America.

Redemption

Redemption literally means the act of buying something back and in the Old Testament is specifically used to refer to the repurchase of slaves: "If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her" (Exodus 21:8 King James Version (KJV)). In Jewish theology, redemption also relates to God's liberation of the Israelites. The modern religious and secular connotations of redemption both refer to forgiveness for historical wrongs, with forgiveness being offered in exchange for an act of atonement and sacrifice.

The religious interpretation infers reconciliation, freedom from captivity and a forgiveness of sin through atonement or purification, and ultimately with the sacrifice of Christ:

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated

and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight.

(Colossians 1:20-22: KJV)

The title Christ comes from the Greek translation (Christós) of the Hebrew word Mashiah, or Messiah. In the Christian tradition, Christ as Messiah is the figure who will redeem his people, a saviour or liberator; in Judaism, a messiah is a charismatic leader anointed by the people as a future king. These definitions resonate with the ambition of this thesis to reveal how Obama's campaign rhetoric sought to present the candidate as a unifying leader who will bring about a redemption for America's historic and current racial failings; it can be said that the campaign itself was intended to result in the 'anointment' of the charismatic candidate as his nation's next leader. There is also resonance with Wilson J Moses' (1993) discussion of black messiahs, the African American political, sporting and cultural leaders who symbolise the potential of the race and its capacity to redeem the nation. Moses elaborates four expressions of black messianism, namely: the singling out of a saviour figure; a focus on the race's capacity to bring about national redemption; iconography that presents African Americans such as Martin Luther King as symbolic messiahs, and use of the prophetic tradition. These notions can be seen in Obama's campaign, from the identification of Obama as leader and heir to King, to the use of symbolism and iconography discussed below.

However, this chapter does not seek to establish Obama as a messianic figurehead but it does explore the nature and implications of the ways in which Obama promotes his candidacy as an opportunity for healing and redemption, particularly when considered within a secular interpretation of redemption that does not require a physical sacrifice to atone for past errors. Here the act of atonement may be symbolic, but atonement and sacrifice remain integral to the earning of redemption.

The promise of America

The previous chapter touched on Obama's references to the promise of America, which are bound up in his ambition for the country to move beyond its history of racial injustice. This ambition is in turn related to the myth of the American Dream where every citizen has the same opportunities to succeed if they work hard enough, regardless of their economic or social status. For example, in *The America We Love*, the promise of America is "the right to pursue our individual dreams but the obligation to help our fellow citizens pursue theirs" and an essential American idea "that we are not constrained by the accident of birth but can make of our lives what we will" (Obama, 2008o). Whilst many of Obama's speeches make similar allusions to the American Dream being within every American's reach, his 2008 Democratic National Convention speech, *The American Promise*, provides greatest insight into his understanding of what the promise actually means. In the speech, he defines the promise in relation to national unity, describing it principally as "the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation" (Obama, 2008v). He further suggests that the foundations of the promise lie in a society that has decency and justice at its heart: "we also have the obligation to treat each other with dignity and respect" (ibid), and sees the promise as driving national unity and a belief in a better future: "It is that American spirit – that American promise – that pushes us forward even when the path is uncertain; that binds us together in spite of our differences; that makes us fix our eye not on what is seen, but what is unseen, that better place around the bend. That promise is our greatest inheritance" (ibid). Again, this interpretation underscores the campaign's core messages of unity and hope.

In *The Audacity of Hope* Obama suggests that "that simple notion – that one isn't confined in one's dreams – is so central to our understanding of America that it seems almost commonplace. But in black America, the idea represents a radical break from the past, a severing of the psychological shackles of slavery and Jim Crow" (Obama, 2007b: p241) and he continues to make the connection between the promise of America and racial unity in *The Promise*

of America, by evoking King's *Dream*. Obama states that "it is that promise that forty-five years ago today brought Americans from every corner of this land to stand together on a Mall in Washington, before Lincoln's memorial, and hear a young preacher from Georgia speak of his dream" (Obama, 2008v). The previous chapter discussed Obama's use of the rhetoric and memory of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King but it is worth reiterating here that, in Obama's reading, the promise will be realised through achieving racial unity and completing the work that leaders such as Lincoln and King began. This interpretation has much in common with John F Kennedy's address on civil rights in June 1963, which argued "now the time has come for this nation to fulfil its promise" (Kennedy J F, 1963: n.p.) and that "the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened" (ibid). As such, it can be argued that Obama's vision of a Joshua generation that will fulfil the civil rights movement is closely allied to the promise of America and a redemption of the country's racial failings, and that America will fail to fulfil its promise whilst inequality and injustice remain a feature of American society.

The concept of the American promise is related to the convention in US electoral politics of reinventing America, transcending division and striving for a more perfect Union, often marked by religious language and terminology. This is explored in detail by Christopher Chapp, who concludes that religion employed in contemporary political rhetoric "can best be understood in terms of how it evokes identity, as well as its emotive force" (Chapp, 2012: pXI), but he also argues that religion plays an "ambiguous role in US elections because of the varied forms that public religious expressions can take" (ibid, p3). Chapp clarifies his argument by describing the two primary religious appeals evident in political rhetoric as expressions of culture war (located in deeply entrenched opposing views) and civil religion appeals (a "nondenominational declaration of spiritualized American national identity" that stresses "points of spiritual commonality" to "posit a transcendent religious ethos that permeates American institutions and culture" (ibid, p3)). Chapp further defines those who identify with civil religion appeals as holding "a deep sense of attachment to an explicitly spiritualized understanding of

America ... the US – vested with a sacred sense of purpose in the world order – is as much a religious commodity as a political entity” (ibid, p12).

It is important to highlight here the nondenominational nature of Chapp’s framework: civil religion appeals do not stem from one particular religious tradition but are drawn from all denominations within the Christian tradition, amalgamating within a national civil religion that has broad appeal and which projects the value of collective effort to fulfil the divinely ordered promise of America. Chapp notes that “civil religion can be seen as a rhetorical device that advanced reunification” (ibid, p27), highlighting the unifying and emotive appeal of a spiritualized national identity that invites hope in a better future, and it is in civil religion appeals that Obama recognises the power of religious language to move and inspire. The redemption articulated in Obama’s rhetoric is not actually a religious moment, but utilises the language of religion. Biblical imagery and phraseology is transposed to the political arena as a means of facilitating linguistic reference points that audiences will recognise. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama writes

scrub language of all religious content and we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice. Imagine Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address without reference to ‘the judgements of the Lord’, or King’s ‘I have a Dream’ speech without reference to ‘all of God’s children’. Their summoning of a higher truth helped inspire what had seemed impossible and moved the nation to embrace a common destiny.

(Obama, 2007b: p214).

Thus Obama recognises the value of religious language in his projection of a shared future that is made possible by shared values and common effort. Obama’s religious rhetoric and calls for collective effort are identified and discussed below as part of the analysis of Obama’s articulation of national guilt, sacrifice, and atonement.

Civil religion appeals, like the appeals made by Obama in the 2007/08 campaign, are marked by a tension between past and future. As will be shown below, this duality is evident in Obama’s speeches, which encompass

the failings of the past (racism, segregation, injustice) and the opportunity to realise a better future through collective effort that facilitates a redemption of the past. Chapter four introduced Obama's familiarity and engagement with expressions of double consciousness, notably through his updating of Du Bois' term with the demand that audiences "see the world on a split screen ... to acknowledge the sins of the past and the challenges of the present without becoming trapped in cynicism or despair" (Obama, 2007b: p233). This duality is also a hallmark of US political rhetoric. Chapp argues that civil religion appeals blend "a lament about American sin with a sense of optimism about the future" (Chapp, 2012: p18), inviting hope in a better America whilst recognising the failings of the past and reconciling the nation's shortcomings; "a rhetorical style that contrasts a sense of fear and uncertainty with unyielding optimism about the future" (ibid, p31), and which has been interpreted as a Jeremiad, particularly by Sacvan Bercovitch in his *American Jeremiad* (1978).

The Jeremiad is a form of sermonising traditionally associated with Puritanism and America's Founding Fathers. It is "a precedent from scripture that sets out communal norms; then, a series of condemnations that details the actual state of the community (at the same time insinuating the covenantal promises that ensure success); and finally a prophetic vision that unveils the promises, announces the good things to come, and explains away the gap between fact and ideal" (Bercovitch, 1978: p16). Bercovitch notes how second and third generation American Puritans developed the Jeremiad form to encourage their fledgling community to believe in the boundless opportunities offered by their homeland. The form underwent a transformation from overtly religious expressions of faith in society's ultimate redemption to a more secular interpretation. "The essence of the sermon form that the first native-born American Puritans inherited from their fathers, and then 'developed, amplified and standardized,' in its unshakable optimism ... inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success..." (ibid, p7). However, as intimated above, there is always a tension, or gap, between the better future envisioned in such rhetoric, and the contemporary and historical failings. As the textual analysis below explores, Obama's

speeches identify a series of past and contemporary failings (the guilt to be redeemed) that act as a counterpoint to his messages of hope and change.

The promise of America, the notion that a better future can always be achieved (or “a belief that there are better days ahead” (Obama, 2004)), therefore enshrines a biblical narrative within the American political tradition. The transformation of the Jeremiad “consecrated the American present as a movement from promise to fulfilment, and translated fulfilment from its meaning within the closed system of sacred history into a metaphor for limitless secular improvement” (Bercovitch, 1978: p93), while Andrew Murphy argues that “the Jeremiad’s political and rhetorical power, its ability to move Americans to social and political action, lies in its ability to evoke a dynamic tension between despair and hope” (Murphy, 2009: p12). In Obama’s rhetoric, the despair is evident in his cataloguing of racial injustice and inequalities (discussed below), whilst hope and the “belief in better days ahead” are a central message of his campaign. Indeed, this prophetic message is evident in Obama’s inaugural speech, in which he states that “the time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness” (Obama, 2009). In suggesting that the start of his presidency marks an opportunity for the nation to secure equality of opportunity for all, Obama asks his audience to connect his election with a moment of national renewal.

Textual analysis

The textual analysis undertaken for this chapter covers three primary ideas: how Obama’s articulation of his personal faith in his speeches and books provides context to the redemptive narrative and demonstrates his familiarity with religious tradition; the nature of the guilt that requires purification, and the nature of the sacrifice that will bring about the unity and redemption Obama seeks. As guilt redemption and the forgiveness of sin are religious concepts, it is useful to understand what Obama’s books and speeches reveal about the role of religion in his life, and to demonstrate that the

candidate's use of the rhetoric of redemption is supported by his familiarity with the black church.

In addition to *The Audacity of Hope's* chapter on faith, which encompasses themes ranging from the place religion holds in American life and politics to how Obama came to understand and embrace Christianity, there are twelve speeches in the analytic corpus which also mention faith or make salient use of religious terminology. These are:

1. The Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration (Obama, 2007d)
2. Southern New Hampshire University Commencement (Obama, 2007g)
3. Hampton University Annual Ministers' Conference (Obama, 2007h)
4. A Politics of Conscience (Obama, 2007k)
5. Howard University Convocation (Obama, 2007m)
6. The Great Need of the Hour (Obama, 2008c)
7. A More Perfect Union (Obama, 2008i)
8. Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr (Obama, 2008j)
9. Apostolic Church of God (Obama, 2008l)
10. The American Promise (Obama, 2008v)
11. Remarks of President Elect Obama ("victory speech") (Obama, 2008y)
12. Inaugural speech (Obama, 2009)

Of these, *A Politics of conscience* and *A More Perfect Union* offer particular insights into the ways in which Obama approaches his faith. *Dreams From My Father* also describes Obama's conversion to Christianity, documenting his spiritual awakening in 1987 within the congregation of the Trinity United Church of Christ (TUCC) in Chicago.

Located on the South Side of Chicago, TUCC serves a predominantly African American congregation of more than 8,000 people. The church was founded in 1961 (coinciding with the start of the short civil rights movement of the 1960s) and boasts of being "unashamedly black and unapologetically Christian".³ TUCC claims that its roots lie "in the Black religious experience and tradition" and that its congregation is "an African people" that remains true to the "mother continent, the cradle of civilization" (ibid). The church's teachings have their origins in James H Cone's theory of Black Liberation

³ <https://trinitychicago.org/new-to-trinity/>

Theology, which politicises Christian theology and applies it particularly to African Americans as a means of calling for racial equality and an end to oppression. TUCC's articulation of Black Liberation Theology is based on what the church describes as "an instrument of Black self-determination", the Black Value System, which consists of twelve concepts that "must be taught and exemplified in homes, churches, nurseries and schools, wherever Blacks are gathered".⁴ The first of these value concepts centres on commitment to God; the second focuses on commitment to the Black Community, which is described as "the highest level of achievement for any Black person" (ibid). Other concepts encompass family, education, the pursuit of excellence, the Black Work Ethic, self-discipline and self-respect, and pledging allegiance to Black leaders who embrace the System. The eighth concept is perhaps the most controversial as it requires adherents to disavow the pursuit of "middleclassness", arguing that "classic methodology on control of captives teaches that captors must be able to identify the "talented tenth" of those subjugated, especially those who show promise of providing the kind of leadership that might threaten the captor's control" (ibid). It further argues that African American leaders have been psychologically entrapped, placed in concentration camps or killed as part of white America's drive to subjugate African American thought.

TUCC was Obama's church and spiritual home for 21 years until May 2008, when he resigned his membership following the controversy caused by TUCC's pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright. It can be assumed that he is familiar with TUCC's teachings and philosophy, and is fully aware of the tenets of the Black Value System. Given Obama's longstanding political ambitions, his choice of Trinity United Church of Christ as his church is perhaps surprising. Being a member of TUCC's congregation would likely expose him to controversial political views and opinions, which could lead to adverse publicity, particularly under the glare of the press scrutiny that accompanies presidential campaigns. The impact of Jeremiah Wright's comments on the Primary campaign exemplified this risk. However, it was at TUCC where Obama embraced his faith: "I felt I heard God's spirit beckoning

⁴ <https://trinitychicago.org/the-black-value-system/>

me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth and carrying out His works” (Obama, 2007k). The sermon that ultimately encouraged Obama to affirm his faith was Reverend Wright’s “meditation on a fallen world” (Obama, 2007a: p293), which referred to a picture entitled “hope”, depicting a ragged harpist in the midst of scenes of despair and destruction.

The harpist is looking upwards, a few faint notes floating upwards towards the heavens. She dares to hope...She has the audacity...to make music...and praise God...on the one string...she has left! And in that single note – hope! – I heard something else; at the foot of that cross, inside the thousands of churches across the city, I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh ... Those stories – of survival and freedom, and hope – became our story, my story; ... until this black church, on this bright day, seemed once more a vessel carrying the story of a people into future generations and into a larger world. ... I also felt for the first time how that spirit carried with it, nascent, incomplete, the possibility of moving beyond our narrow dreams.

(ibid, pp293-294)

The sermon provides the title (*The Audacity of Hope*) for Obama’s second book and his 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote speech. Whilst this could be an indication of the importance Obama places on the moment he affirmed his faith at TUC, the sermon’s value lies more in the core messages that Obama takes and threads through the wider redemptive narrative of his campaign rhetoric. It is this sermon that opens Obama’s eyes to what might be achieved through collective effort and how common hopes and a shared belief in a better future can be a powerful societal actuator.

James T Kloppenberg believes the conversion is genuine, noting that “given his lifelong distrust of organized religion and his contempt for expedient conversions, it seems likelier that Obama converted from conviction than for strategic purposes” (Kloppenberg, 2011: p205). The question then should be to what extent did Obama embrace TUC’s Black Value System and espouse its concepts? There is no evidence in either of his books or in the campaign speeches to indicate that Obama’s faith is grounded in Black Liberation Theology and, in *A More Perfect Union*, Obama acknowledges that Jeremiah Wright is “an occasionally fierce critic of American domestic

and foreign policy” who would make controversial remarks which Obama would “absolutely” disagree with (Obama, 2008i). However, what Obama does find in TUC is community, a place where he feels a sense of belonging and purpose.

In *A Politics of Conscience*, for example, Obama speaks of his gradual realisation that “without an anchor for my beliefs, without a commitment to a particular community of faith, at some level I would always remain apart, and alone” and how he came to see faith as “an active, palpable agent in the world and in my own life” (Obama, 2007k). This notion of faith as an active agent is further explored in *The Audacity of Hope*, wherein Obama confesses that he would have not have found religion “had it not been for the particular attributes of the historically black church, attributes that helped me shed some of my scepticism and embrace the Christian faith” (Obama, 2007b: p206). In particular, Obama is “drawn to the power of the African American religious tradition to spur social change” (ibid, p207), and it is this realisation that prompts his conversion; there is no Damascene revelation, rather a pragmatic understanding of the role that faith and the church could play in his ambition to become an effective community organiser. Obama’s use of the Exodus narrative and Martin Luther King Jr’s language flows from this recognition.

Chapter four introduced the finding that Obama avoids mention of the realities of racial discrimination unless addressing African American communities in Baptist churches or in settings with a predominantly African American audience, for instance when addressing the NAACP. Whilst this reinforces the argument that Obama recognises the potential for black churches to effect change, it also serves to remind us that Obama’s major criticisms of America’s racial failings are predominantly (but not exclusively) addressed to African American audiences, not white Americans. Chapter four argued that this could be seen as pandering to white audiences by not highlighting persistent racial inequality, but it can also be argued that Obama chooses not to challenge white audiences in this way because he believes that white Americans no longer experience guilt for their role in America’s

past racial failings. In *The Audacity of Hope*, he writes “white guilt has exhausted itself in America. Even the most fair-minded of whites, those who would genuinely like to see racial inequality ended and poverty relieved, tend to push back against suggestions of racial victimisation or race-specific claims based on the history of race discrimination in this country” (Obama, 2007b: p247). In other words, Obama believes white America has moved on from the short civil rights movement and no longer sees racial inequality as a legacy of slavery and segregation, but as a societal issue that does not apportion blame or guilt. Thomas Sugrue argues that this was one of Obama’s most salient insights and that he “stepped deliberately away from the still-persistent problems of racial inequality. Instead, he offered an implicit promise, namely that his election would embody color blindness, offering definitive proof that skin color no longer barred anyone’s aspirations to success” (Sugrue, 2010: p116).

Whilst this appears to be the strategy Obama adopts in the majority of his campaign speeches, there are examples of speeches in which he does demand that white America recognises its role in creating and perpetuating racial inequality and injustice. In *A More Perfect Union*, a national address intended to be received by the entire electorate and not by any one particular segment of the audience, Obama references Williams Faulkner to argue that the racial inequalities of 2008 are a direct consequence of actions taken in the past:

‘The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past.’ We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.

(Obama, 2008i)

The examples Obama provides include the legacy of segregated education, now manifested in second-rate schools in African American communities; the wealth and income inequalities which stem from legalised discrimination that prevented African Americans from owning property, and the lack of economic

opportunities for African Americans which has “helped create a cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continue to haunt us” (ibid).

This argument is significant as it reveals Obama’s view that the racial failings of the past continue to mark American society today. In the *Remarks to the National Conference of Black Mayors and Hampton University Annual Ministers’ Conference* speeches, Obama relates this notion to the underlying causes of the Los Angeles riots of 1992. The riots, sparked by the assault on Rodney King and the subsequent acquittal of the four police officers involved, saw widespread civil disturbance, arson, looting and assaults. Madison Gray (2007) estimates that the riots left 53 people dead and caused property damage in excess of a billion dollars. Obama describes the riots as “a tragic legacy out of the tragic history this country has never fully come to terms with” (Obama, 2007f, 2007h), but argues that they “didn’t erupt over night; there had been a ‘quiet riot’ building up in Los Angeles and across this country for years. They happen when a sense of disconnect settles in and hope dissipates” (ibid). Cornel West accepts that race was the “visible catalyst” of the riots, but not the “underlying cause”, arguing that the rioting was “the consequence of a lethal linkage of economic decline, cultural decay, and political lethargy in American life” (West, 1993: p1). Obama connects the riots with a “disconnect” and the dissipation of hope, which echo West’s assertion, but he places greater emphasis on the role of race.

The riots provide Obama with a metaphor for the persistent racial inequalities he seeks to address, with the story of a baby born during the riots with a bullet in her arm. The doctors operated successfully to remove the bullet but the scar would remain, prompting Obama to muse that “You take the bullet out. You stitch up the wound and fifteen years later, there's still going to be a scar” (ibid). The inference is that no matter how often racial wounds are healed the scar tissue remains as a lasting reminder of legacies of the past. Obama also argues that many of the underlying causes of such wounds still exist: “in too many places we haven't even taken the bullet out. And so God is asking us today to remember that miracle of that baby. And He is asking us to take that bullet out once more” (ibid); he then places his candidacy within

this anecdote, framing his election to the presidency as an opportunity for the nation to collectively “pull out bullet after bullet. We're going to stitch up arm after arm. We're going to wear those scars for justice. We're going to usher in a new America the way that newborn child was ushered in” (ibid).

The Faulkner reference in *A More Perfect Union* is derived from the author's 1951 novel *Requiem for a Nun*, which is preoccupied with the attainment of religious or spiritual redemption through suffering and sacrifice, and in which Faulkner writes “the past is never dead. It's not even past” (Faulkner, 1951: p92). The implication is that the present is subject to constant interpretation and reinterpretation, and is always haunted by past choices and actions. In one of his most widely reported and lauded speeches, therefore, Obama makes an explicit connection between the history of segregation and the inequalities and injustices of the present. The failings of the past, which result from the country's “original sin of slavery” (Obama, 2008i), have created the inequalities which prevent all Americans from benefitting equally from the opportunities encapsulated in the idea of the American Dream. Obama goes on to say that “there were many who didn't make it - those who were ultimately defeated, in one way or another, by discrimination. That legacy of defeat was passed on to future generations” and that “even for those blacks who did make it, questions of race, and racism, continue to define their worldview in fundamental ways” (ibid).

However, Obama is also explicit about the need to recognise that the “legacy of defeat” can be understood in the experience and “similar anger” of the white community, manifested in the frustration at the perception that African Americans gain an advantage “because of an injustice that [white Americans] themselves never committed” (ibid). Obama argues that describing this white anger as racist fails to acknowledge the underlying concerns and issues that complicate the race debate just as much as the anger and resentment expressed in the African American community. This results in the racial stalemate that characterises modern America, but also in an opportunity for mutual responsibility that provides Obama with a “firm conviction – a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people –

that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union” (ibid). As discussed below, this belief is the foundation of the atonement required to absolve the nation of its guilt and achieve the redemption Obama seeks.

Articulating guilt

David Bobbitt (2004, p38) argues that the first step towards absolution is to name the guilt and place it in the public gaze so that it can be confronted. This is effectively what Obama does when highlighting the many racial inequalities and injustices, such as the health care gap, achievement gap, and empathy gap described in Chapter four’s discussion of the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* speech. The speech also sets out Obama’s demand for “absolute equality in this country in terms of people being treated on the basis of their color or their gender” (Obama, 2007d). In other speeches, Obama catalogues different injustices, highlighting for instance that there are “more black men in prison than in our colleges and universities” (Obama, 2007f), or “a Justice Department whose idea of prosecuting voting rights violations is to look for voting fraud in black and Latin American communities where it doesn’t exist” (Obama, 2007m), and how “Jena exposed glaring inequalities in our justice system that were around long before that schoolyard fight broke out” (ibid).

The disparities Obama highlights provide evidence of America’s failure to deliver equality and justice, and therefore the nation’s guilt for failing to realise the ambitions of the civil rights movement. However, the blame is not laid solely at the feet of white Americans, as Obama also demands that African Americans face up to their own obligations to improve economic and social conditions within their communities. In *The Great Need Of The Hour*, for instance, he asks his (African American) audience to recognise that although jobs, health care, education and justice are still influenced by race, “we must admit that none of our hands are entirely clean. If we’re honest with ourselves, we’ll acknowledge that our own community has not always been true to King’s vision of a beloved community” (Obama, 2008c), and he

proceeds to argue that African Americans have been guilty of homophobia, anti-Semitism, and discrimination against immigrants. Obama's metaphor of hands being "clean" is suggestive of the purification that is necessary to achieve redemption, with the implication that African Americans must find a way of atoning for their own shortcomings if the country as a whole is to be redeemed of its racial failings. Obama concludes this passage by demanding that communities come together in order to address the challenges of poverty and conflict.

In other speeches, Obama highlights the need for African American fathers to recognise their responsibilities, and the social problems that can stem from the breakdown of African American marriages. For instance, in the *Apostolic Church of God* speech Obama highlights the fact that "more than half of all black children live in single-parent households", arguing that "children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and twenty times more likely to end up in prison" (Obama, 2008l). The *Selma* speech also declares that "we have too many children in poverty in this country and everybody should be ashamed, but don't tell me it doesn't have a little to do with the fact that we got too many daddies not acting like daddies" (Obama, 2007d), whilst *A More Perfect Union* argues that

For the African-American community, that path means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means ... taking full responsibility for own lives - by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny.

(Obama, 2008i)

This thesis argues, therefore, that the guilt that Obama seeks to redeem extends to the government policies that sustain and reinforce racial inequalities, as well as encompassing what Obama sees as a failure by

African Americans to take ownership of some of the issues that lead to economic injustice.

The guilt is also manifested in Obama's rhetoric concerning the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the storm surge it created along the Gulf of Mexico in August 2005. The disaster caused extensive destruction from Florida to Texas, led to the deaths of more than 1,800 people, inflicted \$108 billion of property damage, and is financially the costliest natural disaster in American history (Knabb et al, 2005: n.p.). In New Orleans, much of which lies below sea level, the levee system designed to protect the city from storm surges failed, causing flooding to 80 percent of the city and the locality. Whilst many fled the city ahead of the hurricane, a significant proportion of the New Orleans population – the poorest – had no means of leaving the city, no access to transport, or could not afford to escape to motels outside the city. Alan Berube and Steven Raphael (2005: n.p.) note that the poorest households accounted for nearly 80 percent of New Orleans' non-car-owning population, and the majority of the people left in the city as the hurricane and storm surge struck were African American.

The Federal Government was slow to respond, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis unfolding in New Orleans and prompting accusations that the Government's seeming reluctance to support the relief effort stemmed from racial bias. For example, Jesse Jackson claimed that President George W Bush "has not shown that he cares for civil rights or cares for the interests of black people" (in Wills, 2013: n.p.), and Kanye West criticised the president live on television at a *Concert for Hurricane Relief*, claiming that "George Bush doesn't care about black people".⁵

In his sobering account of the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Michael Eric Dyson agrees that when the Administration failed to respond quickly to the disaster, "they made themselves vulnerable to the charge that race was the obvious reason for the delay" (Dyson, 2007: p17). For Dyson, although "many colors were present in this multicultural stew of suffering, but

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pVTrnxCZaQ>

the dominant color was black” (ibid, p2), Katrina and its aftermath becomes much more representative of racial history in the Southern states. He argues that “there were poor blacks, mostly from Louisiana, drowning in twenty-five foot floods, awaiting help from a Texas-bred president and an Oklahoma-born head of FEMA.⁶ At its core, this was a Southern racial narrative being performed before a national and global audience” (ibid, p21). Dyson also reports the findings of polls which found that 60 percent of African Americans surveyed (and just twelve percent of white Americans) believed the delay was caused by racial factors; 63 percent of African Americans (21 percent of white Americans) believed the delay was because the disaster hit the poorest hardest, and that poor communities did not register on the Administration’s radar (ibid, p33).

It is consequently possible to connect the government’s response with accusations of institutional racism. However, as explained below, it is not the response to, and impact of, Katrina that contributes to the nation’s racial failings, and hence guilt, as expressed in Obama’s rhetoric. Katrina’s aftermath simply laid bare the reality of centuries of segregation, racism, and discrimination. Certainly, Obama does not accept that the government’s response to the disaster was racially motivated (perhaps endorsing the assertion in Chapter four that the candidate does not challenge white voters). There are thirteen speeches which make reference to Hurricane Katrina:

1. Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration (Obama, 2007d)
2. Remarks to the National Conference of Black Mayors (Obama, 2007f)
3. Southern New Hampshire University Commencement (Obama, 2007g)
4. Hampton University Annual Ministers’ Conference(Obama, 2007h)
5. Take Back America 2007 (Obama, 2007j)
6. Howard University Convocation (Obama, 2007m)
7. A Change We Can Believe In (Obama, 2007o)
8. The Great Need of the Hour (Obama, 2008c)
9. The Past Versus the Future (Obama, 2008f)
10. Rebuilding Trust With New Orleans (Obama, 2008h)
11. A More Perfect Union (Obama, 2008i)

⁶ Federal Emergency Management Agency

12. Building Trades National Legislative Conference (Obama, 2008k)
13. Inaugural Speech (Obama, 2009)

In none of these does Obama see race as the causal factor behind the Bush Administration's ineffectual response to the disaster, but instead he argues that the Administration "was colorblind in its incompetence" (Obama, 2007b: p229, and Obama, 2007f). In *The Past Versus the Future*, Obama presents the response as the antithesis of competent government (Obama, 2008f), whilst in *A Change We Can Believe In*, he highlights the Administration's lack of empathy: "we were promised compassion and conservatism but we got Katrina and wiretaps" (Obama, 2007o). While Obama does not claim that the Administration was racially biased in its response, he does use the disaster to highlight the racial inequalities that were exposed by the impact of the hurricane on the city's communities:

everyone here knows the disaster and the poverty happened long before that hurricane hit. All the hurricane did was make bare what we ignore each and every day which is that there are whole sets of communities that are impoverished, that don't have meaningful opportunity, that don't have hope and they are forgotten.

(Obama, 2007f).

This is a view echoed by Anna Hartnell, who has written about racial voyeurism and the commodification of African American suffering that followed the hurricane. Hartnell has described Hurricane Katrina as "a glaring example of a disaster that exacerbated inequalities" (Hartnell, 2009: p724) and "a disaster of racial and economic disenfranchisement that was exposed and further exacerbated by the levee breaches in August 2005" (Hartnell, 2012: p17). With disproportionate numbers of African Americans in poor communities affected by the disaster, the narrative of Katrina and its aftermath therefore serves Obama as a representative example of the racial inequalities that still mark American society. Obama notes in the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* that "in New Orleans, the murder rate was one of the highest in the country – ten times the national average – well before the hurricane hit ... The schools were failing long before the levees

broke. The city's poverty rate was twice the national average", and he calls Katrina a "powerful metaphor for what's gone on for generations" (Obama, 2007d). Obama returns to this theme in *Rebuilding Trust with New Orleans*: "Katrina may have battered these shores - but it also exposed silent storms that have ravaged parts of this city and our country for far too long. The storms of poverty and joblessness; inequality and injustice", and he gives the example of an evacuee who told him "We had nothing before the hurricane. Now we got less than nothing" (Obama, 2008h). These sentiments echo George W Bush's *Rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina* speech, delivered on 15 September 2005 in New Orleans, in which he stated "As all of us saw on television, there's also some deep, persistent poverty in this region, as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America" (Bush, 2005: n.p.), and it can therefore be argued that the disaster stands as a metonym for the legacy of inequality, particularly in disadvantaged African American communities.

Obama also uses the apparent lack of compassion shown to victims of the disaster as a metonym for the "empathy gap" he articulated in the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* speech and other speeches. In the *Howard University Convocation*, for example, Obama argues that

Dr King did not take us to the mountaintop so that we would allow a terrible storm to ravage those who were stranded in the valley; he would not have expected that it would take a breach in our levees to reveal a breach in our compassion; that it would take a hurricane to reveal the hungry God asks us to feed; the sick He asks us to care for; the least of these He commands us to treat as our own.

(Obama, 2007m).

This is an argument he makes again four months later in *The Great Need Of The Hour* (Obama, 2008c).

If, in Obama's rhetoric, Katrina's aftermath is emblematic of the nation's guilt for failing to resolve racial inequality, the city of New Orleans itself becomes a symbol for rebirth and redemption. Obama describes the city as a place

where different religions and races come together to contribute positively to a greater whole. It is “a city that has always shown America what is possible when we have the imagination to see the unseen and the determination to work for it”; “a city that has always stood for what can be done in this country”, and “an imperfect place made more perfect through its promise of forgiveness” (Obama, 2008h). New Orleans therefore comes to stand for unity and progress, perhaps as a microcosm of the American Dream and the national redemption that can be brought about through the unity Obama seeks.

Atonement

As discussed above, the traditional route to redemption requires sacrifice and atonement, both of which find expression in Obama’s rhetoric through repeated calls for Americans to come together, to overcome their differences, and to work together for a better and more prosperous future – “the call to sacrifice on behalf of the next generation, the need to think in terms of ‘thou’ and not just ‘I’” (Obama, 2007b: p216). This section highlights how this call is articulated and presented in Obama’s rhetoric, specifically through the topics of unity and collective effort.

Obama frames his candidacy as an opportunity for Americans of all colours and beliefs to come together and bring about fundamental, societal change, overcoming the country’s racial inequalities and injustices, and fulfilling the American Dream of opportunity for all. National renewal is dependent on the collective will, but also on individuals recognising that personal responsibility contributes to collective responsibility; the country must come together in shared recognition of individual and collective guilt. This unity that Obama seeks to foster among the electorate equates to the act of atonement that will facilitate redemption for the country’s past failings. The word atonement, literally at-one-ment, stems from the Medieval Latin “adunamentum” (unity) and the archaic “onement” (to unite), and has come to mean an act of contrition or reparation to make amends for an act of sin or damage. Atonement is also an act of reconciliation, where opposing parties find common ground to reconcile their differences. In biblical terms, atonement

relates to the reconciliation between man and God, which is made possible through the sacrifice of Christ. For Obama, however, unity is the mechanism by which the promise of America can be fulfilled: “the promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort” (Obama, 2008v), or the “belief that America should be a nation where we pursue our individual dreams, but still come together, as one American family, to ensure the next generation can pursue their dreams too” (Obama, 2008w). The topic of unity consequently features prominently in the analytic corpus, with calls for Americans to overcome their differences for mutual benefit evident in 26 speeches:

1. 2004 Democratic National Convention (Obama, 2004)
2. Announcement for President (Obama, 2007c)
3. Remarks to the California State Democratic Convention (Obama, 2007e)
4. Take Back America 2007 (Obama, 2007j)
5. Howard University Convocation (Obama, 2007m)
6. A Challenge for Our Times (Obama, 2007n)
7. A Change We Can Believe In (Obama, 2007o)
8. A Call to Serve (Obama, 2007p)
9. The Great Need of the Hour (Obama, 2008c)
10. Kennedy Endorsement Event (Obama, 2008d)
11. Reclaiming the American Dream (Obama, 2008e)
12. Super Tuesday (Obama, 2008g)
13. Rebuilding Trust With New Orleans (Obama, 2008h)
14. A More Perfect Union (Obama, 2008i)
15. Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr (Obama, 2008j)
16. Remarks with Hilary Clinton in Unity (Obama, 2008m)
17. National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (Obama, 2008n)
18. The America WeL (Obama, 2008o)
19. League of United Latin American Citizens (Obama, 2008q)
20. Remarks to the National Council of La Raza (Obama, 2008s)
21. 99th Annual Convention of the NAACP (Obama, 2008t)
22. The American Promise (Obama, 2008v)
23. Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Gala (Obama, 2008w)
24. Española (Obama, 2008x)
25. Remarks of President Elect Obama ("victory speech") (Obama, 2008y)
26. Inaugural Speech (Obama, 2009)

The call for unity is not just visible in Obama’s claim that “there's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America” (Obama, 2004; echoed in Obama 2008y); it is

also evident in Obama's belief "that we are connected as one people ... 'E pluribus unum'. Out of many, one" (Obama, 2004, 2007e) and that "beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are one people" (Obama, 2007c). These assertions accord with Obama's use of Abraham Lincoln's *House Divided* speech to bind his candidacy to the legacy of Lincoln as the nation's healer, as discussed in Chapter five, and with his demand that his campaign "has to be about reclaiming the meaning of citizenship, restoring our sense of common purpose" (ibid).

Obama argues that it is through building common purpose that America will fulfil its promise, with representative examples of this claim evident in a number of speeches, for instance: "we believe that we rise or fall as one people" (Obama, 2007j); "we have always been able to come together and make this nation stronger, and more prosperous, and more united, and more just" (Obama, 2008o), and "because America can only prosper when all Americans prosper ... And in this country, we rise and fall together" (Obama, 2008n). Obama also locates this sense of progress being enabled through unity within his conviction (rooted in his faith in God and the American people) that "working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union" (Obama, 2008i).

He follows up this argument by noting that moving beyond racial division "requires all Americans to realise that your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams; that investing in the health, welfare, and education of black and brown and white children will ultimately help all of America prosper" (ibid). The emphasis is therefore on the need for all Americans to work together for mutual benefit, and Obama relates this to the aspirations of Dr King and the civil rights movement, which "wasn't just a movement of African Americans, but Latino Americans, and white Americans, and every American who believes that equality and opportunity are not just words to be said but promises to be kept" (Obama, 2007l), and he reminds his audience that "the civil rights movement was your movement too, and its unfinished work is still the task of every American" (ibid). Obama also relates

his call for unity to the thrust of Martin Luther King Jr's *Montgomery Bus Boycott Speech* (King, 1955), arguing that "unity is the great need of the hour' ... Unity is how we shall overcome" (Obama, 2008c) and highlighting King's recognition that "unity cannot be won on the cheap; that we would have to earn it through great effort and determination" (ibid). Obama presents this as a requirement for Americans to make the effort to come together and find common purpose; this, in turn, provides the sacrifice necessary to deliver atonement and reconciliation.

Sacrifice

This is reflected in the topic of collective effort, which encompasses the speeches that make reference to notions of giving back to society through personal and collective sacrifice, volunteering, community organising, taking and sharing responsibility for the progress Obama seeks, and shouldering each other's burdens. The 23 speeches which include the topic of collective effort are:

1. Announcement for President (Obama, 2007c)
2. Selma Voting Rights March commemoration (Obama, 2007d)
3. Southern New Hampshire University Commencement (Obama, 2007g)
4. Hampton University Annual Ministers' Conference (Obama, 2007h)
5. Strengthening Families in a New Economy (Obama, 2007i)
6. A Politics of Conscience (Obama, 2007k)
7. Howard University Convocation (Obama, 2007m)
8. A Call to Serve (Obama, 2007p)
9. Iowa Caucus Night(Obama, 2008a)
10. New Hampshire Primary (Obama, 2008b)
11. The Great Need of the Hour (Obama, 2008c)
12. Super Tuesday (Obama, 2008g)
13. Rebuilding Trust With New Orleans (Obama, 2008h)
14. A More Perfect Union (Obama, 2008i)
15. Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr (Obama, 2008j)
16. Building Trades National Legislative Conference (Obama, 2008k)
17. Remarks with Hillary Clinton in Unity (Obama, 2008m)
18. The America We Love (Obama, 2008o)
19. A New Era of Service (Obama, 2008p)
20. 99th Annual Convention of the NAACP (Obama, 2008t)
21. National Urban League Conference (Obama, 2008u)
22. The American Promise (Obama, 2008v)
23. Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Gala (Obama, 2008w)
24. Española (Obama, 2008x)

The nature of the sacrifice Obama asks of his audiences is located in his demand for people to make a contribution to their communities and society, an ethos which in turn is rooted in the idea of collective responsibility. This is a theme that marks Obama's four "milestone" speeches: his *Announcement for President*; the speech to the Democratic Convention in 2008, when he accepted the party's nomination; his victory speech, and his inaugural speech. Announcing his candidacy for the presidency, for instance, Obama says that "each of us, in our own lives, will have to accept responsibility - for instilling an ethic of achievement in our children, for adapting to a more competitive economy, for strengthening our communities, and sharing some measure of sacrifice", calling on America to work together to transform the country (Obama, 2007c). By the time he has secured the nomination as the Democratic Party's candidate for president, "individual responsibility and mutual responsibility" has become "the essence of America's promise" (Obama, 2008v), which in turn becomes a "new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other" in his victory speech (Obama, 2008y). The "new spirit of patriotism" evolves into a "new era of responsibility" with Obama's inauguration (Obama, 2009), with the "recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task" (ibid).

Obama therefore believes every American has a duty to make a contribution to society, that "the call to sacrifice for the country's greater good remains an imperative of citizenship" (Obama, 2008o), and that by giving back to the community through public service is "how we put our country first" (Obama, 2008w). In some cases, Obama promises to reward public service monetarily, e.g. in Obama, 2008h and 2008x, in which he promises tax credits to students who serve their community, but in all other examples where Obama asks for people to serve their country there is no offer of recompense. There is, instead, the promise of a better future.

For example, Obama claims that “if we're willing to shoulder each other's burdens, to take great risks, and to persevere through trial, America will continue its journey towards that distant horizon, and a better day” (Obama, 2007g) and that as president the “most important thing I'll do is call on you every day to take a risk and do your part to carry this movement forward. ... I will ask you to believe again that we can right the wrongs we see in America” (Obama, 2007m). Obama argues that bringing about the change he seeks for America “will require each of us to do our part in closing the moral deficit - the empathy deficit - that exists in this nation” (2008e) and that people working together “are not just going to change this country, but ... will change the world” (Obama, 2008m). In *Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr*, Obama uses King's image of the arc of moral universe to advocate a collective effort to secure racial justice and equality, noting that the arc

bends because each of us puts our hands on that arc and bends it in the direction of justice ... and if we can do that and march together - as one nation, and one people - then we won't just be keeping faith with what Dr. King lived and died for, we'll be making real the words of Amos that he invoked so often, and 'let justice roll down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream'

(Obama, 2008j)

Ultimately, “it's about each and every one of us doing our part to build that more perfect union” (Obama, 2008t).

Obama also recognises that realising a better America “will not be easy. It will require struggle and sacrifice” (Obama, 2008g), that “living up to this country's ideals and its possibilities will require great effort and resources; sacrifice and stamina” (Obama, 2008c), and that “the sacrifices made by previous generations have never been easy. But America is a great nation precisely because Americans have been willing to stand up when it was hard” (Obama, 2007p), and there is therefore an expectation that the contributions he asks of his audiences will require significant effort. There is consequently a direct connection between Obama's calls for sacrifice and the promise of a better future predicated on overcoming racial barriers and prejudice.

Intertextual analysis

The intertextual analysis conducted for Chapters four and five has yielded extensive contextual connections between Obama's rhetoric, the civil rights movement and the canon of African American literature. The intertextual links discussed in this chapter are related primarily to the language used by Obama to support his calls for personal and collective sacrifice, and national unity, with some further links to Martin Luther King Jr and John F Kennedy also evident. Specifically, this section discusses how concepts of light, hope, and compassion in Obama's rhetoric have biblical and religious connotations and contribute to the narrative of redemption.

In the Bible, light is generally used as a symbolic reference to faith, God, or the state of grace where sin has been forgiven. In John 8:12 (KJV), for example, Christ says "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"; in 1 Peter 2:9, Christians are urged to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light", and in Matthew 5:14, those who follow Christ "are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid". Those who are in the light have therefore overcome trials and challenges (the darkness) to attain a state that is to be aspired to and that represents the prospect of a better future, the city on a hill a metaphor for a model society for others to aspire to.

This is a theme that has been appropriated by other politicians, most notably by President Ronald Reagan in his address on the eve of the 1980 election. Reagan holds Washington DC up as the exemplar of "a city of hope in a country that is free" (Reagan, 1980: n.p.) and connects that freedom with racial equality and national unity in terms that foreshadow Obama's own calls for unity: "These visitors to that city on the Potomac do not come as white or black, red or yellow; they are not Jews or Christians; conservatives or liberals; or Democrats or Republicans. They are Americans awed by what has gone before, proud of what for them is still...a shining city on a hill" (ibid).

It should be noted here that the notion of a city on a hill has lasting significance in American cultural and political history. The expression derives from a sermon given by John Winthrop, one of the Puritan founders of the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1630. Winthrop's sermon, *A Model of Christian Charity*, called for the settlers to "be as a city upon a hill"; a Christian community to be watched and emulated. The phrase is closely linked to the concept of American exceptionalism, manifested in a national belief that Americans and America "are special, exceptional, because they are charged with saving the world from itself and, at the same time, America and Americans must sustain a high level of spiritual, political and moral commitment to this exceptional destiny" (Madsen, 1998: p2). Madsen also describes America as a "redeemer nation", where "the New World is the last and best chance offered by God to a fallen humanity" (ibid, p2).

The city on the hill and the myth of the chosen people also appear in African American thought, but with African Americans, not white Americans, as the chosen race that can unite and redeem the nation; as the race that will save America from itself. For instance, Wilson J Moses argues that "this mythic perception supported black nationalism, racial integration, and mainstream American nationalism" (Moses, 1993: p29). Moses suggests that this facilitates a black messianism that supports black nationalism and separatism, and yet also encourages racial harmony and integration. Moses notes that black messianism is "potentially appealing to whites" and that figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. "represented at once the militancy of black people and their willingness to get along with whites" (ibid, p180). Moses also argues that Booker T Washington "shrewdly worked to reconcile the myth of America as a chosen nation with the myth of the black population as a chosen people. The two groups, white and black, would work to redeem one another" (ibid, p87). These ideas of integration and harmony are also reflected in the articulation of atonement in Obama's rhetoric, and in the projection of his candidacy as an opportunity for unity and racial atonement, and they accord with Moses' claim that "black messianism is the point in our cultural mythology where nationalism and assimilation come together most strongly" (ibid, pviii).

Obama also holds America up as the model for freedom, hope, equality and unity, arguing that the country has “stood as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before” (Obama, 2004) and is “the beacon that has led generations of weary travelers to find opportunity, and liberty, and hope on our doorstep” (Obama, 2007e). He also claims that it was because of that light and the prospect of opportunity that his father came to America (Obama, 2008e).

The beacon of hope is described in related terms in Martin Luther King’s *I have a Dream* speech. King does not hold America up as the city on the hill but singles out the Emancipation Proclamation as “a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice ... a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity” (King, 1963). This is a theme that resonates with Obama’s interpretation of the promise of America, with light associated with the promise of equality set out in the Constitution and darkness implying the country’s failure to deliver that equality. For example, in the speeches which use the story of the baby born with a bullet in her arm during the Los Angeles riots, Obama reminds his audience that “we’re never going to forget there is always hope - there is always light in the midst of desperate days” (Obama, 2007f and 2007h). Here, light is synonymous with the hope that racial division can be overcome and that equality of opportunity can be secured for all Americans. Likewise, in *The Past versus the Future* he speaks of America’s “light of justice” (Obama, 2008f), and in *The American Promise* he speaks of his desire for the US to still be “a beacon of freedom and justice for the world” (Obama, 2008v). Finally, celebrating his election victory in November 2008, Obama argues that America’s beacon still burns brightly, and that “the true strength of our nation comes ... from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity, and unyielding hope” (Obama, 2008y). In his inaugural speech “[these] ideals still light the world” (Obama, 2009).

This last phrase also appears in the *Kennedy Endorsement* speech and is explicitly linked to the claim that Obama’s election would mark a

transformative moment in American history, demonstrating that equality of opportunity is possible:

if you'll stand to keep the American dream alive for those who still hunger for opportunity and thirst for justice ... then we will win these primaries, we will win this election, we will change the course of history, and light a new torch for change in this country - and 'the glow from that fire can truly light the world'

(Obama, 2008d)

The quotation in this extract is taken from the section of John F Kennedy's inaugural speech that talks of the defence of freedom, and which comes immediately before Kennedy's defining appeal for Americans to serve their country. Service will therefore preserve the ideals of democracy and liberty, as suggested in *A New Era of Service* where Obama connects the call to service with the preservation of the image of America as the shining city. Obama argues that Kennedy "made their service a bridge to the developing world, and a bright light of American values in the darkest days of the Cold War" (Obama, 2008p; see also 2007p), and there is evidently a close connection between images of light and expressions of hope, and in turn a direct link to the American Dream and to the racial equality dimension that underpins Obama's interpretation of the promise of America, as argued above.

In his 2004 Democratic Convention Speech, Obama describes this as "the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; ... the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too", and he concludes that this "is God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation; the belief in things not seen; the belief that there are better days ahead" (Obama, 2004). There are direct echoes here of Hebrews 1:1 (KJV), which states "now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen", and there are other instances of the biblical interpretation of hope evident in Obama's speeches. For instance, the ambition to overcome injustice and inequality can be seen in Job 5:16 (KJV) ("so the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth"), and Romans 8:24-25 (KJV), where

the inference is that mankind is saved by hope in a better future, rather than hope in what has already been achieved.

Hope in relation to redemption is evident in 1 John 3 2:5 (KJV), which describes how hope in salvation is a purifying force, and that God was “manifested to take away our sins [...] Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not”. In the Obama campaign, hope is manifest through the belief in better days ahead and the realisation of America’s promise through the election of the country’s first African American president. A representative example can be seen in *The Past versus the Future*: “And if you put your trust in me, I will stand up at that convention and say that our divisions are past, our hope is the future, and our time for change has come” (Obama, 2008f).

The unity and consensus Obama seeks to build to effect the atonement necessary for redemption is also evident in the narrative of hope, with “the hard-earned unity” being “that effort, and that determination, that can transform blind optimism into hope - the hope to imagine, and work for, and fight for what seemed impossible before” (Obama, 2008c). Again, there are Biblical echoes here: Romans 5:2-4 (KJV) says that “we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope”, tracing a path between effort (or sacrifice) and hope.

The calls for collective effort, linked to these expressions of sacrifice, can be seen to have their origins in the Christian tradition. In the New Testament, 1 John 3:16 (KJV) says that “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” because of the sacrifice God made for man, and Galatians 6:2 (KJV) commands “bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”; Matthew 22:39 (KJV) simply commands “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”. The religious phrase that is perhaps most evident in Obama’s speeches, however, is drawn from the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis. Cain perceives his brother to be favoured by God and murders him out of jealousy. When asked where Abel is, Cain responds “I know not: Am I my

brother's keeper?"⁷ (Genesis 4:9: KJV), a phrase that appears in fourteen of Obama's speeches to reinforce his belief in a cohesive community that can rise above its differences and inequalities, "that we all have a stake in each other; that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper; and we rise and fall together as one people" (Obama, 2007l). This phrase can also be found in similar forms in:

1. 2004 Democratic National Convention (Obama, 2004)
2. Take Back America 2007 (Obama, 2007j)
3. A Politics of Conscience (Obama, 2007k)
4. A Challenge for Our Times (Obama, 2007n)
5. A Call to Serve (Obama, 2007p)
6. The Great Need of the Hour (Obama, 2008c)
7. Reclaiming the American Dream (Obama, 2008e)
8. A More Perfect Union (Obama, 2008i)
9. Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr (Obama, 2008j)
10. Building Trades National Legislative Conference (Obama, 2008k)
11. League of United Latin American Citizens (Obama, 2008q)
12. The American Promise (Obama, 2008v)
13. Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Gala (Obama, 2008w)

Obama's use of the phrase has its origins in a moment of recognition illustrated in the "Kenya" section of *Dreams From My Father*. Obama relates his uncle's comments on the differences between Nigerians and Kenyans, noting that "we share more than divides us" (Obama, 2007a: p382). Daniel Stein argues that this phrase "rings true for [Obama's] political message and finds a middle ground between black nationalism, double consciousness, and racial invisibility ... From this sense of a common history and a common purpose emerges one of Obama's most frequently repeated biblical acknowledgements, a modified version of Cain's question to God: "I am my brother's keeper; I am my sister's keeper" (Stein, 2011: p8).

Although the phrase functions for Obama as a shorthand call for all Americans to look out for each other's interests, there is an undeniable racial

⁷ The phrase also gives its name to the initiative launched by President Obama in 2014 to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by African American boys and young men. The programme focuses on preparing for education, improving reading, completing education, and on working to "keep kids on track". (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper>)

subtext that many, particularly in African American audiences, would have recognised. The story of Cain and Abel has often been employed with reference to race in the United States, for instance in the antebellum period where the story was used as a biblical justification of slavery by white theologians who have argued “after Cain killed Abel, God banished him and placed on him ‘the mark of Cain’. Some suggested that the ‘mark of Cain’ was blackness” (Finkelman, 2006: p4) or that “the ‘Divine Curse’ placed upon Cain was black skin and negroid features” (James W A, 2003: p57). In this reading, Cain becomes the threatening outsider, jealous of the advantages enjoyed by his (white) brother. Cain is the ‘other’ who is no longer accepted and there are evident parallels with racial segregation. However, the mark of Cain is a sign of God’s protection and demand that Cain is not harmed in retaliation for killing his brother. So there is also an alternative reading that singles out Cain (and by extension African Americans) as having special status, despite his fate being to wander constantly in search of acceptance and community. In referencing the story of Cain and Abel, it can be assumed that Obama recognises the historical use of the story to justify slavery and racism. In his rhetoric, however, it is used as a parable about the need to foster mutual understanding and responsibility. In *A Politics of Conscience*, Obama is clear that the need to shoulder each other’s burdens is central to his faith: “it’s not enough to just believe this - we have to do our part to make it a reality. My faith teaches me that I can sit in church and pray all I want, but I won’t be fulfilling God’s will unless I go out and do the Lord’s work” (Obama, 2007k). Obama therefore sees his campaign’s call for renewal in biblical terms. The atonement and sacrifice that he describes in the secular terms of unity and collective effort evidently have their origins in the biblical language that also contributes to the American Jeremiad and the promise of America.

Extralinguistic factors

The extralinguistic analysis is focused primarily on how the imagery most closely associated with the campaign (the logo and the series of posters produced by Shepard Fairey) reinforces the campaign’s promise of unity and a brighter future, and facilitates the iconography of the candidate. This

section also discusses the ways in which the logo appears as a halo surrounding Obama in countless photographs from the campaign, and how the media echoed this imagery in presenting Obama as a heroic saviour.

The key design features of the campaign logo are founded in the 'O' of Obama, which suggests a sun rising against a blue sky, over ploughed fields made up from the stripes of the US flag, and therefore representative of the American landscape. The logo often appears in isolation on badges, posters and slogans (i.e. without "Obama '08" underneath), rendering the image synonymous with Obama, and the use of his name unnecessary. The logo was also easily adapted to represent specific demographic groups. For instance "African Americans for Obama" includes a circle of thirty-six stars around the outside of the logo, likely a reference to the number of states in the Union at the end of the Civil War; "Women for Obama" saw the logo transformed into the universal symbol for women, the mirror of Venus; "Students for Obama" replaced the ploughed fields with a textbook; "Obama Pride" replaced the blue sky with a rainbow, and "People of Faith for Obama" includes a shining sun at the centre of the logo.⁸



Figure 7: Obama's campaign logo.

The campaign logo was developed by Chicago-based design agency, Sender LLC, who were contracted by the campaign's chief strategist and Communications Director, David Axelrod. Sender specialised in advertising, not political campaigning, and had never produced a political logo prior to being approached by Axelrod. The Obama campaign evidently sought a new approach to the creation of the logo, quite likely seeing the process as akin to

⁸ <http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/004262.html>

developing the sort of marketing or brand identity adopted by major corporations. The circular logo certainly represents a break from the traditional, rectangular, name-heavy political identities in US election history; a symbolic change to mark the political change offered by Obama.

The illustration below shows twenty years of Republican and Democrat campaign logos from 1988 to 2008, each offering similar variations on the theme of flag and candidate name (with the exception of John McCain's logo, which uses a naval star to evoke his military career):

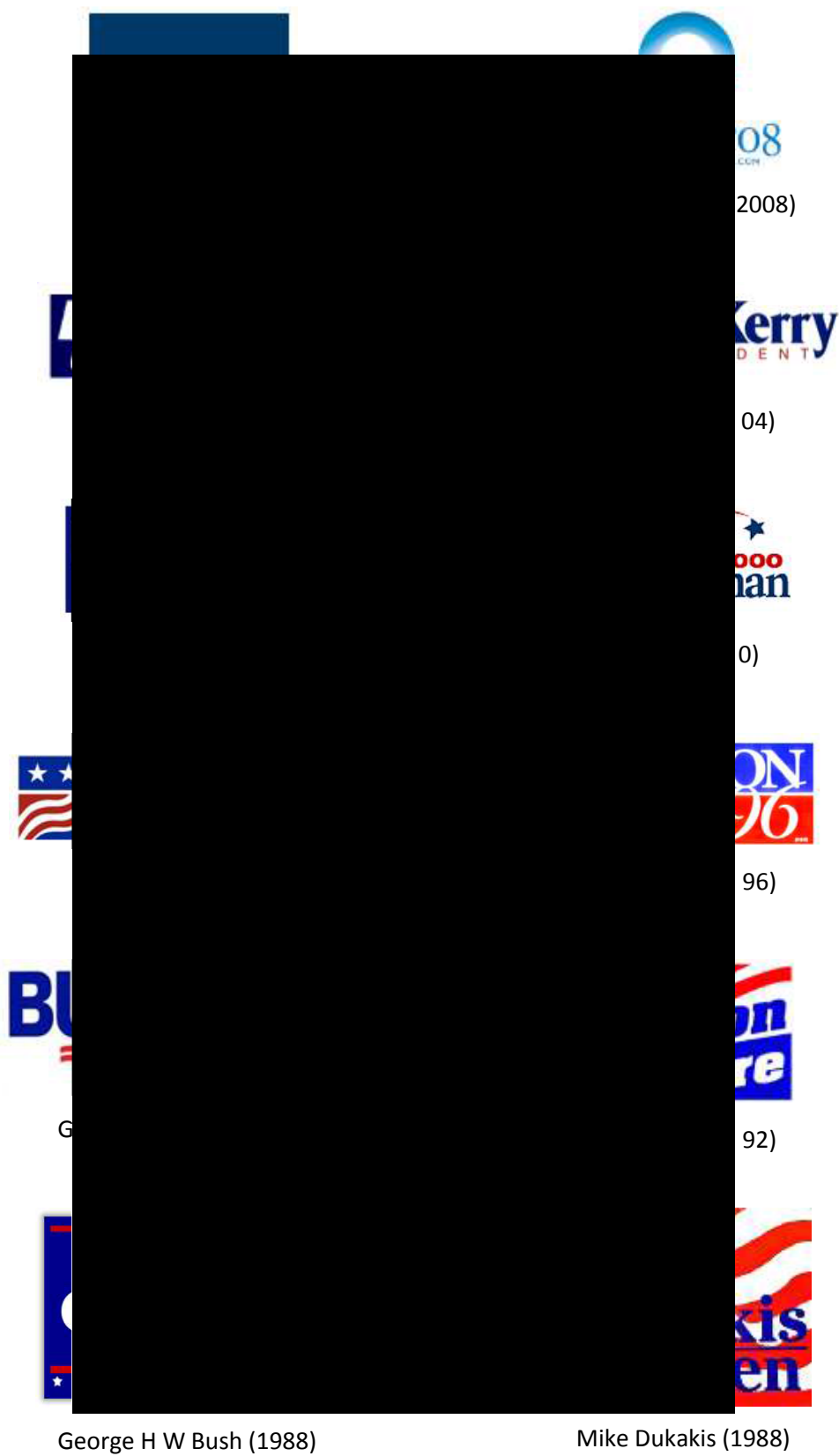


Figure 8: US presidential campaign logos, 1988-2008

The Obama '08 logo clearly stands out as different from its contemporaries and predecessors. In a 2008 interview with Steven Heller, Sol Sender explains that the logo has its origins in the core messages of Obama's campaign: "We were struck by the ideas of hope, change and a new perspective on red and blue (not red and blue states, but one country). There was also a strong sense, from the start, that his campaign represented something entirely new in American politics — 'a new day', so to speak" (Heller, 2008: n.p.). Sender therefore designed the logo to connect with the notions of unity, renewal, and rebirth expressed in Obama's rhetoric. (Sender was also asked if Obama provided input into the logo design, but it appears that the choice of logo was primarily down to the campaign staff (Axelrod, David Plouffe, and others) with minimal involvement from the candidate himself).

In addition to associating Obama with the promise of a new day, the logo also served as a symbol or emblem for the campaign without always needing to include Obama's name. Bobby Calder, Professor of Marketing at the Kellogg School of Management (Illinois) suggests that, as a consequence, the logo "has a sort of superhero look to it. You can imagine somebody wearing something like that on their chest in a Superman kind of movie. So it has that sort of larger than life, superhero dimension even beyond just the name. This fits the notion that this is the candidacy of a strong person" (in Arnon, 2009: n.p.). The suggestion that the campaign logo could be seen as a superhero's emblem also fits the notion that Obama is a figure who stands for the eventual triumph of good over adversity; the hero who will save the nation.

Given this association of the Obama campaign logo with a Superman-like symbol, it is perhaps interesting to remark, as an aside, that the 2007/08 election campaign coincided with the resurgence of the Hollywood superhero movie, with popular characters Spiderman (2002, 2004 and 2007), Batman (2006, 2008), Superman (2006) and Iron Man (2008) featuring prominently. The 2006 film *Superman Returns* features the hero embarking on "an epic journey of redemption" in order to "protect the world he loves from

cataclysmic destruction”.⁹ The film includes a scene in which Superman sacrifices himself to save the planet then falls to earth, arms outstretched as if crucified. In August the same year, Obama posed in front of the Superman statue in Metropolis, Illinois, inevitably inviting associations and comparisons. In October 2008, shortly before the election, Obama gave a humorous and self-deprecating address at the Alfred E Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner, in which he made fun of both his origins and the ways in which he has been portrayed as a saviour figure. In the speech, he claimed to have been born on Krypton (Superman’s home planet) and sent to Earth to save the world.¹⁰ These are inconsequential and harmless connections, which nevertheless add colour to the presentation of Obama as heroic national saviour.



Figure 9: Obama in Metropolis, 2006 (Picture credit: unknown)

One of the most recognisable examples of the campaign logo being used without Obama’s name, and in a setting which denotes the candidate as a visionary leader with his eyes fixed on the horizon’s better future, is the “Hope” poster produced by artist Shepard Fairey. Fairey, an American street artist and graphic designer, produced stencil portraits of Obama that were initially distributed in small numbers and independently of the official Obama campaign. Fairey printed a larger number for distribution at campaign rallies early in 2008 and made the image available electronically. The poster quickly captured the public imagination and gained a popular following, subsequently

⁹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0348150/plotsummary>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vws9fTtQgz4>

winning the tacit approval of the Obama campaign although it was never formally included in the campaign's marketing collateral. The posters are therefore not an official part of the Obama campaign and consequently not influenced by the campaign staff. However, they illustrate how Obama was elevated as an icon, becoming a symbol for change and progress.



Figure 10: HOPE by Shepard Fairey

The poster depicts Obama gazing thoughtfully into the distance, leading the viewer to imagine that he has his mind on the future. It could also be inferred that Obama is looking upwards towards Heaven or God. The image is made up of four colours (red, cream and two shades of blue), suggesting the colours of the American flag, and is captioned by a single word: "Hope". The text is produced in a typeface known as Gotham, described by the font's designers as "a hard working typeface for the ages" with "an honest tone that's assertive but never imposing, friendly but never folksy, confident yet never aloof"¹¹ – qualities that would seem to accord with how Obama would want to be seen by the electorate. Gotham is also associated with the Batman comics, giving its name to the grimy, crime-ridden city the Batman

¹¹ <http://www.typography.com/fonts/gotham/overview/>

fighters to clean up, so there is another quirky but tenuous connection between Obama and the world of the superheroes.

Fairey's use of colour is interesting as the red, cream and blues enable him to portray Obama without making the candidate's racial heritage evident. In a 2010 interview, Fairey noted that he "wanted to make an image that deracialized Obama, where he's not a black man, but a *nationalized* man" (Pop, 2010: n.p.). The red, cream and blues that come together in the image also call to mind Obama's claim that "we are more than a collection of Red States and Blue States; we are, and always will be, the United States of America" (Obama, 2008g), and the image therefore becomes a subliminal reminder of Obama's call for political and national unity. Fairey admits that this was a deliberate choice: "The way I shaded the face half blue, half red – the convergence of the left and the right, the blue states and the red states. These are things that may be more subconsciously understood by the viewer, but I think they made the image powerful and people remembered it" (Gambino, 2009: n.p.). In Fairey's poster, then, Obama transcends race and becomes a representative for the whole nation, rather than a particular party.

The first version of the poster included the word "Progress" but Fairey changed the slogan to Hope "because the more I thought about it, the more I realized that people are complacent and apathetic when they're hopeless, and so hope leads to action. It's also hard to be anti-hope. It's one of those bulletproof things" (Pop, 2010: n.p.). Again, the poster chimes with Obama's demands that the electorate come together to work as a collective for a better future. It can also be argued that words such as "Hope" and "Progress" resonate more with African American audiences in the context of the prospect of the poster's subject becoming the first African American president. Those who have experienced segregation, inequality, racism and injustice can see a brighter future represented in the poster's subject matter.

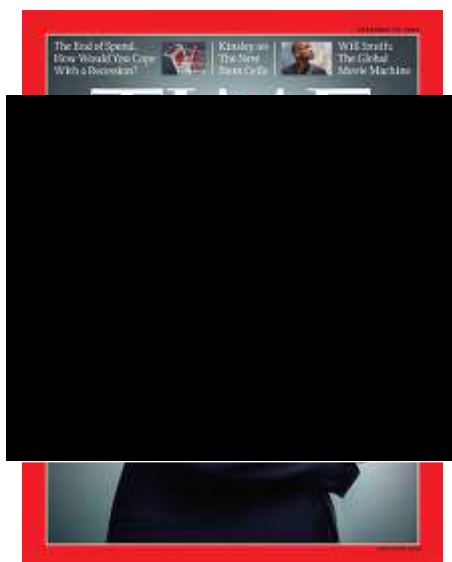


Figure 11: *Time Magazine* cover, 10 December 2007 (Credit: Platon)

The “Hope” poster was not the first instance of Obama portrayed with eyes fixed on the horizon. In December 2007, for instance, he featured on the cover of *Time Magazine*, arms folded and with a similar, thoughtful expression to the image in Fairey’s poster; Obama is also lit from behind, which creates a halo effect. A common feature of religious iconography, halos are rings of light used to signify deeply spiritual, heroic or anointed leaders with a divine connection. Although not mentioned in the Bible, halos are particularly evident in Christian art, where they represent light, divinity, and resurrection. As internet searches demonstrate,¹² there are many examples of photographs of Obama with a halo, often created as a result of the candidate being photographed with his head in front of the campaign logo, the Presidential seal (since 2009), or other light sources. Although in some cases the halo effect will be unintentional or serendipitous, it is likely that, in others, more deliberate attempts will have been made to capture images of Obama with a halo. Figure 12 below provides a representative selection of images captured during the 2008 election campaign and used on blogs, news websites, and so on. The images contribute to the picture that the campaign paints of Obama as national redeemer.

¹² For example:

https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=obama+halo&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0CAcQ_AUoAWoVChMI34P1jPHzXglVx9UUCh3F1gc_&biw=1280&bih=927

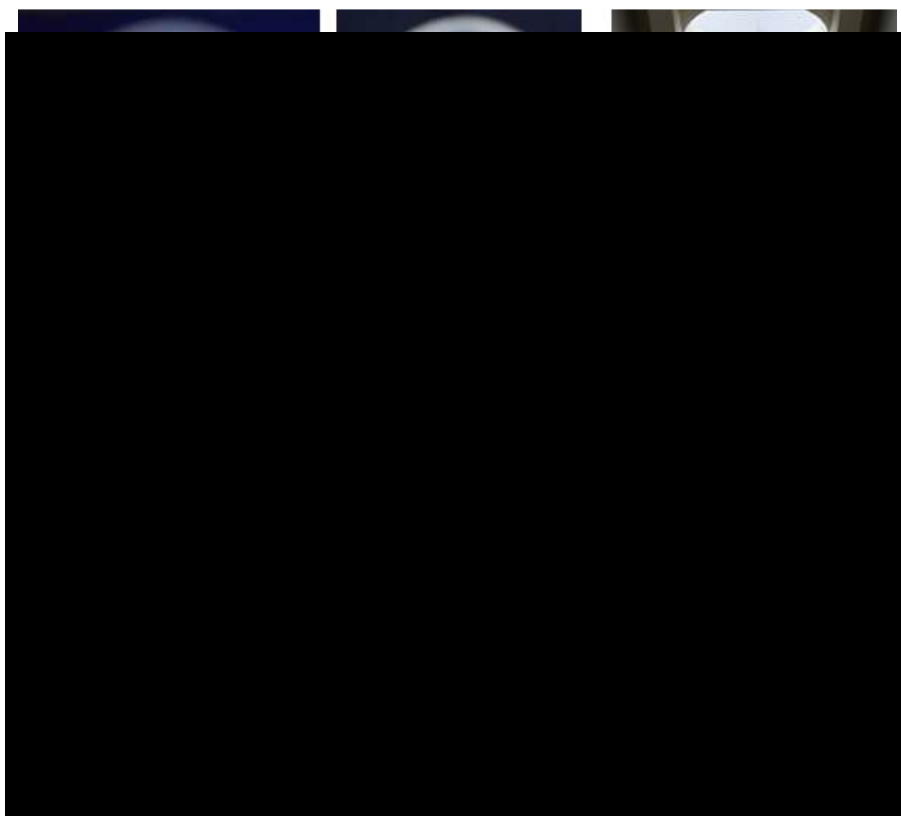


Figure 12: Representative selection of pictures from media coverage generated during the 2008 campaign, featuring Obama with a halo

On the cover of the March 2008 edition of *Rolling Stone*, which was published after the Fairey poster had gained popularity, the halo effect is more ethereal, with Obama wreathed in a bright, white glow. The headline “A New Hope” clearly references a central theme of Obama’s rhetoric as well as acknowledging Fairey’s poster but there is also another pop culture reference, this time to the original (1977) *Star Wars* film (Episode 4: A New Hope), in which a new generation of heroes rises against an evil Empire. Paola DiMeglio (Associate Art Director with *Psychiatric Times*) and Robert Siel (Production Director with Sumner Communications) also suggest that Obama’s pose and the “one touch of colour on the red tie” symbolise a Superman-type image (Stableford, 2008: n.p.).

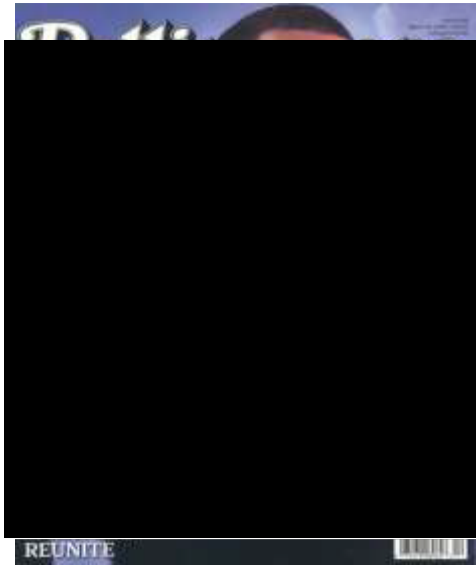


Figure 13: *Rolling Stone* magazine cover, March 2008

(Illustrator: Tim O'Brien)

The backlit halo effect is also evident on the July 2008 cover of *Der Spiegel*, which places Obama in the role of Messiah with a headline that translates as “The Messiah-factor. Barack Obama and the yearning for a new America”, connecting the candidate with the ideas of renewal and making a break from the past that can be found in Obama’s speeches.

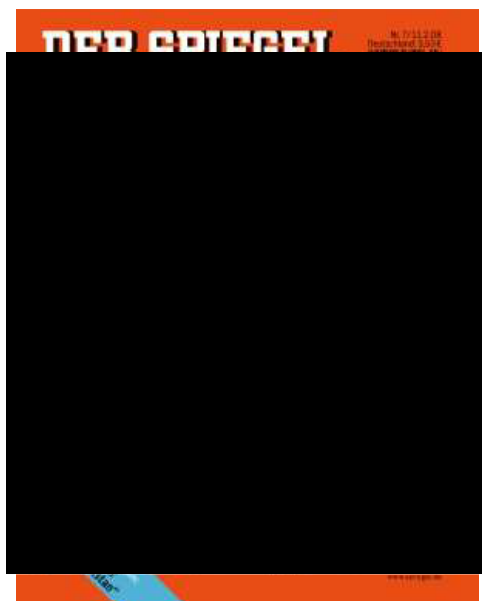


Figure 14: *Der Spiegel* magazine cover, July 2008 (Credit: Damon Winter)

The most overt portrayal of Obama as a Christ-like figure can be seen on the January 2008 cover of the left-leaning, liberal magazine, *The New Republic*. Obama, with a perfect halo and framed against the American flag, appears to be raising his hand in blessing or forgiveness under the headline “The trials of Barack Obama”. Although a reference to the political, racial and electoral challenges faced by Obama during the campaign, there is a clear intertextual link that conflates Obama as the nation’s redeemer with the Bible’s description of the trials Christ underwent before crucifixion.

It is also worth briefly acknowledging here Cornel West’s discussion of how black political leaders have presented themselves sartorially, and particularly those leaders of the short civil rights movement who, West argues, clothed themselves to “reveal the tame and genteel face of the black middle class. The black dress suits with white shirts worn by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr signified the seriousness of their deep commitment to black freedom, whereas today the expensive tailored suits of black politicians symbolize their personal success and individual achievement” (West, 1993: pp37-38). Although it may be argued that the images depicting Obama as healer-preacher do follow the pattern of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr’s style, Obama is a self-made, well-educated African American with a record of accomplishment. It would therefore appear to be more appropriate to apply West’s latter description of politicians and their expensive suits to Obama.

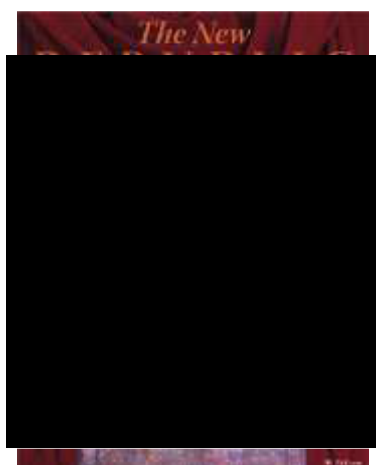


Figure 15: *The New Republic* magazine cover, January 2008
(Credit: unknown)

In her introduction to Maurice Berger's *For all the world to see: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, Thulani Davis writes that "the representation of African-Americans in the cultural mainstream ... has been so selective, narrowly conceived, and determined by anticipation of white reception that widely accessible black images also become iconic. Most of them still exist in a shorthand of African American fame rather than history" (Berger, 2010: pxi). Davis lists Frederick Douglass, Booker T Washington, Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King Jr, Mohammed Ali and Michael Jackson as representative examples of African Americans whose images have become icons. We might now add Obama to this list given the presentation of the candidate as a confident, articulate and sophisticated African American.

Berger notes that "between 1940 and 1960 *Life* magazine rarely published affirmative images of African Americans" and "almost never included them in its definition of prosperity, progress or 'the American way of life'" (ibid, p60). Berger then credits *Ebony* with changing the way African Americans are seen in the media, through the increasingly common use of "constructive and self-assured images of black people" (ibid, p62). It can be argued that the presentation of Obama's image in the 2007/08 campaign falls within, and draws upon, this tradition.

African American leadership / Exodus

Chapter five signalled the use of the Exodus trope by the civil rights movement. While Exodus has been appropriated by African Americans, drawing parallels between slavery and the Israelites' flight from Egyptian oppression, the narrative also plays to the notion of the American Dream and the city on a hill acting as the exemplary society. Winthrop's exhortation urged the European settlers to watch over each other in their new promised land, free from the claustrophobic restrictions of seventeenth-century Europe. The Puritans "saw their conquest of the New World as manifest destiny and America as the land of 'milk and honey'" (Harris, 2012: p83), anointing the New World as their utopia with, as Michael Walzer describes it, the Exodus as "a march toward a goal, a moral progress, a transformation" (Walzer, 1985: p12).

For African Americans the moral progress faltered due to what Obama calls the “original sin of slavery” being at odds with America’s claim to be beacon of hope (Obama, 2008i). In this context, Exodus becomes the “paradigmatic tale of suffering, deliverance, and redemption in western consciousness” (Murphy, 2011: p402). Similarly, as Frederick Harris argues, African Americans “saw themselves as an oppressed people, enslaved, liberated, and wandering in the wilderness of America’s racist society” (Harris, 2012: p83). This accords with Anna Hartnell’s assertion that “in many ways black America’s rendition of the Exodus story is a deconstruction of the myth that stands at the centre of accounts of what many have characterised as an ‘American civil religion’ ... In most African American renditions of the national story, America is not the promised land of the Exodus vision, but rather the site of Egyptian oppression” (Hartnell, 2011: p2). Hartnell’s discussion of the Exodus narrative further explores this tension between black memory (the articulation of resistance and struggle) and state memory (the national master story that America is a divinely ordered nation, conveniently eliding slavery and oppression).

Hartnell also provides an interesting analysis of how Obama now straddles both black memory and state memory, with the struggle for civil rights and the prophetic tradition lending context to the presidential campaign but conflicting with Obama’s presidential imperative to promote the national myth. As described in the previous chapter, the presidential candidate was careful to identify with the people and ambitions of the short civil rights movement, falling back on black memory to demonstrate his credentials, but Hartnell’s argument is that Obama’s use of black memory is necessarily subordinate to the expectation that, as president, he will promote the image of America as the land of freedom and opportunity. His campaign relies on his connection to the African American struggle and the unfulfilled promise of America, but this is at odds with state memory and the national myth. Whether Obama’s presidency conforms to this expectation falls outside the scope of this thesis, but it is helpful to recognise the tension that Obama faces in reconciling African American hopes for progress (black memory) with the promulgation of the national master story.

Chapter five established a rhetorical connection between Obama and Martin Luther King Jr. It is therefore not surprising that Obama should choose to extend the Exodus narrative that also underpinned aspects of King's rhetoric. In his autobiography, King recalls how he overcame his indecision about whether to face imprisonment in Birmingham Jail when he thought of "the twenty million black people who dreamed that someday they might be able to cross the Red Sea of injustice and find their way to the promised land of integration and freedom" (Carson, 2008: p183), and he returned to the idea of the Promised Land in his prophetic last speech, given in Memphis the day before his assassination in 1968:

I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.

(King, 1968: n.p)

The Promised Land, as a vision of racial equality and justice, resonates within the civil rights tradition and is explicitly mentioned in five speeches in the reference corpus:

1. The Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration (Obama, 2007d)
2. A Politics of Conscience (Obama, 2007k)
3. Howard University Convocation (Obama, 2007m)
4. The Great Need of the Hour (Obama, 2008c)
5. Remarks of President Elect Obama ("victory speech") (Obama, 2008y)

In the *Howard University Convocation*, for instance, Obama notes that "Dr. King did not take us to the mountaintop so that we would allow a terrible storm to ravage those who were stranded in the valley". He highlights the role of Joshua in leading his people into the Promised Land, and, using the repeated command from Deuteronomy 1-3 to "be strong and of good courage", urges his audience to "be strong and have courage and [...] cross over to that Promised Land together" (Obama, 2007m). Moses and the mountaintop are also referenced in *The Great Need Of The Hour*, alongside Joshua and the Israelites at Jericho. The value of the figure of Joshua to Obama is not simply as the successor to Moses: Joshua is also a leader who

governed his people, a presidential role model. It should be recognised that Joshua was also a military leader and that, in the Bible story, he and his army bring down the walls of Jericho in Canaan as part of the quest to regain the Promised Land. The only occasion on which Obama refers to the fall of Jericho is in *The Great Need Of The Hour*, and then only to reinforce the need for unity and collective effort (in the story, Jericho's walls fall when Joshua's army blow their trumpets in unison). Although the image of the falling walls acts as a metaphor for the dismantling of discriminatory barriers, the violence of the act is perhaps too martial for a candidate seeking to build consensus and racial rapprochement, and it is perhaps therefore for this reason that this is not a recurring image in the campaign rhetoric.

John M Murphy argues that the phrase "be strong and of good courage" "is critical" as, in the Bible, it "eases the transition between Moses and Joshua" (Murphy, 2011: p395). In passing the baton of leadership, Moses instils in Joshua the confidence to lead his people into the Promised Land: "And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it" (Deuteronomy 31:7: KJV). The phrase also appears in the Book of Joshua, where this time it is God encouraging Joshua: "Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1:9: KJV).

Obama's use of the phrase requires some analysis. On one hand, it serves to remind his audience of his connection to the Exodus narrative and his claim to be following in the footsteps of the Moses figures from the short civil rights movement; the rhetorical echo locating Obama in the story. Yet Obama is urging his audience to be strong and to have courage, implying that he is handing the baton of leadership to them. In the Bible quotations above, it is Joshua who is receiving instruction; in Obama's speech it is the audience. It can be argued that Obama places the pursuit of equality and justice into the hands of the entire nation, who together will lead America into the Promised

Land as a collective founded on the unity of purpose and effort that Obama articulates in his rhetoric.

As noted in Chapter four, sections of the African American community were initially reluctant to embrace Obama's candidacy due to his lack of track record within the civil rights movement. Obama's allusions to Exodus consequently also helped him to convince his African American audience of the legitimacy of his campaign, and nowhere is this more evident than in the *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* speech of 2007. In this speech, Obama places himself within the Exodus narrative, and specifically as the Joshua to Martin Luther King's Moses. This speech therefore offers extensive evidence of Obama's intent to establish himself as the heir to King. His audience in Selma's Brown Chapel, an important institution in the history of the short civil rights movement, would naturally be familiar with the Exodus story and the concept of the Promised Land as the delivery of the racial equality set out in the constitution. Obama acknowledges that he is in the presence of a lot of Moses, "people who battled [...] for America's soul", who "took them across the sea that folks thought could not be parted". These successes notwithstanding, Obama thanks the Moses generation for their efforts, but reminds his audience that "Joshua still had a job to do. As great as Moses was, despite all that he did, he didn't cross over the river to see the Promised Land [...] The Moses generation pointed the way. They took us 90% of the way there. We still got that 10% in order to cross over to the other side." Obama then uses a significant portion of his speech to set out how the Joshua generation should strive to reduce inequality, concluding that "it was left to the Joshuas to finish the journey Moses had begun and today we're called to be the Joshuas of our time, to be the generation that finds our way across the river [...] let us cross over that Promised Land together" (Obama, 2007d). Obama clearly proposed himself as the successor to King, a new Joshua who will lead his people into the Promised Land, but he is equally determined that reaching the Promised Land should be a collective effort, a generational challenge that is made possible through the unity of purpose he calls for.

The *Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration* speech therefore gave the “Moses generation” the confidence to place their hopes in Obama’s campaign. David Remnick reports that the Reverend Lowery’s response to the address was to accept Obama’s claim to a connection with the movement: “People were talking about was he black enough, but, to me, it’s always a question of how you see the movement, where you see yourself in the movement. And he came through”. Remnick also records the Reverend C T Vivian’s assertion that “Martin Luther King was our prophet The politician of our age, who comes along to follow that prophet, is Barack Obama. Martin laid the moral and spiritual base for the political reality to follow” (Remnick, 2010: p24).

The *A Politics of Conscience* speech (also given in a church to an African American audience) similarly encourages the audience to associate Obama with Joshua: “...we all have it within our power to make this a better world. [...] It's the wisdom Moses imparted to those who would succeed him. And it's a lesson we need to remember today – as members of another Joshua generation” (Obama, 2007k). However, Obama’s need to secure cross-racial support for his campaign requires him to move beyond an African American interpretation of Exodus and the Promised Land. Although Obama’s most detailed exposition of Exodus is delivered to African American audiences in order to advocate for legitimacy within the scope of black memory, it is important to note that Obama is not just speaking to African Americans when he invokes the Promised Land and the need for unity. Obama’s campaign seeks equality for all Americans, not for a particular demographic. Racial equality for African Americans must be secured alongside equality for white Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. John M Murphy argues that Obama “picked up the [Exodus] story at a later point, one in which King’s sacrifice had *already* saved the soul of all America, as the Senator put it at Selma. But the American people had forgotten the unity King forged, lost momentum, and stood stalled on the banks of the Jordan. Through this campaign, we could call forth the spirit and finally cross over the river” (Murphy, 2011: p403). Obama’s Exodus, and his Joshua generation, is

intended as an inclusive call for all Americans to bridge the gap between the rhetoric of the Perfect Union and the reality of racial injustice.

The Selma speech's emphasis on the story of Moses and Joshua evidently positions Obama as the figurehead who will secure for African Americans the freedom and equality that the US Constitution promises to all Americans. However, Obama himself has noted that he has "never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy" (Obama, 2008i) and his election night Victory Speech is clearly intended to evoke the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr looking down from the mountaintop. Obama declares that "the road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even in one term, but America – I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you, we as a people will get there" (Obama, 2008y).

Obama's redemption drama

With Obama's intent to redeem America of its racial failings functioning as the '*purpose*' in Burke's *pentad*, the pentadic elements are now fully populated. The *act* is the purging of society's guilt for not realising the nation's "improbable experiment in democracy" (Obama, 2008i), and, as noted above, Obama includes the failings of the black community alongside those of white America. The *scene* is the context of racism, segregation and the short civil rights movement; Obama is the *agent* and his *agency* to effect change is through harnessing the political will of the electorate and encouraging the nation to unite around a common goal. This chapter's discussion of sacrifice and atonement can also be related to Burke's work, and particularly to his exposition in *Permanence and Change* (1965) of the guilt-purification-redemption cycle, a "secular version of the Christian drama of sinful humans achieving salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ" (Bobbitt, 2004: p8), which Bobbitt also describes as the foundation for a redemption drama.

Burke argues that the purification that leads to redemption can be achieved through victimage (transferring the guilt to a symbolic scapegoat where blame can be attributed) or mortification (manifested in the atonement gained through personal sacrifice). As Bobbitt notes, “these two modes of purification are closely related, because while victimage is the mortification of the other (the scapegoat), mortification is the victimizing or scapegoating of the self” (ibid, p42). In the case of Obama’s rhetoric, victimage is evident in the way Obama lays the blame for racial injustice at the feet of both white Americans, for sustaining and reinforcing inequalities, and African Americans, for not taking responsibility for the issues they can control. The mortification, or “scapegoating of the self”, can be seen in Obama’s claim that “we must admit that none of our hands are entirely clean” (Obama, 2008c) and in the demands for personal sacrifice evident in the calls for collective effort and unity to restore the promise of America. Burke’s *pentad* can therefore be applied to elucidate the guilt-purification-redemption cycle.

In *A Grammar of Motives* (1969), Burke introduces the concept of the representative anecdote, the paradigmatic discourse of the rhetoric being considered. The representative anecdote is therefore a specific speech or discourse that has become most associated with a particular subject. For instance, King’s *I Have A Dream* speech can be described as the representative anecdote of the short civil rights movement, as is argued by David Bobbitt (2004). Bobbitt summarises the three requirements of Burke’s representative anecdote as persuasive reasoning that

- 1) reflects human action and choice;
- 2) must possess the scope to be representative of the subject matter and incorporate the language and imagery of the discourse, and
- 3) must be synecdochic by providing a summation of the core symbols of the dramatic conflict embodied in the larger discourse (Bobbitt, 2004: p7).

It can be argued that Obama’s discussion of race in *A More Perfect Union* (Obama, 2008i) fulfils the requirements of the representative anecdote in the

discourse of redemption evident in the campaign rhetoric. The focus of the speech is on the core message of Obama's campaign: the need to perfect the imperfect Union and to secure progress through collective effort and national unity "by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren" (Obama, 2008i).

The speech also evokes both Lincoln and King, with "Two hundred and twenty years ago" (ibid) echoing the opening structures used in the speeches given by Lincoln at Gettysburg and King in Washington. There are references to the Union being imperfect, stained by the "original sin of slavery" despite promising "equal citizenship under the law", whilst the history of civil rights is evident in Obama's reference to "Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part – through protests and struggle and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience" (ibid). Obama believes that the electorate has the opportunity to perfect the Union and that his candidacy has the potential to unite the country around a common cause.

Chaper four discussed the view Obama expressed in this speech that Reverend Wright represents a generation of leaders that has failed to recognise the progress that has been made with regard to the civil rights struggle. Obama therefore uses the speech to defuse Wright's comments by placing the differences between African Americans and white Americans in the context of American history and demanding that his audience moves on to acknowledge his understanding of a more tolerant and equitable America. The result is a rhetorical strategy that relies on fostering interracial understanding and a "patriotic lexicon ... meant to comfort white ears and soothe white fears. What keeps the speech from falling into a pandering sea of slogans is language that reveals, not the ideals, but the failures of the American experiment" (Clark, 2008: n.p.). *A More Perfect Union* therefore encompasses the principal themes of the broader analytic corpus: racial progress, civil rights, collective effort, and unity in the cause of progress.

Obama then illustrates his argument with the story of Ashley Baia, which also appears in *The Great Need of the Hour* (Obama, 2008c) and which is effectively a distillation of the redemptive moment that Obama's redemption drama seeks to achieve. Obama describes when Ashley, a young white woman who worked as a community organiser within the African American community "was nine years old, her mother got cancer. And because she had to miss days of work, she was let go and lost her health care" (ibid). Obama then compounds this image of a young, sick, bankrupt mother who cannot afford health insurance by describing how Ashley convinced her mother that her favourite food was mustard and relish sandwiches "because that was the cheapest way to eat" (ibid). The story becomes one of a white family that takes responsibility for itself, makes do, and does not blame anyone else for the difficulties it faces, specifically not "blacks on welfare" or "Hispanics coming into the country illegally" (ibid).

Finally, Obama describes how Ashley's story touches other communities through the example of an elderly African American who has been persuaded to support Obama's campaign "because of Ashley". Obama calls this a "single moment of recognition", and the start of a stronger union that transcends race. It is therefore argued that the story of Ashley Baia is representative of the national unity and interracial tolerance that Obama believes America can achieve, and its inclusion in *A More Perfect Union* serves to encapsulate in anecdotal form the redemptive moment he seeks.

Consequently, the speech acts as the representative anecdote of Obama's discourse because it:

- 1) reflects human action and choice: Obama gives his audience the opportunity to embrace the moment of recognition in order to effect change in America;
- 2) is representative of the wider subject matter as it addresses the central issues and appeals of Obama's campaign and makes use of the same imagery and language, and

3) is a synecdochic representation of the campaign because the story of Ashley Baia works as a summation of everything his campaign aspires to deliver: reconciliation, understanding and progress.

This “single moment of recognition” therefore represents a dramatic catharsis in the guilt-purification-redemption cycle of the redemption drama.

Summary

This chapter has located Obama’s campaign rhetoric within the longstanding American political tradition of reinventing and renewing America with each electoral cycle; a secular, civil religion that promotes a spiritualised national identity and which yet is grounded in religious tradition and language. It has been argued that Obama conflates the promise of America with the American Dream so that his ambition to move the nation beyond its history of racial injustice is entwined with “the right to pursue our individual dreams but the obligation to help our fellow citizens pursue theirs” (Obama, 2008o), the goal being to reach “that better place around the bend” (Obama, 2008v). This in turn evokes the Promised Land of the Exodus narrative.

It has also been shown that Obama’s rhetoric calls on the Jeremiad tradition, which displays optimism in the future whilst also highlighting past failures. Specifically, Obama’s speeches express hope for a better future that can be realised through collective effort, but they also elaborate on the country’s history of institutionalised racism, slavery and segregation. It is this belief in the nation’s capacity to overcome its past, to be a beacon of hope, and to finally realise the vision of its founders that underscores Obama’s candidacy as an opportunity for healing and redemption, the purpose in Burke’s model.

The chapter has highlighted the role of the black church in shaping Obama’s commitment to community organising and making a difference to society, and how this connection with the African American religious tradition exposes him to the language of Exodus and Joshua. It subsequently argued that achieving redemption for racial guilt requires atonement and sacrifice, and noted that a significant proportion of the reference corpus calls in some way for national

unity, and how the promise of America can be achieved through collective effort and giving back to society: “the promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort” (Obama, 2008v).

The recognition of guilt and the call for atonement and sacrifice underpin a redemptive framework, which is complemented by the use of biblical language as well as imagery and iconography that reinforce the presentation of Obama as a healer-redeemer who will facilitate a national atonement for the “original sin” of slavery (Obama, 2008i). Through this redemption, the Promised Land of equality and justice can be reached by the “Joshua generation” as a collective, with Obama as figurehead. The chapter has therefore argued that Obama’s campaign rhetoric carries a consistent message of national unity and reconciliation that will effect a redemption of the past.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen; by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the very first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different; that their voice could be that difference.

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled - Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America.

It's the answer that led those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, and fearful, and doubtful of what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.

It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America.

(Obama, 2008y)

Shortly after eleven o'clock in the evening on 4 November 2008, after the media had called the State of Virginia (and with it the election) for Obama, America's first African American first-family-elect strode onto the stage in Grant Park, Chicago. To the acclaim of a crowd nearly a quarter of a million people strong, Obama stepped forward and proclaimed that change had come to America.

President-elect Obama's election night victory speech, particularly its first five paragraphs, neatly underscores the key preoccupations of this thesis. The first paragraph ties his success to the American Dream, although it is not

hard to see Martin Luther King Jr's *Dream* also implicated in this opening. The next two paragraphs recognise that his campaign has brought a sense of unity to America through its appeal to a demographically broad range of voters, and that his campaign has encouraged people to believe that each vote mattered. Here, the unspoken suggestion is that Obama's campaign has instilled a belief in the electorate (especially African American voters) that his candidacy could succeed where previous attempts by African American candidates had failed; that this election really could deliver America's first non-white president. This spirit of unity is evident in the electoral results. Analysis of the polls would later show that Obama's success had been ensured by a coalition of non-white voters: he had secured 95 percent of the black vote, 67 percent of the Hispanic vote and 62 percent of the Asian vote, whilst his 43 percent share of the white American vote compared favourably with previous Democratic Party candidates (Bobo and Dawson, 2009: p4).

The fourth paragraph also calls to mind the frustrations of the long freedom struggle in its reference to "those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, and fearful, and doubtful of what we can achieve" (Obama, 2008y), which is swiftly followed with references to how the trajectory of King's "arc of history" can be changed through collective effort. Obama also places the campaign's message of hope in a better future in this context. Finally, the fifth paragraph connects Sam Cooke's civil rights anthem *A Change is Gonna Come* with the change that the electorate has brought about.

The opening section of Obama's victory speech therefore encompasses hope, change, civil rights, national unity, and collective effort. It is consequently and unequivocally about race and overcoming the past. In the middle of Grant Park, a location associated with the 1968 Chicago riots,¹ Obama holds out his election as an opportunity to reconcile and unite the nation, and as a defining moment in American history. He later returns to the idea of America as a beacon of hope, and that the "true genius of America" is

¹ Although Chicago, like many US cities, witnessed rioting after the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, the Grant Park riots which took place during the Democratic National Convention later the same year were predominantly the result of youth protests against the Vietnam War.

that “America can change. Our union can be perfected. And what we have already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow” (ibid). There are also direct references to Lincoln and King, whilst Obama’s calls for “a new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in” (ibid) channels Kennedy’s inaugural address.

Finally, Obama illustrates his belief in America’s proven capacity to effect change with the story of Ann Nixon Cooper, a 106-year-old African American who had just voted in an election for the first time in her life. Cooper,² who had been a friend of W E B Du Bois and who received a telegram from Martin Luther King on her husband’s death, had already witnessed a century of change. Obama catalogues the events that Cooper had lived through, from suffrage, the Great Depression, and Pearl Harbor, through to the Freedom Rides, Selma, the Moon landing, and the dawn of the Internet. Obama punctuates each of these examples with “that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes We Can” (ibid), reminding his audience that the United States can deliver significant societal change when its people come together in the pursuit of progress. Obama then concludes his speech by challenging America to continue this commitment to progress in order “to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American Dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth - that out of many, we are one” (ibid).

It is evident that a substantial proportion of Obama’s victory speech is given over to notions of national progress. The speech unites many of the ideas and conclusions proposed by this thesis and it therefore can be described as the redemptive moment of the campaign. There is certainly the implication that Obama’s success represents a repudiation of the past and an opportunity to heal racial wounds.

This chapter draws together the findings of the research and relates them back to the initial research questions. The intention is not simply to summarise and recapitulate the conclusions presented in each chapter, but

² Cooper was also grandmother to sociologist Lawrence Bobo, whose work is cited in this thesis.

to provide cohesive analysis of the findings of the application of the Discourse Historical Approach to argue that the thesis has achieved its aim to reveal the nature of the redemptive framework articulated within Barack Obama's rhetoric. This chapter also reaffirms the thesis' contribution to the existing scholarship, considers the limitations of the research, and proposes new research projects that could be prompted by its findings, or which could benefit from the methodology used.

Research questions and focus

There can be little doubt that Obama's candidacy was viewed through a racial lens by the American electorate, or that his campaign was scrutinised through the same lens. As the introductory chapter demonstrates, his election success was heralded by the media in terms that invoked King's *Dream* and Du Bois' color line, and there was much public and press speculation about the meaning and implications of an Obama victory, or whether an America that had elected its first non-white president could be described as post racial.

Yet, whilst many in academia and the media commented on Obama's identity, candidacy, and the extent to which he did or did not speak about race, their arguments were generally supported either by limited textual analysis of individual speeches or a small corpus, or by applying a historical perspective to the campaign. There has been no clear consensus on the extent to which Obama referred to racial issues during the campaign and the principal arguments have focused on the belief that Obama rarely mentioned and even played down the significance of race. For instance, authors such as Rogers Smith and Desmond King propose that Obama's strategy entailed "not talking about race and minimising its impact on the election" (Smith and King, 2009: p31) whilst Kevin Coe and Michael Reitzes undertake a quantitative analysis of a corpus of Obama's speeches to argue that just 1.72 words of every 1,000 spoken by Obama during the campaign were related to race (Coe and Reitzes, 2010: p400). Given the nature of the debate about

the significance of Obama's victory in the context of race and civil rights in America, there is a clear need to test these assertions.

This thesis consequently set out to undertake systematic analysis of Obama's speeches and books to ascertain whether race was indeed a key feature of his rhetoric. The thesis asked whether his 2007/08 campaign could be said to have presented the candidate as a unifying figure whose election could be seen as a moment of redemption for America's "original sin of slavery" (Obama B H, 2008i), i.e. its failure to achieve racial equality and justice. It was posited that this redemptive opportunity would arise from Obama's

- 1) projection of his personal history within the context of a narrative arc that spans centuries of inequality and racial discord;
- 2) careful positioning of his campaign to neither confront nor accommodate white America about racism, inequality and injustice, and
- 3) rhetorical strategies, deployment of history, and considered use of music and imagery to weave a narrative that would particularly appeal to and reassure African American voters.

In summary, this project sought to examine the extent to which expressions of race and identity featured in Obama's election campaign. It also sought to understand the extent to which the campaign rhetoric referred to America's history of racial inequality and to explore Obama's construction of a racial identity that connected him to the African American struggle for civil rights, and which placed him within an African American progress narrative. The thesis' primary aim was therefore to reveal whether a significant feature of Obama's campaign was the articulation of a rhetoric of redemption. The methodology adopted to address these questions combined discourse analysis with the application of cultural and historical knowledge, and the introduction of Kenneth Burke's *dramatistic pentad* model for understanding the motives contained in rhetoric.

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) was selected as the ideal method to interrogate the large corpus of speeches as it is specifically configured to enable the researcher to take into account a broader range of contextual considerations, from the literary and linguistic to the social, political, and historical. DHA requires four levels of analysis, which provided the structure for each of the thesis' main chapters:

- 1) textual analysis conducted on the analytic corpus;
- 2) the application of contextual knowledge to illuminate intertextual relationships, for example between Obama's speeches and the canon of African American literature;
- 3) analysis of the rhetoric's extralinguistic context, such as imagery, venues and music, and
- 4) consideration of how the Exodus narrative lends further context to the findings produced by the other levels of analysis.

The three primary chapters also relate the five constituent elements of Burke's *pentad* (Act, Agent, Agency, Purpose, Scene) to the results of the data analysis. The model can work independently of other frameworks and methodologies but was incorporated within the DHA as Burke also introduces the redemption drama within his theory of dramatism. It is argued that the data analysis undertaken through the Discourse-Historical Approach produces reliable, underpinning findings that afford a secure foundation on which to test Burke's model. As far as can be ascertained, this thesis is the first to combine DHA and Burke's *pentad* in studies of Obama and his rhetoric.

Principal findings

The primary data analysis exercise revealed that 41 of the 172 speeches in the reference corpus referred to race in some way. This finding proves that Obama spoke about race in nearly a quarter of his speeches, and does not avoid talking about the subject as suggested by Smith and King (2009) or Coe and Reitzes (2010).

The secondary data analysis exercise, conducted on this analytic corpus of 41 speeches, showed that the speeches covered 18 topics ranging from racial identity, civil rights, and African American leadership (including references to the Exodus narrative) to issues such as religion, immigration, Hurricane Katrina, and crime. Collective effort, responsibility, sacrifice, and unity also feature prominently in this analytic corpus. These results also show that Obama does not avoid speaking about contentious issues, such as the persistent racial inequalities that were exposed by the impact of Hurricane Katrina or the need to perfect the Union to ensure that all Americans benefit from the rights enshrined in the Constitution. However, it was noted that it was Obama's addresses to predominantly African American audiences that highlighted these issues, and rarely those to white audiences.

Further interrogation of the analytic corpus showed that Obama's principal preoccupations were his racial identity, the struggle for civil rights, and the call for unity, atonement and sacrifice. These findings subsequently informed the application of Burke's model to the campaign rhetoric, as described below. Of the 41 speeches that discussed race,

- 15 relate to Obama's exploration and presentation of his identity;
- 37 refer to civil rights (including the idea of the Promised Land);
- 26 include the call for unity, which is linked to notions of atonement, and
- 24 call for the collective effort that Obama argues can transform America, and which is linked to notions of sacrifice.

The intertextual analysis revealed the broad and diverse range of sources and traditions that informed Obama's arguments. Of particular interest is Obama's use of motifs drawn from African American literature, which enable him to articulate his racial identity in terms that would be immediately recognisable to African American audiences. For instance, Obama relates his attempt to understand his biracial heritage to Du Bois' concepts of double consciousness and the veil as well as to themes contained Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Ellison's representation of black nationalism also provides the approach

used by Obama in *Dreams From My Father* to confront the spectre of Malcolm X and to explore the value and limitations of black nationalism in achieving transformational racial change. It has also been argued that *Dreams From My Father* follows the tradition of African American autobiography and slave narratives as Obama works through his struggle to define his racial identity, ultimately reconciling his white ancestry with the place and sense of belonging he finds within the African American community.

These intertextual connections demonstrate that Obama has a familiarity with African American thought that helps him to place his own identity and candidacy in the same traditions. Whilst this allows him to reassure African American voters that he recognises and understands the evolution of the key debates about racial identity, it also provides the basis for Obama's own contribution to these debates. Specifically, Obama's updating of Du Bois' double consciousness to a determination that America sees "the world as a split-screen [...] to acknowledge the sins of the past and the challenges of the present without becoming trapped in cynicism or despair" (Obama, 2007b: p233) reflects his belief that racial progress has been made even though the attitudes of those who led the short civil rights movement may not have kept pace with the progress.

The intertextual analysis further shows that Obama's rhetoric harnesses the memory of figures such as Abraham Lincoln, John F Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr, with textual connections to Lincoln and King prominent in the corpus. These connections reflect Obama's ambition to be considered alongside the leaders who are most closely associated with the quest for racial progress: Lincoln, the healer president who united a nation and King, whose *Dream* provides the defining discourse of the civil rights movement. Even though Obama chooses to use particular readings of Lincoln and King, these connections also serve to strengthen Obama's credibility with African American voters as they enable him to establish a connection between his candidacy and the struggle for civil rights. Finally, intertextual analysis also revealed the many biblical references that are contained in the campaign

rhetoric and which are connected to the corpus' articulation of atonement and redemption.

The extralinguistic analysis stage of the methodology provides evidence to show that the textual and linguistic elements of Obama's rhetoric were complemented by the use of imagery, iconography, music and location. The venues for particular speeches would have been selected by the campaign team predominantly for their seating capacity and ease of access, but venues such as the Old State House in Springfield, Illinois (where Obama announced his candidacy) and the National Convention Centre in Philadelphia (scene of the *A More Perfect Union* speech) were clearly selected for their contextual and symbolic value. Whilst the campaign will also have choreographed the use of music by Stevie Wonder, Sam Cooke, and Curtis Mayfield to connect Obama's candidacy with the civil rights movement, it had less influence and control over the imagery most associated with the candidate, Fairey's *Hope* poster for instance, or the numerous depictions (deliberate or otherwise) in the media of Obama wreathed in light or with a halo. However, the fact that publication and dissemination of these images was not managed by the campaign but spread through social media, the press and the grassroots support for Obama demonstrates that his rhetoric of redemption was effective in the way it encouraged an iconography that presented him as a unifying redeemer figure.

It has also been argued that the exposition of the Exodus narrative is integral to the campaign rhetoric. Obama's particular reading of Exodus has been conditioned by his familiarity with King's rhetoric and is readily accessible to both African American and white audiences. Although only referred to directly in five speeches in the analytic corpus, Obama's Exodus is intricately linked to his ambition for America to deliver equality and justice, particularly for African Americans. Obama establishes himself as the successor to Martin Luther King and the leader of an inclusive Joshua generation that encompasses all Americans. Under his leadership, the Joshua generation will come together and work together to fulfil the promise of America. Although Obama clearly encourages African American audiences to

recognise the allusions to the rhetoric of liberation and civil rights, his reading of Exodus is not predicated on narrow definitions of race and ethnicity or the singling out of a chosen people in the way that other readings are. Obama is equally determined that reaching the Promised Land should be a collective effort, a generational challenge that is made possible through the unity of purpose he calls for.

The final stage of the methodology considered how Burke's *pentad* may be used to support the assertion that Obama's rhetoric is concerned with guilt, atonement and redemption. The thesis has demonstrated that the pentadic elements can be readily populated, with Obama as the *agent* whose *agency* is a capacity to effect change through his election to the Presidency. The civil rights context which is evident in a significant proportion of the analytic corpus equates to the *scene*, and Obama's ambition to redeem America of its racial failings can be seen as the *purpose*, which will result in a purging of society's guilt (the *act*).

The *dramatistic pentad* is intended to reveal the motives contained within rhetoric through the use of different ratios between the constituent elements. Here, the *agent-scene* and *scene-purpose* ratios are important as they highlight Obama's racial identity within the context of civil rights, and link his ambition to redeem America to the history of civil rights. The thesis has also identified the *A More Perfect Union* speech as the representative anecdote in the redemption drama that arises from the 41 speeches in the analytic corpus.

Implications and contribution to the field

In undertaking the first analysis of Obama's rhetoric through the Discourse-Historical Approach, this project makes an original contribution to scholarship concerned with the implications of the campaign and Obama's victory from the perspective of race. It contributes primarily to three bodies of work: cultural and historical appraisals of Obama's candidacy; discourse analysis of the campaign's rhetoric, and discussion of the extent to which Obama

confronted America with racial issues. In each case, DHA adds value through the integration of both contextual knowledge and textual analysis.

For instance, data selection and analysis show that a significant proportion of the speeches in the analytic corpus is concerned in some way with civil rights. This provides the statistical evidence to support the propositions of authors such as David Remnick, whose focus on situating Obama within the history of civil rights is dependent on cultural and historical interpretations of a small number of campaign speeches and *Dreams From My Father*. Remnick, as well as other authors such as Richard Wolffe and James Kloppenberg, is also interested in Obama's conciliatory approach to leadership but again relies on informed readings of Obama to reach his conclusions. The data analysis procedure in this project has enabled evidence-based discussions of Obama's leadership style, and particularly of the way he adapts the Exodus narrative to motivate the Joshua generation as a collective.

The thesis' analysis of representations of Obama's identity in the analytic corpus also complements Carl Pedersen's proposition that "Obama, far from being less than American, reflects the social, cultural and demographic developments that are transforming the US in the twenty-first century" (Pedersen, 2010: p14). Here, the statistical evidence gained from data analysis shows that Obama unequivocally presented his biracial heritage and success as a product of the American experience.

Where DHA provides data to add value to the cultural and historical studies of the campaign, it also adds contextual value to the more data-driven analyses of Obama's rhetoric. For example, Kevin Coe and Michael Reitzes' first quantitative, linguistic analysis of a large corpus of Obama's speeches concluded that the focus of Obama's rhetoric was on policy making and thematic appeals to hope, change and unity, rather than on race. Whilst this project has used DHA to argue that race-based appeals were a more significant feature of Obama's rhetoric than Coe and Reitzes believe, it also supports their assertion that hope, change and unity were core themes.

Similarly, Jacques Savoy's quantitative analysis of Obama's discourse lacks the qualitative dimension that DHA facilitates, and which enables discussion of the implications of the data analysis and not simply the production of a list of findings. The application of DHA (with due consideration of Exodus and the *pentad*) creates the capacity to consider these assertions within the broader social, cultural, historical and political contexts of the campaign.

Finally, DHA has also enabled discussion of Obama's deployment of his racial identity, connection to the civil rights movement, and strategy of building consensus in the context of the extent to which he chose to confront white voters with the reality of institutionalised racism. Authors such as Ron Walters and Richard Thomson Ford have argued that Obama recognised the need to secure African American support without losing white votes, and that he "distanced himself from the symbolic issues that had historically defined Black political activism" (Ford, 2009: p39). Shelby Steele, on the other hand, argued in his flawed thesis that Obama neither bargained with the white electorate nor challenged them, and could not therefore develop his own political voice or expect to win the 2008 election.

This thesis makes a contribution to the debate by demonstrating that Obama does highlight racial inequality and injustice and that he is prepared to criticise white audiences for past racial failings, just as he is prepared to criticise the wider African American community for its own prejudices and failings. Although many of the speeches that highlight inequality are given to predominantly African American audiences, several, such as the *A More Perfect Union* speech, had national reach and were therefore not confined to a particular demographic audience. The thesis has shown that, whilst Obama by no means distances himself from the issues that have preoccupied African American political leaders, such issues are not the primary preoccupation of his campaign rhetoric.

Limitations

Although the application of the Discourse-Historical Approach has produced valid results and insights, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the thesis.

The first point to recognise is that the analytic corpus was initially compiled through close reading of each speech in the reference corpus to identify the speeches that included references to race or civil rights. Selection of the analytic corpus was therefore informed by the author's contextual knowledge. Although this is a key requirement of the Discourse-Historical Approach, it does bring into question the limitations of the data selected for analysis in each chapter. As noted in Chapter three (*Methodology*), a secondary data selection exercise was undertaken using concordancing software to validate the primary analysis. It is entirely likely that this data selection process will not have picked up every reference to race or civil rights but the resulting structured framework has yielded an analytic corpus that can be fully justified. The approach is perhaps not driven by statistics in the same way as, say, Coe and Reitzes' methodology but it does enable the application of wider knowledge and understandings to facilitate contextual insights into the data. This is, however, an advantage of using an approach rooted in both cultural studies and discourse analysis, and DHA is therefore particularly appropriate for this project.

A secondary limitation stems from the undeniable fact that this is a wide ranging thesis that encompasses language, literature, history, popular culture, politics, and imagery. Although a genuine strength of the thesis is its capacity to draw on these topics in order to inform rich and cohesive understandings of Obama's rhetoric, it could be argued that the scope of the thesis is too broad. There are consequently likely to be gaps in the knowledge which may affect the interpretation of results. For instance, having a stronger background in African American literature may have facilitated a deeper engagement with the works of Ellison and Du Bois, as well as other authors, which in turn may have produced intertextual links that could have

revealed further (or different) insights. An entire thesis could probably be written on the intertextual links between Obama's rhetoric and books and the broader African American literary canon, or perhaps solely on Obama's reading of Du Bois.

Similarly, greater familiarity with the history and personalities of the civil rights movement may have revealed additional historical and linguistic connections, and a biblical scholar would doubtless find more religious motifs in Obama's rhetoric. However, it is believed that the texts and traditions this project draws on provide a sufficiently holistic and considered knowledge-base to inform the reasoned analysis of the corpus.

Opportunities for further research

The methodology has demonstrated that the Discourse-Historical Approach can be applied to a large corpus of political speeches, and that it provides a robust structure for the analysis and interpretation of the themes contained within those speeches. The methodology was used in this project to identify how Obama's campaign rhetoric holds out the prospect of redemption, but the underlying principles of the methodology are sufficiently flexible so as to permit its application to related corpora and situations. For instance, the methodology could be applied to a corpus of Jesse Jackson's speeches from his 1984 and 1988 campaigns for the Democrat nomination for president. Jackson was the most successful African American candidate before Obama and it would be of interest to analyse his rhetoric to understand how he approached the issue of race and whether he associated his campaign with the idea of a national redemption. Using DHA to undertake a comparative analysis of both Obama's and Jackson's speeches in this way could provide insights into their differences and commonalities. In addition to utilising Burke's model to reveal the motives contained in Jackson's rhetoric, the methodology could retain the Exodus narrative element given Jackson's direct connections to King and the short civil rights movement.

A similar comparative analysis could be undertaken with a corpus of speeches given by Obama during his presidency. Here the application of

DHA would distil the entire corpus into a subset of speeches concerned with race. It would be interesting to evaluate whether Obama's position has changed since taking office in 2009, and to use DHA to understand whether his hopes for reconciliation and redemption have been in any way diminished, or perhaps even fuelled, by the racial tensions that continue to haunt the USA.

The methodology could also be adapted with some ease to enable its application to other studies. For example, where the rhetoric being analysed has no overt connection to civil rights, consideration could be given to adapting the Approach to replace its emphasis on Exodus and the Jeremiad with other forms of rhetoric or literary genres. The amended methodology could then be applied to other large corpora of political speeches, such as the 2007/08 campaign speeches of John McCain. Here, the methodology could reveal the extent to which McCain claimed to be a maverick in order to distance himself from the Bush Administration, as well as understanding the importance McCain attached to his experiences as a prisoner of war, and how these issues shaped the ethos of his campaign. Combined with the use of Burke's *pentad*, this analysis would provide insight into how McCain pitched his campaign, and what the ultimate aspirations or motives contained in his rhetoric were.

Dramatic catharsis: Barack Obama's rhetoric of redemption

In conclusion, this thesis has argued that Obama's 2007/08 campaign speeches and two books provided the foundation for a rhetoric of redemption that projected Obama's election as an opportunity for the United States to atone for its failure to deliver equality and justice for all Americans.

The redemptive framework relies on the presentation of Obama's racial identity as emblematic of the progress that his election might deliver, with his appeals for national unity and reconciliation reflected in his biracial heritage and in the connections he traces between his candidacy and the unfulfilled aspirations of the civil rights movement. Achieving the unity Obama calls for

would represent atonement for past division, enabling his multicultural Joshua generation to make progress where previous generations of African American leaders have stumbled, whilst the collective effort and sacrifice Obama calls for to overcome inequality and injustice are the mechanisms by which purification and redemption will be achieved.

This thesis' key findings are therefore that race was an important, recurring theme of Obama's election campaign; that the analytic corpus made frequent references to civil rights and Obama's connection to the movement; that Obama invested heavily in the construction and articulation of a racial identity that placed him within the narrative of African American progress, and that Obama's discussion of guilt, atonement, and sacrifice reveals his desire for a national catharsis to enable the country to come together in recognition and repudiation of its history of segregation and racial injustice. Taken together, these findings amount to a rhetoric of redemption that has at its core the guilt-purification-redemption cycle of Burke's redemption drama.

Communities had to be created, fought for, tended like gardens. They expanded or contracted with the dreams of men – and in the civil rights movement those dreams had been large. In the sit-ins, the marches, the jailhouse songs, I saw the African American community becoming more than just the place where you'd been born or the house where you'd been raised. Through organizing, through shared sacrifice, membership had been earned. And because membership was earned – because this community I imagined was still in the making, built on the promise that the larger American community, black, white and brown, could somehow redefine itself – I believed that it might, over time, admit the uniqueness of my own life.

That was my idea of organizing. It was a promise of redemption.

(Obama, 2007a: p134)

Epilogue

Of course, change has not come to America. At least not in terms of the racial progress envisaged by Obama.

One person, even the first African American president, cannot overturn 400 years of discrimination. Obama's victory and two terms in office may signify that no position is out of reach for African Americans in the twenty-first century, but his presidency has not had the positive impact on race relations that many had hoped for, and perhaps it never could. Perhaps racial division is still ingrained too deeply in the fabric of American society. Certainly, the experience of the last few years would indicate that racism continues to trouble America.

Just seven months into his first term in office, Obama found himself embroiled in controversy after Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr was arrested for disorderly conduct by Sergeant James Crowley, a white police officer. Gates had struggled to enter his own home and attempted to force the door open; neighbours called the police believing that a burglary was underway, and Gates had protested that the police response was racially biased. The charges against Gates were subsequently dropped, but Obama commented that the police had acted "stupidly" and "what I think we know separate and apart from this incident is that there's a long history in this country of African Americans and Latinos being stopped by law enforcement disproportionately" (McPhee and Just, 2009: n.p.). Obama later expressed regret for having made these remarks and described the event as a "teachable moment" (Khan et al, 2009: n.p.), but the disproportionate stopping of African Americans continues.

For instance, of the 260,284 people who were stopped and searched by New York police between 2013 and 2015, 54 percent were African American and 28 percent were Hispanic. Just 14 percent were white and 86 percent of

those stopped were innocent.¹ In comparison, the demographic profile of New York in 2013 was 33.1 percent white, 28.8 percent Hispanic, 22.8 percent African American, and 12.7 percent Asian.² The number of African Americans being stopped and searched is therefore significantly disproportionate to the City's demographic make-up, although the number of Hispanics being stopped is actually in line with the profile.

In 2012, the #BlackLivesMatter movement was born in the protests following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the second-degree murder and manslaughter of seventeen year-old Trayvon Martin. Zimmerman, a neighbourhood watch volunteer, shot and killed Martin who was walking home from a convenience store in Miami Gardens, Florida, because he believed him to be acting suspiciously. Reflecting on the event, Obama noted "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago" (Cohen, 2013: n.p.). Three years later, in February 2015, #SayHerName grew from the #BlackLivesMatter movement as a campaign against police brutality, particularly against African American women. In July 2016, protests escalated across the USA following another shooting in Baton Rouge of an African American by a white policeman, and the shooting of five white policemen in Dallas by Micah Johnson.

In 2014, the shooting of eighteen year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, by a white police officer ignited several days of civil unrest. The same year, 43 year-old Eric Garner suffocated in a chokehold inflicted by (white) police officer Daniel Pantaleo in New York. Garner's death was ruled a homicide by the coroner but no charges were brought against Pantaleo, although the City of New York later settled out of court. The event sparked further protests and civil unrest. Obama's response was to set up a task force to make "recommendations about how we strengthen the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color and minority communities that feel bias is taking place ... And it is incumbent upon all of

¹ <http://www.nyclu.org/content/stop-and-frisk-data>

² <http://mycrains.crainsnewyork.com/stats-and-the-city/2013/demographics/racial-breakdown-1>

us, as Americans, regardless of race, region, faith, that we recognize this is an American problem”.³

The scale of this “American problem” was revealed in a 2015 Guardian study, which reported that US police officers shot and killed 1,134 civilians during the year. The study highlighted that minority groups were disproportionately affected, noting that non-white Americans represented less than 38 percent of the population but nearly half of all people killed by police. Minorities also represented more than half of all unarmed suspects killed.⁴

Although African Americans account for roughly thirteen percent of the American population, African American unemployment rates remain higher than white unemployment rates. Significantly more white Americans than African Americans have college degrees, and while in 2007 white families “were 4.3 times as wealthy as black and Hispanic families [...] by 2010, the multiple had widened to 6.1”.⁵ The US Department of Justice reported in 2014 that 35 percent of prison inmates were African American⁶ and the country is still marked by race hate crimes, such as the mass shooting that took place in 2015 at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where nine people were killed. The gunman, a white supremacist, confessed that he had hoped to start a race war. The shootings also prompted heated debate about whether the state Capitol should still fly the Confederate flag, a symbol closely associated with segregation and slavery in the southern States. Although the South Carolina Senate voted to take down the flag in July 2015, a third of the senators voted in favour of keeping it. America’s racial divide clearly persists.

On 7 March 2015, Obama returned to Selma, Alabama, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday voting rights marches. In a speech that

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/12/03/president-obama-delivers-statement-grand-jury-decision-death-eric-garner>

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/31/the-counted-police-killings-2015-young-black-men>

⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/upshot/americas-racial-divide-charted.html?_r=0

⁶ <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/jim14.pdf>. Note also that the issue of mass incarceration of African Americans is discussed in depth by Melanie Alexander in *New Jim Crow* (2010), which argues that the US Justice System perpetuates racial controls and actively targets black men through the War on Drugs.

touched on some of the ideas expressed in his 2007 Selma speech, Obama reminded his audience that “the black struggle for freedom is at the center of our national story, an emblematic example of America’s actual exceptionalism. Not its people per se, but their belief in the capacity for change and their conviction that they can stand as the agents of their own destiny” (Obama, 2015). Where this speech differs from the 2007 address is in the assertion that, although racism and disadvantage exist, America has changed. Obama rejects “the notion that nothing has changed” and refuses to “deny progress” (ibid), challenging his audience to consider how life and opportunities have improved for racial minorities, women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans since the 1960s.

Obama recognises that America is still not perfect but it remains a country where collective effort can make a difference, and he retains his belief in the capacity of the nation to come together to effect change. He invests his hopes in the collective, claiming that “the single-most powerful word in our democracy is the word ‘We’. ‘We The People’. ‘We Shall Overcome’. ‘Yes We Can’” (ibid), and he calls on his audience to continue to work towards perfecting the imperfect Union.

Obama also uses the speech to urge his audience to fight to uphold the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which was enacted as a direct result of the Selma marches and which “stands weakened, its future subject to political rancor” (ibid). Obama was referring to the 2013 decision by the US Supreme Court to allow nine States (mostly in the South) to amend election laws without federal approval, effectively revoking a central provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which outlawed discriminatory practices. The irony is that it was Obama’s election as America’s first African American president that opponents of the law cited to argue that it was no longer needed.

A year later, in a move reminiscent of the 1950s and early ‘60s, Texas introduced a voter identification law, which requires voters to obtain photographic IDs – but only from specific, state-approved locations. This resulted in 400,000 eligible voters facing three-hour journeys to obtain their

IDs. The District Court noted the Texas Legislature would benefit from suppressing the votes of minority groups; the Supreme Court ignored this opinion.⁷

The question must surely be asked whether Obama's election in 2008 has actually set back the campaign for race equality and civil rights, and not improved them in the ways his campaign had envisaged. In this respect, the Promised Land would still appear to be out of reach. Even so, the election of the first African American president does represent real progress along the arc of history and encourages the hope that lasting change will eventually come to America. As Obama noted in his 2008 victory speech, "the road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even one term, but America - I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you - we as a people will get there" (Obama, 2008y).

Thesis length: 82,019 words

⁷ <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/how-latest-federal-court-ruling-affects-texas-voter-id-law>

Appendix 1

Corpus of speeches

This disc contains 170 speeches given by Barack Obama during the 2007/08 election campaign. It also includes Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote speech (*The Audacity of Hope*) and 2009 Inaugural Speech.

All the speeches were downloaded from the official Obama website www.barackobama.com/speeches in July 2010.

Appendix 2

Table of results: selection of the analytic corpus

This appendix contains the results of the initial exercise to identify the speeches that are concerned with race issues. The table lists 172 speeches given by Barack Obama between 2004 and 2009. Each speech has been placed within its appropriate field of action, and thirteen common arguments or topics were identified.

Fields of action

- 1: Formation of public opinion and self-presentation. Includes press conferences, articles, books, commemorative speeches, and inaugural speeches
- 2: Political advertising, marketing and propaganda. Includes slogans, speeches in election campaigns.

List of topics

- 1: Change
- 2: The economy/job creation/trade/housing
- 3: Education
- 4: Clean energy/energy security/the environment
- 5: The establishment/the Bush Administration/"Washington" politics
- 6: Family/the role of mothers and fathers
- 7: Healthcare
- 8: Hope
- 9: Identity/Obama and the American Dream/the American Promise
- 10: Military issues/national security/veterans
- 11: Race/Civil Rights/African American and Latino issues
- 12: Religion
- 13: Unity/collective effort

No.	Speech	Date	Field	Topic					
				1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2004 Democratic National Convention	27.07.04	1		x				
2	Announcement for President	10.02.07	1		x		x	x	
3	AIPAC Policy Forum	02.03.07	2						
4	Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration	04.03.07	1			x			x
5	The American Moment	23.04.07	2		x		x		
6	Remarks to the California State Democratic Convention	02.05.07	2	x	x	x	x		
7	Remarks to the National Conference of Black Mayors	05.05.07	2	x	x	x			x
8	Remarks to the Detroit Economic Club	07.05.07	2		x		x		
9	Southern New Hampshire University Commencement	19.05.07	1	x	x	x			
10	A 21st Century Health Care System	20.05.07	2						
11	Hampton University Annual Ministers' Conference	05.06.07	2			x			x
12	Strengthening Families in a New Economy	15.06.07	2		x			x	x
13	Take Back America 2007	19.06.07	2		x	x		x	
14	Taking Our Government Back	22.06.07	2		x			x	
15	A Politics of Conscience	23.06.07	2						
16	National Education Association Annual Meeting	05.07.07	2			x		x	
17	Changing the Odds for Urban America	18.07.07	2		x	x			
18	Remarks to the National Council of La Raza	22.07.07	2		x				
19	Remarks to College Democrats of America	26.07.07	2	x	x	x	x	x	
20	The War We Need to Win	01.08.07	2						
21	A Sacred Trust	21.08.07	2						

22	Remarks at Labor Day Rally	03.09.07	2		x	x	x	x	
23	Turning the Page in Iraq	12.09.07	2						
24	Our Common Stake in America's Prosperity	17.09.07	2		x	x		x	
25	Tax Fairness for the Middle Class	18.09.07	2		x				
26	Howard University Convocation	28.09.07	1						
27	A New Beginning	02.10.07	2					x	
28	Real Leadership for a Clean Energy Future	08.10.07	2			x	x		
29	Lessons from Iraq	12.10.07	2						
30	A Challenge for Our Times	02.11.07	2			x			
31	A Change We Can Believe In	03.11.07	2	x	x			x	
32	Reclaiming the American Dream	07.11.07	2		x	x		x	
33	Iowa Jefferson-Jackson Dinner	10.11.07	2					x	
34	United Auto Workers Conference	13.11.07	2		x				
35	Our Kids, Our Future	20.11.07	2			x			
36	Democratic National Committee Fall Meeting	30.11.07	2		x	x		x	
37	A Call to Serve	05.12.07	2						
38	Foreign Policy Forum	18.12.07	2						
39	Our Moment Is Now	27.12.07	2		x			x	
40	Iowa Caucus Night	03.01.08	2						
41	New Hampshire Primary	08.01.08	2						
42	The Great Need of the Hour	20.01.08	1		x	x			
43	Economic Speech	22.01.08	2		x			x	
44	South Carolina Victory Speech	26.01.08	2	x	x				
45	Kennedy Endorsement Event	28.01.08	2						
46	Response to the State of the Union	28.01.08	2		x				
47	Reclaiming the American Dream	29.01.08	2		x	x		x	

48	The Past Versus the Future	30.01.08	2		x	x	x	x	x	x
49	Super Tuesday	05.02.08	2	x					x	
50	Rebuilding Trust with New Orleans	07.02.08	2		x	x			x	
51	Virginia Jefferson-Jackson dinner	09.02.08	2		x	x	x		x	
52	Potomac Primary Night	12.02.08	2		x				x	
53	Keeping America's Promise	13.02.08	2		x	x	x		x	
54	National Gypsum in Lorain, Ohio	24.02.08	2		x					
55	March 4th Primary Night	04.03.08	2	x	x				x	
56	Endorsement by US Admirals and Generals	12.03.08	2							
57	A More Perfect Union	18.03.08	1							
58	The World Beyond Iraq	19.03.08	2							
59	The Cost of War	20.03.08	2		x				x	
60	Renewing the American economy	27.03.08	2		x				x	
61	AFL-CIO	02.04.08	2		x				x	
62	Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr	04.04.08	1		x					
63	Gary Indiana	10.04.08	2		x				x	
64	Alliance for American manufacturing	14.04.08	2		x				x	
65	AP Annual Luncheon	14.04.08	2		x				x	
66	Building Trades National Legislative Conference	15.04.08	2	x	x				x	
67	Town hall meeting with veterans and military families	15.04.08	2							
68	Pennsylvania Primary Night	22.04.08	2	x	x				x	
69	Press avail on energy plan	25.04.08	2	x				x		
70	Fight for working families and take on special interests	03.05.08	2		x	x			x	
71	Primary Night	06.05.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	x	

72	Economic Discussion	09.05.08	2	x	x		x	x	
73	Veterans Remarks	12.05.08	2						
74	Macomb Community College	14.05.08	2		x		x		
75	Forging a New Future for America	20.05.08	2	x	x			x	
76	Renewing US Leadership in the Americas	23.05.08	2		x		x		
77	Weslyan University Commencement	25.05.08	1		x	x	x		
78	Memorial Day	26.05.08	2						
79	Troy High School	02.06.08	2		x				
80	Final Primary Night	03.06.08	2	x	x			x	
81	AIPAC Policy Conference	04.06.08	2						
82	Health Care Town Hall	05.06.08	2						
83	Change That Works For You	09.06.08	2	x	x				
84	Remarks in Kaukauna, Wisconsin	12.06.08	2		x			x	
85	Remarks in Columbus, Ohio	13.06.08	2		x				
86	Apostolic Church of God	15.06.08	2		x	x			
87	Renewing American Competitiveness	16.06.08	2		x	x	x		
88	Town Hall on College Affordability	17.06.08	2		x	x			
89	A Metropolitan Strategy for America	21.06.08	2		x				
90	Discussion with Working Women	23.06.08	2		x				x
91	A Serious Energy Policy for our Future	24.06.08	2				x		
92	Opening of Competitiveness Summit	26.06.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
93	Remarks with Hilary Clinton	27.06.08	2	x	x	x		x	
94	National Assoc of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials	28.06.08	2		x	x			
95	The America We Love	30.06.08	2		x				
96	Council for Faith	01.07.08	2						

97	A New Era of Service	02.08.08	2			x			
98	On Veterans	03.07.08	2						
99	An agenda for middle class success	07.07.08	2		x	x			
100	League of United Latin American Citizens	08.07.08	2		x	x			
101	Joint event with Senator Hilary Clinton	10.07.08	2		x				
102	Women's Economic Security Town Hall	10.07.08	2		x				
103	A secure energy future	11.07.08	2				x		
104	2008 National Council of La Raza Annual Meeting	13.07.08	2	x	x			x	
105	80th Convention of the American Federation of Teachers	13.07.08	2			x			
106	99th Annual Convention of the NAACP	14.07.08	2		x	x			x
107	A New Strategy for a New World	15.07.08	2		x				
108	Summit on Confronting New Threats	16.07.08	2						
109	A World that Stands as One	24.07.08	1		x				
110	Town hall on the economy	30.07.08	2		x		x		
111	Town hall on energy	31.07.08	2				x		
112	Town hall on the economy	01.08.08	2		x				
113	Town hall on the economy	02.08.08	2		x				
114	2008 National Urban League Annual Conference	02.08.08	2	x	x	x			
115	New Energy for America	04.08.08	2				x		
116	Energy Town Hall	05.08.08	2				x		
117	Town hall on Energy	06.08.08	2				x		
118	Remarks on the Russian Invasion of Georgia	11.08.08	1						
119	VFW National Convention	19.08.08	2						
120	Vice President Announcement	23.08.08	1					x	
121	The American Promise	28.08.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	x

122	Remarks at the AARP Life@50+ National Expo	06.09.08	2		x				
123	A 21st Century Education	09.09.08	2			x			
124	Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Gala	10.09.08	2					x	
125	On Taxes	12.09.08	2		x	x		x	
126	Confronting an Economic Crisis	16.09.08	2		x		x	x	
127	The Change We Need	17.09.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
128	Espanola	18.09.08	2	x	x	x		x	
129	The Fed	19.09.08	2		x			x	
130	Daytona Beach, FL	20.09.08	2	x	x	x		x	x
131	Charlotte, NC	21.09.08	2	x	x	x		x	
132	Green Bay, Wisconsin	22.09.08	2	x	x			x	
133	Plan To Protect Taxpayers and Homeowners	23.09.08	2		x				
134	Dunedin, FL	24.09.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	x
135	The Clinton Global Initiative	25.09.08	2		x	x	x		
136	Greensboro	27.09.08	2	x	x			x	
137	Detroit	28.09.08	2	x	x	x		x	
138	Westminster, CO	29.09.08	2	x	x	x		x	
139	Reno	30.09.08	2	x	x	x		x	
140	La Crosse	01.10.08	2	x	x	x		x	
141	Grand Rapids	02.10.08	2	x	x	x		x	
142	Abington	03.10.08	2		x	x		x	
143	Health Care	04.10.08	2						
144	Asheville	05.10.08	2		x				
145	Indianapolis	08.10.08	2		x	x	x	x	
146	Dayton	09.10.08	2		x	x		x	
147	Chillicothe	10.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	

148	Philadelphia	11.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
149	A rescue plan for the middle-class	13.10.08	2		x				
150	Londonderry	15.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
151	Roanoke	17.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
152	St Louis	18.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
153	Fayetteville	19.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
154	Tampa Bay	20.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
155	Growing American jobs summit	21.10.08	2		x				
156	Miami	21.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
157	National Security Avail	22.10.08	2		x		x		
158	Richmond	22.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
159	Indianapolis	23.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
160	Charleston	24.10.08	2		x		x		
161	Reno	25.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
162	Denver, Colorado	26.10.08	2	x	x	x	x		
163	Closing Argument Speech: "One Week"	27.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
164	Chester	28.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
165	Raleigh	29.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
166	Sarasota	30.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
167	Columbia, Missouri	30.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
168	Des Moines	31.10.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
169	Columbus	02.11.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
170	Jacksonville	03.11.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	
171	Remarks of President Elect Barack Obama ("Victory Speech")	04.11.08	1	x					x
172	Inaugural Speech	20.01.09	1		x				

Appendix 3

Table of results: Sub-topics within the topic of race

This appendix contains the results of the process undertaken to list the different topics contained within the 41 speeches that the initial selection process identified as including the topic of race. Each speech has been placed within its appropriate field of action, and eighteen topics were found.

Fields of action

- 1: Formation of public opinion and self-presentation. Includes press conferences, articles, books, commemorative speeches, and inaugural speeches
- 2: Political advertising, marketing and propaganda. Includes slogans, speeches in election campaigns.

List of topics

No.	Topic	Associated vocabulary
1	Obama's identity	Obama's parents and grandparents; upbringing; education; Hawaii; Kenya; Indonesia; Michelle Obama; Father-in-law; Brother-in-law
2	Civil Rights	Civil Rights leaders; Martin Luther King Jr; Abraham Lincoln; Anne Cooper; Jimmy Lee Jackson; Rev Lowery; John Lewis; C T Vivian; Governor Wallace; Thurgood Marshall; Kennedy; Cesar Chavez; Rosa Parks; Jeremiah Wright; Marches; Birmingham; Selma; Montgomery; Alabama; Atlanta; Georgia; Memphis; Mississippi; Little Rock; church bombings; Freedom Rides; billy clubs; firehoses; nooses; bus boycotts; voting rights; Edmund Pettus Bridge; Arc of the moral universe; the battles of the 60s; Gettysburg; Slavery; <i>Brown v Board</i> ; non-violence; NAACP
3	Equality	US Constitution; the Perfect Union; Founding Fathers; gender equality; Gay rights; Women's rights; liberty; diversity
4	Economy	Economic justice; economic opportunity; the American Dream; the American Promise
5	Education	College education; tuition fees; education to stimulate opportunity
6	Latino	Hispanic vote; Latino organisations
7	Hurricane Katrina	Hurricane; New Orleans; levees; storms
8	Unity	Together; united; "red states, blue states, United States",
9	Black anger	Anger; resentment
10	Immigration	Opportunity; Obama's family; perceived threats; control
11	Leadership	African American leaders; presidency;
12	Religion	Faith; biblical references; gospel of brotherhood; original sin
13	Exodus	The Promised Land; Moses; Joshua; Jericho; Crossing over; Jordan; Mountaintop
14	Crime	Criminal justice; Jena justice; Louisiana; prison populations
15	Collective effort	Giving back; sacrifice; responsibility; volunteering; community organising; "my brother's keeper"; Ashley Baia
16	Health	Healthcare; hospitals; care system
17	Family	Fathers; single mothers; responsibilities; role models
18	Hope	The Audacity of Hope; light of hope

No	Speech	Ref in thesis	Date	Field	Topic												
					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
1	2004 Democratic National Convention	Obama, 2004	27.07.04	1	x	x	x		x	x		x		x			
2	Announcement for President	Obama, 2007c	10.02.07	1		x	x					x					
3	Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration	Obama, 2007d	04.03.07	1	x	x	x		x		x				x		
4	Southern New Hampshire University Commencement	Obama, 2007g	19.05.07	1		x			x		x		x	x	x		
5	Howard University Convocation	Obama, 2007m	28.09.07	1		x	x		x	x	x	x					
6	The Great Need of the Hour	Obama, 2008c	20.01.08	1		x	x	x	x		x	x					
7	A More Perfect Union	Obama, 2008i	18.03.08	1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
8	Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr	Obama, 2008j	04.04.08	1		x	x	x	x			x		x			
9	The American Promise	Obama, 2008v	28.08.08	1	x	x	x	x	x			x		x			
10	Remarks of President Elect Obama ("victory speech")	Obama, 2008y	04.11.08	1		x	x					x					
11	Inaugural Speech	Obama, 2009	20.01.09	1		x	x	x				x	x				

12	California State Democratic Convention	Obama, 2007e	02.05.07	2	x	x			x			x				
13	National Conference of Black Mayors	Obama, 2007f	05.05.07	2		x		x	x		x					x
14	Hampton University Annual Ministers' Conference	Obama, 2007h	05.06.07	2	x	x	x				x					x
15	Strengthening Families in a New Economy	Obama, 2007i	15.06.07	2	x			x	x							
16	Take Back America 2007	Obama, 2007j	19.06.07	2		x					x	x				x
17	A Politics of Conscience	Obama, 2007k	23.06.07	2	x		x		x						x	
18	Remarks to the National Council of La Raza	Obama, 2007l	22.07.07	2		x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x
19	A Challenge for Our Times	Obama, 2007n	02.11.07	2		x	x		x			x				
20	A Change We Can Believe In	Obama, 2007o	03.11.07	2		x	x	x	x		x	x				
21	A Call to Serve	Obama, 2007p	05.12.07	2		x	x	x	x			x				x
22	Iowa Caucus Night	Obama, 2008a	03.01.08	2	x	x	x	x								
23	New Hampshire Primary	Obama, 2008b	08.01.08	2		x	x	x								x
24	Kennedy Endorsement Event	Obama, 2008d	28.01.08	2	x	x						x		x		

25	Reclaiming the American Dream	Obama, 2008e	29.01.08	2	x		x	x	x			x			
26	The Past Versus the fFuture	Obama, 2008f	30.01.08	2	x	x			x		x				x
27	Super Tuesday	Obama, 2008g	05.02.08	2	x	x		x				x	x		
28	Rebuilding Trust With New Orleans	Obama, 2008h	07.02.08	2	x	x	x	x	x		x	x			
29	Building Trades National Legislative Conference	Obama, 2008k	15.04.08	2	x					x	x				
30	Apostolic Church of God	Obama, 2008l	15.06.08	2			x		x						
31	Remarks with Hilary Clinton in Unity	Obama, 2008m	27.06.08	2			x	x				x			
32	National Assoc of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials	Obama, 2008n	28.06.08	2						x		x		x	x
33	The America We Love	Obama, 2008o	30.06.08	2	x	x	x		x			x		x	x
34	A New Era of Service	Obama, 2008p	02.07.08	1	x	x	x		x						
35	League of United Latin American Citizens	Obama, 2008q	08.07.08	2	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x
36	Joint event with Senator Hilary Clinton	Obama, 2008r	10.07.08	2			x	x							
37	National Council of La Raza	Obama, 2008s	13.07.08	2	x			x	x	x					x

38	99th Annual Convention of the NAACP	Obama, 2008t	14.07.08	2		x	x	x	x				x		x
39	National Urban League Conference	Obama, 2008u	02.08.08	2	x	x	x		x						
40	Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Gala	Obama, 2008w	10.09.08	2		x	x			x			x		x
41	Espanola	Obama, 2008x	18.09.08	2					x	x			x		

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