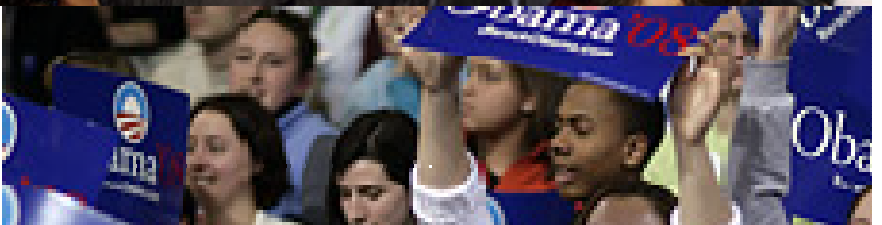


THE VICARIOUS VOICE:
BARACK OBAMA, THE FORGOTTEN YOUTH
AND THEIR BATTLE FOR REPRESENTATION

By Philippa Levenberg

Email: philippalev@gmail.com

(This is version, revised for online publication, of a dissertation in rhetoric, within the Honours in Political Communication, supervised by Distinguished Professor Salazar, Centre for Rhetoric Studies, and submitted for graduation in December 2008, at the University of Cape Town).



“I can tell you that the young people were the heart and soul and the nuts and bolts of this campaign. The youth have made it explicitly clear who they believe will best represent them in the White House and who speaks to their interests, desires and concerns about the future of this country”

– US College Student, University of Texas, Austin¹

The 2008 United States election was a historic race, virtually unprecedented in many regards. This protracted contest boasted unique and enduring contenders who persevered in the face of escalating, arduous circumstances; namely the worst economic crisis America had seen since the Great Depression and an embattled image of the US abroad driven by the war in Iraq. On one hand, Democratic candidate, Barack Obama, was the quintessential trailblazer; a young, inspirational orator with an unconventional and fairytale-like story, an ingenious campaign strategy and an incorruptible idealism that believed unshakably in America’s ability to change. Consequently, he was able to rally previously-neglected and disempowered constituencies of the American electorate, namely ethnic minorities and the youth. They saw in Obama, both their key to a brighter future and the long-anticipated opportunity for their own representation.

On the other hand, Republican nominee, John McCain, was the archetypal American patriot; a war veteran who had, with seemingly altruistic devotion, joined his forefathers in fighting for his country. He offered ageing, disillusioned US citizens a nostalgic glimpse of a bygone era – of good, old-fashioned values, safety and familiarity, and when being an American was a truly proud thing to be. Subsequently, he was able to consolidate the united support of defiant stalwarts of the prevailing system, specifically older, conservative whites.

These elections unearthed deep, unresolved stratifications in America. Election Day, 4 November 2008, was the manifestation of a predestined battle between guardians of the status quo and those who sought to overturn it. So consequential was this battle, that voter turnout reached epic proportions; the highest America had seen since 1908². One might say that this day saw the culmination of a bloodless revolution, with the establishment of a new social order led by Barack Obama, the first black President of the United States of America.

In the spirit of this renewal, it is appropriate that young people played a determinant role in the outcome of this election. According to exit polls, approximately 69% of American voters between the ages of 18 and 29 cast their ballot in the hopes of an Obama victory, guaranteeing him the majority of the youth vote in 41 US states³. This means that, in comparison to McCain, he won the support of people under 30 by 38 percentage points. This substantially exceeds President Bill Clinton’s 19-point lead

¹ A. Kroll. “Youth voter turned out for Obama on Tuesday”, *Youth Vote '08, Next-Gen Election Coverage, CBS News*. Available from: http://www.youthvoteblog.com/2008/11/05/youth_vote_turned_out_for_obama_tuesday/, 5 November, 2008.

² “Highest turnout since 1908 poll”, Sapa-AFP, Published in *The Star*, 5 November, 2008.

³ J. Von Kanel and H. Quinley, “Exit polls: Obama wins big among young minority voters” *Election Center 2008, CNN Politics.com*. Available from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/11/04/exit.polls/index.html>, 4 November, 2008.

among this demographic over Bob Dole in 1996⁴. Clinton was particularly popular with young voters. In the 2004 elections, which saw the first substantial increase in youth voter turnout since 1972, when the voting age was lowered to 18, John Kerry won this voting bloc by a mere 6-percent margin.

It appears that youth turnout increased by 1% since the elections in 2004, with voters between the ages of 18 and 29 now comprising 18% of the electorate⁵. This is the fourth consecutive contest in which the number of young voters has increased, projecting a consistently ascending trend in participation among the youth. While a single percentage point may not seem particularly significant, without the overwhelming support of young people, Barack Obama probably could not have claimed victory; McCain secured the majority of voters aged 65 and over⁶. It was the youth that breathed life into Obama's campaign from its conception. This virtually unilateral endorsement from young people imbued Obama's call for change with the meaning and credibility that was needed in order for it to be realised.

Furthermore, 72% of first-time voters selected Obama as their candidate of choice and it is arguable whether or not his candidacy influenced their decision to participate in these elections at all⁷.

Even more significant, is the fact that 54% of white voters under the age of 30 supported Barack Obama. In the past three decades, no Democratic Presidential nominee has been able to secure the support of more than 45% of young whites⁸. This means that age played more of a factor than race did in determining how the youth voted in these elections. It is a testimony to the progressiveness of the younger generation, which is somewhat of a hybrid in itself. It also demonstrates that the youth were able to reconcile their differences in the pursuit of a greater goal – the change necessary to guarantee their representation.

This dissertation, completed prior to the US national elections, explores whether there was in fact a correlation between Obama's candidacy and the resuscitation of youth voter participation in America. It argues particularly that the support Obama garnered among this part of the electorate was determined by his capacity to serve as a vicarious voice, through which the youth found their expression and articulation in a system that had otherwise forgotten them.

⁴ D. Kuhn, "Exit Polls: How Obama Won", Politico. Available from: <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1108/15297.html>, 5 November, 2008.

⁵ A. Kroll. "Youth voter turned out for Obama on Tuesday", *Youth Vote '08, Next-Gen Election Coverage, CBS News*

⁶ J. Von Kanel and H. Quinley, "Exit polls: Obama wins big among young minority voters" *Election Center 2008, CNN Politics.com*

⁷ J. Von Kanel and H. Quinley, "Exit polls: Obama wins big among young minority voters" *Election Center 2008, CNN Politics.com*

⁸ D. Kuhn, "Exit Polls: How Obama Won", Politico.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	5
1.1 Methodology	9
1.2 Barack Obama: A Brief Biography	12
2. The Youth Vote in Context	13
3. One of Us: Barack Obama and the Millennial Generation	16
3.1 The First Millennial to Run for President	17
3.2 The Millennial Personality	19
3.3 Millennials and Cyber Space: A Place That's Theirs	20
3.4 Millennials Talk Politics	23
3.5 The Generation Gap and the Battle For Representation	24
3.6 The Youth: Guardians of Liberal Ideals?	25
3.7 Young People on the Big Issues Facing America	28
4. The Cultivation of a Celebrity	31
4.1 The Importance of Visual Communication	32
4.2 Barack Obama: Embodying the Extraordinary	35
4.3 The Politics of Stardom	43
4.4 Obama and Religious Discourse	48
4.5 The Celebrity Frame	52
4.6 Obama as the Family Man	53
4.7 "Pimp" My Campaign: The Role of Celebrity Endorsements	57
4.8 Barack and Roll: Obama and the World of Rock Music	62
4.9 Barack Obama, Tabloids and the Middle Class	65
5. Barack Obama and the Power of Storytelling	69
6. Conclusion	75
7. References	78
Appendix A – Discussion Group Report: Participant Information and Selected Transcript	86
Appendix B – Selected Speeches Delivered by Barack Obama	101

1. INTRODUCTION

More than 6.5 million young Americans under the age of 30 participated in the 2008 primary elections and caucuses. With a 17% turnout rate among people age 18-29, participation among this voting bracket had doubled since the 2000 primary elections, which drew a mere 9% to the polls. The number of young voters tripled and even quadrupled in some states that held primaries, according to research conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)⁹. Statistics indicate that participation increased among all sub-groups in almost every state that held a caucus or primary election, including those with large African-American populations (Georgia and South Carolina), a sizeable white majority (Iowa, New Hampshire), and a large Latino population (California).¹⁰

This spike in youth voter turnout made these primary elections a historical and record-breaking contest, demonstrative of the fact that Americans age 18-29, despite preceding underestimation, are a decisively powerful, influential voting bloc. It is also the latest and most substantial evidence of an upward trend in youth voting patterns, observed since the 2002 mid-term elections. The 2004 national elections saw a 9% increase in turnout among the same voting bracket from 2000, 49% from 40%. The 2006 mid-term elections saw a 3% rise in participation among young people from 2002 – a greater increase in off-year voting than in any other age group. This is the first time since the 1972 elections when 18-year-olds were awarded the chance to cast their ballots, that there has been an increase in youth voter participation in three consecutive cycles¹¹.

Participation among young voters may have been more striking in the 2008 primaries than in previous election cycles, but the rising figures projected for these elections were not a once-off bolt from the blue. Many have referred to the 2008 contests as the “year of the youth vote.” However, such statistics are in fact a predictable part of a larger steadily ascending trend in youth voting behaviour. Only now, there has been one more election cycle on which to test the theory and the results have been more pronounced. These elections cannot claim to be entirely unique in this regard, but it warrants the speculation of why the number of young voters increased so dramatically.

⁹ D. Roscow, “2008 Primary Summary” *Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_08_primary_summary.pdf, 13 June, 2008.

¹⁰ S. Keeter, “Young Voters in the 2008 Presidential Primaries”. *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. Available from: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/730/young-voters>. February, 2008.

¹¹ K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, “Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends.” *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/CIRCLE_RtV_Young_Voter_Trends.pdf. February, 2008.

The likelihood of youth voter turnout in November's national elections matching or exceeding the numbers recorded during the primaries is high. In a 2008 April survey conducted by the Harvard University Institute of Politics (IOP), 80% of participants age 18-24 said that they would probably vote in this year's national elections. Of the outstanding 20%, 10% said that there was a 50% chance that they would cast their ballot.¹² Among the nine American-exchange students that participated in the discussion group for the purposes of this dissertation, just three had voted in the primaries, yet 100% anticipated casting their ballot in the national elections. Why does the youth vote matter? Because this demographic outnumbers any other age group and the majority of young people who are considered to be included in this generation are still under the eligible voting age. This means that this part of the electorate could prove to be even more influential in subsequent elections.

Not only has there been somewhat of a statistical anomaly among young voters, but there has also been a clear attitudinal shift in recent years. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released in July 2008, showed that among young American voters aged 18 to 29, 67% called this year's presidential campaign interesting – up 36% from 2000. 66% of those 30 to 49, 58% of those 50 to 64 and 52% of those 65 and over described it as interesting¹³. This indicates that young voters are more excited about the pending elections than any other age group. There has also been a greater increase in interest among this voting bracket since 2000 than has occurred in any other.

This means that marginally more young voters are paying attention in an election that has been uncharacteristically unique and captivating for voters across all age groups. This is due to a number of factors: The unpopularity of the Bush administration has been driven by an unrelenting war on terrorism followed by an increasingly negative perception of America abroad. This, compounded by the severity of the issues currently facing America; namely the economy, the war in Iraq, unaffordable health care and education and environmental concerns, have alerted Americans to the reality that this election, arguably more so than recent comparable contests, does in fact matter.

These elections have been an extremely close race and the candidates are particularly unusual: The Democratic primary elections were tightly contested by Barack Obama, an African-American and Hillary Clinton, a woman: neither of which have, in the history of America, won the presidency. Although the Republican contests were not as contested and

¹² Harvard University IOP 14th Biannual Youth Survey of Politics and Public Service, Available from: <http://www.iop.harvard.edu/Research-Publications/Polling/Spring-2008-Survey>: April, 2008:3.

¹³ E.J. Dionne Jr., "The Year The Youth Vote Arrives", Available from: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/07/24/AR2008072403414_2.html. 25 July, 2008.

Senator John McCain emerged the clear victor, his candidacy is somewhat atypical for a Republican presidential candidate. Despite the fact that he is a war-veteran and subscribes to many of the ideas and principals associated with the Republican Party, many archetypal Republican supporters perceive him as being too moderate. His choice to share his ticket with Alaskan Governor, Sarah Palin, a woman with little political experience, and a self-professed “hockey mom” to five children, including a pregnant teenager and down-syndrome infant, regenerated the interest in McCain’s candidacy. Despite the nature of these contests, both the increase in turnout and interest among young voters in these elections exceeded that of other demographics.

Not only did more young people cast their ballot in these primary elections than in other comparable contests, but they were fairly specific in the demonstration of their support. More youth voted in the Democratic than Republican primaries and more supported Senator Barack Obama than any other candidate. Of the 2.2 million new young voters this cycle, two million voted for a Democrat for president¹⁴. On Super Tuesday, more than 2 million of the approximate 3 million voters under 30 that headed to the polls, voted in Democratic contests, according to CIRCLE¹⁵. The number of young voters who participated in Democratic contests in 2008 outnumbered those participating in Republican contests in all states except Michigan. Young people constituted an average of 14% of Democratic primary voters, a 9% increase since comparable contests in 2004¹⁶. The Democratic Party has been increasing its support among young voters since the 2006 elections¹⁷. This is unusual considering that prior to 2006, it was not the leading choice among this demographic.

There is substantial evidence to illustrate Barack Obama’s popularity among young Americans age 18-29. Obama received 60% of votes among young Democrats during the primaries, receiving the highest number of youth votes in states with significant black populations (Georgia, South Carolina, Missouri, and Alabama) and in his home state of Illinois¹⁸. He claimed a 22 percentage-point lead over Hillary Clinton among voters of this age group. In comparison to the Republican candidates, McCain secured only 3% more of young votes nationally than his contender for the Republican nomination, Mike Huckabee,

¹⁴ “Young Voters: The New Democratic Base”, *Young Democrats Association (YDA) Website*.

<http://www.yda.org/tools/19/youth-statistics>.

¹⁵ D. Roscow. “Super Tuesday” by Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/PR_08_Super%20Tuesday.pdf. 6 February, 2008:1.

¹⁶ S. Keeter, “Young Voters in the 2008 Presidential Primaries”. *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, Available from: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/730/young-voters>. February, 2008.

¹⁷ N. Schwab. “Young Voters Could Put Obama or Clinton in the White House”, *US News and World Report*. <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/campaign-2008/2008/03/13/young-voters-could-put-obama-or-clinton-in-the-white-house.html>, 13 March, 2008.

¹⁸ S. Keeter “Young Voters in the 2008 Presidential Primaries”. *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. February, 2008.

which was 34% to 31% respectively and only 9% more than Mitt Romney¹⁹. Eight out of the nine participants in the discussion group conducted as part of this study, planned to vote for Obama in the ensuing elections. From these statistics, it is clear that Obama emerged the victor across both political parties. Additionally, the April 2008 Harvard IOP survey found that 18-24 year-olds who planned to vote in November favoured Obama by 53% in a what was then a hypothetical head-to-head contest against U.S. Senator John McCain (32%), but gave Clinton a much smaller lead (44% to 39%) when matched up against the Arizona Senator. 47% of participants in the survey said they disliked Hillary over 12% who disliked Obama²⁰. According to youth voting statistics released by the Young Democrats Association (YDA), 49% of American youth view McCain negatively, while only 30% view him favourably²¹. If Clinton had won the Democratic nomination instead of Obama, young voters would most likely have supported the Democratic over the Republican Party in the national elections, but with a smaller margin. This means Obama had a determinant role in the turnout of young voters.

In sum, the youth vote in the 2008 primary elections was characterised by a heightened level of enthusiasm and political involvement, a continuing tendency towards identification with the Democratic Party and an obvious preference for Barack Obama as the candidate of choice.

How does one attempt to ascertain the causality of this phenomenon? On one hand, young people currently constitute the largest voting bloc and their numbers are continuously increasing as they reach eligible voting age. The fact that the incumbent power is Republican, means arguably that there is a greater tendency among voters to seek asylum in the opposing philosophy of the Democratic Party regardless of the candidate. In addition to this, the younger, “Millennial” generation have shown a particular predisposition to civic engagement and an interest in politics as colleges and future employers look to fill highly sought-after positions with the most well-rounded candidates.

On the other hand, the disproportionate support Barack Obama received from this demographic in comparison to other candidates means that he evidently struck a chord among young voters. Obama was able to conceive and articulate a message that truly resonated with the youth. It embodied the change they needed to reclaim their representation in a political system that had forgotten them and was without the baggage that had up until this point,

¹⁹ D. Roscow, “2008 Primary Summary” *Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*. 13 June, 2008.

²⁰ Harvard University Institute of Politics (IOP) 14th Biannual Youth Survey of Politics and Public Service, April, 2008: 7-8.

²¹ “Young Voters: The New Democratic Base”, *Young Democrats Association (YDA) Website*.

suppressed any real hope for transformation. Barack Obama possesses an extraordinariness, enhanced by a unique and compelling life story that has inspired young people to believe in his capabilities to spur the change they seek. It is his exceptionality that also made him a celebrity, as the idols that society creates are crystallised manifestations of our own aspirations and desires. Through association with other celebrities, Barack Obama managed to bring new young voters into the fold and consolidated the cult-like following he obtained among this part of the electorate. Obama also invented creative and ingenious ways in which to attract and mobilise young voters through mediums that they both felt comfortable with and that truly belonged to them. Through Barack Obama, young people saw an opportunity for the articulation and expression of their own voice within the confinements of an otherwise dominated public discourse.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The data for this dissertation was firstly obtained through the collection of rhetorical material delivered by Barack Obama. This included verbal rhetoric, comprising mainly of campaign speeches, television advertisements and interviews; visual rhetoric, referring to campaign posters, images featured on his website, magazine spreads in which he has appeared, and other staged photographs; and finally e-rhetoric, involving the transmission of campaign messages via internet-related communication technologies such as Obama's website and social networking site, YouTube. This analysis is concerned predominantly with the rhetorical messages disseminated by Barack Obama in the months leading up to and during the 2008 Democratic primary elections, December 2007-June 2008. However there are limited references to other critical rhetorical moments occurring outside of this designated time frame. The material also included commentary made by the media about Barack Obama and the youth vote, as well as studies and surveys that sought to gauge youth voter behaviour.

A selection of the material retrieved was compiled into DVD format to be screened for the purposes of a discussion group.²² It was a collection of campaign advertisements, interviews, speeches, endorsements, commentary and analyses related to Barack Obama's 2008 primary campaign. Content was chosen on the basis of its relevancy to this study: Either such material was demonstrative of his charisma, his celebrity, his appeal to the youth or most effectively captured the essence of his message. The point of the discussion group was to compare what the media and commentators had posited about the impact of Barack Obama's candidacy on youth voter turnout with actual responses expressed by young Americans.

²² A copy of this DVD (running time approximately 30 minutes) and a written list of its contents were included with the hand-in of this dissertation.

The discussion group was spread over two one-hour long sessions, held at the University of Cape Town on 11 and 12 September 2008. The first discussion group session included the screening of the DVD and initial reflections on its content by participants. The second session moved to a general discussion about Barack Obama's candidacy.²³ The participants were American exchange students involved in a six-month study abroad programme at UCT. They were recruited for the purposes of the discussion group through the International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO) and their participation was obtained on a voluntary basis. There was no preliminary selection process or set criteria other than their capacity as young Americans between the ages of 18 and 29. Any individual who fit this profile and indicated his or her interest in participating, was permitted to do so. The total number of participants was nine: five attended the first session. Four joined the group for the subsequent session. They were all 20 years old. The gender distribution was seven female, two male. In terms of ethnic composition: seven members of the group were white, one was African-American (only one parent is black) and one was Asian. All participants had graduated from high school and were currently enrolled for the completion of a Bachelor's degree at a US college. Geographically, three participants were from the state of California. The other six hailed originally from the states of North Carolina, New York, Massachusetts, Delaware, Florida and Colorado. For the purposes of this dissertation, the full names of the discussion group participants have been omitted; indicated by an asterisk (*) following their first name.

The representativeness of this sample is an obvious limitation. The inherent biases are as follows: The fact that participants were obtained on a voluntary basis meant that the majority of participants were either studying towards a degree in political science or a related discipline, were interested in politics generally, or felt that they possessed the necessary knowledge to contribute intelligibly to a discussion about Barack Obama. Therefore, it would be an inappropriate assumption to make that young Americans are necessarily more civically engaged or enthusiastic about politics based on their responses alone.

There are further prejudices within the categories of race, age and geographical location. African-American and Asians make-up approximately 20% of young Americans. In this instance, 22% of the participants were either African-American or Asian. However, the other 82% were white, which means that this ethnic group was over represented: only 60% of American youth are white. The other approximate 20% consists of Latino youth (18%) and Native Americans (1%), neither of which was spoken for at the discussion group. Every

²³ A DVD recording of both discussion groups is also included in the hand-in of this dissertation. Running Time: About 86 minutes.

participant was 20 years of age, which means that a range of ages from 18 to 29 (which constitutes the youth voter demographic) were unrepresented. However, American exchange students who study abroad in South Africa are generally part of a set programme, available in a specific year of study. Therefore, finding a variety of ages among this group was nearly impossible. Discussion group participants were representative of only seven out of 50 US states. Given that physical location has been cited as a variable in voter behaviour, this may also reflect partiality in the information obtained.

Another intrinsic prejudice is related to educational attainment. All participants were currently enrolled at a university. To provide some context, 50% of American voters under the age of 30 have some kind of college experience, but only 10% of Americans have a Bachelor's degree or higher. In addition to this, many of the participants attended prestigious colleges in America including the University of California, Emory University and Bryn Mawr College. These participants had privileged access to education and had in some way or another, obtained the financial capital to secure their placement there. Although scholarships can be obtained, this is a deduction based on the exorbitant fees of college education in America. Participants were also most likely imbued with a large pool of resources, inherent to any leading academic institution, that have contributed to their knowledge and depth of understanding. Such resources include state of the art technology, academic material and staff support. It is also probable that most of the group have support-structures in place that assisted them in obtaining this level of education, which have contributed to an enhance self-esteem. Participants were extremely communicative, confident and opinionated. Their access to college education may have been determinant in their support for Barack Obama, as he has received substantially more support among university students than young people not enrolled in college.

This group of youth was comprised of critically-thinking, upwardly-mobile young adults who are capable, if not skilled in the production of independent thought, analysis, and public deliberation. These participants did not represent the average young American, but were instead part of an emerging, over-achieving and ambitious intelligentsia. Essentially, it was specifically these kinds of youth that were the engine of Barack Obama's primary campaign and were naturally more inclined to support him. While this was a prejudice, it was also an advantage, as these individuals were able to offer significant reflection and well-informed insight on the matter.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention that participants were not in their natural environment when the discussion group was held. Because they were living overseas, they may have believed

that, compared to their South African peers, they had augmented expertise or authority on US-related issues. Indeed, they were chosen because they could provide more legitimate insight into Barack Obama's candidacy and possible youth appeal than most young South Africans. However, they were perhaps more vocal about certain things than they would have been on home soil. There is also a greater likelihood of participants making assertions that may not necessarily be accurate, but believed it would be accepted unconditionally because of a heightened sense of authority.

Nonetheless, this group of students was considered to be the most accessible and appropriate sample in terms of age and nationality for this study. Participants were already studying at UCT, had grown up in the United States, were residing there for the duration of the 2008 primary elections and fell within the 18-29 age group. Their responses should thus be noted as *an* opinion of what is arguably Barack Obama's stronghold, rather than *the* opinion of American youth generally.

1.2 BARACK OBAMA: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

The inquiry into the relationship between Barack Obama's candidacy and the rise in youth voter turnout demands that both Obama and young Americans be qualified. Barack Obama is a 47-year-old US Senator, who has represented the State of Illinois since 2004. His father was born in rural Kenya and attended university in America. His mother came from a white blue-collar background and grew up in the state of Kansas. Obama lived much of his formative life in Hawaii, with a few years spent in Indonesia.

He graduated from Columbia University in 1983, and worked as a community organiser with a church-based group in Chicago. He later earned a law degree from Harvard University in 1991 where he became the first African-American President of the *Harvard Law Review*. He practised as a civil-rights lawyer and taught constitutional law. From 1997-2004, he served as a member of the Illinois Senate for District 13. In 2004, he became the third black US Senator since Reconstruction, the period between 1865 and 1877, which sought to rebuild the country in the aftermath of the American Civil War. An acting politician for only a decade, he announced his candidacy for the President of the United States in February 2007.

He ran in the 2008 Democratic primaries against New York Senator, Hillary Clinton and North Carolina Senator, John Edwards, who withdrew early in the contest. Obama won the race, making him the first African-American to be nominated by a major political party for the US Presidency. He will compete against Arizona Senator and Republican nominee, John

McCain in the November 2008 national elections for the Presidential title.²⁴ If he is elected, he will be the first black president in American history.

This brief introduction serves to contextualise Obama's candidacy, but it also foreshadows the importance of storytelling as a campaign technique employed by Obama. His personal narrative served as a way to essentially "act out" and hone his campaign message, making it an important tool in knowledge management. Barack Obama's story was important in overcoming divisions based on class and race as it allowed him to point to the extraordinary and ordinary, the black and white, the affluent and middle class parts of himself. By showing that all of these things converged within his personal narrative, it was symbolic of the potential that a diverse America has for unification. This will be discussed in more detail throughout the course of this dissertation.

2. THE YOUTH VOTE IN CONTEXT

For the purposes of this dissertation, "American youth" refer to US citizens between the ages of 18-29. This group is born from 1979 to 1990, and their numbers in 2008, stand at approximately 45 million out of a national population of 300 million²⁵. This demographic is larger than any other who qualify to vote in the United States: Outnumbering 30-41 year-olds by 9 million, 42-53 year-olds by 2 million, 54-65 year-olds by 3 million and more than doubling the 66-77 year-old voting bracket²⁶. In 2006, 18-29 year-old Americans comprised 21% of the electorate with 41.9 million²⁷. This is mindful of the fact that those whose are of voting age (18) in 2008, were ineligible two years ago and the percentage today is predictably higher. The sheer size of this part of the electorate supports the notion that young people are in fact a potentially powerful and consequential force in national politics, even though they had for many years fallen off the radar. Given the stir caused by the mere 17% of people under the age of 30 who cast their ballot in the 2008 primary elections, one can only image the impact this group might have if the majority voted. What is truly staggering, is that the number of people currently under the age of 17 in the United States is 70 million²⁸, and therefore this age group will prove to be even more consequential in ensuing elections. Discussion group participant, Grant*, from Wilmington, Delaware argues that, "historically, the youth vote always fails." However, this may no longer be an absolute given the level of

²⁴ "Meet the Candidate", on Barack Obama's website: http://www.barackobama.com/learn/meet_barack.php.

²⁵ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, "The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation", *The New Politics Institute*. Available from: http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full_report=1. 20 June, 2007.

²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, 2008 population <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbagg>.

²⁷ "Young Voters: The New Democratic Base", *Young Democrats Association (YDA) Website*.

²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, 2008 Population <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbagg>.

enthusiasm, political involvement and size of the emerging youth population.

In terms of the composition of this demographic, white youth still represent the largest racial/ethnic group among young voters (67.6%). However, this percentage has fallen from 88% in 1968 to 62% in 2006²⁹. During the same period, the percentage of young people who are African-American or Hispanic has grown by 2.3% and 10.6% respectively³⁰. Collectively, Latino and African American youth have represented almost 30% of young voters in recent elections, up from 13% in 1992. In 2004, African-American voters were the largest minority voting bloc (15.3%), while in 2006 (a mid-term election), Latino youth represented the single largest constituency (14.2%). Among Americans age 18-25, the breakdown is 61% white, 5% Asian, 18% Hispanic, 15% African-American and 1% Native-American³¹. Therefore, 39% consider themselves to be non-white³², which means that this group is in fact a hybrid, significantly more diverse than it was 30 years ago.

One might speculate that there is a greater chance that they may vote for a multi-racial presidential candidate. In both South Carolina which had the highest proportion of black voters between the ages of 18-29 (61%), and in Nevada where Latino youth comprised 19% of voters in this same age group (the highest in any state), Obama was the outright winner among this age group in the 2008 primary contests and caucuses that these states held, with 67% and 59% of the youth vote respectively³³. Arguably, Barack Obama has been decisive in securing the support of young minorities living in America that have historically been less politically engaged. He is also responsible for the creation of a more diverse voting bloc.

Americans age 18-29 tend to be less religious than their elders. According to an article published by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 23% of people this age say they have no religious affiliation, compared to 18% among those ages 30-44, 15% among those 45-59 and 10% among those ages 60 and older³⁴. Rock the Vote, a non-profit organisation based in Los Angeles committed to engaging youth in the political process, found that 69% of this age group consider themselves to be Catholic or Christian, and 29% of this segment (the most common choice) belongs to a Christian denomination that is not

²⁹ K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, "Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends." *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. February, 2008:10.

³⁰ M. Lopez, and K. Marcelo, "Youth Demographics", conducted by *The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement*. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/quick/youth_demo.htm. November, 2006.

³¹ K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, "Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends." *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. February, 2008:15.

³² "Young Voters: The New Democratic Base", *Young Democrats Association (YDA) Website*.

³³ K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, "Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends." *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. February, 2008:4-5.

³⁴ S. Keeter "Young Voters in the 2008 Presidential Primaries". *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, Available from: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/730/young-voters>. February, 2008.

Catholic or Protestant³⁵. Evangelical Christians would be included here. A US religious landscape survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that Evangelical Christians are currently the most sizeable religious group in America at 26.3%³⁶. Rock the Vote argued that religiosity is an important predictor in electoral participation because it indicates partisanship and subsequently a tendency to support the Republican Party. Evangelical Christians specifically are a key constituent in the Republican support base. However, through an emphasis placed on his Christian faith and the frequent positioning of his rhetoric within a religious discourse, Barack Obama has attempted to reach out to these voters.

Voters between the ages of 18-29 tend to be female. The turnout rate of young women was nearly 7% higher than that of young men in recent presidential elections. This difference has grown from around 1% in 1972³⁷.

Young voters tend to be more educated than the youth population at large. 50% of voters between the ages of 18-29 in the early 2008 primary contests said that they had some kind of college experience. Young people with a Bachelor's degree or more reported the highest turnout rates in both 2004 (69%) and 2006 (41%). Only 10% of young Americans generally have Bachelor's degrees or higher. Among them; 12% are White, 20% are Asian, and projected figures are 5% or less for both African-Americans and Latino youth. Women have a 3.8% greater likelihood of possessing a college degree than men³⁸. Therefore, college students are more inclined to vote than those not attending college. According to the April 2008 Harvard (IOP) study, 3% more college students voted for Barack Obama in the 2008 primaries (43%) than non-college students (40%). In contrast, Hillary Clinton received 1% more votes in the primaries among non-college students than those currently enrolled at a tertiary institution³⁹. This indicates that Barack Obama is more popular among college students than non-college students. Discussion group participants who attended politically-active colleges, said that Obama was the most visible political candidate on their campus throughout the primary election season. Perhaps, Obama has been able to consolidate the support of college students because of the extraordinariness of his story. Any moderately-ambitious, upwardly-mobile young American should find Obama's ascent to greatness,

³⁵ K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, "Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends." *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. February, 2008:12.

³⁶ "US Religious Landscape Survey", conducted by *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*. Available from: <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>. September, 2008.

³⁷ K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, "Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends." *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/CIRCLE_RtV_Young_Voter_Trends.pdf. February, 2008:12.

³⁸ K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, "Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends." *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. February, 2008:10.

³⁹ Harvard University IOP 14th Biannual Youth Survey of Politics and Public Service, April, 2008:8.

inspirational. Many young people who are not enrolled in college, may not share the same aspirations for the future: They are not looking to become one of the first black presidents of the *Harvard Law Review*, or run for President of the United States. They are content with living a humble life and seek a leader that shares their values.

In terms of geographical location, the highest number of voters between the ages of 18-29 reside in the Southern states (30.9%), followed by the Midwest (28.7%), the Northeast (20.3%), and the West (20.2%)⁴⁰. Barack Obama won in many of the states projecting the highest numbers of young voters including Georgia (where the youth voter turnout actually tripled from previous contests). However, there is also a large African-American population in this state and that may have been more influential than its geographical positioning in terms of youth voter turnout.

Therefore, the most generic profile of an American voter between the ages of 18 and 29 is white, female, Christian, from the Southern states and has had some college experience.

3. ONE OF US: BARACK OBAMA AND THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

*“What is significant is how fully and seamlessly Barack Obama embodies the attitudes, aspirations and shortcomings of the generation that's rallied around him: The optimism. The diversity. The sense of community. The faith in government. The repudiation of partisanship and the call for consensus.”*⁴¹

– Newsweek Magazine, February 2008

In addition to aforementioned indicators, there is a character or personality associated with this age group that may also offer some insight into youth voting patterns. This age group forms part of what is referred to as the ‘Millennial Generation’ or ‘Y Generation’, which includes those born until the year 2000 i.e. Americans age 8-29 in 2008. This generation is a significantly larger group than any other: 95 million (though only about half are adults) compared to 78 million baby boomers (born roughly between 1946-1964)⁴². By 2015, they will comprise one third of the electorate and by 2016, roughly 30% of actual voters. By 2018, millennials, by this definition, will be 100 million strong and they will all be old enough to

⁴⁰ K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, “Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends.” *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. February, 2008:14.

⁴¹ A. Romano, “He’s One of Us Now”, *Newsweek* website, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/109589>: 18 February, 2008.

⁴² P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation”, *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

vote. Taking citizenship into account, there will still be 90 million citizen-eligible millennial voters⁴³. This means that their political representation would have more than doubled in a decade and thus, the upwards trend in youth voter participation that has emerged in recent years, is really only a glimpse at the impact this voter bloc could have in future contests.

3.1 THE FIRST MILLENNIAL TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT

Some have argued that it is Barack Obama's age (46) that has made him particularly appealing to young voters. He was younger than any other candidate running in either the 2008 Democratic or Republican primaries. His contender for the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton, was born in 1947, making her the quintessential baby boomer. Republican nominee, John McCain, will be 72 years old in 2008, meaning that Obama has a 26-year advantage over him in identifying with voters age 18-29 come the national elections in November.

Obama's age has allowed him to surpass many of the battles that don't necessarily concern young people such as the Vietnam War, in which both McCain and 2004 Democratic presidential nominee, John Kerry emphasised their participation throughout their campaigns. It means that that he does not come across as parental to young voters, but as a peer or equal⁴⁴. Andrew Romano of *Newsweek* said, "Obama is not a late boomer, as his birth date would suggest, but the first millennial to run for president."⁴⁵ Romano's article was appropriately entitled, "He's one of us now," which testifies to the level of identification that Obama shares with young voters. It means that the American youth trust him more than any other candidate to fight for their interests against the predominating dogma of the baby boomer generation. As discussion group participant, Daniel*, originally from Orlando, Florida, says: "Instrumental in the connection with youth voters, is that Obama is of a new generation and that he is the first post baby boomer president. He came of age in the 80's. This was before us, but different from [Bill] Clinton, [Hillary] Clinton, Bush, Kerry and certainly McCain who is not even part of the baby boomer generation. With previous candidates, there were just arguments about whether they had served in Vietnam or not. That's so far removed from our lives. With Obama, there is a sense of freshness. The people of our generation remember the Clinton administration, but we were still really young. It's kind of old baggage to us... There is a sense of enough is enough. Are people in their 40's, 50's and 60's going to have a stranglehold on public discourse in this country forever?"

⁴³ "Young Voters: The New Democratic Base", *Young Democrats Association (YDA) Website*.

⁴⁴ B. Waxman "Why Obama Wins the Youth Vote", *Philadelphia Daily News*. Available from <http://www.democracyguard.org/ben/node/71>. 19 January, 2007.

⁴⁵ A. Romano, "He's One of Us Now", *Newsweek* website, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/109589>: 18 February, 2008.

Daniel* was not alone in expressing this sentiment. Mengfei* from Irvine, California, said, "People I know have been fed-up with the baby boomers. They ask, 'Why aren't you guys like us?' They [the baby boomers] act like they were the best generation ever. They were like '60's the new 30, then 70's the new 30.' They are just not going to let go." Sarah*, from North Carolina, felt that the younger generation is failing to be recognised because "people are stuck in the 60's."

Perhaps this resentment towards baby boomers and the obvious need among youth to articulate their own voice have been partly responsible for the increase in political involvement. Young, thinking Americans see Barack Obama as their vessel for representation in a forum characterised by lobbyists, factionalism and baby boomers. He also signifies the way forward and the parting with old baggage that has dominated the political landscape for decades. Molly*, from Poughkeepsie, New York says, "He [Obama] has put so much effort into getting the youth involved, I think that if he is elected, throughout his term, there is going to be a shift. On some level, he is going to be concerned about keeping that level of involvement up. If youth voter participation decreases in subsequent elections, that's what people will remember about him."

Most significantly, Obama's age positions him most appropriately as an embodiment of change. Analysts say that this particular message has been a determining factor in drawing young people to the polls. Robert Pastor, the head of American University's Center for Democracy and Election Management in Washington D.C., says that that youth are inspired by Obama's message because, "He reflects a new generation, a new generation's view of the world, a desire on the part of the new generation to change things in a dramatic fashion, in bold fashion and all of those things, I think, are part of what excited young people to participate and vote for him."⁴⁶ Young Americans have also cited Obama's desire for transformation as particularly appealing. In the April 2008 Harvard IOP survey, 25% of participants identified the "need for change", as their reason for supporting Obama. This was significantly higher than any other reason provided⁴⁷.

Barack Obama also credited his message of change as an important part of the package he was selling to young voters. "Your Fate '08", aired on ABC News and based in New Hampshire, is a political initiative created to keep young people informed about the campaign. It asked Barack Obama why young voters should select him in this upcoming election and he said: "I think that young voters know that we have challenges like climate

⁴⁶A. Villarreal, "Youth Vote Growing in US Presidential Contests" *NewsVOA.com*. Available from: <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-02/2008-02-07-voa25.cfm>, 7 February, 2008.

⁴⁷ Harvard University IOP 14th Biannual Youth Survey of Politics and Public Service, April, 2008:9.

change, our national debt and paying for college. None of those challenges we are going to solve with the same kind of politics. We need a new kind of politics. That's what this campaign represents and I think that young people are naturally going to gravitate to somebody who wants to transform how politics works in this country."⁴⁸

He embodies the kind of change they seek. Lastly, Obama's age and subsequent identification with young voters not only means that he represents the interests of this generation, or that he can make a legitimate call for change, but also that he personifies the aspirations of American youth. This demographic may thus want to emulate his most appealing qualities, in an attempt to be more like him. To a certain extent, this has made Obama a celebrity, as fame itself is based on such emulation. Celebrities are vicarious representations of our own desires and aspirations.

3.2 THE MILLENNIAL PERSONALITY

Many have posited that the millennial generation is more civically engaged, more interested in politics, less cynical, more technologically-savvy, more liberal in their thinking and subscribe to a more communitarian philosophy. If this paints an accurate picture, then it is not a stretch to comprehend why young people would support Obama. He has run a largely internet-driven campaign premised on progressiveness, idealism and grassroots organisation, encompassed by the slogans, "Change We Can Believe In", "hope" and "Yes We Can" respectively. The "We" places an emphasis on the collective rather than the individual.

Millennials are what social scientist William Strauss calls a "civic generation," drawn to issues of "community, politics and deeds"⁴⁹ and guided by the belief that people are more powerful when they come together. According to Morley Winograd and Michael Hais, authors of "Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics," millennials are "team players"; who are conditioned through social interaction, find consensus when solving problems and prefer to learn from their peers. Conversely, the baby boomer generation was focused on issues of self, culture and morals, and advanced these causes, usually combatively and confrontationally, through partisan politics.⁵⁰

This communitarian approach has meant that young Americans appear to be more dedicated to the development of the greater collective. For example, volunteerism is higher among millennials than it was among baby boomers at the same age. UCLA's 2006 American

⁴⁸ "Obama on the Youth Vote", *Your Fate '08, ABC news*. Available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOB17pIFJkg>. 20 December, 2007.

⁴⁹ A. Romano, "He's One of Us Now", *Newsweek* website. 18 February, 2008:2.

⁵⁰ A. Romano, "He's One of Us Now", *Newsweek* website. 18 February, 2008:2.

Freshman survey – conducted for the last 40 years, with several hundred thousand respondents each year – showed that 83% of entering college freshmen in 2005 volunteered at least occasionally during their high school senior year. This was the highest ever measured in this survey. 71% said they volunteered on a weekly basis. A Harvard IOP survey conducted in October 2006, found that 88% of participants (age 18-24) thought community service was a honourable thing to do⁵¹. This attitude has been extended to political service. 55% of participants in the April 2008 Harvard IOP survey said they would be interested in volunteering for a political campaign⁵². 73% considered voting to be a civic duty. 56% of those interviewed for the October 2006 Harvard IOP survey disagreed that “it is difficult to find ways to be involved in politics.”⁵³ One third of the participants who partook in the discussion group for this dissertation had, at some point in their lives, been directly involved in campaigning for a presidential candidate or congressman.

With this said, however, the ever-increasing ferociousness of competition among aspirant college students has meant that young Americans are attacking extra-curricular activities with a renewed zeal. They are willing to and must get involved in anything and everything outside of the conventionally academic spectrum to ensure a future with greater opportunities.

3.3 MILLENNIALS AND CYBER SPACE: A PLACE THAT’S THEIRS

The World Wide Web has been a key player in enhancing the civic-mindedness of this generation and has had a knock-on effect in facilitating an awakened interest in politics. Presidential hopeful Howard Dean, who ran in the 2004 Democratic primary elections pioneered the use of the internet for political campaigning to fundraise and reach young voters.

A study conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press in January 2008 involved a nationwide sample of 1,430 adults between the ages of 18 and 29. It found that 42% of participants regularly learnt about the elections from the internet, which was the highest percentage for any news source. This figure has doubled since 2004, when only 22% consumed the internet for this purpose⁵⁴. In other age groups, the increase in internet consumption was not as substantial: 10% for those aged 30-49 and only 8% for those 50 and

⁵¹ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation”, *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

⁵² Harvard University IOP 14th Biannual Youth Survey of Politics and Public Service, April, 2008:10.

⁵³ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation”, *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

⁵⁴ A. Kohut, S. Keeter, C. Doherty, and M. Dimock, “Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off: Internet’s Broader Role in Campaign 2008”, *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. Available from: <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/384.pdf>. 11 January, 2008:2.

older.⁵⁵

This phenomenon has been driven predominantly by social networking sites, which are not only being used more by young people, but are increasingly being consumed as a source of campaign news. The April 2008 Harvard IOP survey found that 65% of participants between the ages of 18-24 had a Facebook account and 66% had a Myspace account. 27% of Americans under the age of 30 have received campaign information from social networking sites. Nearly one-in-ten people under the age of 30 (8%) say that they have signed up as a “friend” of one of the candidates⁵⁶. Over half of the participants who partook in the discussion group for this dissertation have consumed social networking sites for political purposes. Statistically, this is not concurrent with other age groups. Just 4% of Americans in their 30’s, and 1% of those ages 40 and older, have received news about the campaign from social networking sites⁵⁷. Mindfully, these resources are more likely to be used by young people anyway because such technology has served as an integral part of their socialisation.

Barack Obama’s primary campaign was driven by the internet and was in fact groundbreaking in this regard. Discussion group participant, Lauren* from Denver, Colorado, mentioned that people have called Obama’s campaign a “Mac” campaign, in contrast to Hillary Clinton’s “PC” campaign. This indicates the level of technological efficacy and ingenuity with which Obama’s campaign operated. The Apple brand of computers tend to have more features, are more aesthetically pleasing and function better than PCs do. Mengfei* said that over and above any speech Obama gave, it was the way in which his campaign was run that won her support.

Obama’s utilisation of internet-related and mobile technology, and most recently the placement of political campaign ads in video-gaming, has made important inroads into the youth voter bracket, as it involves the use of tools and resources that millennials feel comfortable with. “It [the election process] used to be a very elitist, academic debate, and peer-to-peer technology made it a social discussion. Sites like YouTube allow for a new level of transparency.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ A. Kohut, S. Keeter, C. Doherty, and M. Dimock, “Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off: Internet’s Broader Role in Campaign 2008”, *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. Available from: 11 January, 2008:3.

⁵⁶ A. Kohut, S. Keeter, C. Doherty, and M. Dimock, “Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off: Internet’s Broader Role in Campaign 2008”, *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. 11 January, 2008:10.

⁵⁷ A. Kohut, S. Keeter, C. Doherty, and M. Dimock, “Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off: Internet’s Broader Role in Campaign 2008”, *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. 11 January, 2008:3.

⁵⁸ J. Staul, “Youth voters’ interest and participation increasing”, Available from Kentnews.net, *Kent State University*. Available from:
<http://media.www.kentnewsnet.com/media/storage/paper867/news/2008/04/24/News/Youth.Voters.Interest.And.Participation.Increasing-3346225.shtml>. January, 2008.

The internet was particularly important for Obama's campaign because unlike other mediums, it allows for direct contact with voters. Researchers Marion Just, Ann Crigler and Montague Kern say that the electorate consumes the internet for "surveillance" and "solidarity" reasons. Surveillance refers to the accessibility of extensive information and knowledge about the campaign itself, which is not only easy to navigate, but also continuously updated. It was easier for young people to get involved in Obama's campaign because of the wide availability of information in a medium they were consuming anyway and at a time that was convenient for them to do so. Not only did the internet provide the means for people to keep up with the fast-pace of the primary elections and retrieve information about the race itself, it was also strategic in the coordination of youth voter outreach programmes, college campus initiatives and upcoming Obama-related events.

This is linked to the "solidarity" function of internet-related political campaigning, which describes the "experience of the gratifications of reinforced, shared political identification or orientation."⁵⁹ The internet has been instrumental in creating imagined communities where people, particularly the youth, can connect with each other, debate and rally around common interests that transcend geographical boundaries. Most importantly for young people, the internet is a space that is theirs, that is not dominated by baby-boomers, where they can articulate and develop their own voice in their battle for representation in the public sphere.

Obama has stressed the importance of civic empowerment and grassroots mobilisation in the pursuit of political transformation. The opportunities that the internet provides are synonymous with this objective. Through the Worldwide Web, Obama was able to organise ex-pats living abroad to vote in the primaries, reach disparate voters and 17-year-olds who would be eligible to vote come national election time. Any member of the public can make Obama a 'friend' on Facebook, post a comment about a video he uploaded on YouTube or his website, and meet other Obama supporters with only a click of the mouse. Everyone can become a member of Obama's online community, an opportunity associated with some of the fundamental premises of his campaign: unity, empowerment and bipartisanship.

The internet was also pivotal in providing the financial endorsement needed to keep the Obama campaign running: It was relatively effortless to donate money online and any amount was acceptable. Daniel* commented that, "People never really felt inclined to give [2004 Democratic nominee] John Kerry any of their money. You work too hard for your money to give it away to John Kerry. There's something about Obama that has gotten my college

⁵⁹ J. Trent and R. Friedenberg. "Advertising in Political Campaigns" in *Political Campaign Communication*, Westport, Praeger. 4th ed. 2000:344.

roommate in Atlanta to give money, and James donates sperm for a living and James smokes a lot of marijuana, and James doesn't really do anything productive, and Barack Obama has been able to tap into that resource as well." Discussion group participant, Lilian* from Boston, MA, explained the propensity of voters to donate money to the Obama campaign: "His campaign slogan, 'Yes We Can' is about yes, even if you only have a little bit of money, you can be a part of something."

In the case of Obama's campaign, financial assistance is not being associated with selfishness or with one individual's pursuit for power, even though it is in fact a contest for the presidency. Obama has been effective in making voters feel that by donating money, they are prescribing to an ideal – a collectively, beneficial ideal – where the participation of every individual is invaluable in struggle for change. His central campaign slogan, "Change We Can Believe In," suggests that if Obama becomes President, it is a goal that was realised together. This is quite obviously articulated at the top of Obama's website's homepage, "I'm asking you to believe. Not just in my ability to bring about real change in Washington...I'm asking you to believe in yours. "

3.4 MILLENNIALS TALK POLITICS

The millennial generation has shown itself to be more interested and involved in politics generally. UCLA's 2006 American Freshman survey reported that more freshmen discussed politics as frequently when they were high school seniors (34%), than in the 40-year history of the survey.⁶⁰ The October 2006 Harvard IOP survey found that 71% of participants between the ages of 18 and 24 disagreed that "politics is not relevant to my life right now" and 84% disagreed that "it really doesn't matter to me who the president is." This same survey found that 48% had signed an online petition, 31% had written an email or letter advocating a political position, 29% had contributed to a political discussion or blog, 21% had attended a political rally, 18% had donated money to a political campaign or cause, and 14% had volunteered for a political campaign. In addition, 60% said that they followed news about national politics closely⁶¹. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that millennials are ten points higher than baby boomers were at the same age both in following what's going on in government and in keeping up with national affairs⁶².

⁶⁰ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, "The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation", *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

⁶¹ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, "The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation", *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

⁶² P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, "The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation", *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

3.5 THE GENERATION GAP AND THE BATTLE FOR REPRESENTATION

The discussion group showed that there was a discrepancy between the political interest and attitudes of participants and their parents. Among those whose parents were voting for the Democratic Party, their mother's tended to strongly support Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama during the primaries. Conversely, the participants themselves were more likely to support Obama. This is synonymous with the notion that Clinton was more representative of (particularly female) liberal baby boomers, while Obama tended to embody the interests of the millennial generation. One participant commented that her mother had been a big Hillary supporter and "was upset that Obama has not been putting enough effort into getting the middle-age female vote." A discussion group participant who voted in the Republican primary elections said that he supported a different candidate to his parents. Another group member who plans to vote for Obama in the national elections was representative of the most extreme scenario: One parent was generally apathetic and the other supported the Republican Party. He said, "My mom knows she has to be interested in politics because I'm watching her." It is too simplistic to suggest that young Americans are more interested in politics than their elder counterparts, but there is evidence of differing political allegiances and perspectives between the two age groups. This demonstrates the need among millennials to distinguish themselves from the baby boomer generation.

Millennials are less cynical about the future than baby boomers and have faith in government to bring about positive change. According to a January 2008 survey by Frank N. Magid Associates, 43% of boomers believe that the 2008 election will leave the US unchanged or worse off. Only 32% of millennials agree, and 40% say that it will make America stronger⁶³. In a February 2006 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 18-29 year olds were the most optimistic age group in assessing whether today's children would grow up better or worse off than the previous generation; 45% said better, compared to 40% who thought that the situation had worsened. Other age groups responded more negatively than positively by margins of 17-27 points.⁶⁴

Significantly, millennials generally do not feel represented by the current government. A 2006 Harvard IOP survey found that 78% of participants agreed that "elected officials seem to be motivated by selfish reasons;" 74% agreed that "politics has become too partisan;" and

⁶³ A. Romano, "He's One of Us Now", *Newsweek* website: 18, February 2008:2.

⁶⁴ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, "The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation", *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

75% felt that “elected officials don’t seem to have the same priorities that I have.”⁶⁵ This means that young people seek change in the political system and an alternate form of leadership that represents their interests.

The above evidence underlines the cleavages that exist between the millennial and baby-boomer generations. Such differences are attitudinal. That is, millennials are more optimistic about the future and have more confidence in the government’s ability to deliver than their older counter parts. One might argue that the disparities between these age groups are an indication of a need among millennials to distinguish themselves from the baby-boomer generation in the pursuit of their own representation. This has manifested itself in candidate preference and young people see Obama as their ally in the fight against the predominance of the older generation.

3.6 THE YOUTH: GUARDIANS OF LIBERAL IDEALS?

Millennials tend to be more progressive in their thinking and support liberal policies when choosing a candidate. They have demonstrated open-mindedness on controversial issues such as homosexuality and race. According to a 2007 Pew Research Center study, 56% of 18-29 year old Americans support homosexual marriage, while the general public opposed gay marriage by a 55-37 majority.⁶⁶ Gay marriage is a contentious topic in America and its endorsement is usually associated with the liberal lobby. A 2003 Pew Generation Next study found that almost all 89% of white 18-25 year-old millennials thought that it was acceptable for black and white people to date each other, compared with only 56% in 1987-88. Additionally, 82% of white participants believed that they had things in common with people of other races.⁶⁷ A sizable majority of young Americans say that race does not play a factor in how they would vote for president⁶⁸. This evidence suggests that young people are becoming increasingly less likely to regard race as a determinant in how they see the world, partly because they have grown up in a less divided society, but also because they are themselves a hybrid of various racial identities. This means that they would be more accepting than older age groups of the fact that Barack Obama is black and would in fact strongly identify with him because his background embodies the diversity that characterises their generation. Younger people are also willing to rethink what race means in society, not

⁶⁵ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation”, *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

⁶⁶ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation”, *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

⁶⁷ P. Leyden, R. Teixeira, E. Greenberg, “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation”, *The New Politics Institute*. 20 June, 2007.

⁶⁸ B. Waxman, “Why Obama Wins the Youth Vote”, *Philadelphia Daily News*. 19 January, 2007.

only because they are more open to alternative perspectives, but because they seek to challenge and even undermine the dominant belief system upon which the previous generation was built. Millennials do not share the same preconceived notions about race that baby-boomers do, because they have not been shaped by the Civil Rights Movement or the segregationist mantra that characterised their parents' era. The appeal for non-racialism among American youth can be seen once again as a way of asserting and distinguishing themselves from the previous generation. Their willingness to talk about race attempts to pry open the grip baby-boomers have on public discourse.

Barack Obama delivered a speech entitled "A More Perfect Union" on 18 March, 2008 in Philadelphia. It was groundbreaking because it spoke frankly about the palpable racial tensions that still exist in America today, a subject often perceived unofficially as taboo among the older generation. Discussion group participant, Lilian* cited this speech as a highlight of Obama's primary campaign, commenting that, "As a person of colour living in the United States, I had never heard anybody talk about race like that, so candidly and so honestly. He [Obama] is mixed, African-American, and has multiple experiences. He is really able to open up about that and talk about that. The race speech was monumental because it spoke to different kinds of people. I could relate to it, it was something I would think about with a group of people who felt they had no voice." A More Perfect Union was a testimony to Obama's progressiveness as a candidate and to his willingness in contesting prevailing social norms. Although this speech was specifically about the black experience, it really wasn't just about being black. It spoke to young people across the colour line because more than anything else, it was about the struggle for representation in an otherwise dominated public sphere.

It perhaps did more to galvanise the youth than it did to affirm black support. Mengfei*, who worked on the Obama campaign during the primaries, thought that initially, older African-Americans were sceptical of Obama: "A lot of black people, particularly the older generation, thought he isn't really African-American, he's African and he's white and he went through Harvard and he's not one of us. He wasn't around for the Civil Rights Movement. He wasn't there. How can he be one of us? The turning point came after he started winning the Southern States." Primary victories for Obama in these states were driven largely by young African-Americans. This comment suggests that the generational gap straddles all sub-groups. Black Americans regard participation in the Civil Rights Movement with the same esteem as white baby boomers associate with service in the Vietnam War. On one hand, there is the perception among older black people that Obama doesn't know what it's like to truly struggle. He has enjoyed the kind of opportunities and respect that were unimaginable during their time and has thus evaded the persecution and degradation that has historically been the black man.

In their eyes, he belongs to a different generation of African-Americans and thus the generational gap serves as a stronger basis for identification than race.

What such a perspective fails to recognise however is that race has been a factor for Barack Obama. He has achieved success within the confinements of a euro-centric framework, which means essentially that he has had to work his whole life on suppressing his blackness as a means towards social mobility. He has had to try even harder than the next white guy to be less emotional, less passionate, less aggressive and altogether less threatening to prove to the world that he does not constitute the typical stereotype of the African-American man. This has been the only way towards success in politics, an almost entirely white-dominated sector of society. Passing describes a phenomenon, which occurs whenever a member of some category is perceived (and allows himself to be perceived) as a member of another, mutually exclusive category, for example or a black person passing as white.⁶⁹ Barack Obama has tailored his persona essentially in way that “passes” for white in order to achieve what he has. To some extent, Obama’s fierce struggle for black representation in a white system has consequentially alienated him from the African-American community. Professors of rhetoric and interdisciplinary studies, D. Frank and M. McPhail, point out that Obama further has to deal with the “twoness or double-consciousness of being both African and American,” which is located somewhere in between believing in the promise of the American dream and the acknowledgement of broken promises of America’s racial realities.⁷⁰ These aspect of Obama’s candidacy make him unique, but it also makes identification with the black part of the electorate that much harder.

The progressiveness of the millennial generation infers a tendency among young voters to support the Democratic Party, due to its liberal leanings. The April 2008 Harvard IOP survey found that 46% of participants were leaning towards or are liberals, compared with the 35% who considered themselves leaning towards conservatism⁷¹. Nearly half of this age group (47%) identify as Democrats (up 7% since 2006), compared to 28% who support the Republican Party (a 27% decrease since the early 90’s), according to the Young Democrats Association (YDA). This means that Democrats generally have a 19-point partisan advantage over Republicans among the 18-29 year-old voting bracket⁷².

⁶⁹ R. Mallon, “Passing, Traveling and Reality: Social Constructionism and the Metaphysics of Race,” University of Utah. Available from: <http://www.hum.utah.edu/philosophy/faculty/mallon/Materials/ptr.pdf>, 2004:646.

⁷⁰ D. Frank and M. McPhail. “Barack Obama’s Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience and the (Im)possibility of Racial Conciliation.” In *Rhetoric & Public Affairs Vol. 8, No. 4*, 2005:572.

⁷¹ Harvard University IOP 14th Biannual Youth Survey of Politics and Public Service, April, 2008:2.

⁷² Young Voters: The New Democratic Base”, *Young Democrats Association (YDA) Website*.

With this said however, this generation has shown itself to be less partisan. This is essentially synonymous with the inclination young people have to elect unity and consensus for their preferred course of action. One discussion group participant was a registered independent voter because she believed that the importance of candidacy exceeded that of party identification. Daniel* commented that there were people on both sides, Democratic and Republican, that he can trust and agree with. Mengfei* said, “The easiest way to get involved in politics, is to pick a candidate and pick a side.” She explained that it was her desire to participate in politics, rather than her political affiliation to any specific party, that she chose to support the Democrats. Grant* argues against partisanship, “It’s not that one is right and one is wrong. It is two ways of looking at the same thing. It’s not as simple as being liberal or conservative. It’s not, ok well I think this way on the economic issue, therefore this is my stance on the death penalty and abortion. Because of the way partisan politics works, it’s about what you care about more.” One might infer based on these comments that the desire for representation among young people in the political process outweighs party identification in determining youth political participation.

3.7 YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE BIG ISSUES FACING AMERICA

Millennials have identified specific topics that concern them; namely the economy, education and employment, the war in Iraq, health care and the environment. In the April 2008 Harvard IOP survey, 29% of participants ages 18-24 cited the economy as the biggest issue, closely followed by Iraq at 20%, health care at 9% and the environment at 5%. In a testimony of their progressiveness, participants of this study expressed the least amount of concern on the topics of same-sex marriage and abortion⁷³. A Rock the Vote Study also found that although less often in the top five, the issues of homeland security and immigration tend to be ranked highly among young adults.

Gender and ethnicity among this age group have been found to account for nuanced differences in their prioritisation of these issues. In Lifetime Women’s Pulse Poll (March 2007), young women were twice as likely as young men to list education as a top election issue, 42% to 21% respectively, whereas men were more likely than women to list jobs and the economy as a top issue, 31% to 20% respectively. This is synonymous with the observation that American women are more likely than men to have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Rock the Vote’s November 2006 poll of young adults found that the top issues for young women was the war in Iraq (47%), homeland security and terrorism (40%), health care (39%), and job creation (37%). Polling from Rock the Vote shows that young African-

⁷³ Harvard University IOP 14th Biannual Youth Survey of Politics and Public Service, April, 2008:6.

Americans rate health care as their top issue and are less likely to prioritise education or college affordability. Latinos, on the other hand, rate college affordability as a more important issue than young adults overall⁷⁴. The general consensus among the discussion group participants was that the economy and the war in Iraq were the greatest challenges currently facing America.

It is important to evaluate the main concerns of this age group in tandem with the issues that Obama has focused on in his campaign. Barack Obama has been rather vocal about being against the war. He claims that “he opposed the war in Iraq before it began,” unlike both Hillary Clinton and Republican nominee, John McCain, a decorated war hero himself and advocator for the war against terrorism. The fact that Clinton initially voted for the war in Iraq put her at a great disadvantage among the youth demographic. An anti-war stance has been historically pivotal in obtaining the youth vote, exemplified by Eugene McCarthy in 1968 and Howard Dean in 2004⁷⁵. However, compulsory conscription in the US has been abandoned and thus the war is not as directly consequential an issue for this part of the electorate as it once was.

A number of discussion group participants who planned to vote for Barack Obama, were not necessarily confident in his abilities to deliver on these aforementioned issues. Molly* commented, “It’s hard to have confidence in one person to take care of everything, because our system is built around making sure that one person can’t make the decision. Maybe it’s terrible, but I’m a little bit less concerned about the specific policies that these candidates say they stand for, because, in the long run, what they tell me they are going to fight for to the very end, is probably not going to happen – it’s going to be some compromise in the middle.” Grant* noted the appointments to the Supreme Court and make-up of the Congress as being particularly far-reaching. Daniel* argued that he is confident in Obama’s ability to nominate and staff these areas with individuals who share his ideals.

This section has offered an overview of the archetypal millennial personality in order to provide more insight into youth voting patterns, and to outline some of the possible reasons for the overwhelming demonstration of support Obama has received from young voters. In sum, millennials have shown themselves to be more inclined towards civic engagement and political participation, not only as a necessary undertaking in an increasingly competitive environment, but as critical step in the pursuit of greater agency and representation in the

⁷⁴K. Marcelo, M. Lopez, C. Kennedy, K. Barr, “Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends.” *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. February, 2008:23.

⁷⁵A. Nagourney, “Will Obama Rock the Youth Vote”, *New York Times*, 8 October, 2007.

political system. Their progressiveness and propensity towards liberalism is symbolic of their desire to move forward and to distinguish themselves from the previous generation. They are also not shaped by the same prejudices or baggage that their parents were and are in a more suitable position to embrace change. Millennials subsequently possess the idealism needed to believe in this transformation. Young people also have more resources at their disposal than the older generation did. The advent of the internet has been consequential in the development of a well-informed and socially-conscious emerging generation by providing what was relatively an unclaimed space to articulate their aspirations and desires. It has also been instrumental in fostering a sense of communion that transcends traditional boundaries. Barack Obama truly speaks to this generation because he is young enough to identify with their interests and has devised a campaign that takes heed of the concerns that young people have, that empowers them, and that has creatively sought to further the goals of communal identity and bipartisanship through a medium that millennials both feel comfortable with and that belongs to them. Most importantly, Obama's campaign hasn't looked back.

4. THE CULTIVATION OF A CELEBRITY

“Barack Obama is not only the first black presidential candidate destined to earn a party nomination, but he's also the first truly cool candidate of the new millennium.”

– Ann Powers, the Los Angeles Times.⁷⁶

Barack Obama has featured on the cover of *Vanity Fair* and *Men's Vogue*, has posed for some of the world's most fêted tabloids, is ranked in the top 100 celebrities, and his contender for the Presidential nomination has compared him to the likes of Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. He is revered by arguably the greatest rap artists and purveyors of sleaze and misogyny of our time, and catapulted to rock stardom with a historic appearance in *Rolling Stone* Magazine, while his fans have chanted the slogan, “Barack and roll” at rallies and caucuses. Yet, despite all this, he remains the quintessential gentleman; chivalrous, incorruptible, and the kind you could bring home to dad. It is for this reason, that he has women eating out of the palm of his hand: Actress and model, Amber Lee Ettinger, semi-clad in Obama underwear serenaded the politician on the viral YouTube video, “I got a crush Obama”⁷⁷ and he is the inspiration behind Facebook groups such as “Barack Obama for President, or father of my baby – preferably both.” In the company of his wife Michelle, one might call the pair “America's sweethearts,” comparable to Hollywood's hottest celebrity couples. The media also appears to have “a crush on Obama.” According to a July 2008 telephone survey conducted by Rasmussen Reports, a trusted American public opinion polling firm, 49% of American voters believe most reporters will try to help the Democrat with their coverage, while just 14% believe most reporters will do the same for McCain.⁷⁸ Perhaps this prelude bears, in itself, the more irksome hallmarks of the tabloid journalism genre, but it points to a pivotal aspect of Barack Obama's candidacy in securing the support of the youth, both in terms of bringing new voters into the fold and in rallying the base – the cultivation of his celebrity. The *Washington Post* said of Obama four months before he declared his decision to run for the presidency: “Not since John F. Kennedy has a junior senator so quickly become a national celebrity and a possible candidate for the White House.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ A. Powers. “Support for Obama proudly on display at the BET Awards”, *Los Angeles Times Music Blog*. Available from: <http://theguide.latimes.com/blogs/soundboard/2008/06/25/support-for-obama-proudly-on-display-at-the-bet-awards/>. 25 July, 2008.

⁷⁷ L. Kauffman, B. Relles, R. Friedrich and A. Ettinger “I Got A Crush on Obama”. Available on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU>. Released 13 June, 2007.

⁷⁸ “Belief growing that reporters are trying to help Obama”, *Rasmussen Reports*. Available from: http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/election_20082/2008_presidential_election/belief_growing_that_reporters_are_trying_to_help_obama_win. 21 July, 2008.

⁷⁹ M. Kazin, “Rising Star” Review of Barack Obama's book *The Audacity of Hope* Available from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/19/AR2006101901175.html>. 22 October, 2006.

Putting the tumult of the current political climate and the highly contested nature of the 2008 primary elections aside, Obama's celebrity has catalysed a popularisation of politics, driven by increased media coverage. This has meant a number of things: The role of the media has ensured that there is a greater dissemination of politically-related content and in this case, has meant greater scope for the propagation of Obama's message. This is not only through the diversity of mediums, but also through a variety of forms. Technological advancements and the shift in modern society towards a fast-paced lifestyle based on instant gratification, has meant that political rhetorical delivery is neither confined to the conventions of speeches or billboards, nor is it as effective in reaching voters when only these channels of communication are activated. The infiltration of such campaign rhetoric into more aspects of public life has meant that disparate and more inactive parts of the electorate, such as the youth and ethnic minorities, are not only paying more attention, but also entering the political process itself. This has been further encouraged by the incorporation of established celebrities into Obama's campaign, permissible mainly because of his own celebrity and the rolling expansion of his youth following. He has truly transformed politics into a socially-acceptable or "cool" part of society to be involved in.

4.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

The contemporary world increasingly relies on visual stimuli to acquire knowledge, due to the highly visual nature of post-modernist culture⁸⁰, the dissipation of patience among the general populace and because people just don't have the time to listen to an entire speech, or read through a lengthy manifesto, particularly when the population is becoming more and more politically apathetic. People need a brief message that is all encompassing and intriguing enough to sustain their attention, which is why effective visual political rhetoric can be so powerful. Obama and his campaign managers have managed to enhance name recognition, reinforce major campaign themes and assert his ethos (character), through the selection of key images and words. The ultimate objective of course is persuasion – to convince voters that Obama most appropriately represents their interests.

It is significant that discussion group members described Barack Obama's campaign as "pop-art", that they knew people who voted for him because "he had cool graphics" and that "blogs dedicated to reviewing typeface said that Obama's poster design was the best they'd ever seen." This means that Obama and his campaign managers fully comprehended the

⁸⁰ J. Rice. "A Critical View of Visual Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age: Complementing, Extending and Presenting New Ideas" in *Review of Communication Vol 4, No. 1/2*. April 2004:64.

power and importance of visualisation in political campaigning. Discussion group participant, Daniel*, argued that, “The [Hillary] Clinton campaign never decided on a message and had these titles of nine words like, ‘Securing America’s Energy Future and Bringing Jobs Back to Iowa....’ It’s not that she isn’t qualified, but her campaign struggled to find an appealing message...Obama had a coherent, brief message to inspire people, while Clinton had long-winded policy tours.” Not only were Obama’s campaign messages visually appealing, but they were short, punchy and memorable. Many people have criticised Obama for being somewhat two-dimensional: that he is only about “hope” and “change” without any real substance or policy to support these ideals. A more appropriate explanation might be that the extent of the research most US citizens are willing to partake in does not exceed the few campaign posters or brief messages that intrusively cross their paths. The fact that voters can summarise his campaign message into a few words is really a testimony to the efficacy of its communication. As Daniel* pointed out that prior to the 2008 Democratic National Convention where Obama detailed his plans for change, he “had heard that argument from him before” and people had not taken heed. Other discussion group participants commented that a number of their friends and contacts they had made while campaigning did not know the issues, and didn’t really care enough to look for them. Politicians are dealing with an increasingly disinterested and impatient electorate. Successful political campaigning today is about ruthlessly choosing only what the most important ideas of that campaign are and converting those into images people can both identify with and understand instantly.

This is the essential idea behind the concept of ideographs. As defined by American rhetorical theorist, Michael McGee, ideographs are historically and culturally-grounded commonplace terms that sum up and invoke identification with key social commitments.⁸¹ Ideographs are abstract terms such as the rule of law, liberty, or more pertinent to this discussion – hope, unity and change – which cannot be physically seen, but have a set of criteria a community knows needs to have been filled in order for that word to describe what has occurred. They are building blocks of ideology, which is why they are called ideographs, and are one-term significations of a unique ideological commitment⁸². Because of these prior commitments and understanding, the meaning of such words is imprisoned⁸³.

Ideographs will differ among separate collectives: A Democrat’s view of change – more social programmes, increased financial assistance for education, more oversight on Wall

⁸¹ D. Cloud: “To Veil the Threat of Terror”, *QTS* 90/3. August, 2004:288.

⁸² M. McGee. “The Ideograph: A link between Rhetoric and Ideology.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 66, February, 1980:7.

⁸³ M. McGee. “The Ideograph: A link between Rhetoric and Ideology.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 66, February, 1980:9.

Street particularly, better health care, tax cuts for the middle class, restoration of America's moral standing in the world and a more effective representation in government for all, for example, is different to a Republican's view of change – more privatisation, less government oversight, choice in schools supported by vouchers, a relax in gun control and state rights over abortion laws. Ideographs are vernacular signs of social membership⁸⁴ that translate into different forms of public consciousness⁸⁵, be it along political party, national or international lines. However, they are constructions or illusions and thus when used effectively, can prove to be a powerful tool of persuasion and social control.

When Barack Obama's campaign circulates posters that say, "hope," "unity", or "Change We Can Believe In," their meaning lies within the epideictic potential of those ideographs, that is, their ability to connote certain values and associations that potential Obama voters might possess. The implied narrative is that Obama recognises that the American people are fed up with the Bush administration and are tired of divisive politics, unaffordable health care, education and economic concerns, but that through faith in government and collective effort, Obama will ensure that the necessary change in Washington is achieved to guarantee their representation. However, in order to connect Obama's key campaign slogans with that particular narrative, one has to be part of the community to which those ideographs belong. Voters must see themselves in these representations – they must be a reflection of their own principles and aspirations. Daniel* said that "even if you see through some of it [Obama's rhetoric], it doesn't matter, because it feeds into what we hope and aspire to anyway." It is also significant that Grant* commented that Obama "is a talented speaker and he is saying what people want to hear." Obama is activating the ideographic potential of rhetoric all the time and by linking them with his name, and his face, it is an assertion of his ethos. He is demonstrating that he understands the nuances of a particular community that prescribes to such ideals, as well as the history of the ideological commitments associated with such ideographs. Significant moments like the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, the Bill of Rights, the Civil Rights Movement, to which he often refers, have historically constructed the meaning of ideographs like hope, liberty, equality and empowerment in the American consciousness. By recognising this legacy, Obama is showing that he is also part of this collective – that he is one of them. It is this understanding that separates him and his supporters from other candidates and the rest of the electorate, who may understand those ideographs to mean things that they neither relate to nor positively identify with.

⁸⁴ R. Hariman and J Lucaites. "Performing Civic Identity" in *QJS Vol 9. 1/2*. November 2002:365.

⁸⁵ M. McGee. "The Ideograph: A link between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 66, February, 1980:4.

Ideographs in political campaigning rally voters around a collective identity, which enhances the support for a particular candidate. This community is of course constructed and illusionary, yet it is the candidate's job to persuade his/her supporters that the foundations or ideographs upon which their community is built are real. This is illustrated in a quote from Barack Obama's New Hampshire primary speech delivered on 8 January 2008, "In the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope."⁸⁶ Discussion group participant, Molly*, says that unlike other candidates who competed in the 2008 elections, Barack Obama was able to project a consistent campaign message from the very beginning. The reproduction of those same ideographs was instrumental in strengthening that communal identity associated with him. However, the persistent devotion to specific ideographs also imprisons a political campaign in a particular discourse – it makes it exclusive – whereby reaching undecided and disparate voters becomes difficult. Yet, the ideographs Obama used in his campaign were chosen as much as possible on the basis their inclusivity and identification with them in fact transcends many of the imagined borders between people; including race, religion, age and geographical location. Through such ideographs, he has attempted to discourage the reinforcement of traditional ideological commitments in order to further his message of unity and bipartisanship.

4.2 BARACK OBAMA: EMBODYING THE EXTRAORDINARY

The cultivation of Obama's celebrity has been somewhat determined by the construction and widespread dissemination of a concise and appealing message in an aesthetically-pleasing way. It made Obama visible, got his name out into the public domain, rallied supporters, increased brand awareness, and attracted a lot of attention. However, it wasn't just creative campaign strategies that has made Obama a celebrity. He has the X-factor – an intangible magnetism that Sociologist Max Weber would call "charismatic leadership." It is based on a perception held by followers that the leader is extraordinary. According to Weber, a charismatic leader is "set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least...exceptional powers and qualities."⁸⁷ They earn the loyalty of their supporters through the demonstration and exemplification of their extraordinary virtues and by persuading their followers that they can transform their lives in some way. This is achieved through the articulation of a lofty, stimulating and idealised vision for the future that

⁸⁶ B. Obama. "Yes We Can," *New Hampshire Primary Speech*. 8 January, 2008:5.

⁸⁷ (M. Weber, 1925/1968) in J. Conger, N. Rabindra, S. Kanungo. "Charismatic Leadership and Follower Effects" in *Journal of Organisational Behaviour Vol. 21, No. 7*. November, 2000:750.

seeks to oppose the existing status quo.⁸⁸ Charismatic leaders usually emerge in times of upset and instability,⁸⁹ when there is widespread resentment towards the incumbent power.

Barack Obama is extraordinary because he is an unlikely candidate for the US Presidency: He is unusually young, has a multi-racial background that spans two continents, was the first black president of the Harvard Law Review, the third African-American US Senator since Reconstruction and was active in politics for just under a decade before deciding to run for president. He is also a maverick who has continually defied social norms and expectations and holds a record of challenging government on the issues of the day. On one hand, it is on the basis of this extraordinariness that his support has been won. Many Americans are frustrated with the incumbent administration and the severity of circumstances they find themselves in. It is in a context of the crisis and volatility facing America that Obama's call for change has resonated with voters who do not want to see the perpetuation of the established order. Daniel* pointed out, "For Obama to emerge, we had to have come from the depth of malaise we are in." It is specifically because Obama is not a Washington insider, does not have expertise or extensive experience in serving the status quo and the fact that he is of a different race that he has been successful. He represents the way forward, the renewal of American politics. He is the change that people seek. Through the reinforcement of this, he has earned the loyalty of his followers. It has also made him a celebrity, because he personifies their desires and aspirations.

While his extraordinariness is an important part of his appeal, it is also his greatest obstacle. Charismatic leaders struggle most with grounding the extraordinary in the happenings of everyday life⁹⁰. It has been difficult for Obama to convince the general populace of what hope and change actually look in reality. This has invited comments like those expressed by discussion group participant Sarah*, originally from North Carolina, that it is because of Obama's charisma "that he can get away with not addressing policies." Daniel* thought that Obama had in fact consistently articulated his policies throughout his campaign. "People tune into what they want... but you can't undo his charisma." Charismatic leadership is not suited to the management of everyday routine, so much so that when it reaches a state of stability or becomes the status quo, it ceases to exist. The greatest challenge for Obama will emerge if he is awarded the presidency, when he will no longer be an opposition to the social order, but an integral part of it.

⁸⁸ J. Conger, N. Rabindra, S. Kanungo. "Charismatic Leadership and Follower Effects" in *Journal of Organisational Behaviour* Vol. 21, No. 7. November, 2000:752.

⁸⁹ F. Parkin "Domination and Legitimacy" in *Max Weber*. Ellis Horwood Ltd., UK and Tavistock Publications Ltd., USA.1982:84.

⁹⁰ P. Breiner. *Max Weber and Democratic Politics*. Cornell University Press, London.1996:141.

It is also the difficulty of finding the relevancy of the extraordinary in the ordinary that has alienated parts of the American electorate. Many people are not looking for a dramatic change in their lives and don't necessarily want to be rescued or transformed. The average middle-class citizen doesn't identify with Obama's unconventional candidacy. They are earning between \$40,000-60,000 per year, and face an unrelenting uphill battle of paying off their mortgage, funding their children's education and affording adequate health care. They don't have time to dream about the future. They haven't attended an Ivy League university or have generally had to overcome racial persecution in achieving their goals. Many have never left the country or their state for that matter and have certainly never contemplated holding the kind of high-profile leadership position that Obama has envisioned for himself. They can't relate to the extraordinary, because essentially, they are ordinary. What these Americans seek is a leader who won't look down on them, but is one of them. Who will strive to validate their existence, instead of highlighting its inadequacies. In their eyes, Obama is an "elitist." It is this reason particularly that he lost to Hillary Clinton in states like Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania during the 2008 primary contests. It also explains why Obama lost much of the support of young people who do not have a college education to Clinton. Just as African-Americans question Obama's blackness because of the opportunities and privileges he has received, middle-class white Americans doubt him for similar reasons. One of Barack Obama's greatest challenges has been making inroads into this very important part of the electorate. Just as he has "passed" for white, he has had to invent ways of "passing" for middle-class in order to secure his political success. This he has done through emphasising that his mother came from a blue-collar background, his Christian faith, the importance of family, that he has earned his opportunities through scholarships, and that he passed up high-profile jobs in the commercial world in order to serve the American people. Barack Obama's conception of a broad message with wide appeal that emphasises diversity and inclusiveness has assisted him in reaching out to wholly disparate segments of the electorate.

Because of its resistance to the established order, the charismatic leadership model contains no inherent hierarchy, which advances a sense of empowerment among followers⁹¹. Barack Obama's campaign has been driven by a "Yes-We-Can" attitude where anyone can make a difference; placing emphasis on grassroots organisation and civic initiatives. Although such an approach serves to mobilise people, it is based on a philosophy that the needs of the group are greater than that of the individual and one must subscribe to the ideology of the mass in order for their efforts to be realised. This has been a particularly appealing aspect of Obama's

⁹¹ F. Parkin "Domination and Legitimacy" in *Max Weber*. Ellis Horwood Ltd., UK and Tavistock Publications Ltd., USA. 1982:84.

campaign for young people because they tend to feel most comfortable expressing themselves in a herd. They are impressionable, socially conscious and will be shaped and validated by the opinions and perceptions of the group at large. As Lauren* says, “Obama’s created this big following and it’s the cool thing to do to join that following.”

Charismatic leaders enjoy the purest form of legitimacy because compliance is voluntary⁹². This freedom to choose means that the support charismatic leaders receive is of a more fervent nature than that associated with other types of authority where obedience is obligatory. Followers do not feel coerced into expressing loyalty towards charismatic leaders; they do so because they find the leader to be inspirational. This of course makes charismatic authority difficult to maintain, as leaders must constantly prove to their followers that they are extraordinary. This may explain the somewhat fanatical following that Barack Obama has earned. People support him because they want to, which strengthens identification. Fanaticism is tantamount to conceding to the desires of the mass. This presents a recurring theme in Obama’s relationship with his supporters, which is accurately captured in the campaign poster below.

⁹² F. Parkin “Domination and Legitimacy” in *Max Weber*. Ellis Horwood Ltd., UK and Tavistock Publications Ltd., USA. 1982:85.



Fig 1.1 – A Barack Obama 2008 primary election campaign poster ⁹³

This campaign poster (Fig 1.1) appeared on Barack Obama’s website www.barackobama.com for an extended period of time upon the commencement of his primary campaign. It is indicative of his propensity towards charismatic leadership, highlighting his extraordinary virtues, his vision for the future, the upset and turmoil from which he has risen, and “the mass” of which his supporters is comprised.

This poster reinforces a major campaign theme – “Change We Can Believe In,” as an articulation of Obama’s inspirational vision for the future and to inspire confidence among the electorate in his ability to transform their lives. This is what Joseph Tuman refers to as “the message”, which is the “all-encompassing, pervasive theme that hangs over a campaign and by extension, over any speech by the candidate.”⁹⁴ Change is an ideograph. Its meaning is constructed by elements in this representation. For example, Obama’s gaze can be interpreted

⁹³ Available online from: <http://obamamedia.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/change-we-can-believe-in-800px.pngarehouse.com/apple/>.

⁹⁴ J. Tuman. *Political Communication in American Campaigns*. Sage Publications, California, 2008.

as a glance into the future, which is a symbol of his own visualisation of the transformation of American politics. The colours blue and white connote the purity and clarity of that vision. The campaign logo appearing at the bottom centre of the poster, which features the horizon, contribute to the meaning of the word “change” as it is the most appropriately tangible way of illustrating it.

The colours used in this campaign poster; red, white and blue are also ideographic because they have ideological connotations. Most importantly, they appear on the American flag, which evokes a sense of patriotism and national identity. All Americans are able to recognise and understand this reference and are therefore part of the community to which this poster subscribes. The colour blue lends itself to the idea of a ‘blue state’, a term Tim Russert of NBC News⁹⁵ used to describe those regions in America that have more liberal leanings and have demonstrated a propensity towards voting for the Democratic Party. This is contrasted by ‘red states’, which tend to be more politically conservative. Thus, in the poster, Obama is primarily associating himself with the colour of the Democratic Party, provoking identification with those who choose to do so as well.

Although the distinction between red and blue states serves to recognise the political divide in America, the harmony of the red and white stripes and the colour blue in the poster firmly supports the idea of unity. This visual rhetoric is sustained by Obama’s verbal rhetoric in his Keynote Address at the National Democratic Convention in 2004, *“The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats...Well, I say to them tonight, there's not a liberal America and a conservative America -- there's the United States of America.”*⁹⁶ D. Frank, describes this as the “rhetoric of consilience”; an approach in which disparate members of a composite audience are invited to “jump together” out of their separate experiences in favour of a common set of values or aspirations. It is the symbolic strategy of what M. McPhail terms “coherence”, which is the conscious understanding and integration of difference in order to transform division.⁹⁷ Daniel* comments that this is the complete opposite message to Democratic Senator John Edwards who employed the theme of the “Two Americas” for his 2004 campaign, referring specifically to the gap between rich and poor. “This gets uncomfortable because you don’t know if you should be acknowledging these differentials.” Mengfei* said that what is

⁹⁵ T. Russert, “Meet the Press”. Available from: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4459759/>.

⁹⁶ B. Obama, “One Voice”, *Keynote Address at the Democratic Convention*. Available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/demconvention/speeches/obama.html>. February, 2004.

⁹⁷ D. Frank and M. McPhail. “Barack Obama’s Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience and the (Im)possibility of Racial Conciliation.” In *Rhetoric & Public Affairs Vol. 8, No. 4*, 2005:572.

particularly appealing about Obama is that his campaign was not based on one specific ideology. “My parents went through the Cultural Revolution and they know all too well what happens when people stick to ideological lines. I like that he is not ideological because of my past.” For Mengfei*, the ideograph that is “unity” has historical commitments that transcend the story of America. It is the antithesis of the divisive politics of her heritage. The use of colouring in this poster does contain certain ideological commitments, but it attempts to extend identification among voters in the furthering of the message of unity.

Obama’s extraordinariness is represented by his positioning in the frame. He is the only recognisable face in the crowd and is elevated above the other subjects in the image, showing that he is distinguishable from the common man. His eye-line extends upwards suggesting a relationship or understanding between himself and a higher power. This is supported by the word “believe” which assumes a faith-based character and the ethereal blue and white colour scheme, which one might posit, connotes the heavens. Discussion group participant, Lauren*, said that upon entering Obama’s website, her friend thought “she could hear heavenly harps because of the way they backlight him.” The ethereal nature of these colours also makes the image seem dreamlike, as if it exists in a realm outside of consciousness or reality. Therefore on one hand, this representation depicts a somewhat imaginary ideal. On the other hand, this poster uses words and pictures to illustrate its physical manifestation and to demonstrate how it would appear in actuality. It thus attempts to ground the extraordinary in the ordinary. If people can see Barack Obama’s vision, they are more likely to believe in it.

Of course, this representation is a construction and not rooted in reality at all. “Change”, as it is expressed in this campaign poster, is only one interpretation of what change should look like. It is what modern philosopher, intellectual, writer and the father of inductive reasoning, Francis Bacon, would call an “idol”, which is an abstraction of that which is intangible and difficult to define.⁹⁸ Change is not a material object and our perception of its meaning is shaped through experience and other influences. Over time, we devise our own definitions for words we cannot see in order to help us make sense of the world around us. They are called idols, however, because our understanding of them is essentially false, imagined, and is not grounded in anything real. Idols are deceptions, which “are venerated without being of substance in themselves.”⁹⁹ Campaign messages are built on idols because their meanings are transient and can be refashioned to suit whatever purpose they are assigned. We know what Obama means by change because of the way it has been tailored to fit his campaign. But it is

⁹⁸ B. Chambers and Z. Dahl. “The Four Idols of Sir Francis Bacon”. Available on *Sir Francis Bacon’s New Advancement of Learning website*. Available from: <http://www.sirbacon.org/zeb-ben.htm>.

⁹⁹ B. Chambers and Z. Dahl. “The Four Idols of Sir Francis Bacon”. Available on *Sir Francis Bacon’s New Advancement of Learning website*.

truly a mutation of its original meaning. This is what Bacon refers to as idols of the market¹⁰⁰, which are the deviation of words from their true meaning through communication between human beings.

Idols can also be useful in fostering a sense of communal identity, which are what Bacon calls idols of the tribe. They are the false perceptions of the “herd” adopted as personal truths and based on a person that the tribe admires¹⁰¹. In the case of this campaign poster, “we” is an idol of the tribe, as the behaviour and perceptions of that entity dictates the actions and opinions of Obama supporters as a whole. “We” appears in Obama’s main campaign slogans: “Change We Can Believe In” and “Yes We Can.” Both of these slogans attempt to establish a consensus or shared perception about mutually-desired ends: that “we” seek change and empowerment. Support for Obama is thus a concession that you endorse those same ideals and therefore belong to that “we.” Of course, this collective identity is constructed, but it mobilises voters around the perception that they are fighting for the same cause. The visualisation of this in the poster is the horde of people holding Obama-themed placards in the background who have been reduced to the messages that these posters bear. This suggests that the entire “tribe” shares the same identification with the Obama brand, and subsequently with his vision. The size of the crowd has been exaggerated, spilling off the sides of the page, which is another construction. This hyperbole creates the perception that Obama is the leader of a mass revolutionary movement and encourages others to join this following. It also emphasises the fanaticism that surrounds Obama.

Fanaticism is usually associated with religion as a transpersonal experience. That is, the permission of “one to operate beyond the uncertainties of normal human existence and the norms of consensual morality; here one can attain the utter confidence and certainty of an idealised prophet or messiah.”¹⁰² The word “fanatical” is derived from the Latin root *fanum* meaning “temple,” with one definition being, “possessed by a deity or a devil.”¹⁰³ Therefore, fanatics serve essentially as embodiments of the sublime that behave and act in the image of that power. It would be an oversight to suggest that Obama is somehow divine, or a manifestation of God. However, it has already been argued that through charismatic leadership, he does exemplify the extraordinary and in the modern world, idolatry and

¹⁰⁰ F. Bacon. *Novum Organum 1620 The Works*, 3 vols. Basil Montague, ed. and trans. Parry & MacMillan, Philadelphia. 1854:347.

¹⁰¹ B. Chambers and Z. Dahl. “The Four Idols of Sir Francis Bacon”. Available on *Sir Francis Bacon’s New Advancement of Learning website*.

¹⁰² J. Firman and A. Gila, “On Religious Fanaticism: A Look at Transpersonal Identity Disorder”, *Psychosynthesis Palo Alto*, Palo Alto, CA. 2006. Available from: http://www.psychosynthesispaloalto.com/pdfs/Religious_Fan.pdf

¹⁰³ J. Firman and A. Gila, “On Religious Fanaticism: A Look at Transpersonal Identity Disorder”, *Psychosynthesis Palo Alto*, Palo Alto, CA. 2006.

worship can occur within the secular context; celebrities provide the best example. This campaign poster portrays Obama's supporters as acting in his image as the faceless placards demonstrate that his message speaks on their behalf. Mengfei*, who campaigned for Obama during the 2008 primary elections, testified for the fanatical following he has: "This one girl in Nevada who I was on a campaign tour with shook Obama's hand and refused to wash it for days. It creeped me out. Sure, he's inspirational, but it was a little disturbing to see just how caught up some people were in him. I was volunteering because I knew you had to pick a candidate if you wanted to get involved in the process. But he had so many people worshipping him." Lauren* conceded, "he [Obama] does a strange following, more so than any other candidate."

This phenomenon is indicative of Obama's charisma. Because compliance is obtained on a voluntary basis, followers express their loyalty to charismatic leaders in a passionate and fervent manner. This devotion is perpetuated through the use of campaign posters, which reinforce partisans who are already committed to the candidate. They enhance the spirit of the staff and volunteers, serving as a link between the candidate and his/her supporters¹⁰⁴.

4.3 THE POLITICS OF STARDOM

The fanatical following that Obama has earned and the perception that he is somehow extraordinary or distinguishable from the average human being, equates him with modern day celebrities. Like other celebrities, Barack Obama embodies his followers' desires and fans worship him in an attempt to emulate the qualities that they admire in him. Professor of Sociology and Culture, C. Rojek, posits that society's democratisation, the decline of organised religion and the commodification of every day life have catalysed the emergence of a fairly new phenomenon – the celebrification of the politician.¹⁰⁵ The word "celebrification" implies a number of things: At a basic level, it means to make famous, even though politicians have traditionally served as well-known individuals of social stature. It also captures the convergence of two worlds: that of politics on the one hand and of celebrity and entertainment on the other. This has not only meant an increase in media attention received by politicians, but has also facilitated greater communication between themselves and celebrities. Such communication is mutually beneficial: Politicians increase awareness about their campaign and are able to tap into the diverse markets with which these celebrities are

¹⁰⁴ J. Trent and R. Friedenber: "Advertising in Political Campaigns" in *Political Campaign Communication*, Westport, Praeger, 2000:327.

¹⁰⁵ E. Hendrickson, and L. Wilkins. "The Political is the Personal: Celebritizing Politicians in the 21st Century" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association*, San Francisco, CA.

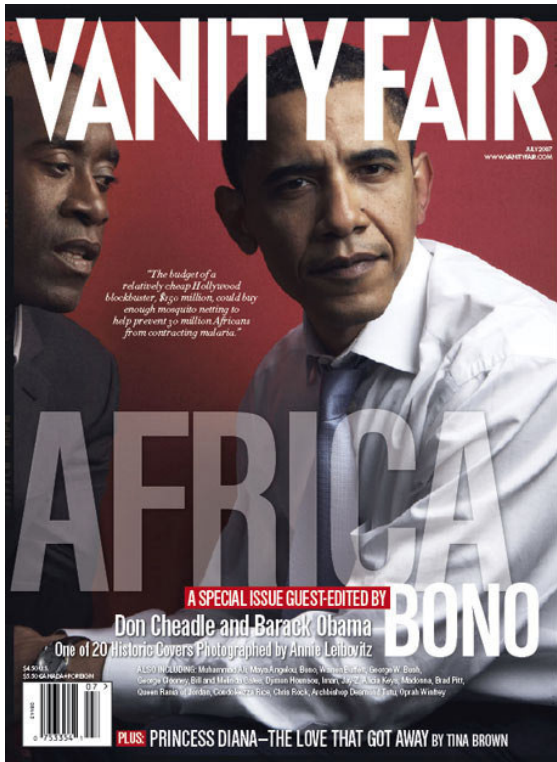
Available online at: http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p169233_index.html. May, 2007:2.

associated. In turn, celebrities are connected to a civic and socially conscious cause. “Celebrification” also refers to the transformation of politicians into objects of deity, who are often idolised, worshipped and even sexualised, just as celebrities are.

Democratisation has contributed to this phenomenon because it involves the election of a political leader through a popular mandate, where candidates compete for the affection of the general populace in order to secure votes. This is so much a feature of modern-day elections that Daniel* referred to the 2008 primaries as “a battle of celebrities.” The commodification of everyday life has meant that even political campaigning has become commercialised. Running a presidential campaign is like managing a high-profile business: It’s about devising an appealing and original product that can adequately compete with others on the market, selling it in an attractive way to the greater population, and then being able to secure and maintain the confidence of investors needed to keep it afloat. The electorate therefore becomes both voters and consumers.

Mass media plays an important role because it is the site at which celebrities are cultivated, nurtured and developed. Elizabeth Hendrickson and Lee Wilkins in a paper entitled “The Politics is Personal: Celebritizing Politicians in the 21st century” note how political content itself is receiving increasingly more space in the media.

Fig 1.2 – A Cover of *Vanity Fair* Magazine, July 2007, photographed by Annie Liebowitz.¹⁰⁶



This cover of the July 2007 edition of *Vanity Fair* Magazine (Fig 1.2) illustrates the synergy between politics, the mass media and the celebrity world. This publication has been deemed a “quirky cultural pastiche”¹⁰⁷ where fashion, politics and culture converge. Its website describes it as “a mix of lively writing, bold portraiture, keen cultural intuition, in-depth reporting, and memorable profiles of the movers and shakers of the age”, claiming to be “magazine journalism’s acknowledged arbiter of modern society, power, and personality.”¹⁰⁸

Vanity Fair was conceived in 1914 by *Vogue* publisher, Condé Nast, in the image of John Bunyan’s 17th century novel, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, which described a vanity fair as “a place or scene of ostentation or empty, idle amusement and frivolity.”¹⁰⁹ It was also inspired by William Makepeace Thackeray’s book *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero*, which satirises 19th century England regarding its preoccupation with wealth and social status. Although not referred to by the magazine itself, an interesting reference is Tom Wolfe’s 1987

¹⁰⁶ A. Liebowitz, July 2007, *Vanity Fair Magazine*. Available from: http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/07/onthecover_slideshow200707. July, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ D. Frien “*Vanity Fair: The One-Click History*”. *Vanity Fair Magazine* website. Available from: <http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/vintage/oneclickhistory>.

¹⁰⁸ D. Frien “*Vanity Fair: The One-Click History*”. *Vanity Fair Magazine* website.

¹⁰⁹ D. Frien “*Vanity Fair: The One-Click History*”. *Vanity Fair Magazine* website.

novel, “The Bonfire Vanities”, which addresses the themes of class politics and ambition in 1980’s New York. Wolfe’s novel originally ran in instalments in *Rolling Stone Magazine*. The title is a reference to the religious ritual, the Bonfire of the Vanities, which took place in Italy in 1497, involving the burning of objects (vanity items essentially) considered to tempt one to sin. It is unlikely that the Bonfire of the Vanities influenced *Vanity Fair Magazine*’s choice of name. After being discontinued in the 1930’s, the magazine was resurrected in 1983, prior to the release of Wolfe’s book. However, the core ideas of this ritual and the main themes that appear in the novel are synonymous with *Vanity Fair*’s image. For one, the magazine is fairly elitist and likes to dabble in the frivolity associated with high society. At \$4.50 an issue (about R36), its readership tends to be upwardly-mobile or affluent. *Vanity Fair* also tends to be secular, given its celebration of sexuality and the human form, its tendency towards indulgence and its portrayal of celebrities as individuals worthy of worship and idolatry. Because of this, one might argue that the magazine’s readership is more liberal in its leanings. In terms of political partisanship, the editorial content seems to reflect a balance between Republican and Democratic powers, awarding space to representatives of both parties. This is to ensure that parts of its readership aren’t alienated. However, the magazine is essentially progressive, aimed at commenting and reflecting upon the changing times and attracting an emerging, somewhat younger upper-class.

The July 2007 edition reflects the symbiotic relationship between culture and politics. It was called “The Africa Issue” and the cover that appears above featuring Barack Obama was one of 20 covers photographed by renowned photographer, Annie Liebowitz for the purposes of this particular edition. For the photo shoots, politicians and social activists were paired with celebrities as “shout-outs for the challenge, the promise, and the future of Africa.”¹¹⁰ Most of these individuals had in some way contributed to the African cause. Examples include Brad Pitt and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu; Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice and singer Bono; actor and comedian, Chris Rock, Madonna, Bill Gates and business tycoon, Warren Buffett. The Africa Issue illustrates the overlap between the worlds of celebrity and politics.

This particular cover features Senator Barack Obama and Actor, Don Cheadle, who was nominated for an Oscar for his role in *Hotel Rwanda* about the Rwandan genocide. This convergence is illustrated by the quote, “The budget of a relatively cheap Hollywood blockbuster, \$150 million, could buy enough mosquito netting to help prevent 30 million Africans from contracting malaria.” It employs a commercial discourse to popularise social

¹¹⁰ A. Liebowitz. “The Africa Covers” *Vanity Fair Magazine*. Available from: http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/07/onthecover_slideshow200707?slide=2#globalNav. July, 2007.

activism and conversely, it grounds the world of celebrity in something more purposeful and consequential. Hendrickson and Wilkins argue that in addition to the celebrification of the politician, an increasing number of celebrities are becoming active politically, which is being showcased here. Similarly, the May 2007 edition of *Vanity Fair* was called “The Green Issue”, and featured actor Leonardo DiCaprio on the cover¹¹¹, who has played an important role in raising environmental awareness.

The composition of this magazine cover is without clear lines or divided sections. The words and images blur into each other which enhances *Vanity Fair*'s perception of itself: a junction between culture and politics. This convergence is frequently a feature of *Vanity Fair* covers: The August 2007 edition celebrates actor Bruce Willis on a motorbike, framed by the words “Reagan’s Unseen White House Diaries” and “The Campaign: YouTube Gotchas” – which explores the popularisation of politics through internet-related technology – and “Queen Elizabeth sits down for Annie Liebowitz”.¹¹²

Barack Obama’s appearance under the *Vanity Fair* banner suggests a number of things. For one, it enhances his celebrity: Hollywood A-Listers like Tom Cruise and George Clooney as well as mammoth celebrities such as David Beckham, too featured on the *Vanity Fair* covers of 2007. He has positioned himself within a secular discourse where celebrities are depicted with a deity one might associate with religious figures. His appearance in this magazine is a testimony to his social status – that he is an exclusive member of society’s “elite” and has made an impact on the socio-political landscape of this age. He is part of “a special issue”, and thus assumes privileged status. In sum, it portrays him as extraordinary. Obama occupies the foreground of the magazine cover, which places him at the apex of that hierarchy of importance. He is being associated with the African cause, which alludes to his ability in conducting successful foreign policy. Important in the pursuit of voters, the appearance on the cover of this magazine, as is the case with other contributions Obama has made to various media, is a form of political communication. It furnishes him with the opportunity to hone the support of this particular niche market or selected part of the electorate. This representation appeals to voters who are generally young, financially well off and ambitious social climbers who perceive Barack Obama as a symbol of the kind of success they envision for themselves.

¹¹¹ “The Green Issue” *Vanity Fair Magazine* website: <http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/toc/2007/toc200705>.

¹¹² Covers available from the *Vanity Fair Magazine* website: <http://www.vanityfair.com/archives>.

4.4 OBAMA AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

The decline of organised religion, noted by Rojek as an explanation for the celebrification of the politician, has meant that people seek alternative means of worship, idolatry and guidance, which is often fulfilled by celebrities. Famous people are actually referred to as “idols”, and all kinds of cults are established in their name. To some extent, Obama’s extraordinariness is associated with worship, which was noted earlier in the discussion on fanaticism. In an article entitled, “Charisma, Ritual, Collective Effervescence, and Self-Esteem”, Carlton-Ford argues that in Durkheimian terms, charismatic leaders are representations of the sacred. Through their involvement in “collective effervescence (emotion)”, and subsequent interaction with group rituals, members of the group members are revived because they are in contact with a source of transcendental power.¹¹³ The line between charisma and divinity is often blurry because they are both manifestations of the extraordinary, associated with virtues that the common man does not possess, but vicariously enjoys through devotion.

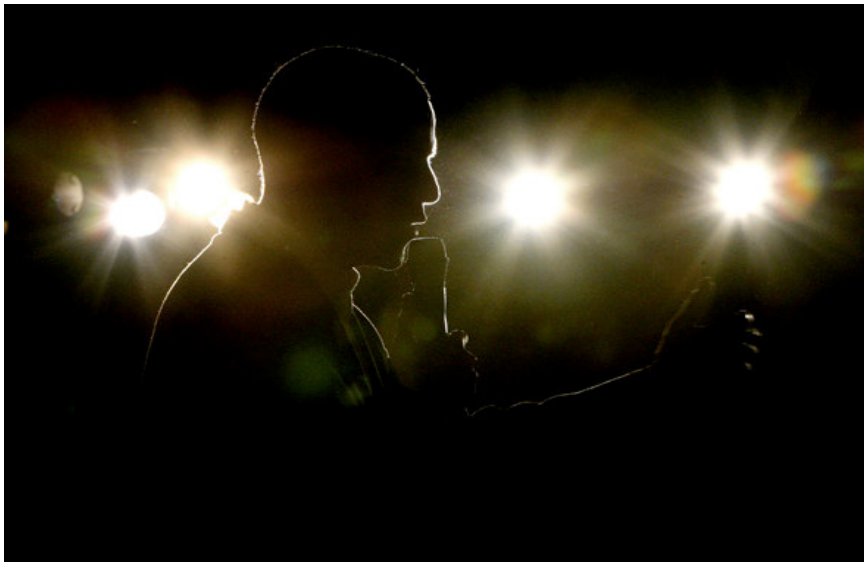


Fig 1.3

This photograph of Obama taken from the visual rhetoric website: www.nocaptionneeded.com, eloquently captures both his charisma as an expression of the divine and his celebrity. The use of lighting evokes a sense of being in the spotlight, which, together with the microphone, suggests stardom. The way in which the light illuminates his profile also conjures a feeling of divine radiance. His outstretched hand is symbolic of his capacity to offer guidance and leadership, and perhaps his tendency to reach out to disparate

¹¹³ S. Carlton-Ford. “Charisma, Ritual, Collective Effervescence and Self-Esteem” in *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, Published by: Blackwell Publishing. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121324>, 1992: 366.

parts of the electorate. Due to the lack of clarity in the lines of his suit, the white by his neck resembles a clerical collar worn by priests in the Christian faith. This is supported by the religious discourse he frequently employs.

Some examples of this kind of rhetoric are:

- *“It’s that fundamental belief -- I am my brother’s keeper, I am my sisters’ keeper -- that makes this country work.”*– Democratic Convention, Keynote Address, 2004.¹¹⁴
- *“In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world’s great religions demand - that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother’s keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister’s keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.* – “A More Perfect Union” Speech, Philadelphia, March 2008.¹¹⁵
- *“...And a king who took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the promised land”*– New Hampshire Primary Speech, January 2008.¹¹⁶
- *“...We heard a King’s call to let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”* – Announcement of his Candidacy for the Democratic Nomination, Springfield, Illinois, February 2007.¹¹⁷

Barack Obama’s use of pseudo-religious rhetoric to fulfil the role of an idol or subject of worship is one argument. However, it relies on the assumption that there has in fact been a decline in organised religion. Conversely, America has, in recent years, seen a growth in religious fundamentalism. To some extent, this has been in response to 9/11 and the events that followed. Many Americans believe that religiosity is paramount to the security and survival of a nation engaged in fighting a “holy war” against terrorism. This has led to the diffusion of religion into politics. The Christian right particularly is becoming an increasingly more influential voting bloc. An inflated number of young people are being drawn to evangelical Christianity, which may or may not prove to be advantageous for the Republican Party in future elections.

Contrary to the assumption that democracy is necessarily secular, Americans are generally a religious people. In a June 2006 Pentecost Speech at the Call to Renewal’s Building a Covenant for a New America conference in Washington, Barack Obama noted that 90% of Americans believe in God, 70% affiliate themselves with an organised religion, 38% call themselves committed Christians and substantially more people in America believe in angels

¹¹⁴ B. Obama, “One Voice”, *Keynote Address at the Democratic Convention*. February, 2004:3.

¹¹⁵ B. Obama. “Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: ‘A More Perfect Union’”, Philadelphia, PA. 18 March, 2008.

¹¹⁶ B. Obama. “Yes We Can,” *New Hampshire Primary Speech*. 8 January, 2008:4.

¹¹⁷ B. Obama, “Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President, Springfield, Illinois”. Available online at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=76999>, 10 February, 2007.

than they do in evolution.¹¹⁸ The US pledge of allegiance reads “...one nation, under God.” This context challenges Professor’s Rojek’s argument that the celebrification of the politician is a product of a decline in organised religion.

What the infiltration of religious values into politics does mean however, is that politicians must seek to appeal to religious Americans who are too sizeable and influential to ignore. Perhaps, then, Obama’s use of pseudo-religious rhetoric is not to position himself as a placeholder for the worship and idolatry associated with organised religion, but is rather an attempt to make inroads into a very important part of the electorate. This is particularly considering that Democrats and the liberal lobby have historically found it difficult to reach these voters due to stances on moral issues like abortion and gay-marriage. The need to galvanise this group of people is not only for the purposes of securing more votes, but as Sharon Crowley argues in “Towards a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism”, Christian fundamentalists generally perceive their perspectives on the world as being non-negotiable, employing apocalypticism, a brand of fundamentalist Christian discourse steeped in “end-times” theology that purportedly has strong sway over influential political voices. Unless Christian fundamentalists are engaged with, which Crowley argues is most effectively achieved through rhetorical invention, this group poses a significant threat to American democracy¹¹⁹.

Obama has attempted to reach out to these voters through the frequent positioning of his rhetoric within a religious framework. He has emphasised the importance of his Christian faith, as an important precursor for the way that he lives his life, as the principal reason for his initial entry into politics as a community organiser and to some extent, to quell fears about his “Muslim” background. Obama’s father was Muslim before he became an atheist and Barack Obama’s second name is “Hussein.” In a political climate that is both panicked and paranoid about the possibility of an “Islamic” terrorist threat, Obama has had to emphasise his Christianity as a way of distinguishing himself from what many Americans believe to be “the enemy.” His Christian faith has served as a means to prove his patriotism and that he is on America’s side.

Barack Obama has openly criticised the liberal tendency to ignore religious commitments, condemning some “progressives” for their attempts to “scrub language of all religious

¹¹⁸ B. Obama. “2006 Pentecost Keynote Address” at *Call to Renewal’s Building a Covenant for a New America Conference*, Washington. Available from: <http://www.nccusa.org/news/060628obama.html>. 28 June 2006.

¹¹⁹ M. DePalma, J. Ringer and J. Webber, “(Re)Charting the (Dis)Courses of Faith and Politics, or Rhetoric and Democracy in the Burkean Barnyard”, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 38/3, 2008:3.

content”¹²⁰. However, Obama has stressed that there must be some kind of compromise between religious beliefs and social values. In Obama’s 2006 “Call to Renewal” Pentecost speech, which dealt mainly with how to reconcile faith and America’s modern pluralist democracy, he stated, “democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values.”¹²¹ While such an attempt is strategic in terms of addressing the concerns of religious voters, it also supports his own campaign message. Obama states that “Faith is an active, palpable agent in the world. It is a source of hope,”¹²² making the link between religious faith and hope, an important concept in his campaign, remarkably clear. His rhetoric seeks to transcend the boundaries created by religion by pointing to the presence of a shared humanity, and a shared community, governed by “universal” values. Religion is important to Obama, not because it offers a strict doctrine to govern the way you live your life, but because it instills hope in believers and promotes a communitarian philosophy.

E. Steele and C. Redding argue that Christian morality is a premise of persuasion in American presidential campaign rhetoric because “Americans like to see the world in moral terms. Acts are said to be good or bad, ethical or unethical. The central themes in this ethic have been derived from Christianity and the morals of Puritan immigrants, as reinforced during the frontier experience.”¹²³ Therefore, despite the fact that not all Americans are necessarily religious, they exist within a community that has been shaped by Christian morality and it is thus an integral part of their own identity and heritage. By activating common places that are associated with these ethics, such as “my brother’s keeper” and “the promised land,” Barack Obama is attempting to create a sense of communion that unites otherwise contradictory voting blocs around mutually-shared moral principles. He is demonstrating that fundamental Christian ethics are in fact universally cherished ideals.

However, M. DePalma, J. Ringer and J. Webber argue in their article entitled “(Re)Charting the (Dis)Courses of Faith and Politics, or Rhetoric and Democracy in the Burkean Barnyard,” that while Barack Obama attempts to open the universe of discourse – that is, to provide ways of bridging the divide between political liberals and religious conservatives – he in fact shuts

¹²⁰ B. Obama. “2006 Pentecost Keynote Address” at *Call to Renewal’s Building a Covenant for a New America Conference*, Washington, 28 June 2006.

¹²¹ B. Obama. “2006 Pentecost Keynote Address” at *Call to Renewal’s Building a Covenant for a New America Conference*, Washington, 28 June 2006.

¹²² B. Obama. “2006 Pentecost Keynote Address” at *Call to Renewal’s Building a Covenant for a New America Conference*, Washington, 28 June 2006.

¹²³ E. Steel, and C. Redding. “The American Value System: Premises for Persuasion” in *Journal of Western Speech*:1962:85.

down the possibility for dialogue¹²⁴. This is because he is imprisoned by the liberal discourse his partisan commitments hold him to; the vocabulary he chooses or rather is more or less confined to, has certain ideological obligations which cannot reconcile the differences between these two groups. This is essentially because liberal discourse, which Crowley calls, “the default discourse”¹²⁵ of American politics prioritises freedom and equality. Fundamental Christianity on the other hand, subscribes to the notion that all actions must be taken in accordance with holy scriptures, which means that the freedom to choose is restricted. Obama’s rhetoric is thus one which “masquerades as a perspective of perspectives,”¹²⁶ when it is really a biased view of the world. This once again highlights the importance of ideographs, which emphasise the ideological power of language.

4.5 THE CELEBRITY FRAME

Hendrickson and Wilkins argue that politicians are turned into celebrities through the construction of a celebrity frame. Framing refers to choosing “some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.”¹²⁷ Political candidacy is thus the product of a carefully considered selection process, where parts of a politician’s true self are extracted and brought to the fore, in the tailoring of a specific message. The political campaign is an opportunity for the candidate to consciously talk and act in a manner that builds and reinforces this selection.

Hendrickson and Wilkins note that the celebrity frame includes three aspects, which have been determinant in Barack Obama’s campaign. These are the focus on the actions of a person outside of a role-related sphere of expertise, a placed emphasis on the response of other celebrities to the actions of a particular person, and a focus on the “backstory” of a certain individual’s life, asking readers/viewers to connect that story to either professional competence or specific policy outcomes without explicitly making or questioning such connections¹²⁸.

¹²⁴ M. DePalma, J. Ringer and J. Webber, “(Re)Charting the (Dis)Courses of Faith and Politics, or Rhetoric and Democracy in the Burkean Barnyard”, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 38/3, 2008:1.

¹²⁵ M. DePalma, J. Ringer and J. Webber, “(Re)Charting the (Dis)Courses of Faith and Politics, or Rhetoric and Democracy in the Burkean Barnyard”, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 38/3, 2008:13.

¹²⁶ M. DePalma, J. Ringer and J. Webber, “(Re)Charting the (Dis)Courses of Faith and Politics, or Rhetoric and Democracy in the Burkean Barnyard”, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 38/3, 2008:15.

¹²⁷ E. Hendrickson, and L. Wilkins. “The Political is the Personal: Celebrityizing Politicians in the 21st Century” *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association*, San Francisco, CA. 2007:3.

¹²⁸ E. Hendrickson, and L. Wilkins. “The Political is the Personal: Celebrityizing Politicians in the 21st Century” *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association*, San Francisco, CA. 2007:7.

4.6 OBAMA AS THE FAMILY MAN

Barack Obama's participation in aspects outside politics cannot be as clearly defined as was the case with individuals like Bill Clinton for instance, who played the saxophone or Republican hopeful, Mike Huckabee, who entertained audiences with his guitar during the 2008 primary election season. It is Obama's role as a "family man" that is frequently reinforced, exemplified in the introduction of his Super Tuesday speech, "*It is good to have Michelle home. The girls are with us tonight, but we asked them, 'Do you want to come on stage?' And Malia, our nine-year-old, said, 'Daddy, you know that's not my thing.' So they're upstairs doing what they do.*"¹²⁹ The placed emphasis on Obama's relationship with his family as a selection of his reality is interesting. African-American men have frequently been negatively stereotyped, mostly by whites, as the antithesis of the family man. They have been portrayed as threatening, angry and often violent, prescribing to the "ghetto" or "thug life," which necessarily means involvement in drugs or criminal activity. This stereotype suggests that such men do not honour their romantic commitments, are prone to promiscuity, and if they do father children, shirk the responsibility. The emphasis that Barack Obama has placed on his role as a family man is an attempt to separate himself from such typecasting. Obama has shown that he is person of upstanding principals and is someone who respects the commitments he makes. Although this provokes identification with average American citizens who too value familial commitments, it to some extent also reinforces his extraordinariness, as he defies the conventions of what constitutes "blackness" created by a white-dominated society. Furthermore, due to the legacy of oppression African-Americans have endured, their opportunities in life have been limited. The worlds of sports and entertainment have traditionally provided the only real prospects for social mobility among American black people. Barack Obama's success in politics and the construction of himself outside conventionally "black" roles, have in themselves shaken up some of the more conservative societal norms; appropriately positioning Obama as both a non-conformist and an embodiment of the extraordinary.

¹²⁹ B. Obama. "Super Tuesday Speech", Illinois. 6 February, 2008.



Fig 1.4 – The Obama Family¹³⁰

This is the first representation that one sees when logging onto Barack Obama’s website, www.barackobama.com. There is a link in the corner of this photograph that will subsequently navigate you into the website’s homepage. Barack Obama is featured here with his wife Michelle and two daughters, Malia and Natasha Obama. It is interesting that he would like to be viewed by his voters, first and foremost in his capacity as a husband and father, before a politician.

This image is somewhat of an intriguing paradox as the text reads “Change We Can Believe In,” which conjures a sense of the unconventional – an alternative perspective of the world – a different paradigm. However, the most traditional of values are being expressed in the image. This picture is in black and white, resembling an old family portrait. The Obama’s are dressed conservatively. Michelle is calm and collected, wearing a skirt and pearls. Barack is dressed in an elegant pair of slacks and a button-down white shirt. His left hand is prominently positioned in the front/centre of the photograph so that his wedding ring is in full view – a symbol of heterosexual fidelity. Malia and Natasha are draped across him, evidently conveying their familial role as “daddy’s girls.”

This photograph casts the black family unit in a traditionally “white” framework. While it may masquerade as an attempt to “pass” as white, it is in fact a reappropriation of African-American identity. It is an assertion that black men make the equally outstanding fathers that

¹³⁰ Image available from www.barackobama.com

white men do. It also demonstrates that black families can enjoy the prosperity, affluence and access to opportunities that they have historically been denied. This image is a paradox as it presents socially-accepted values in a way that in fact challenges conventional norms. Therefore, it is a very important visualisation of the “change” Obama represents. The idea of change is also reinforced by the presence of Obama’s children in the photograph. The prominence given to Natasha and Malia both in this image and Obama’s campaign generally, is indicative of the value he places on American youth as being instigators of transformation in America.

This representation is also constructed to offer a sincere glimpse into the man behind the hype – to ground the extraordinary in the ordinary. It says that while Obama defies many of the conventions that society prescribes, he in fact values commonly cherished ideals like family. Family is a common place, activated as a means of reconciling differences based on race and class. This image attempts to show that white and black families in fact want the same things: To look after each other, live with respect and dignity, and guarantee a future for their children. Essentially, they share a common humanity. The Obama family is symbolic of a prospective larger American “family,” which is founded on a similar sense of communion and views its members as equals. Barack Obama’s placed emphasis on his role as a family man is an expression of the exceptional and ordinary, as well as the progressive and traditional parts of himself.

Lastly, the repetitive use of both the colour scheme and the slogan, “Change We Can Believe In” as the aforementioned campaign poster (1.1.), which was the first image to appear on Obama’s website, means that this representation is viewed in light of an already established context. Voters should be able to link this image with the preceding campaign poster. Stephen Denning, a leading scholar and writer in business communication says that narrative meaning is about connections.¹³¹ Subsequently, this connection increases awareness about the Obama brand.

¹³¹ S. Denning, “What is a Story?” Available from: http://www.stevedenning.com/What_story.html.

Fig 1.5 – Obama embraces his family following his election onto the US senate, Chicago, November 2004. ¹³²



In contrast, this photograph does not cast the Obama family as just like any other. They have been singled out and made an example of in a celebration of the extraordinary. This image captures a unique moment – the election of an African-American onto the US Senate for the third time since Reconstruction. This achievement truly defied normal societal expectations of “blackness.” The confetti raining down upon them connotes this triumphant moment and is reminiscent of a ticker tape parade. This was a New York tradition dating back to 1886, which has historically sought to pay tribute to individuals in the spheres of politics and sports, for their contributions to the building of national identity and pride. “Ticker tape”, refers to the shredded output of ticker-tape machines, used in brokerages to provide updated stock market quotes¹³³, which were showered on the subject/s of the parade. These kinds of representations have awarded Barack Obama his maverick status and have reinforced the belief in his ability to truly transform the way politics works in America.

¹³² G. Spencer, Available online from: <http://www.daylife.com/photo/03Hi8fMfBQbAJ>, November, 2004.

¹³³ “Understanding The Ticker Tape”, *Investopedia, A Forbes Digital Company*. Available from: <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/01/070401.asp>.

4.7 “PIMP” MY CAMPAIGN: THE ROLE OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS

Although Obama’s candidacy in many ways represents a departure from traditional expressions of African-American identity, and more than anything else, has been premised on the idea of non-racialism, being black is an important part of his X-factor. The prospect of an African-American making it to the White House for the first time in US history, has captured the imagination of the world at large. Obama’s race has opened up other avenues in which to involve himself outside of the political spectrum, particularly in sports and the entertainment industry. Such connections, which have involved some of the most celebrated personalities in these fields, have not only seen him catapult to stardom, but have made Obama a household name among parts of the electorate who have historically remained estranged from the political process. This refers to young Americans, specifically African-American and Latino youth. Obama seemed to pay lip service to more stereotypically “black” modes of expression as a way of galvanising minority votes, but tended to keep such influences at arms length. This was possibly because he did not want to alienate white voters, but also because he did not wish to endorse or further entrench the black stereotypes that he had committed himself to breaking down.

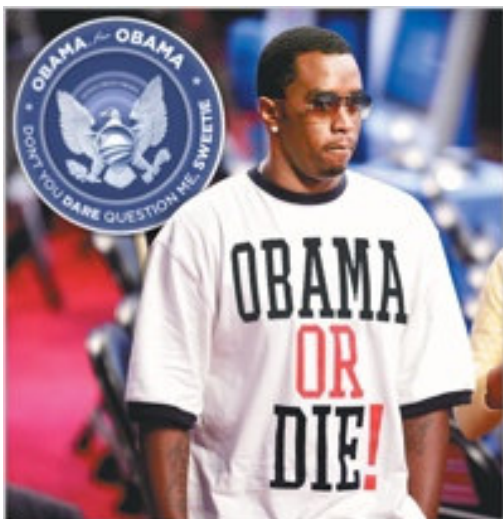
Barack Obama has been associated with a number of strategic celebrity endorsements that have both enhanced and impeded his political campaign. While these endorsements increased awareness about Obama’s candidacy, brought new, particularly young voters into the fold and enhanced his own celebrity, they also were frequently responsible for the dissemination of negative messages, for emphasising popularity over policy, and for trivialising his campaign. Talk show host, Oprah Winfrey, was one of the first individuals in entertainment to publicly applaud the candidate, which assisted Obama in appealing to liberal, middle-aged women that might have otherwise supported Hillary Clinton. Discussion group participant, Molly*, said that “it’s hard to argue that having Oprah endorse your campaign means nothing. The people she impacts are not the people who are necessarily paying attention. It’s a part of the electorate who have more important things in their lives than which politician they are going to support: mothers who spend all of their time working at home.” This suggests that the Oprah endorsement was important in reaching voters that might not otherwise be involved in the political process. Other discussion group participants argued that the impact of this endorsement was even more far-reaching. Mengfei* commented that “All the fieldworkers at the Congresswoman’s office get together and watch Oprah religiously.” This implied that the endorsement appealed to American women across the board, not just disempowered housewives.

Oprah's status is more than that of just a celebrity. She is a counsellor – an oracle – to which women look for advice. Daniel* said, "Oprah has a window into the homes of women's lives that other celebrities don't have." Lauren* added that, "People trust Oprah. She says something is a good book, and it's flying off the shelf." This means that the suggestions Oprah makes, including endorsements of political candidates, are considered by women to be more trustworthy and valid than that made by other celebrities.

After Oprah Winfrey, other, arguably less-esteemed personalities in the entertainment industry followed suit. The Black Entertainment Television (BET) Awards were held in Los Angeles, California, in June 2008, where some of the most acclaimed Hip-hop and R&B artists and black actors in America turned out, fully-clad in what one might call "blinging" Obama gear. BET's stronghold lies within the young, urban, African-American population. Rapper and music mogul, Sean "Diddy" Combs, sported a T-shirt that read, "Obama or Die" – a spin on civic initiative, Citizen Change's slogan, "Vote or Die."¹³⁴ Citizen Change was Combs' brainchild supported by singers and celebrities Mary J. Blige, Mariah Carey, 50 Cent and Paris Hilton, established to encourage American youth to register to vote in the 2004 elections.

¹³⁴ C. Elsworth, "P Diddy leads rapper 'shout out' for Barack Obama", *The Daily Telegraph*. Available online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/uselection2008/barackobama/2200788/P-Diddy-leads-rapper-'shout-out'-for-Barack-Obama.html>, 26 June, 2008.

Fig 1.6 – Rapper Sean “Diddy” Combs and Actress Kim Whitley at the Black Entertainment Television (BET) Awards in June 2008, Los Angeles, California.¹³⁵



Sean Combs was not the only one who publicly endorsed Obama that evening. In her acceptance speech for best female R&B artist, Alicia Keys, shouted “Yes We Can!” These three words had become one of the central mantras of Obama’s primary campaign, coined in his January 2008 New Hampshire primary speech. This phrase reappeared in subsequent addresses including his primary Victory Speech in South Carolina and Super Tuesday speech delivered in Chicago, Illinois.

“Yes We Can” simply, yet effectively stresses the agency, optimism and sense of communion that inform Obama’s message. These words are particularly motivational: Students at Bronx High School for Performance and Stagecraft, who are generally minorities (African-American and Latino) and come from underprivileged backgrounds, were inspired to write their own “Yes We Can” speeches. In a video posted on you both YouTube and Barack Obama’s website, these students expressed how Obama had stirred their ambitions for the future. “He [Obama], makes me care, and he makes me believe, and he makes me want to get up and go and do something with my life and go out and make a difference,” expressed one student. A Latino class member said that Obama’s “Yes We Can” speech made her believe that although

¹³⁵ Images available from: (LEFT) C. Elsworth. “P Diddy leads rapper ‘shout out’ for Barack Obama”, *The Daily Telegraph*. Available online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/uselection2008/barackobama/2200788/P-Diddy-leads-rapper-'shout-out'-for-Barack-Obama.html>. 26 June, 2008.
(RIGHT) A. Powers “Support for Obama proudly on display at the BET Awards”, *Los Angeles Times Music Blog*. 25 July, 2008.

she battles with English, she can learn to read and write.¹³⁶ These three words are the war cry in the battle for representation, and their assertion empowers those who have not enjoyed a voice in the public domain. It is for this reason that they have been strategic in reaching voters who have otherwise been alienated from the political process.

Black-Eyed Peas front man Will.i.am, Jesse Dylan, Bob Dylan's son, and Mike Jurkovic wrote and produced a music video based on Barack Obama's "Yes We Can" speech. Other famous singers and actors were recruited to collaborate, including Scarlett Johansson, John Legend, and Grey's Anatomy star, Kate Walsh. It was strategic in absorbing new young voters into the fold because they were able to associate Obama's message with people that they recognised. The video also served to rally Obama's already-existing support base.

The song begins with a key passage from Obama's New Hampshire primary speech: "*It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation: Yes, we can. It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights: Yes, we can.*"¹³⁷ Later it cites Obama's South Carolina Victory Speech in reaffirming the theme: "*Yes we can heal this nation. Yes we can seize our future...*"¹³⁸ and then returns to the New Hampshire Speech "*Yes we can repair this world.*"¹³⁹ This video received over 10 million hits on YouTube¹⁴⁰, which is a testimony to the impact that this collaborative celebrity endorsement had. Comments posted on the website bared witness to both Obama's youth appeal and to the potential power of such endorsements. "That's why the youth is for him; new, fresh, real and original. If anybody is going to make change, it is him. It's time for young ideas", said one. Other posts read, "considering the possibility and necessity of inspiring and uniting the hearts and minds of the world and the youth, how can we choose anyone but Obama?", "a new generation of leadership" and "time to throw out all the white-haired people".¹⁴¹ These remarks demonstrate the perception among the youth that Obama represents their desire for agency and that they can speak vicariously through him. They are thus allies in the battle against "the white-haired people," or members of the older generation who have refused to relinquish power.

¹³⁶ "Bronx Students Discuss Obama's Race Speech", Available from YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9IIdaegAB0>, 28 March, 2008.

¹³⁷ B. Obama. "Yes We Can," *New Hampshire Primary Speech*, 8 January, 2004:4.

¹³⁸ B. Obama. "Victory Speech in South Carolina", delivered in Columbia, S.C. <http://elections.foxnews.com/2008/01/26/transcript-barack-obamas-victory-speech-in-south-carolina/>. 26 January, 2008.

¹³⁹ B. Obama. "Yes We Can," *New Hampshire Primary Speech*: 8 January, 2008:5.

¹⁴⁰ R. Parekh, "Creatives have a crush on Obama" in *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, Vol. 79, Issue 8. 25 February, 2008.

¹⁴¹ Comments on "Yes We Can-Barack Obama Music Video" available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyqcx-mYY>.

Other comments such as “I would vote Obama because I saw Scarlett in his video...I love her!” exemplifies what discussion group participant Molly* said about celebrity endorsements: They are useful in reaching “the kids who don’t know what is going on, and don’t have anything in their lives to pull them into politics. All of a sudden, they see somebody that they recognise, and that, if nothing else, is enough to get them to watch the commercial. Maybe it won’t have any effect, but there is a chance that it will.” When Barack Obama in an interview with Angie Martinez of New York’s Hot 97 FM, disclosed that he listens to Jay-Z and Beyonce on his ipod,¹⁴² popular names among American youth, it sought to achieve the same effect.

Daniel* believed that the point of the “Yes We Can” music video was not necessarily to reach new voters, but to “feed the enthusiasm – the fanatics – the people who were already in it. That music video was to rally the base. It came out after he lost in New Hampshire to keep the enthusiasm up.”

However, Obama has also made some unsavoury alliances in the Hip-hop world. Rapper Ludacris released a song entitled, “Politics as Usual”, in which he waxes lyrical about Obama in a typically disreputable manner: “*Paint the White House black and I’m sure that’s got ‘em terrified. McCain don’t belong in any chair unless he’s paralysed. Yeah I said it cause Bush is mentally handicapped,*” and “*Make me your Vice-President. Hillary hated on you, so that (a word too misogynist to print) is irrelevant.*”¹⁴³ Although such comments are condoned by most of the electorate, they are formative and potentially powerful among certain voting blocs, particularly some African-American youth who regard Ludacris as an icon. Often, it’s the negative associations with a candidate that people tend to remember: Discussion group participant, Grant*, remarked that the first thought that comes to his mind when someone mentions the name “Barack Obama”, is a March 2008 interview with rapper DMX who was asked, “‘Have you been paying attention to politics?’ He said, ‘Nah, I can’t vote,’ because he is a convicted felon. The interviewer asked him, ‘What do you think of Barack Obama?’ And DMX said, ‘Who dat?’ ‘He’s running for president’, replied the interviewer. DMX said, ‘Is he African? His mama didn’t name him no Barack; that’s not a name.’”

Barack Obama is in a difficult predicament: On one hand he has to pay lip service to more traditionally “black” forms of representation in order to consolidate support among this demographic. Hip-hop and rap as musical genres have been conceived historically as a way of

¹⁴² A. Martine. “Interview with Barack Obama”, *Radio Station: Hot 97* Available from: http://media.hot97.com/SHARED/podcasts/angie_barackobama_010408.mp3: January, 2008.

¹⁴³ Rapper Ludacris, “Politics as Usual.” Lyrics available at: http://www.6lyrics.com/music/ludacris/lyrics/politics_as_usual1.aspx. July, 2008.

documenting the African-American experience. By openly deriding Ludacris or other Hip-hop stars, he risks alienating a key part of his voter base, and to some extent, loses touch with an important aspect of his own identity. Yet, on the other hand such connections can attract negative attention. Unlike his own campaign message, potentially controversial statements made by rappers about Obama cannot be filtered or tailored in order to minimise harm and they tend to shift the focus away from actual policy. Yet, he is still associated with such sentiments and is often required to provide an explanation for them. He also does not want to reinforce cultural stereotypes about what constitutes “blackness” because it serves to entrench divisions, rather than advance his appeal for unity and non-racialism. Barack Obama made the following comment on the matter: “I am troubled sometimes by the misogyny and materialism of a lot of rap lyrics.” He praised Jay-Z, Ludacris and Russell Simmons for being “great talents and great businessmen.” “But I think the genius of the art form has shifted the culture and helped to desegregate music... It would be nice if I could have my daughters listen to their music without me worrying that they were getting bad images of themselves.”¹⁴⁴

4.8 BARACK AND ROLL: OBAMA AND THE WORLD OF ROCK MUSIC

While Obama’s association with black-dominated areas of the entertainment sector has been important in attracting young, particularly African-American voters, he has embraced the rock music scene as a more traditionally white form of artistic expression. This has been important in appealing to young white Americans, the white middle-class and to some extent, ageing rockers of the baby-boomer generation who reminisce about a bygone peace-loving era of sex, drugs and rock ‘n roll. The anti-war movement of the 1960’s was inextricably bound to the world of rock music, and ideologically, as a liberal and Democratic nominee, Obama has somewhat of a historical commitment to honour. Such an association also helps to further Obama’s argument against the war in Iraq. However, just as Barack Obama did not want to endorse the frequently misogynistic, one-dimensional aspects of Hip-hop culture, he similarly does not want to support the destructive, hedonistic lifestyle that has characterised rock music. This is because it opposes his sense of Christian morality, and alienates his more religiously-inclined voters. He also doesn’t want to be perceived as trying to “pass” for white.

Obama has received a number of important endorsements from rock music icons. Singer, songwriter and guitarist Bruce Springsteen paid him the most humbling compliment: “He [Obama] has the depth, the reflectiveness, and the resilience to be our next president. He speaks to the America I’ve envisioned in my music for the past 35 years, a generous nation

¹⁴⁴ G. Kaufman, “Barack Obama Reveals His iPod Playlist: Jay-Z, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen ... And Sheryl Crow?” *MTV news report*. Available online from: http://www.vh1.com/artists/news/1589934/20080625/springsteen_bruce.jhtml, 25 June, 2008.

with a citizenry willing to tackle nuanced and complex problems, a country that's interested in its collective destiny and in the potential of its gathered spirit. A place where '...nobody crowds you, and nobody goes it alone.'¹⁴⁵ This endorsement was significant because Springsteen is most famous for his contributions to the sub-genre of heartland rock, which captured the everyday plight of blue collar-life in America in the 1970's and 1980's. This kind of music strived to create a sense of social consciousness. Springsteen's endorsement helped to bridge the divide between Obama and white, middle-class Americans. It was thus important in his "passing" as middle-class. Discussion group participant Grant*'s response to this endorsement however was, "Why should I care what some 52-year-old rocker has to say about politics. He's a monkey...I pay him to entertain me...I don't want to hear his thoughts on politics. I never take celebrity endorsements seriously." Perhaps Springsteen's endorsement was more strategic in appealing to an older generation of white middle-class voters than the youth.

One of the most critical endorsements that Barack Obama received in the rock entertainment industry was from *Rolling Stone Magazine*. It was the first time ever that the magazine had issued a primary season endorsement since its inception in 1967.¹⁴⁶ Obama appeared on the cover of a March 2008 edition with an article entitled, "A New Hope", by the publication's founder, Jann Wenner. Wenner said of the Democratic candidate, "...then along comes Barack Obama, with the kinds of gifts that appear in politics but once every few generations. There is a sense of dignity, even majesty, about him, and underneath that ease lies a resolute discipline. It's not just that he is eloquent — with that ability to speak both to you and to speak for you — it's that he has a quality of thinking and intellectual and emotional honesty that is extraordinary."¹⁴⁷

The magazine is not only a renowned brand in the rock music world, but it is a historically political publication that has been formative in reflecting and shaping popular culture for over four decades. Conceived at the height of the Vietnam War, it was associated with the articulation and development of a counter-culture movement, rooted in liberalism and based on resistance to the established social order. The personality of the publication is constantly in-flux and has continued to reinvent itself over the years. It has maintained its reputation as a barometer of trends in popular culture and in the up-and-coming rock music scene. It is thus associated with a younger readership. The *Rolling Stone Magazine* endorsement was important because it positioned Barack Obama within the context of a transformative,

¹⁴⁵ G. Kaufman, "Barack Obama Reveals His iPod Playlist: Jay-Z, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen ... And Sheryl Crow?" *MTV news report*, 25 June, 2008.

¹⁴⁶ J. Wenner, "A New Hope", *Rolling Stone Magazine*. March, 2007.

¹⁴⁷ J. Wenner, "A New Hope", *Rolling Stone Magazine*. March, 2007.

reformist framework, establishing him as a maverick who has challenged mainstream thinking in the pursuit of change. It was also significant in galvanising young, socially conscious Americans. The cover of *Rolling Stone* is usually occupied by an individual or group who holds a certain deity among youth, which depicted Obama as an embodiment of the “extraordinary.” It showed young people that Obama is one of them; he’s anti-establishment and alternative with the ability as Wenner pointed out, “to speak for you.” Because of this, it imbued Obama with somewhat of a cult status. Given *Rolling Stone*’s influence on popular culture, it expressed him as a trend onto himself. This endorsement made him “cool” and assisted in the cultivation of his celebrity. However, it also to some extent bridged the generational gap because of *Rolling Stone* Magazine’s longstanding legacy.



Fig 1.7 – Cover of *Rolling Stone* Magazine, March 2008.

This representation depicts Obama as extraordinary, as a non-conformist and as the quintessence of the aspirations of the younger generation. The ethereal colour scheme and illumination of Obama’s silhouette, asserts his uniqueness as an individual who is imbued with exceptional powers and qualities. Obama’s red tie is a bold statement – a testimony to his unconventionality and status as a trailblazer in challenging the status quo. “Inside his people-powered revolution” positions this visual text within the framework of the 1960’s revolution, envisioning Obama as the leader of a counter-culture movement and subsequently

a new social order, charged with the idealism and sense of empowerment that characterised this era. “The Call of History,” enhances this comparison and establishes *Rolling Stone’s* authority as a veteran predictor of social patterns. “Hillary’s Last Stand” is symbolic of the pending destabilisation of existing power structures and an assertion of millennial representation under Obama’s leadership. Thus, he represents a “new hope” for young people in the search for their own voice in the public domain. The synergy between Obama and the youth is crystallised by Obama’s black suit and the words “The Black Crowes”. This association signals a welcoming of Obama into the world of *Rolling Stone*, and establishes a commonality between himself and the magazine’s readership. It reiterates that Obama is in fact the embodiment of “us,” the younger generation.

4.9 BARACK OBAMA, TABLOIDS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

While Barack Obama’s connections in the entertainment industry have been instrumental in tapping into parts of the electorate that have been previously neglected, such as young people, minorities, and other sub-cultures that are indeed alienated because they don’t fulfil normal societal expectations, Obama has had to make an even greater attempt to secure the support of mainstream America. These are average, middle-class, god-fearing white families that in most ways conform to normal standards of social behaviour. This voter bloc is in fact the most important, because they represent the majority of America. Obama is not normal or average – he is extraordinary. The greatest cost of being unconventional is disaffecting the conventional. One of the ways in which Obama has tried to come across as more “ordinary” and “pass” for middle class, is through appearances in tabloids and teen magazines that are mass distributed exercises in popular taste. The drawbacks of this however, are the diluting of Obama’s uniqueness and his succumbing to the status quo.



Fig 1.8 – AMERICA’S SWEETHEARTS: The Obama’s feature on the cover of tabloid, *US Weekly*.

Michelle and Barack Obama’s appearance on the cover of the celebrity, gossip tabloid *US Weekly* constitutes an attempt to reach out to white middle-class America through the projection of themselves as “ordinary.” *US Weekly* appeals to a less socially-conscious, affluent, and educated readership than is associated with either *Vanity Fair* or *Rolling Stone Magazine* and operates within a commercial, mainstream discursive framework. *US Weekly*, which is read mostly by teenage girls and housewives, is a light, entertaining read. Its objective is to provide a window into the secret lives of celebrities and ultimately prove that they are in fact subject to the same imperfections we all are.

The focus of this representation is on Michelle Obama as a means of provoking identification with its female readership. Thus, such communication is an attempt to consolidate support for Barack Obama by proxy. The cover portrays Michelle Obama as engaging in the everyday activities that constitute most women’s lives, which attempts to ground the extraordinary in the ordinary. She is projecting the message that she is in fact not unlike *US Weekly* readers: She shops at the same places – Target, a warehouse of mass-produced commodities of every kind, epitomises middle-class America. She watches the same mainstream TV shows, and most importantly, she is a “down-to-earth” mother, which is a role that forms a common place

with the *US Weekly* readership. Her appearance with Barack Obama and her referral to him as her “rock”, implicates him as part of a loving family unit, which resonates with middle-class families as something they value. The disclosure of the personal, private life of the Obama’s, typified by their wedding photograph, in contrast to the “public” life that is usually on show, is an effort to prove to readers that they just like them.

The clothing the Obamas are wearing attempts to further enhance identification with the magazine’s readership. Their attire does not project the kind of style and sophistication with which this couple are usually associated and instead bear the hallmarks of a bourgeois, middle-class lifestyle. Michelle’s pink suit jacket and gaudy gold necklace are a far cry from her elegant sweater sets and delicate pearls she is usually pictured wearing. Unlike the red tie he sported on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, Obama’s tie in this image does not highlight the more unconventional aspects of himself. It could be worn by your average “Joe” who works an office job.

The last notable aspect of this magazine cover, are the images that frame the Obama couple. The subjects in the photographs are all white, which suggests that Barack Obama must succumb to conventional representations of “whiteness” and subsequently distance himself from his racial identity in order to determine his acceptance by this part of society. The Hogans family is being featured somewhat as an embodiment of the aspirations, values and taste of *US Weekly* readers. This is synonymous with the notion that celebrities are a vicarious representation of our desires. The magazine has cast the Obamas in a similar way. It is arguably degrading and such a portrayal does not do justice to who and what Barack Obama really is, but it is a stilted attempt to reconstruct himself within a middle-class value system that characterises a sizeable part of the electorate.



Fig 1.9 – Cover of *Tiger Beat* Magazine, July 2007. ¹⁴⁸

Barack Obama’s appearance on the cover of *Tiger Beat* Magazine, which covers celebrity news and gossip for a pre-teen market, is aimed at bringing young, white, middle-class Americans into the fold who may or may not be eligible to vote come national election time. Like the other teen icons featured, Obama is portrayed as a determiner and personification of mainstream social trends among this age group. It both secures his “cool”, celebrity status and his role as a representative of the younger generation. Additionally, it reassures the parents of *Tiger Beat* readers that Obama is non-threatening, positive influence on their children. He is being located within a context of naïvity and innocence – a world of “crushes” and “first kisses.” The words, “I sing in the shower” and “more personal facts,” establish a sense of familiarity and openness that seek to undermine the negative stereotyping of black men as being dangerous. There are no other black faces on this cover and Obama’s appearance is to some extent, an attempt to “pass” as white in order to secure the trust of this readership. The portrayal of Obama in this way also affirms parents’ confidence in the *Tigerbeat* brand as a promoter of morally-upstanding, incorruptible role models and objects of desire for their children. The magazine is suggesting that Barack Obama is the kind of guy that you can bring home to your parents. This edition has offered readers “a giant poster” of the political candidate framing him as a kind of “pin-up.” Obama’s desirability therefore lies in the fact that he is safe.

¹⁴⁸ Image available from: <http://thecurvature.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/tigerbeat.j>

The problem with Obama's representations in both *US Weekly* and *Tigerbeat* is they function in increasing his popularity among voters through a discourse that is unrelated to political policy. It shifts the focus away from traditional politics and drowns out political discussion, making it harder and harder to connect the candidate with a specific issue/policy.¹⁴⁹ This was highlighted by John McCain in a July 2008 negative campaign ad, which compared Barack Obama to Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. It asked the electorate: "He [Obama] is the greatest celebrity in the world, but is he ready to lead?" Discussion group participant, Grant* says that up until the attack ad and Obama's response, very few policy issues had been discussed.

5. BARACK OBAMA AND THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

The last part of the celebrity frame as identified by Hendrickson and Wilkins, includes an emphasis on the "back story" of the politician; that is, the construction of a candidate's personal narrative. This has become increasingly more important in the 2008 elections. Amidst fierce competition in both the Democratic primaries and run up to the national elections, candidates have had to try particularly hard to distinguish themselves from their opponents. This has largely been achieved through storytelling. The tightly-contested nature of these elections has also meant that the contests have gone on for longer than many other comparable contests. There has been more time and opportunity to become wholly acquainted with the candidates. Because they have been particularly unique, the public are intrigued by their personal stories. Most importantly though, is the fact that these elections have transpired in the wake of severe circumstances currently surrounding America, both in terms of the economy and its moral standing in the world. The American people don't want to make a rash decision: They want to know who they are voting for because the outcome of these elections really does matter. Discussion group participant, Daniel*, argued that "if you look at the issues alone, the President's [Bush's] approval rating, the economy... if it was just a generic battle of Republican versus Democrat, this would be a landslide election, but people want to know: Is this guy [Obama] Muslim? Who is this man? Why does he have a funny name? Does he hate America? Whether or not you think it [a candidate's story] should matter is a different question to the fact that it clearly does matter." Another member of the group Kim* from Santa Barbara, CA, conceded, "If you are going to trust someone to lead your country, you kind of want to know who you are voting for." Grant* said that storytelling was standard procedure now for presidential candidates.

¹⁴⁹ E. Hendrickson, and L. Wilkins. "The Political is the Personal: Celebritizing Politicians in the 21st Century" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association*, San Francisco, CA. 2007:9.

Storytelling is a particularly effective form of political communication because members of the public unintentionally connect these narratives with either professional competence or specific policy outcomes.¹⁵⁰ It is a way for political candidates to hone their message and is thus an important tool in the strategic dissemination of information by political leaders, also known as knowledge management. Storytelling in this context is the purposeful use of narrative to achieve practical outcomes. Stephen Denning argues that the use of narrative is a critical tool for leaders in the communication of who they are and the enhancement of their brand, the transmission of values, the creation of meaning in their message, and the persuasion of those they address through anecdotal evidence, which can move people in a way that statistics or theory cannot.¹⁵¹ Most important to this discussion, storytelling is a technique for the instigators of change, who aim to continue transformation and the creation of a fruitful tomorrow. This is because narrative offers leaders a way in which to embody or exemplify the change they seek by presenting a compelling picture of their goals.¹⁵²

Denning has noted the importance of storytelling in recent elections, commenting that Hillary Clinton's popularity grew during the 2008 primary contests when she started sharing her own story with the electorate: "That her grandfather lived in Pennsylvania and started working in a lace mill, her father grew up there too and played football for Penn State, and that despite a fortune of over \$100 million, she has improbably morphed into a 'home-town working class gal'".¹⁵³ Similarly, it was Al Gore's failure to project who he was and what he stood for that cost him the 2000 Presidential election.¹⁵⁴ Much, if not most of the support that has been garnered for Alaskan Governor and 2008 Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, has been obtained not on the basis of a decorated political career, but through the construction of a life story that resonates with American voters. A key contributor to the success of Barack Obama has been his articulation and development of a clear and compelling story that exemplifies his extraordinariness, his message of hope and change, and helps to establish commonalities between disparate voting blocs, through the construction of his own narrative as a metonym for the greater American story. It has been particularly important in his candidacy because of his positioning as a reformer and because of his limited political experience. He needs to show voters that although he has not had an extensive

¹⁵⁰ E. Hendrickson, and L. Wilkins. "The Political is the Personal: Celebritying Politicians in the 21st Century" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association*, San Francisco, CA. 2007:8.

¹⁵¹ "Storytelling: Passport to Success in the 21st Century". Available from: <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org>

¹⁵² S. Denning, "Why Storytelling is so important". Available from: http://stevedenning.typepad.com/steve_denning/2005/10/why_storytelling.html

¹⁵³ S. Denning, "The Uniter vs the Divider". Available from: http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_steveden_080427_the_uniter_vs_the_di.htm. 27 April, 2008.

¹⁵⁴ S. Denning, "An Inconvenient Truth for Democrats" http://www.opednews.com/articles/genera_steveden_071018_an_inconvenient_trut.htm. 18 October, 2007.

opportunity to demonstrate his leadership abilities, he in fact possesses the qualities and life experience needed to be president. Obama's training as a lawyer and thus essentially in argumentation, persuasion and public advocacy, has made him an even greater storyteller.

The extraordinary aspects of Obama's life story that have been brought to the fore, are that he comes from a multi-racial background, has lived in diverse locations including Hawaii and Indonesia, that he was the first African-American President of the *Harvard Law Review* and is the third African-American since Reconstruction to be elected onto the US Senate. He highlights that he was able to achieve such greatness, despite humble beginnings and without losing sight of the most important things in life – family. His maverick status is also affirmed through the emphasis on his expressed opposition to the war in Iraq from the outset.

In Obama's Keynote Address at the 2004 Democratic Convention, he told his story in the following way:

“My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father, my grandfather, was a cook, a domestic servant. But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance, my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place; America, which stood as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before. While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas...they [Obama's grandparents] too had big dreams for their daughter, a common dream, born of two continents. My parents shared not only an improbable love; they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or “blessed,” believing that in a tolerant America your name is no barrier to success. They imagined me going to the best schools in the land, even though they weren't rich, because in a generous America you don't have to be rich to achieve your potential.”¹⁵⁵

This passage emphasises Obama's uniqueness. For one, his name means blessing, which is associated with the uncommon and is imbued with an ordained purpose. It suggests that he was born with a call to lead. The unusualness of his name has been both an assertion of his individuality and a cause for suspicion among the American public who are scared of the unfamiliar. This ties in with another exceptional aspect of Barack Obama's identity, which is that he is not just African-American, but “African.” While being African is associated with the purest form of “blackness”, it at the same time separates him from other black Americans. The fact that he is also half white means that he does not strictly belong to any racial

¹⁵⁵ B. Obama “One Voice”, *Keynote Address at the Democratic Convention*. February 2004:1.

category. This is both why he has been able to appeal to voters across the racial divide and also why neither black nor white Americans will truly consider him to be one of them. However, it has also supported his appeal for non-racialism, as he has demonstrated that race is not a factor in success. The African continent is being associated in this passage with simplicity, primitiveness to some extent and is depicted as a land of limited promise and opportunity. This part of his heritage, compounded by the fact that his mother's parents did not have a lot of money, emphasises Obama's humble circumstances and makes his ascendance to greatness that much more extraordinary. His African identity also points to his worldliness, which is further constructed through his experience living in Indonesia and Hawaii. On his website, it says of Obama that "...growing up in different places with people who had differing ideas have animated his political journey." In "A More Perfect Union," Barack Obama says: "*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.*"¹⁵⁶ This experience has given Obama greater insight and perspective into world affairs, enhancing the notion that he possesses special qualities and skills. It also reinforces policy, which is the restoration of America's moral standing in the world. However, he is careful not to estrange himself too much from the United States and asserts his American identity when he says, "*I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.*"

The unusualness of Obama's story further suggests that he brings to the table, an alternative viewpoint that challenges existing norms. This means that he is an independent thinker, laying claim to the fact that he "opposed the war in Iraq, before it began." It also fortifies his call for change. As Denning suggests, storytelling is an important tool for leaders who seek to transform the existing status quo and thus there is a strategic link between the use of narrative and the reinforcement of "change" as a major campaign theme.

While the extraordinariness and unconventionality in Barack Obama's story have been strategic in inspiring those parts of the electorate who have been underrepresented in the political system, Obama cannot come across as too removed from those he wishes to lead. He has thus also had to establish the commonalities that exist between his own life and that of the average American citizen. This he has done through a placed emphasis on his mother's white, blue-collar background, his Christian faith and his work as a community organiser in touching the lives of everyday people. In the same 2004 Democratic Convention speech, cited frequently throughout the course of this dissertation, Obama says, "*My mother was born in a*

¹⁵⁶ B. Obama. "Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: 'A More Perfect Union'", Philadelphia, PA. 18 March, 2008: 1.

town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oilrigs and farms through most of the Depression. The day after Pearl Harbor he signed up for duty, joined Patton's army and marched across Europe. Back home, my grandmother raised their baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line. After the war, they studied on the G.I. Bill, bought a house through Federal Housing Program, and moved west in search of opportunity.”¹⁵⁷ This aspect of his story resonates with white, middle-class Americans who share a similar familial legacy. Not only does it show that he has in fact been shaped by the same historical hardships that they have, but that he is a part of a lineage that has fought patriotically for the preservation of the American nation.

In appealing to these voters, he has also highlighted his Christianity as the source of direction and guidance in his life and as a potentially powerful instigator of social transformation. In his 2006 Pentecost Speech, he provided the main reason why religion has had a formative role in his life: *“I believed and still believe in the power of the African-American religious tradition to spur social change...In its historical struggles for freedom and the rights of man, I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death, but rather as an active, palpable agent in the world. As a source of hope.”*¹⁵⁸ In this passage, Barack Obama has rooted his faith in what would become his two most important campaign themes in 2008: hope and change. It is Obama’s perception of religion’s role in social change that formed the basis for the commitment he would make in helping the lives of everyday American people. When he announced his candidacy for the Presidency, he affirmed this: *“I moved to Illinois over two decades ago... I knew no one in Chicago, was without money or family connections. But a group of churches had offered me a job as a community organizer for \$13,000 a year. And I accepted the job, sight unseen, motivated then by a single, simple, powerful idea – that I might play a small part in building a better America.”*¹⁵⁹ *“My work took me to some of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. I joined with pastors and lay-people to deal with communities that had been ravaged by plant closings. I saw that the problems people faced weren't simply local in nature...It was in these neighborhoods that I received the best education I ever had and where I learned the true meaning of my Christian faith.”*¹⁶⁰

His experience as a community organiser would shape the decisions he made along the way: After three years of work, Barack Obama enrolled at Harvard Law School “to understand

¹⁵⁷ B. Obama “One Voice”, *Keynote Address at the Democratic Convention*. February 2004:1.

¹⁵⁸ B. Obama. “2006 Pentecost Keynote Address” at *Call to Renewal's Building a Covenant for a New America Conference*, Washington, 28 June, 2008.

¹⁵⁹ B. Obama. “Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President, Springfield, Illinois”, 10 February, 2007, 1

¹⁶⁰ B. Obama. “Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President, Springfield, Illinois”. 10 February, 2007, 1

how the law should work for those in need.¹⁶¹” When he graduated, he “turned down lucrative job offers”¹⁶², in continuing his service to the community. He claimed, “In 20 years of public service, I have brought Democrats and Republicans together to solve problems that touch the lives of everyday people.”¹⁶³ The role of religion in Obama’s story established a significant common place between himself and average American voters, and forged a connection between Obama’s life experience and the plight of the working class.

The emphasis Barack Obama has placed on both the extraordinary and ordinary aspects of his story have contributed to a very important message: That he is the embodiment of the diversity that makes America exceptional and it is within this heterogeneity that the country finds the main basis for its unification. Discussion group participant, Daniel* said, “He could be the first black president. He is different, because he is multi-racial, yet he has a story that I can connect to because I was raised by a single mother and my grandparents. It’s really weird that you’d think I have nothing in common with this guy from Hawaii that lived in Indonesia, but our childhoods are really similar.” Barack Obama has cultivated an eclectic story in which everyone sees a little bit of themselves. This has fostered a sense of communion among American people from diverse backgrounds. There is a belief in a greater humanity that transcends the parameters of race and class. Obama emphasised this in his speech, “A More Perfect Union.” *“It’s a story that hasn’t made me the most conventional candidate. But 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,”* and *“My parents shared not only an improbable love; they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation... I stand here today, grateful for the diversity of my heritage...I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story.”*¹⁶⁴ While Barack Obama recognises his uniqueness, he points out that it is endemic to the American experience – that his story is a metonym for the greater American story. Stephen Denning argues that one of Obama’s greatest strengths lies in his role as a “uniter,” which involves telling the stories of the entire country¹⁶⁵.

While Obama has found storytelling to be effective in the dissemination of key campaign messages and in garnering support among disparate parts of the electorate, it is an anecdotal, poetic and emotionally-stirring technique for promoting his candidacy. One discussion group

¹⁶¹ “Meet the Candidate”, on Barack Obama’s website: http://www.barackobama.com/learn/meet_barack.php.

¹⁶² “Meet the Candidate”, on Barack Obama’s website: http://www.barackobama.com/learn/meet_barack.php.

¹⁶³ B. Obama, 2008 Primary Election Campaign Ad “Believe”. Available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEWoDyahXT8&feature=related>.

¹⁶⁴ B. Obama. “Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: ‘A More Perfect Union’”, Philadelphia, PA. 18, March, 2008: 2.

¹⁶⁵ S. Denning, “The Uniter vs the Divider”. Available from: http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_steveden_080427_the_uniter_vs_the_di.htm. 27 April, 2008.

participant said that storytelling tends to overlook the issues and has “more to do with likeability than actual policy”.

6. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to assess the impact of Barack Obama’s candidacy on the staggering increase in youth voter participation observed during the 2008 United States primary elections. Americans aged 18-29 across all sub-groups turned out to vote in record-breaking numbers. Not only did the majority of them cast their ballots in Democratic contests, but the greater part of this demographic selected Barack Obama as their candidate of choice. While this phenomenon was interesting, it could not be separated from the specific circumstances that surrounded its emergence. These were the uniqueness of the candidates, the tightly-contested nature of the elections, the widespread disapproval of the incumbent leadership and the unsettling realisation that the severity of America’s situation in terms of its economy and tarnished image abroad, meant that the 2008 elections would be extremely consequential. More people across all age groups were paying attention. Although the most visible spike in political participation occurred among young people, it was in fact the third consecutive election cycle in which such an increase was observable. Furthermore, the size of this demographic is larger than any other and is continuously on the rise as more millennials become eligible to vote. Lastly, the personality of the millennial generation has shown itself to be more inclined towards civic participation and expressing an interest in politics in a fiercely competitive age where they have had to become more involved generally. In light of these issues, it makes drawing absolute conclusions about the relationship between Barack Obama and youth voter participation somewhat complicated.

Yet, Barack Obama’s own agency in appropriately responding to such a political climate cannot go unnoticed, nor can the overwhelming, somewhat fanatical following he secured among young voters. It has been argued that the youth supported Obama because he served as a proxy for the expression of their own voice in a political system, which had previously discounted them. He conceived and disseminated a message that truly spoke for the youth. It was a call for change that sought to undermine existing power structures and dominant discourses avariciously harboured by a bygone generation and it was driven by an idealism untainted by the baggage of preceding years. This message was visually stimulating, punchy, alternative and expressed through channels that young people were familiar with, and that were specifically targeted at their recruitment and mobilisation. The internet particularly served as a space to which this part of the electorate has truly claimed ownership. Its

utilisation in Obama's campaign absorbed new young voters into the process and was instrumental in rallying the base.

The celebrity world and more specifically Obama's association with Hollywood A-Listers, the hip-hop industry, the rock music scene and gossip tabloids, made him a household name among social circles that had otherwise remained estranged from the political process. It was key to the cultivation and development of his own celebrity. These connections were also critical in the establishment of common places among diverse elements of the American youth demographic that bridged the gap between mainstream and counter-culture tastes, affluence and the middle class, and different racial groups. This contributed to the sense of solidarity that the youth demonstrated in support for Obama that transcended established social distinctions. However, it was also his association with the celebrity world that at times threatened to trivialise and defame him and frequently shifted discussion away from policy issues.

However, it was not only by association that Barack Obama became a celebrity, but because he is a maverick and embodiment of the extraordinary in his own right. This was emphasised in his campaign primarily through the use of storytelling, which painted a picture of a multi-racial, diverse candidate whose heritage spanned two continents and could offer a unique perspective on the world. He has achieved the kind of greatness that most can only dream about and has been completely pioneering in his accomplishments. Despite his youth and limited political experience, he could potentially be the first black president of the United States. It is this exceptionality that has made him a charismatic leader, accompanied by a devoted and somewhat cult-like following among the youth. He is the embodiment of the kind of change they seek and their commitment is guided by the belief that he will transform their lives in the same way.

Barack Obama's greatest challenge has been to ground the extraordinary aspects of himself in the ordinary. His uniqueness frequently threatens to alienate him from average American citizens who struggle to relate or identify with him. They do not perceive Obama as someone who will represent their interests. It is certainly a bias of this study that the American youth sampled were the kind of privileged, educated and over-achieving independent thinkers that have been the driving force behind Barack Obama's political campaign. For young people and Americans generally who are largely uneducated, have limited aspirations for the future and who subscribe to the mainstream, feel, if they are interested in politics at all, that few commonalities exist between themselves and Barack Obama. Through storytelling and visual communication, Obama has attempted to reach out to predominantly white middle-class

voters through a placed emphasis on family, his Christian faith, his mother's background, his humble beginnings, and his steadfast commitment to public service. He has also pointed to his diversity as being symbolic of the greater American story, which all voters share.

However, this conflict between his unconventional candidacy and securing the support of ordinary people has meant that Barack Obama is forever engaged in a delicate balancing act. He has been forced to "pass" as other things in order to ensure his success. He is both white and black, elitist and middle-class, extraordinary and ordinary. It makes him a diverse candidate, which has been pivotal in garnering support among a hybrid youth population. It has also meant that he has had to make a compromise, and thus his identification with any other group has been more difficult to achieve.

In closing, Barack Obama has reached out to embattled youth as allies in a revolutionary struggle against the prevailing social order. He is a vicarious voice, through which young people have asserted themselves and found their source of empowerment. He is their leader in their battle for representation in an otherwise dominated system.

7. REFERENCES

Critical Sources

Books

- Bacon, F. *Novum Organum 1620 The Works*, 3 vols. Basil Montague, ed. and trans. Parry & MacMillan, Philadelphia, 1854.
- Breiner, P. *Max Weber and Democratic Politics*. Cornell University Press, London, 1996.
- Parkin, F. "Domination and Legitimacy" in *Max Weber*. Ellis Horwood Ltd., UK and Tavistock Publications Ltd., USA, 1982.
- Tuman, J. *Political Communication in American Campaigns*. Sage Publications, California, 2008.

Academic Articles

- Carlton-Ford. S. "Charisma, Ritual, Collective Effervescence and Self-Esteem" in *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, Blackwell Publishing. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121324>. 1992.
- Cloud, D. "To Veil the Threat of Terror", *QTS* 90/3. August, 2004.
- McGee. M. "The Ideograph: A link between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 66. February, 1980.
- Conger, J., Rabindra, N., Kanungo, S. "Charismatic Leadership and Follower Effects" in *Journal of Organisational Behaviour* Vol. 21, No. 7. November, 2000.
- Denning, S. "What is a Story?" Available from: http://www.stevedenning.com/What_story.html.
- Denning, S. "Why Storytelling is so important". Available from: http://stevedenning.typepad.com/steve_denning/2005/10/why_storytelling.html.
- DePalma, M., Ringer, J. and Webber, J. "(Re)Charting the (Dis)Courses of Faith and Politics, or Rhetoric and Democracy in the Burkean Barnyard", *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 38/3, 2008.
- Firman, J. and Gila, A. "On Religious Fanaticism: A Look at Transpersonal Identity Disorder", *Psychosynthesis Palo Alto*, Palo Alto, CA. Available from: http://www.psychosynthesispaloalto.com/pdfs/Religious_Fan.pdf. 2006.
- Frank, D. and McPhail, M. "Barack Obama's Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience and the (Im)possibility of Racial Conciliation." In *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* Vol. 8, No. 4, 2005.
- Hariman, R. and Lucaites, J. "Performing Civic Identity" in *QJS* Vol 9. 1/2. November, 2002.

- Hendrickson, E. and Wilkins, L. “The Political is the Personal: Celebritying Politicians in the 21st Century” *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association*, San Francisco, CA. Available online at: http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p169233_index.html. May, 2007.
- Henry, K. “Max Weber's Typology of Forms of Authority - Traditional, Rational-Legal, and Charismatic” Available from: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Kathy_Henry.
- Leyden, P., Teixeira, R., Greenberg, E. “The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation”, *The New Politics Institute*. Available from: http://www.newpolitics.net/node/360?full_report=1. 20 June, 2007.
- Mallon, R. “Passing, Traveling and Reality: Social Constructionism and the Metaphysics of Race,” University of Utah. Available from: <http://www.hum.utah.edu/philosophy/faculty/mallon/Materials/ptr.pdf>, 2004.
- Parekh, R. “Creatives have a crush on Obama” in *Communication & Mass Media Complete, Vol. 79, Issue 8*. 25 February, 2008.
- Rice, J. “A Critical View of Visual Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age: Complementing, Extending and Presenting New Ideas” in *Review of Communication Vol 4, No. 1/2*. April, 2004.
- Steel, E. and Redding, C. “The American Value System: Premises for Persuasion” in *Journal of Western Speech*:1962.
- “Storytelling: Passport to Success in the 21st Century”. Available from: <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org>.
- Trent, J. and Friedenberg, R. “Advertising in Political Campaigns” in *Political Campaign Communication*, Westport, Praeger. 4th ed. 2000.

Studies, Surveys and Statistics

- “Belief growing that reporters are trying to help Obama”, *Rasmussen Reports*. Available from: http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/election_20082/2008_presidential_election/belief_growing_that_reporters_are_trying_to_help_obama_win. 21 July, 2008.
- Keeter, S. “Young Voters in the 2008 Presidential Primaries”. *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. Available from: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/730/young-voters>. February, 2008.
- Kohut, A, Keeter, S., Doherty, C. and Dimock, M. “Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off: Internet’s Broader Role in Campaign 2008”, *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. Available from: <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/384.pdf>. 11 January, 2008.
- Harvard University IOP 14th Biannual Youth Survey of Politics and Public Service, Available from: <http://www.iop.harvard.edu/Research-Publications/Polling/Spring-2008-Survey>: April, 2008.

- Lopez, M. and Marcelo, K. “Youth Demographics”, conducted by *The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement*. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/quick/youth_demo.htm. November, 2006.
- Marcelo, K., Lopez, M., Kennedy, C., and Barr, K. “Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends.” *CIRCLE and Rock the Vote*. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/CIRCLE_RtV_Young_Voter_Trends.pdf. February, 2008.
- Roscow, D. “2008 Primary Summary” *Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_08_primary_summary.pdf. 13 June, 2008.
- Roscow, D. “Super Tuesday” by Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. Available from: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/PR_08_Super%20Tuesday.pdf. 6 February, 2008.
- “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey”, conducted by *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*. Available from: <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>. September, 2008.
- U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, 2008 population <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbagg>.
- “Young Voters: The New Democratic Base”, *Young Democrats Association (YDA) Website*. <http://www.yda.org/tools/19/youth-statistics>.

Primary Sources

Media Articles

- Denning, S. “An Inconvenient Truth for Democrats” http://www.opednews.com/articles/genera_steveden_071018_an_inconvenient_truth.htm. 18, October, 2007.
- Denning, S. “The Uniter vs the Divider”. Available from: http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_steveden_080427_the_uniter_vs_the_di.htm. 27 April, 2008.
- Dionne Jr., E.J. “The Year The Youth Vote Arrives”, Available from: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/07/24/AR2008072403414_2.html. 25 July, 2008.
- Elsworth, C. “P Diddy leads rapper ‘shout out’ for Barack Obama”, *The Daily Telegraph*. Available online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/uselection2008/barackobama/2200788/P-Diddy-leads-rapper-'shout-out'-for-Barack-Obama.html>. 26 June, 2008.
- “Highest turnout since 1908 poll”, Sapa-AFP, Published in *The Star*, 5 November, 2008.

- Kaufman, G. "Barack Obama Reveals His iPod Playlist: Jay-Z, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen ... And Sheryl Crow?" *MTV news report*. Available online from: http://www.vh1.com/artists/news/1589934/20080625/springsteen_bruce.jhtml. 25 June, 2008.
- Kazin, M. "Rising Star" Review of Barack Obama's book *The Audacity of Hope*. Available from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/19/AR2006101901175.html>. 22 October, 2006.
- Kroll, A. "Youth voter turned out for Obama on Tuesday", *Youth Vote '08, Next-Gen Election Coverage, CBS News*. Available from: http://www.youthvoteblog.com/2008/11/05/youth_vote_turned_out_for_obama_tuesday/, 5 November, 2008.
- Kuhn, D. "Exit Polls: How Obama Won", *Politico*. Available from: <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1108/15297.html>, 5 November, 2008.
- Nagourney, A. "Will Obama Rock the Youth Vote", *New York Times*, Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/08/us/politics/08web-nagourney.html?_r=1&oref=slogin. 8 October, 2007.
- Powers, A. "Support for Obama proudly on display at the BET Awards", *Los Angeles Times Music Blog*. Available from: <http://theguide.latimes.com/blogs/soundboard/2008/06/25/support-for-obama-proudly-on-display-at-the-bet-awards/>. 25 July, 2008.
- Schwab, N. "Young Voters Could Put Obama or Clinton in the White House", *US News and World Report*. Available from: <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/campaign-2008/2008/03/13/young-voters-could-put-obama-or-clinton-in-the-white-house.html>. 13 March, 2008.
- Romano, A. "He's One of Us Now", *Newsweek* website, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/109589>: 18 February, 2008.
- Russert, T. "Meet the Press". Available from: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4459759/>.
- Staul, J. "Youth voters' interest and participation increasing", Available from Kentnews.net, *Kent State University*. Available from: <http://media.www.kentnewsnet.com/media/storage/paper867/news/2008/04/24/News/Youth.Voters.Interest.And.Participation.Increasing-3346225.shtml>. January, 2008.
- Villarreal, A. "Youth Vote Growing in US Presidential Contests" *NewsVOA.com*. Available from: <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-02/2008-02-07-voa25.cfm7>. February, 2008.
- Von Kanel, J. Quinley, H. "Exit polls: Obama wins big among young minority voters" *Election Center 2008, CNN Politics.com*. Available from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/11/04/exit.polls/index.html>, 4 November, 2008.
- Waxman, B. "Why Obama Wins the Youth Vote", *Philadelphia Daily News*. Available from <http://www.democracyguard.org/ben/node/71>. 19 January, 2007.

- Wenner, J. “A New Hope”, *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Available from: http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/19106551/a_new_hope. March, 2007.

Speeches and Interviews

- Martine. A. “Interview with Barack Obama”, *Radio Station: Hot 97*. Available from: http://media.hot97.com/SHARED/podcasts/angie_barackobama_010408.mp3: January, 2008.
- Obama. B. “2006 Pentecost Keynote Address” at *Call to Renewal’s Building a Covenant for a New America Conference*, Washington. Available from: <http://www.nccusa.org/news/060628obama.html>. 28 June, 2006.
- Obama, B. “One Voice”, *Keynote Address at the Democratic Convention*. Available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/demconvention/speeches/obama.html>. February, 2004.
- Obama, B. “Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President”, Springfield, Illinois. Available online at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=76999>. 10 February, 2007.
- Obama, B. “Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: ‘A More Perfect Union’”, Philadelphia, PA. Available from: http://www.barackobama.com/2008/03/18/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_53.php. 18 March, 2008.
- Obama, B. “Super Tuesday Speech”, Illinois. Available from: <http://rtturner229.blogspot.com/2008/02/transcript-provided-for-obama-super.html>. 6 February, 2008.
- Obama, B. “Victory Speech in South Carolina”, delivered in Columbia, S.C. <http://elections.foxnews.com/2008/01/26/transcript-barack-obamas-victory-speech-in-south-carolina/>. 26 January 2008.
- Obama, B. “Yes We Can”, *New Hampshire Primary Speech*. Available on *The New York Times* website at: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/us/politics/08text-obama.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1209907096-1AdJR4T9GATEnjpPXX4bVg&oref=slogin#secondParagraph. 8 January, 2008.

Photographs and Magazine Covers

- Campaign Posters, “Change We Can Believe In” (Figs 1.1 and 1.4) available on Barack Obama’s website, www.barackobama.com.
- “Obama and the spotlight” (Fig. 1.3) Available at nocaptionneeded.com.
- Photographs from Black Entertainment Television Awards 2008 (Fig. 1.6)

- “P. Diddy wearing ‘Obama or Die’ t-shirt”. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/uselection2008/barackobama/200788/P-Diddy-leads-rapper-'shout-out'-for-Barack-Obama.html>.
- “Actress Kim Whitley at the BET awards.” Available from: <http://theguide.latimes.com/blogs/soundboard/2008/06/25/support-for-obama-proudly-on-display-at-the-bet-awards/>. 25 July, 2008.
- Spencer, G. “Obama family and confetti.” (Fig. 1.5). Available online from: <http://www.daylife.com/photo/03Hi8fMfBQbAJ>. November, 2004.
- *Rolling Stone* Magazine cover, (Fig. 1.7). Available from: http://www.foliomag.com/files/images/rolling_stone_obama.jpg. March, 2008.
- *Tiger Beat* Magazine cover. (Fig 1.9). Available at: <http://thecurvature.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/tigerbeat.j>. March, 2008.
- *US Weekly* Magazine cover (Fig.1.8) <http://s.buzfeed.com/static/imagebuzz/2008/6/17/23/4a67e2652f43ce8a3b42b3e5412fe2e8.jpg> June, 2008.
- *Vanity Fair Magazine* covers. Available at: <http://www.vanityfair.com/archives>
 - Liebowitz. A. “The Africa Covers” *Vanity Fair Magazine*. (Fig. 1.2) Available from: http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/07/onthecover_slideshow200707?slide=2#globalNav: July, 2007.
 - “The Green Issue” *Vanity Fair Magazine* website: <http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/toc/2007/toc200705>.

Other

- Chambers, B. and Dahl, Z. “The Four Idols of Sir Francis Bacon”. Available on *Sir Francis Bacon’s New Advancement of Learning* website. Available from: <http://www.sirbacon.org/zeb-ben.htm>.
- Comments on “Yes We Can-Barack Obama Music Video” available on the YouTube site at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyqcqcx-mYY>.
- “Decision ‘08”, *Black Entertainment Television (BET)* website: <http://www.bet.com/News/Decision08>.
- Frien, D. “*Vanity Fair: The One-Click History*”. *Vanity Fair Magazine* website. Available from: <http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/vintage/oneclickhistory>.
- Ludacris, “Politics as Usual.” Lyrics available at: http://www.6lyrics.com/music/ludacris/lyrics/politics_as_usual1.aspx. July, 2008.
- “Meet the Candidate”, on Barack Obama’s website: http://www.barackobama.com/learn/meet_barack.php.
- “Understanding The Ticker Tape”, *Investopedia, A Forbes Digital Company*. Available from: <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/01/070401.asp>.

- Obama, 2008 Primary Election Campaign Ad “Believe”. Available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEWOdyahXT8&feature=related>.

Discussion Group Resources:

- Levenberg, P. “Discussion Group on Barack Obama”, filmed at *University of Cape Town*, 11 and 12 September 2008. DVD available with the hand-in of this dissertation (labelled Appendix C). Running time: Approx 86 min.
- Levenberg, P. “Barack Obama Discussion Group Screening”, August, 2008. DVD available with hand-in of this dissertation (labelled Appendix D). Running Time: Approx 30 min.

Video Clips used in the making of this DVD (Appendix D)

- “America’s Youth Come Together for Obama”, statistics on youth voter turnout in early 2008 primary contests. Available from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_yq-6OZLRQ&feature=email. 1 February, 2008.
- “Barack Obama: He Completes Us (Lion King parody)” on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, aired on *Comedy Central*. Available from: <http://tv.muxlim.com/video/gpd7iacxHSQ/The-Daily-Show-Barack-Obama-He-Completes-Us-Lion-King-parody/>. September, 2008.
- “Bronx Students Discuss Obama’s Race Speech”, Available from YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9IldaegAB0>. 28 March, 2008.
- Kauffman, L., Relles, B., Friedrich, R. and Ettinger, A. “I Got A Crush on Obama”. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU>. 13 June, 2007.
- McCain, J. “Obama, Paris Hilton and Britney Spears attack ad.” Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c66HNq8qSZM>. July, 2008.
- “New Hampshire Youth look at Obama and Huckabee”. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jP47hZc6RBc>. 5 January, 2008.
- “Obama on the Youth Vote”, *Your Fate '08, ABC news*. Available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOB17pIFJK>. 20 December, 2007.
- Obama, B. “One Voice” campaign ad. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leZgnRGfD1w>. 31 December, 2007.
- Obama, B. “What If” campaign ad. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaU3fjVAFbE&feature=related>. 8 August, 2007.
- Obama, B. “Yes We Can”, *New Hampshire Primary Speech*. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fe751kMBwms>. 8 January, 2008.

- Will.i.am, Dylan, Jesse and Jurkovic, Mike. “Yes We Can – Barack Obama Music Video”. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyqcx-mYY&feature=related>. 2 February, 2008.

APPENDIX A

Discussion Group Report: **Participant Information and Selected Transcript**

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION:

NAME	AGE	SEX	RACE	US COLLEGE	DEGREE	HOMETOWN
1. Mengfei*	20	F	Asian-American	University of California (Irvine)	Undergraduate	Irvine, CA
2. Sarah*	20	F	White	Pomona College, CA	Undergraduate	North Carolina
3. Lauren*	20	F	White	Colorado College	Undergraduate	Denver, Colorado
4. Molly*	20	F	White	American University, D.C.	Undergraduate	Poughkeepsie, NY
5. Grant*	20	M	White	Washington and Lee University, Virginia	Undergraduate	Wilmington, Delaware
6. Theresa*	20	F	White	University of California (Berkeley)	Undergraduate	Berkeley, CA
7. Lilian*	20	F	African-American	Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania	Undergraduate	Boston, MA
8. Kim*	20	F	White	University of California (Berkeley)	Undergraduate	Santa Barbara, CA
9. Daniel*	20	M	White	Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia	Undergraduate	Orlando, Florida

Political Involvement	Number of Participants
Voted in 2008 Democratic primary contests	2
Voted in 2008 Republican primary contests	1
Total number who voted in the 2008 primary elections	3
Registered to vote in '08 national elections (absentee ballot)	9
Attended political talks/rallies	2
Campaigned for a politician	3*
Use social networking internet sites for campaign news	5

*1 participant campaigned for Barack Obama during the 2008 primary elections. 2 participants have campaigned for Republican candidates in previous election cycles.

Political Party/Affiliation	Number of Participants
Democratic Party	7
Republican Party	1
Independent	1

Candidate Choice for US National Elections 2008	Number of Participants
Barack Obama	8
John McCain	1

SELECTED TRANSCRIPT

SESSION ONE – 11/09/08

- DVD Screening
- Participants were given the opportunity to discuss issues raised in the DVD as well as offer initial thoughts and reflections on Barack Obama's candidacy/campaign.

- **Introductions**

Daniel* – “There is definitely an emotional connection [between Barack Obama and voters]. There is a certain mystique about him...like Camelot, but things are more complicated than that. He talks about being opposed to the war in Iraq and it's easy to be when you are just a state Senator from Illinois. But it doesn't matter because it feeds into what we hope and aspire to anyway. Even if you can see through some of it, it doesn't matter. Part of his appeal is him, part of it is the circumstances we find ourselves in. I don't think that he could've come along if it wasn't after eight years of George Bush. It's been one thing after the other with the administration, then Katrina... For him to emerge, we had to have come from the depth of malaise we are in.”

Grant* – “He's [Obama] a talented speaker and he is saying what people want to hear. It wasn't until the attack ad and the follow up that anything specific to policy was being discussed. Before it was just hope and change.”

- **Obama and Fanaticism**

Mengfei* – “This one girl in Nevada who I went on an Obama campaign tour with shook Obama's hand and refused to wash it for days. It creeped me out. Sure he's inspirational, but it was a little disturbing just to see how caught up some people were in him. I was volunteering because I knew you had to pick a candidate if you wanted to get involved in the process. But he had so many people who were worshipping him.”

Lauren* – “He does have a strange following, more so than any other candidate.”

Daniel* – “Can I disagree with that? I think that the Clinton campaigners are even more militant. It's a 'Her or Die' kind of thing.”

Mengfei* – “No, no, no... you should have heard some of these Obama campaigners. They were crazy.”

Lauren* – “It seems to me that he is targeting his campaign more towards youth. His campaign is more pop-arty and more appealing to young people. But they are not taking the time to look through everything and suddenly he has this huge following. Shouldn't you be voting on the issues, instead of what campaigns look like.”

- **Thoughts on Obama's Message**

Molly* – “I think at the beginning, Obama's campaign was unique. There was a point in the primaries when you saw the rest of the candidates changed their message and then it was the same message across the board. If you hadn't been following it from the outset, you wouldn't have picked up on that. A lot of people don't care about politics and they only picked up on things when it got close to their primary election. By then, there were barely any differences between the candidates. Part of his [Obama's] appeal, was that he had the same message from the beginning.”

Daniel* – “John Edwards had the theme of the Two Americas: That gets uncomfortable, because you don't know if you should be acknowledging these differentials. This is a stark contrast to Obama. The Clinton campaign never decided on a message and had these titles of nine words like, ‘Securing America's Energy Future and Bringing Jobs Back to Iowa....’ It's not that she isn't qualified, but her campaign struggled to find an appealing message.”

- **Obama and Celebrity Endorsements**

Grant* – “The youth vote always fails... historically.... These primaries were the first time it made an impact, whether it will make an impact in the general elections is yet to be seen. Regarding the celebrity thing, I think it takes away as much as it adds. Some people think, ‘How can you take this guy seriously with Puff Daddy wearing Obama or die.’ You had a quote from Bruce Springsteen: Why should I care what some 52-year-old rocker has to say about politics. He's a monkey...I pay him to entertain me...I don't want to hear his thoughts on politics. I never take celebrity endorsements seriously.”

Molly* – I think that the purpose of celebrity endorsements isn't to try and get students like us who are in university. Whether we are studying politics or not, we have some grasp of it. The kids who don't know what is going on, and don't have anything in their lives to pull them into politics, all of a sudden see somebody that they recognise, and that, if nothing else, is enough to get them to watch the commercial. Maybe it won't have any effect, but there is a chance that it will."

Daniel* – "I think that it [celebrity endorsements] feeds the enthusiasm – the fanatics – the people who are already in it. That music video was to rally the base. The Yes We Can music video came out after he lost in New Hampshire to keep the enthusiasm up."

Lauren* – "Celebrities promote products because it does sell things."

Mengfei* – "To say that celebrities are targeted at people who aren't educated is not the way it works. A lot of the college students we were working with on the Obama campaign didn't know the issues either. They felt that they were voting for judgement, not issues. I don't think that celebrity endorsements are that important. I think Obama's biggest strength lay in his grassroots organisation and knocking on peoples' doors."

Molly* – "It [the impact] depends on the celebrity. It's hard to argue that having Oprah endorse your campaign means nothing. If she comes out and says that she's for something, even if it is for a book... The people she impacts are not the people who are necessarily paying attention. It's a part of the electorate who have more important things in their lives than which politician they are going to support: Mothers who spend all of their time working at home."

Mengfei* – "All the fieldworkers of the Congresswoman's office get together and watch Oprah religiously. It's no coincidence that after Oprah came out in support of Obama, Ellen Degeneres became the most popular talk show host. It had a backlash against Oprah."

Daniel* – "Oprah has a window into the homes of women's lives that other celebrities don't have."

Lauren* – "People trust Oprah. She says something is a good book, and it's flying off the shelf."

Daniel* – “His celebrity is important. The Democratic primaries became a battle of celebrities between him and Clinton. Other candidates didn’t have a chance.”

- **Closing Thoughts**

Grant* – “All we have been discussing is the Democratic primary process. In the general election, Obama is going to have to radically change the style of campaigning he has been using, because he’s going to lose. He was targeting the Democratic base and to win you have to target everyone. It’s going to be disastrous on election day if he doesn’t.”

Mengfei* – “If he changes, he won’t be anything special.”

Grant* – “Republicans have adopted the theme of change, because we want it [change] to. Bush is unpopular. McCain has butted heads with Bush on issues all the time.”

Daniel* – “Democrats have to show that McCain isn’t in fact that different. He is still pro-guns, pro-life, supports Reagan economics...”

Grant* – “People talk about Biden being elected because he voted for the war and he is part of the Democratic establishment that Obama claimed not to be part of: He chose this Washington insider.”

SESSION TWO – 12/09/08

- **On Political Involvement**

Molly* – “It is more than of an anomaly not to be involved in politics at my school, but it depends on where you are.”

Lauren* – “More young people are getting involved than ever before, but there is still a lot of apathy. One of my friends was never really involved before, but now he is a major Obama campaigner. He said he supported Obama because he is for change, and a revolutionary, but he couldn’t really back up why.”

Molly* – “I’m not apolitical, but not partisan.”

The general consensus among participants was that it was fairly easy to get involved in politics at their universities, if it was a politically-dynamic college. On those campuses that were not particularly politically active, for example Pomona College and Washington and Lee University, participants said that it was easier to become politically involved outside of campus life. They all agreed that Barack Obama was the most visible candidate on their campus during the Primaries, followed by Republican candidate, Ron Paul.

- **On the Political Involvement/Affiliation of their Parents**

Daniel* – “My mom knows she has been interested [in politics] because I’m watching her. My dad went from very apathetic to being a right-wing guy. Now he is going to vote Republican.” (Daniel* plans to vote for Obama in the 2008 elections).

Kim* – “My mom is a county supervisor so she is very involved in politics. She was a big Hillary Clinton supporter, but now she is going to vote for Obama.”

Sarah* – “My mother was a big Clinton supporter, as was the rest of my family, and she is very upset that Obama has not been putting enough effort into getting the middle-age female vote. She hasn’t got any campaign details from Obama, which she thinks it is very rude of him. She won’t change her party though.”

Grant* – “My parents are pretty involved so they got me involved. But, they supported different people than me in the primaries.”

- **Thoughts on Obama’s Candidacy**

Initial Associations:

Sarah* – “I think of a big blue sign that says Obama for change.”

Grant* – “I always think of a March 2008 interview with rapper DMX. DMX was asked, ‘Have you been paying attention to politics.’ He said, ‘Nah, I can’t vote,’ because he is a convicted felon. The interviewer asked him, ‘What do you think of Barack Obama?’ And DMX said, ‘Who dat?’ ‘He’s running for president’, replied the interviewer. DMX said, ‘Is he African? His mama didn’t name him no Barack, that’s not a name.’”

- **Barack Obama and Charisma**

Daniel* – “Hillary and McCain would rather have a debate about his popularity than the issues. He is not a stupid talking head. He was the president of the Harvard Law Review. He is able to articulate himself and he does have plans, but he is not a policy wonk like Hillary Clinton. He had a coherent, brief message to inspire people, while Clinton had long-winded policy tours. If Clinton was that charismatic, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

Sarah* – “That [his charisma] is why he can get away with not addressing policies.”

Daniel* – “I don’t think he is ignoring policies. At the Democratic Convention, he defined what change was, but I had heard that speech before from him. People tune into what they want: If they bought into the fact that he is a celebrity and they really like him, then they have done that, but you can’t undo his charisma. He’s not a nervy, policy wonk, and it didn’t work for Al Gore or John Kerry. Americans don’t like to vote for people who talk down to them. Bush is effective in connecting with people. This is part of his success. Obama can connect with people like Bush can, which Clinton couldn’t.”

- **On Obama’s Story**

Daniel* – “He’s the first black president. He is different, because he is multi-racial and he has a story that I can connect to because I was raised by a single mother and my grandparents. It’s really weird that you’d think I have nothing in common with this guy from Hawaii that lived in Indonesia, but our childhoods are really similar.”

Sarah* – “I don’t think it [his story] matters that much. I don’t see how a candidate’s personal life has all that much to do with their politics. In the case of Obama, I feel like his politics are overlooked by the fact that he is a very good speaker. Therefore, the things that he says in his speeches and the movement towards change, being his main rhetoric. That is what the main focus is on and when it comes to people talking about what his policy description would be, there really isn’t one.”

Kim* to Sarah* – “Don’t you think you have to look at someone’s personal experiences?”

At least five participants agreed, “It does matter.”

Sarah* – “It [Obama’s story] affects likeability a lot more than actual policy.”

Kim* – “If you are going to trust someone to lead your country, you kind of want to know who you are voting for.”

Daniel* – “After the 2004 elections, anyone that doesn’t think that a person’s personal story matters...if you look at the issues alone, the President’s [Bush’s] approval rating, the economy... if it was just a generic battle of Republican versus Democrat, this would be a landslide election, but people want to know: Is this guy Muslim? Who is this man? Why does he have a funny name? Does he hate America? Whether or not you think it should matter is a different question to whether the fact that it clearly does matter.”

Grant* – “That’s standard procedure for anyone running for President, that they are analysed, that people find out what their [the candidate] 4th grade substitute teacher called them and every other little thing about them.”

- **Key Moments in Obama’s Primary Campaign**

Lilian* – “The race speech was pretty monumental. As a person of colour living in the United States, I had never heard anybody talk about race like that, so candidly and so honestly. He is mixed, African-American, and has multiple experiences. He is really able to open up about that and talk about that. You look at him and he lives as a black man. That speech really spoke to different kinds of people. I could relate to it, it was something I would think about with a group of people who felt they had no voice. My parents are a mixed couple, and were really surprised to hear it [the speech]. My dad is Ethiopian, and my mom is a white American.”

Daniel* – “It’s easy to understate the hugeness of that speech. Up until that point, people were wondering could he pull it off? They didn’t know if he was a serious candidate. Obama showed people that not only could he win, but he could win in Iowa.”

One participant added, “It took longer than Iowa.”

Daniel* – “His victory in Iowa showed that not only could he beat Hillary Clinton, which is one of the biggest upsets in political history in a long time. It was huge news. Across the world, people read the paper and saw that people voted for a black man. This primary showed

that he had real liability. When he won 10 primaries in a row, when he gained that momentum, it was a high point in this campaign.”

Mengfei* – “A lot of people thought Iowa was a fluke. A lot of black people, especially the older generation, thought he isn’t really African-American, he’s African and he’s white and he went through Harvard and he’s not one of us. He wasn’t around for the Civil Rights movement. He wasn’t there, how could he be one of us. That was after Iowa. That turning point only came when he started winning the Southern states.

His speeches were good, but I’m not going to vote for someone based on his speech. What convinced me was the way his campaign was run, more than any speech. Clinton had so much money but her campaign was inefficient and there was a lot of backstabbing within her camp: If you can’t run a campaign, how are you going to run a country?”

Molly* – “A highlight in Obama’s campaign was the Kennedy endorsement, not really for our generation, but it had a huge effect on our parents and their parents. It really pulled those people into the campaign.”

- **On Obama’s Slogans**

Mengfei* – “That [about the slogans] was actually really funny. There are blogs dedicated to reviewing typeface which said that that Barack Obama’s poster design was the best they’d ever seen. They were better than Bush’s posters in 2004. The way the ‘O’ was designed was consistent and the spaces between the letters were consistent. They were simple enough to remember. Hillary’s were inconsistent. [Obama’s posters] were really good branding.”

- **Barack Obama and Technology**

Lauren* – “I have a friend who wants to marry McCain’s son and she had to do a project on political blogs and websites. She said that when she went onto Obama’s campaign website, she could feel herself being sucked in: She said she could hear heavenly harps the way they backlight him. She was quickly clicking through stuff and telling herself she couldn’t get involved and even thought of donating money.”

Lilian* – “Text messages were really effective in informing young voters particularly about upcoming events.”

Daniel* – “The online component of his campaign made you want to donate money to Obama’s campaign. People never really felt inclined to give John Kerry any of their money. You work too hard for your money to give it away to John Kerry. There’s something about Obama that has gotten my college roommate in Atlanta to give money and James donates sperm for a living and James smokes a lot of marijuana, and James doesn’t really do anything productive, and Barack Obama has been able to tap into that resource as well.”

Lilian* – “Yes We Can is about yes, even if you only have a little bit of money, you can be a part of something.”

Lauren* – People have said that Obama’s campaign is a Mac campaign, while Clinton’s was a PC campaign.”

“Obama managed to organise ex-pats living abroad to vote in the primaries.”

Daniel* – “Obama organised 17-year-olds who would be eligible to vote come national election time.”

- **Why are Young People Voting for McCain over Obama?**

Grant* – “McCain’s campaign has been pretty lacklustre. The introduction of his running mate has regenerated it. I wouldn’t say that anyone is supporting McCain because he is so dreamy and gives such great speeches. I support him for his policies and social stances. It involves more thought though than ‘Oh he’s so dreamy.’ I have friends who are members of the Facebook group, ‘Barack Obama for President, or father of my baby – preferably both.’ I don’t think you will get a John McCain group like that. Ben Stein before the national August conventions wrote an editorial in the *New York Times* that said McCain’s campaign was one of the worst he had seen during his time in politics and he had worked for Nixon, Reagan and others in Washington. None of McCain’s success has to do with his campaign.”

Grant* – “Young people are liberal by default.”

Other participants disagreed, “No, not by default.”

Grant* – I like that quote by Winston Churchill, “Don’t trust a conservative under 30 or a liberal over 30.”

Lauren* – “My friends who are voting for McCain have done their research and understand why they are supporting him; not because he is really cool, he’s got great graphics or because his campaign has been targeted at us. A lot of my friends who are voting for Obama don’t know a lot about his policies. But, he’s created this big following and it’s the cool thing to do to join that following.”

“Young people are naïve enough to believe in his message.”

- **The Role of the Media in Obama’s Campaign**

Lilian* – The Will.I.Am video [Yes We Can Music Video], effectively mixed celebrity status with messages. Rapper Nas came up with a song about him.”

Mengfei* – “The media was in love with him. This didn’t really help because it opened up the issue that the media was being so biased and they love to hate the media in the US.”

Grant* – “The media prefer to report on Obama because he is a more appealing person, it sells, and gets people to tune in.”

Sarah* – “Media coverage makes people pay attention.”

- **The Generational Gap**

Daniel* – “Instrumental in the connection with young voters, is that Obama is of a new generation and that he is the first post baby-boomer president. He came of age in the 80’s. This was before us, but different from [Bill] Clinton, [Hillary] Clinton, Bush, Kerry and certainly McCain who is not even part of the baby-boomer generation. There is a sense of freshness. The people of our generation remember the Clinton administration, but we were still really young. It’s kind of old baggage to us. We’re willing to turn the page, not to borrow a campaign motto from Obama. There is a sense of enough is enough. Are people in their 40’, 50’s and 60’s going to have a stranglehold on public discourse in this country forever?”

Mengfei* – “People I know have been fed-up with the baby-boomers. They ask ‘Why aren’t you guys like us?’ They [the baby boomers] act like they were the best generation ever. They were like, ‘60’s the new 30, then 70’s the new 30.’ They are just not going to let go. I got pretty fed up with that.

Sarah* – “People don’t recognise our generation because they’re stuck in the 60’s.”

Daniel* – “With previous candidates, there were just arguments about whether they had served in Vietnam or not. That’s so far removed from our lives. Al Gore reinvented himself with his documentaries. He was definitely not cool though.”

Molly* – “Part of the Hillary Clinton appeal was Bill Clinton. People said that they were going to get two for the price of one. This speaks to the generation gap.”

- **On Obama and Issues Facing America**

Most said the economy and the war in Iraq were the top priorities.

Mengfei* – “Everyone [all candidates] pays lip-service to the environment, but they don’t really want to make the sacrifices.”

Most participants were not completely confident in Obama’s ability to deliver on these issues.

Molly* – “It’s hard to have confidence in one person to take care of everything, because our system is built around making sure that one person can’t make the decision. No matter who we elect, or what they tell us their policies are, isn’t necessarily what they are going to end up standing for in the long run because they have body after body of legislation that they have to work with throughout the process. Maybe its terrible, but I’m a little bit less concerned about the specific policies that these candidates say they stand for, because in the long run, what they tell me they are going to fight for to the very end, are probably not going to happen – it’s going to be some compromise in the middle.”

Grant* – “The biggest thing is what the make-up of the Congress will be and appointments to the Supreme Court.”

Daniel* – “At least if I vote for Obama, I know who is going to nominate and staff in these areas. I hope we won’t have a politicised justice department like we have had. He will appoint people that are more like him.

- **Weighing Up the Candidates**

Molly* – “He [Obama] has put so much effort into getting the youth involved, I think if he is elected, throughout his term, there is going to be a shift. On some level, he is going to be concerned about keeping that level of involvement up. If youth voter participation decreases in subsequent elections, that’s what people will remember about him.”

Sarah* – “I was hesitant to send in my absentee ballot, because I realised how much it might matter who wins this election. I haven’t decided I’m going to vote for Obama, but there really isn’t much choice.”

Molly* – “A lot of people are still on the fence. A lot has been made about the fact that McCain is really old for a candidate. Chances are, he’ll be a one-term president because he is too old to run again. Is that an incentive to vote for him? People know that whatever happens, it’s four years and then there’s another option. Maybe the fact that he is a sort of rogue politician means that he will be less concerned about securing a second term and more focused on the issues and pushing for what needs to get done.”

Grant* – “The campaign has gone for so long, I respect Obama a lot more than I did initially.”

- **On Partisanship**

Lilian* – “Political parties don’t stand for what they did originally.”

Molly* – “There is a push for compromise in America right now and that’s what is so appealing about both candidates. Both have a record of working with the other side. That’s what’s making it so difficult. People have to look at the candidate rather than the party and too many people are looking at the party instead of the candidate.”

Daniel* – “There are people on both sides now that I can trust and agree with, but their personal integrity cannot overcome the ideological differences that come between us. The reality is, that there is partisanship.”

Grant* – “It’s not that one is right and one is wrong. It’s two ways of looking at the same thing. It’s not as simple as being liberal or conservative. It’s not ok well I think this way on

the economic issue, therefore this is my stance on the death penalty and abortion. Because of the way partisan politics works, its about what you care about more.”

Mengfei* – “The easiest way to get involved in politics, is to pick a candidate and pick a side...Economically, Obama is a mix of right-wing and left-wing economic policies. My parents went through the Cultural Revolution and they know all too well what happens when people stick to ideological lines. I like that he is not ideological because of my past.”

Email Conversation with Daniel*: 12/09/08

Obama’s celebrity, his oratory, his unique story, his popularity with youth make him very interesting, but they do not undo or make up the underlying fundamentals of the election: the economy, the economy, the war, the incumbent unpopularity, and the economy. The election is a far way off and people outside of highly interested are just now tuning in. Polls don’t reflect people’s willingness to wait to make up their mind until closer, or the changing voter registration dynamics, or the ground organisation and GOTV efforts invested in by the campaigns.

I think Obama’s appeal to young people is party generational and a result of the way he has run this campaign – more so than individual issues. All of the Dems played the same lip service to the environment, college affordability, the war etc... I also would hesitate to believe that we are somehow a different generation of political conscientiousness. My friends are not. This election is highly unusual and interesting, and people are sick of the last eight years of Bush. Our generation may volunteer more, but as college admissions become ever so increasingly competitive, you will find our generation has been more involved in extracurricular activities as a whole growing up. Sports, instruments, volunteering, test prep...(Oprah did a show on it.) We are products of a regimented, middle class, resource available, baby-boomer generation who expects university educations for their children in a time when there are a lot of well round applicants, and colleges can afford to look for better. The youth vote will be interesting to watch this election – for sure he has brought more people into the fold, especially African-Americans. But in 2004 the youth vote was up, as was voter turnout in all demographics. I’m curious to see what impact we will have – for sure other demographics will not be sitting this one out.

Thanks for the invite to participate. I would love to hear your findings or continuing thoughts.

Daniel*

APPENDIX B

Selected Speeches Delivered by Barack Obama

- “One Voice”, *Keynote Address at the Democratic Convention*. February, 2004.
- “2006 Pentecost Keynote Address” at *Call to Renewal’s Building a Covenant for a New America Conference*, Washington. 28 June, 2006.
- “Announcing Candidacy for President”, Springfield, Illinois. 10 February, 2007.
- “Yes We Can”, *New Hampshire Primary Speech*. 8 January, 2008.
- “Victory Speech in South Carolina”, delivered in Columbia, S.C., 26 January 2008.
- “Super Tuesday Speech”, Illinois. 6 February, 2008.
- “A More Perfect Union”, Philadelphia, PA. 18 March, 2008.

“One Voice” Speech

Barack Obama’s Keynote Address to the Democratic Convention | February, 2004

On behalf of the great state of Illinois, crossroads of a nation, land of Lincoln, let me express my deep gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention. Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let's face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father, my grandfather, was a cook, a domestic servant.

But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place; America which stood as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before. While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs and farms through most of the Depression. The day after Pearl Harbor he signed up for duty, joined Patton's army and marched across Europe. Back home, my grandmother raised their baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line. After the war, they studied on the G.I. Bill, bought a house through FHA, and moved west in search of opportunity.

And they, too, had big dreams for their daughter, a common dream, born of two continents. My parents shared not only an improbable love; they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or "blessed," believing that in a tolerant America your name is no barrier to success. They imagined me going to the best schools in the land, even though they weren't rich, because in a generous America you don't have to be rich to achieve your potential. They are both passed away now. Yet, I know that, on this night, they look down on me with pride.

I stand here today, grateful for the diversity of my heritage, aware that my parents' dreams live on in my precious daughters. 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, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible. Tonight, we gather to affirm the greatness of our nation, not because of the height of our skyscrapers, or the power of our military, or the size of our economy. Our pride is based on a very simple premise, summed up in a declaration made over two hundred years ago, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

That is the true genius of America, a faith in the simple dreams of its people, the insistence on small miracles. That we can tuck in our children at night and know they are fed and clothed and safe from harm. That we can say what we think, write what we think, without hearing a sudden knock on the door. That we can have an idea and start our own business without paying a bribe or hiring somebody's son. That we can participate in the political process without fear of retribution, and that our votes will be counted -- or at least, most of the time.

This year, in this election, we are called to reaffirm our values and commitments, to hold them against a hard reality and see how we are measuring up, to the legacy of our forbearers, and the promise of future generations. And fellow Americans -- Democrats, Republicans, Independents -- I say to you tonight: we have more work to do. More to do for the workers I met in Galesburg, Illinois, who are losing their union jobs at the Maytag plant that's moving to Mexico, and now are having to compete with their own children for jobs that pay seven bucks an hour. More to do for the father I met who was losing his job and choking back tears, wondering how he would pay \$4,500 a month for the drugs his son needs without the health benefits he counted on. More to do for the young woman in East St. Louis, and thousands more like her, who has the grades, has the drive, has the will, but doesn't have the money to go to college.

Don't get me wrong. The people I meet in small towns and big cities, in diners and office parks, they don't expect government to solve all their problems. They know they have to work hard to get ahead and they want to. Go into the collar counties around Chicago, and people will tell you they don't want their tax money wasted by a welfare agency or the Pentagon. Go into any inner city neighborhood, and folks will tell you that government alone can't teach kids to learn. They know that parents have to parent, that children can't achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white. No, people don't expect government to solve all their problems. But they sense, deep in their bones, that with just a change in priorities, we can make sure that every child in America has a decent shot at life, and that the doors of opportunity remain open to all. They know we can do better. And they want that choice.

In this election, we offer that choice. Our party has chosen a man to lead us who embodies the best this country has to offer. That man is John Kerry. John Kerry understands the ideals of community, faith, and sacrifice, because they've defined his life. From his heroic service in Vietnam to his years as prosecutor and lieutenant governor, through two decades in the United States Senate, he has devoted himself to this country. Again and again, we've seen him make tough choices when easier ones were available. His values and his record affirm what is

best in us.

John Kerry believes in an America where hard work is rewarded. So instead of offering tax breaks to companies shipping jobs overseas, he'll offer them to companies creating jobs here at home. John Kerry believes in an America where all Americans can afford the same health coverage our politicians in Washington have for themselves. John Kerry believes in energy independence, so we aren't held hostage to the profits of oil companies or the sabotage of foreign oil fields. John Kerry believes in the constitutional freedoms that have made our country the envy of the world, and he will never sacrifice our basic liberties nor use faith as a wedge to divide us. And John Kerry believes that in a dangerous world, war must be an option, but it should never be the first option.

A while back, I met a young man named Shamus at the VFW Hall in East Moline, Illinois. He was a good-looking kid, 6'2" or 6'3", clear eyed, with an easy smile. He told me he'd joined the Marines and was heading to Iraq the following week. As I listened to him explain why he'd enlisted, his absolute faith in our country and its leaders, his devotion to duty and service, I thought this young man was all any of us might hope for in a child. But then I asked myself: Are we serving Shamus as well as he was serving us? I thought of more than 900 service men and women, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and neighbors, who will not be returning to their hometowns. I thought of families I had met who were struggling to get by without a loved one's full income, or whose loved ones had returned with a limb missing or with nerves shattered, but who still lacked long-term health benefits because they were reservists. When we send our young men and women into harm's way, we have a solemn obligation not to fudge the numbers or shade the truth about why they're going, to care for their families while they're gone, to tend to the soldiers upon their return, and to never ever go to war without enough troops to win the war, secure the peace, and earn the respect of the world.

Now let me be clear. We have real enemies in the world. These enemies must be found. They must be pursued and they must be defeated. John Kerry knows this. And just as Lieutenant Kerry did not hesitate to risk his life to protect the men who served with him in Vietnam, President Kerry will not hesitate one moment to use our military might to keep America safe and secure. John Kerry believes in America. And he knows it's not enough for just some of us to prosper. For alongside our famous individualism, there's another ingredient in the American saga.

A belief that we are connected as one people. If there's a child on the south side of Chicago

who can't read, that matters to me, even if it's not my child. If there's a senior citizen somewhere who can't pay for her prescription and has to choose between medicine and the rent, that makes my life poorer, even if it's not my grandmother. If there's an Arab American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties. It's that fundamental belief -- I am my brother's keeper, I am my sisters' 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.

Yet even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us, the spin masters and negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of anything goes. Well, I say to them tonight, 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. The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the Red States. We coach Little League in the Blue States and have gay friends in the Red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and patriots who supported it. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.

In the end, that's what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism or a politics of hope? John Kerry calls on us to hope. John Edwards calls on us to hope. I'm not talking about blind optimism here -- the almost willful ignorance that thinks unemployment will go away if we just don't talk about it, or the health care crisis will solve itself if we just ignore it. No, I'm talking about something more substantial. It's the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a mill worker's son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too. The audacity of hope!

In the end, that 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. I believe we can give our middle class relief and provide working families with a road to opportunity. I believe we can provide jobs to the jobless, homes to the homeless, and reclaim young people in cities across America from violence and despair. I believe that as we stand on the crossroads of history, we can make the right choices, and meet the challenges that face us. America!

Tonight, if you feel the same energy I do, the same urgency I do, the same passion I do, the same hopefulness I do -- if we do what we must do, then I have no doubt that all across the country, from Florida to Oregon, from Washington to Maine, the people will rise up in November, and John Kerry will be sworn in as president, and John Edwards will be sworn in as vice president, and this country will reclaim its promise, and out of this long political darkness a brighter day will come. Thank you and God bless you.

Pentecost Keynote Address

Delivered at a Call to Renewal's Building a Covenant for a New America Conference in Washington | 28 June, 2006

Good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to speak here at the Call to Renewal's Building a Covenant for a New America conference. I've had the opportunity to take a look at your Covenant for a New America. It is filled with outstanding policies and prescriptions for much of what ails this country. So I'd like to congratulate you all on the thoughtful presentations you've given so far about poverty and justice in America, and for putting fire under the feet of the political leadership here in Washington.

But today I'd like to talk about the connection between religion and politics and perhaps offer some thoughts about how we can sort through some of the often bitter arguments that we've been seeing over the last several years.

I do so because, as you all know, we can affirm the importance of poverty in the Bible; and we can raise up and pass out this Covenant for a New America. We can talk to the press, and we can discuss the religious call to address poverty and environmental stewardship all we want, but it won't have an impact unless we tackle head-on the mutual suspicion that sometimes exists between religious America and secular America.

I want to give you an example that I think illustrates this fact. As some of you know, during the 2004 U.S. Senate General Election I ran against a gentleman named Alan Keyes. Mr. Keyes is well-versed in the Jerry Falwell-Pat Robertson style of rhetoric that often labels progressives as both immoral and godless.

Indeed, Mr. Keyes announced towards the end of the campaign that, "Jesus Christ would not vote for Barack Obama. Christ would not vote for Barack Obama because Barack Obama has behaved in a way that it is inconceivable for Christ to have behaved."

Jesus Christ would not vote for Barack Obama. □□ Now, I was urged by some of my liberal

supporters not to take this statement seriously, to essentially ignore it. To them, Mr. Keyes was an extremist, and his arguments not worth entertaining. And since at the time, I was up 40 points in the polls, it probably wasn't a bad piece of strategic advice.

But what they didn't understand, however, was that I had to take Mr. Keyes seriously, for he claimed to speak for my religion, and my God. He claimed knowledge of certain truths.

Mr. Obama says he's a Christian, he was saying, and yet he supports a lifestyle that the Bible calls an abomination.

Mr. Obama says he's a Christian, but supports the destruction of innocent and sacred life.

And so what would my supporters have me say? How should I respond? Should I say that a literalist reading of the Bible was folly? Should I say that Mr. Keyes, who is a Roman Catholic, should ignore the teachings of the Pope?

Unwilling to go there, I answered with what has come to be the typically liberal response in such debates – namely, I said that we live in a pluralistic society, that I can't impose my own religious views on another, that I was running to be the U.S. Senator of Illinois and not the Minister of Illinois.

But Mr. Keyes's implicit accusation that I was not a true Christian nagged at me, and I was also aware that my answer did not adequately address the role my faith has in guiding my own values and my own beliefs.

Now, my dilemma was by no means unique. In a way, it reflected the broader debate we've been having in this country for the last thirty years over the role of religion in politics.

For some time now, there has been plenty of talk among pundits and pollsters that the political divide in this country has fallen sharply along religious lines. Indeed, the single biggest "gap" in party affiliation among white Americans today is not between men and women, or those who reside in so-called Red States and those who reside in Blue, but between those who attend church regularly and those who don't.

Conservative leaders have been all too happy to exploit this gap, consistently reminding evangelical Christians that Democrats disrespect their values and dislike their Church, while suggesting to the rest of the country that religious Americans care only about issues like abortion and gay marriage; school prayer and intelligent design.

Democrats, for the most part, have taken the bait. At best, we may try to avoid the conversation about religious values altogether, fearful of offending anyone and claiming that – regardless of our personal beliefs – constitutional principles tie our hands. At worst, there are some liberals who dismiss religion in the public square as inherently irrational or intolerant, insisting on a caricature of religious Americans that paints them as fanatical, or thinking that the very word “Christian” describes one’s political opponents, not people of faith.

Now, such strategies of avoidance may work for progressives when our opponent is Alan Keyes. But over the long haul, I think we make a mistake when we fail to acknowledge the power of faith in people’s lives -- in the lives of the American people -- and I think it’s time that we join a serious debate about how to reconcile faith with our modern, pluralistic democracy.

And if we’re going to do that then we first need to understand that Americans are a religious people. 90 percent of us believe in God, 70 percent affiliate themselves with an organized religion, 38 percent call themselves committed Christians, and substantially more people in America believe in angels than they do in evolution.

This religious tendency is not simply the result of successful marketing by skilled preachers or the draw of popular mega-churches. In fact, it speaks to a hunger that’s deeper than that – a hunger that goes beyond any particular issue or cause.

Each day, it seems, thousands of Americans are going about their daily rounds – dropping off the kids at school, driving to the office, flying to a business meeting, shopping at the mall, trying to stay on their diets – and they’re coming to the realization that something is missing. They are deciding that their work, their possessions, their diversions, their sheer busyness, is not enough.

They want a sense of purpose, a narrative arc to their lives. They’re looking to relieve a chronic loneliness, a feeling supported by a recent study that shows Americans have fewer close friends and confidants than ever before. And so they need an assurance that somebody out there cares about them, is listening to them – that they are not just destined to travel down that long highway towards nothingness.

And I speak with some experience on this matter. I was not raised in a particularly religious household, as undoubtedly many in the audience were. My father, who returned to Kenya when I was just two, was born Muslim but as an adult became an atheist. My mother, whose

parents were non-practicing Baptists and Methodists, was probably one of the most spiritual and kindest people I've ever known, but grew up with a healthy skepticism of organized religion herself. As a consequence, so did I.

It wasn't until after college, when I went to Chicago to work as a community organizer for a group of Christian churches, that I confronted my own spiritual dilemma.

I was working with churches, and the Christians who I worked with recognized themselves in me. They saw that I knew their Book and that I shared their values and sang their songs. But they sensed that a part of me that remained removed, detached, that I was an observer in their midst.

And in time, I came to realize that something was missing as well -- that without a vessel for my beliefs, without a commitment to a particular community of faith, at some level I would always remain apart, and alone.

And if it weren't for the particular attributes of the historically black church, I may have accepted this fate. But as the months passed in Chicago, I found myself drawn -- not just to work with the church, but to be in the church.

For one thing, I believed and still believe in the power of the African-American religious tradition to spur social change, a power made real by some of the leaders here today. Because of its past, the black church understands in an intimate way the Biblical call to feed the hungry and cloth the naked and challenge powers and principalities. And in its historical struggles for freedom and the rights of man, I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death, but rather as an active, palpable agent in the world. As a source of hope.

And perhaps it was out of this intimate knowledge of hardship -- the grounding of faith in struggle -- that the church offered me a second insight, one that I think is important to emphasize today.

Faith doesn't mean that you don't have doubts.

You need to come to church in the first place precisely because you are first of this world, not apart from it. You need to embrace Christ precisely because you have sins to wash away -- because you are human and need an ally in this difficult journey.

It was because of these newfound understandings that I was finally able to walk down the aisle of Trinity United Church of Christ on 95th Street in the Southside of Chicago one day and affirm my Christian faith. It came about as a choice, and not an epiphany. I didn't fall out in church. The questions I had didn't magically disappear. But kneeling beneath that cross on the South Side, I felt that I heard God's spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth.

That's a path that has been shared by millions upon millions of Americans – evangelicals, Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims alike; some since birth, others at certain turning points in their lives. It is not something they set apart from the rest of their beliefs and values. In fact, it is often what drives their beliefs and their values.

And that is why that, if we truly hope to speak to people where they're at – to communicate our hopes and values in a way that's relevant to their own – then as progressives, we cannot abandon the field of religious discourse.

Because when we ignore the debate about what it means to be a good Christian or Muslim or Jew; when we discuss religion only in the negative sense of where or how it should not be practiced, rather than in the positive sense of what it tells us about our obligations towards one another; when we shy away from religious venues and religious broadcasts because we assume that we will be unwelcome – others will fill the vacuum, those with the most insular views of faith, or those who cynically use religion to justify partisan ends.

In other words, if we don't reach out to evangelical Christians and other religious Americans and tell them what we stand for, then the Jerry Falwells and Pat Robertsons and Alan Keyeses will continue to hold sway.

More fundamentally, the discomfort of some progressives with any hint of religion has often prevented us from effectively addressing issues in moral terms. Some of the problem here is rhetorical – if we scrub language of all religious content, 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 judgments of the Lord." Or King's I Have a Dream speech without references to "all of God's children." Their summoning of a higher truth helped inspire what had seemed impossible, and move the nation to embrace a common destiny.

Our failure as progressives to tap into the moral underpinnings of the nation is not just rhetorical, though. Our fear of getting “preachy” may also lead us to discount the role that values and culture play in some of our most urgent social problems.

After all, the problems of poverty and racism, the uninsured and the unemployed, are not simply technical problems in search of the perfect ten point plan. They are rooted in both societal indifference and individual callousness – in the imperfections of man.

Solving these problems will require changes in government policy, but it will also require changes in hearts and a change in minds. I believe in keeping guns out of our inner cities, and that our leaders must say so in the face of the gun manufacturers’ lobby – but I also believe that when a gang-banger shoots indiscriminately into a crowd because he feels somebody disrespected him, we’ve got a moral problem. There’s a hole in that young man’s heart – a hole that the government alone cannot fix.

I believe in vigorous enforcement of our non-discrimination laws. But I also believe that a transformation of conscience and a genuine commitment to diversity on the part of the nation’s CEOs could bring about quicker results than a battalion of lawyers. They have more lawyers than us anyway.

I think that we should put more of our tax dollars into educating poor girls and boys. I think that the work that Marian Wright Edelman has done all her life is absolutely how we should prioritize our resources in the wealthiest nation on earth. I also think that we should give them the information about contraception that can prevent unwanted pregnancies, lower abortion rates, and help assure that that every child is loved and cherished.

But, you know, my Bible tells me that if we train a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not turn from it. So I think faith and guidance can help fortify a young woman’s sense of self, a young man’s sense of responsibility, and a sense of reverence that all young people should have for the act of sexual intimacy.

I am not suggesting that every progressive suddenly latch on to religious terminology – that can be dangerous. Nothing is more transparent than inauthentic expressions of faith. As Jim has mentioned, some politicians come and clap -- off rhythm -- to the choir. We don’t need that.

In fact, because I do not believe that religious people have a monopoly on morality, I would rather have someone who is grounded in morality and ethics, and who is also secular, affirm

their morality and ethics and values without pretending that they're something they're not. They don't need to do that. None of us need to do that.

But what I am suggesting is this – secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering into the public square. Frederick Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, Williams Jennings Bryant, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King – indeed, the majority of great reformers in American history – were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious language to argue for their cause. So to say that men and women should not inject their “personal morality” into public policy debates is a practical absurdity. Our law is by definition a codification of morality, much of it grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Moreover, if we progressives shed some of these biases, we might recognize some overlapping values that both religious and secular people share when it comes to the moral and material direction of our country. We might recognize that the call to sacrifice on behalf of the next generation, the need to think in terms of “thou” and not just “I,” resonates in religious congregations all across the country. And we might realize that we have the ability to reach out to the evangelical community and engage millions of religious Americans in the larger project of American renewal.

Some of this is already beginning to happen. Pastors, friends of mine like Rick Warren and T.D. Jakes are wielding their enormous influences to confront AIDS, Third World debt relief, and the genocide in Darfur. Religious thinkers and activists like our good friend Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo are lifting up the Biblical injunction to help the poor as a means of mobilizing Christians against budget cuts to social programs and growing inequality.

And by the way, we need Christians on Capitol Hill, Jews on Capitol Hill and Muslims on Capitol Hill talking about the estate tax. When you've got an estate tax debate that proposes a trillion dollars being taken out of social programs to go to a handful of folks who don't need and weren't even asking for it, you know that we need an injection of morality in our political debate.

Across the country, individual churches like my own and your own are sponsoring day care programs, building senior centers, helping ex-offenders reclaim their lives, and rebuilding our gulf coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

So the question is, how do we build on these still-tentative partnerships between religious and secular people of good will? It's going to take more work, a lot more work than we've done so far. The tensions and the suspicions on each side of the religious divide will have to be

squarely addressed. And each side will need to accept some ground rules for collaboration.

While I've already laid out some of the work that progressive leaders need to do, I want to talk a little bit about what conservative leaders need to do -- some truths they need to acknowledge.

For one, they need to understand the critical role that the separation of church and state has played in preserving not only our democracy, but the robustness of our religious practice. Folks tend to forget that during our founding, it wasn't the atheists or the civil libertarians who were the most effective champions of the First Amendment. It was the persecuted minorities, it was Baptists like John Leland who didn't want the established churches to impose their views on folks who were getting happy out in the fields and teaching the scripture to slaves. It was the forbearers of the evangelicals who were the most adamant about not mingling government with religious, because they did not want state-sponsored religion hindering their ability to practice their faith as they understood it.

Moreover, given the increasing diversity of America's population, the dangers of sectarianism have never been greater. Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers.

And even if we did have only Christians in our midst, if we expelled every non-Christian from the United States of America, whose Christianity would we teach in the schools? Would we go with James Dobson's, or Al Sharpton's? Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is ok and that eating shellfish is abomination? How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith? Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount -- a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application? So before we get carried away, let's read our bibles. Folks haven't been reading their bibles.

This brings me to my second point. Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God's will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.

Now this is going to be difficult for some who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, as many

evangelicals do. But in a pluralistic democracy, we have no choice. Politics depends on our ability to persuade each other of common aims based on a common reality. It involves the compromise, the art of what's possible. At some fundamental level, religion does not allow for compromise. It's the art of the impossible. If God has spoken, then followers are expected to live up to God's edicts, regardless of the consequences. To base one's life on such uncompromising commitments may be sublime, but to base our policy making on such commitments would be a dangerous thing. And if you doubt that, let me give you an example.

We all know the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham is ordered by God to offer up his only son, and without argument, he takes Isaac to the mountaintop, binds him to an altar, and raises his knife, prepared to act as God has commanded.

Of course, in the end God sends down an angel to intercede at the very last minute, and Abraham passes God's test of devotion.

But it's fair to say that if any of us leaving this church saw Abraham on a roof of a building raising his knife, we would, at the very least, call the police and expect the Department of Children and Family Services to take Isaac away from Abraham. We would do so because we do not hear what Abraham hears, do not see what Abraham sees, true as those experiences may be. So the best we can do is act in accordance with those things that we all see, and that we all hear, be it common laws or basic reason.

Finally, any reconciliation between faith and democratic pluralism requires some sense of proportion. □□This goes for both sides. □□Even those who claim the Bible's inerrancy make distinctions between Scriptural edicts, sensing that some passages – the Ten Commandments, say, or a belief in Christ's divinity – are central to Christian faith, while others are more culturally specific and may be modified to accommodate modern life.

The American people intuitively understand this, which is why the majority of Catholics practice birth control and some of those opposed to gay marriage nevertheless are opposed to a Constitutional amendment to ban it. Religious leadership need not accept such wisdom in counseling their flocks, but they should recognize this wisdom in their politics.

But a sense of proportion should also guide those who police the boundaries between church and state. Not every mention of God in public is a breach to the wall of separation – context matters. It is doubtful that children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance feel oppressed or brainwashed as a consequence of muttering the phrase “under God.” I didn't. Having voluntary student prayer groups use school property to meet should not be a threat, any more

than its use by the High School Republicans should threaten Democrats. And one can envision certain faith-based programs – targeting ex-offenders or substance abusers – that offer a uniquely powerful way of solving problems.

So we all have some work to do here. But I am hopeful that we can bridge the gaps that exist and overcome the prejudices each of us bring to this debate. And I have faith that millions of believing Americans want that to happen. No matter how religious they may or may not be, people are tired of seeing faith used as a tool of attack. They don't want faith used to belittle or to divide. They're tired of hearing folks deliver more screed than sermon. Because in the end, that's not how they think about faith in their own lives.

So let me end with just one other interaction I had during my campaign. A few days after I won the Democratic nomination in my U.S. Senate race, I received an email from a doctor at the University of Chicago Medical School that said the following:

“Congratulations on your overwhelming and inspiring primary win. I was happy to vote for you, and I will tell you that I am seriously considering voting for you in the general election. I write to express my concerns that may, in the end, prevent me from supporting you.”

The doctor described himself as a Christian who understood his commitments to be “totalizing.” His faith led him to a strong opposition to abortion and gay marriage, although he said that his faith also led him to question the idolatry of the free market and quick resort to militarism that seemed to characterize much of the Republican agenda.

But the reason the doctor was considering not voting for me was not simply my position on abortion. Rather, he had read an entry that my campaign had posted on my website, which suggested that I would fight “right-wing ideologues who want to take away a woman's right to choose.” The doctor went on to write:

“I sense that you have a strong sense of justice...and I also sense that you are a fair minded person with a high regard for reason...Whatever your convictions, if you truly believe that those who oppose abortion are all ideologues driven by perverse desires to inflict suffering on women, then you, in my judgment, are not fair-minded...You know that we enter times that are fraught with possibilities for good and for harm, times when we are struggling to make sense of a common polity in the context of plurality, when we are unsure of what grounds we have for making any claims that involve others...I do not ask at this point that you oppose abortion, only that you speak about this issue in fair-minded words.”

Fair-minded words. □□So I looked at my website and found the offending words. In fairness to them, my staff had written them using standard Democratic boilerplate language to summarize my pro-choice position during the Democratic primary, at a time when some of my opponents were questioning my commitment to protect Roe v. Wade.

Re-reading the doctor's letter, though, I felt a pang of shame. It is people like him who are looking for a deeper, fuller conversation about religion in this country. They may not change their positions, but they are willing to listen and learn from those who are willing to speak in fair-minded words. Those who know of the central and awesome place that God holds in the lives of so many, and who refuse to treat faith as simply another political issue with which to score points.

So I wrote back to the doctor, and I thanked him for his advice. The next day, I circulated the email to my staff and changed the language on my website to state in clear but simple terms my pro-choice position. And that night, before I went to bed, I said a prayer of my own – a prayer that I might extend the same presumption of good faith to others that the doctor had extended to me.

And that night, before I went to bed I said a prayer of my own. It's a prayer I think I share with a lot of Americans. A hope that we can live with one another in a way that reconciles the beliefs of each with the good of all. It's a prayer worth praying, and a conversation worth having in this country in the months and years to come. Thank you.

Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President

Springfield, Illinois | 10 February 2007

Let me begin by saying thanks to all you who've traveled, from far and wide, to brave the cold today.

We all made this journey for a reason. It's humbling, but in my heart I know you didn't come here just for me, you came here because you believe in what this country can be. In the face of war, you believe there can be peace. In the face of despair, you believe there can be hope. In the face of a politics that's shut you out, that's told you to settle, that's divided us for too long, you believe we can be one people, reaching for what's possible, building that more perfect union.

That's the journey we're on today. But let me tell you how I came to be here. As most of you know, I am not a native of this great state. I moved to Illinois over two decades ago. I was a

young man then, just a year out of college; I knew no one in Chicago, was without money or family connections. But a group of churches had offered me a job as a community organizer for \$13,000 a year. And I accepted the job, sight unseen, motivated then by a single, simple, powerful idea - that I might play a small part in building a better America.

My work took me to some of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. I joined with pastors and lay-people to deal with communities that had been ravaged by plant closings. I saw that the problems people faced weren't simply local in nature - that the decision to close a steel mill was made by distant executives; that the lack of textbooks and computers in schools could be traced to the skewed priorities of politicians a thousand miles away; and that when a child turns to violence, there's a hole in his heart no government alone can fill.

It was in these neighborhoods that I received the best education I ever had, and where I learned the true meaning of my Christian faith.

After three years of this work, I went to law school, because I wanted to understand how the law should work for those in need. I became a civil rights lawyer, and taught constitutional law, and after a time, I came to understand that our cherished rights of liberty and equality depend on the active participation of an awakened electorate. It was with these ideas in mind that I arrived in this capital city as a state Senator.

It was here, in Springfield, where I saw all that is America converge - farmers and teachers, businessmen and laborers, all of them with a story to tell, all of them seeking a seat at the table, all of them clamoring to be heard. I made lasting friendships here - friends that I see in the audience today.

It was here we learned to disagree without being disagreeable - that it's possible to compromise so long as you know those principles that can never be compromised; and that so long as we're willing to listen to each other, we can assume the best in people instead of the worst.

That's why we were able to reform a death penalty system that was broken. That's why we were able to give health insurance to children in need. That's why we made the tax system more fair and just for working families, and that's why we passed ethics reforms that the cynics said could never, ever be passed.

It was here, in Springfield, where North, South, East and West come together that I was reminded of the essential decency of the American people - where I came to believe that through this decency, we can build a more hopeful America.

And that is why, in the shadow of the Old State Capitol, where Lincoln once called on a divided house to stand together, where common hopes and common dreams still, I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for President of the United States.

I recognize there is a certain presumptuousness - a certain audacity - to this announcement. I know I haven't spent a lot of time learning the ways of Washington. But I've been there long enough to know that the ways of Washington must change.

The genius of our founders is that they designed a system of government that can be changed. And we should take heart, because we've changed this country before. In the face of tyranny, a band of patriots brought an Empire to its knees. In the face of secession, we unified a nation and set the captives free. In the face of Depression, we put people back to work and lifted millions out of poverty. We welcomed immigrants to our shores, we opened railroads to the west, we landed a man on the moon, and we heard a King's call to let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Each and every time, a new generation has risen up and done what's needed to be done. Today we are called once more - and it is time for our generation to answer that call.

For that is our unyielding faith - that in the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it.

That's what Abraham Lincoln understood. He had his doubts. He had his defeats. He had his setbacks. But through his will and his words, he moved a nation and helped free a people. It is because of the millions who rallied to his cause that we are no longer divided, North and South, slave and free. It is because men and women of every race, from every walk of life, continued to march for freedom long after Lincoln was laid to rest, that today we have the chance to face the challenges of this millennium together, as one people - as Americans.

All of us know what those challenges are today - a war with no end, a dependence on oil that threatens our future, schools where too many children aren't learning, and families struggling paycheck to paycheck despite working as hard as they can. We know the challenges. We've heard them. We've talked about them for years.

What's stopped us from meeting these challenges is not the absence of sound policies and sensible plans. What's stopped us is the failure of leadership, the smallness of our politics - the ease with which we're distracted by the petty and trivial, our chronic avoidance of tough decisions, our preference for scoring cheap political points instead of rolling up our sleeves and building a working consensus to tackle big problems.

For the last six years we've been told that our mounting debts don't matter, we've been told that the anxiety Americans feel about rising health care costs and stagnant wages are an illusion, we've been told that climate change is a hoax, and that tough talk and an ill-conceived war can replace diplomacy, and strategy, and foresight. And when all else fails, when Katrina happens, or the death toll in Iraq mounts, we've been told that our crises are somebody else's fault. We're distracted from our real failures, and told to blame the other party, or gay people, or immigrants.

And as people have looked away in disillusionment and frustration, we know what's filled the void. The cynics, and the lobbyists, and the special interests who've turned our government into a game only they can afford to play. They write the checks and you get stuck with the bills, they get the access while you get to write a letter, they think they own this government, but we're here today to take it back. The time for that politics is over. It's time to turn the page.

We've made some progress already. I was proud to help lead the fight in Congress that led to the most sweeping ethics reform since Watergate.

But Washington has a long way to go. And it won't be easy. That's why we'll have to set priorities. We'll have to make hard choices. And although government will play a crucial role in bringing about the changes we need, more money and programs alone will not get us where we need to go. 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. So let us begin. Let us begin this hard work together. Let us transform this nation.

Let us be the generation that reshapes our economy to compete in the digital age. Let's set high standards for our schools and give them the resources they need to succeed. Let's recruit a new army of teachers, and give them better pay and more support in exchange for more accountability. Let's make college more affordable, and let's invest in scientific research, and let's lay down broadband lines through the heart of inner cities and rural towns all across America.

And as our economy changes, let's be the generation that ensures our nation's workers are sharing in our prosperity. Let's protect the hard-earned benefits their companies have promised. Let's make it possible for hardworking Americans to save for retirement. And let's allow our unions and their organizers to lift up this country's middle-class again.

Let's be the generation that ends poverty in America. Every single person willing to work should be able to get job training that leads to a job, and earn a living wage that can pay the bills, and afford child care so their kids have a safe place to go when they work. Let's do this.

Let's be the generation that finally tackles our health care crisis. We can control costs by focusing on prevention, by providing better treatment to the chronically ill, and using technology to cut the bureaucracy. Let's be the generation that says right here, right now, that we will have universal health care in America by the end of the next president's first term.

Let's be the generation that finally frees America from the tyranny of oil. We can harness homegrown, alternative fuels like ethanol and spur the production of more fuel-efficient cars. We can set up a system for capping greenhouse gases. We can turn this crisis of global warming into a moment of opportunity for innovation, and job creation, and an incentive for businesses that will serve as a model for the world. Let's be the generation that makes future generations proud of what we did here.

Most of all, let's be the generation that never forgets what happened on that September day and confront the terrorists with everything we've got. Politics doesn't have to divide us on this anymore - we can work together to keep our country safe. I've worked with Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law that will secure and destroy some of the world's deadliest, unguarded weapons. We can work together to track terrorists down with a stronger military, we can tighten the net around their finances, and we can improve our intelligence capabilities. But let us also understand that ultimate victory against our enemies will come only by rebuilding our alliances and exporting those ideals that bring hope and opportunity to millions around the globe.

But all of this cannot come to pass until we bring an end to this war in Iraq. Most of you know I opposed this war from the start. I thought it was a tragic mistake. Today we grieve for the families who have lost loved ones, the hearts that have been broken, and the young lives that could have been. America, it's time to start bringing our troops home. It's time to admit that no amount of American lives can resolve the political disagreement that lies at the heart of someone else's civil war. That's why I have a plan that will bring our combat troops home

by March of 2008. Letting the Iraqis know that we will not be there forever is our last, best hope to pressure the Sunni and Shia to come to the table and find peace.

Finally, there is one other thing that is not too late to get right about this war - and that is the homecoming of the men and women - our veterans - who have sacrificed the most. Let us honor their valor by providing the care they need and rebuilding the military they love. Let us be the generation that begins this work.

I know there are those who don't believe we can do all these things. I understand the skepticism. After all, every four years, candidates from both parties make similar promises, and I expect this year will be no different. All of us running for president will travel around the country offering ten-point plans and making grand speeches; all of us will trumpet those qualities we believe make us uniquely qualified to lead the country. But too many times, after the election is over, and the confetti is swept away, all those promises fade from memory, and the lobbyists and the special interests move in, and people turn away, disappointed as before, left to struggle on their own.

That is why this campaign can't only be about me. It must be about us - it must be about what we can do together. This campaign must be the occasion, the vehicle, of your hopes, and your dreams. It will take your time, your energy, and your advice - to push us forward when we're doing right, and to let us know when we're not. This campaign has to be about reclaiming the meaning of citizenship, restoring our sense of common purpose, and realizing that few obstacles can withstand the power of millions of voices calling for change.

By ourselves, this change will not happen. Divided, we are bound to fail.

But 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.

As Lincoln organized the forces arrayed against slavery, he was heard to say: "Of strange, discordant, and even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought to battle through."

That is our purpose here today.

That's why I'm in this race.

Not just to hold an office, but to gather with you to transform a nation.

I want to win that next battle - for justice and opportunity.

I want to win that next battle - for better schools, and better jobs, and health care for all.

I want us to take up the unfinished business of perfecting our union, and building a better America.

And if you will join me in this improbable quest, if you feel destiny calling, and see as I see, a future of endless possibility stretching before us; if you sense, as I sense, that the time is now to shake off our slumber, and slough off our fear, and make good on the debt we owe past and future generations, then I'm ready to take up the cause, and march with you, and work with you. Together, starting today.

Barack Obama's New Hampshire Primary Speech

New Hampshire | 8 January 2008

Thank you, New Hampshire. I love you back. Thank you. Thank you.

Well, thank you so much. I am still fired up and ready to go.

Thank you. Thank you.

Well, first of all, I want to congratulate Senator Clinton on a hard-fought victory here in New Hampshire. She did an outstanding job. Give her a big round of applause.

You know, a few weeks ago, no one imagined that we'd have accomplished what we did here tonight in New Hampshire. No one could have imagined it.

For most of this campaign, we were far behind. We always knew our climb would be steep. But in record numbers, you came out, and you spoke up for change.

And with your voices and your votes, you made it clear that at this moment, in this election, there is something happening in America.

There is something happening when men and women in Des Moines and Davenport, in Lebanon and Concord, come out in the snows of January to wait in lines that stretch block after block because they believe in what this country can be.

There is something happening. There's something happening when Americans who are young in age and in spirit, who've never participated in politics before, turn out in numbers we have never seen because they know in their hearts that this time must be different.

There's something happening when people vote not just for party that they belong to, but the hopes that they hold in common.

And whether we are rich or poor, black or white, Latino or Asian, whether we hail from Iowa or New Hampshire, Nevada or South Carolina, we are ready to take this country in a fundamentally new direction.

That's what's happening in America right now; change is what's happening in America.

You, all of you who are here tonight, all who put so much heart and soul and work into this campaign, you can be the new majority who can lead this nation out of a long political darkness.

Democrats, independents and Republicans who are tired of the division and distraction that has clouded Washington, who know that we can disagree without being disagreeable, who understand that, if we mobilize our voices to challenge the money and influence that stood in our way and challenge ourselves to reach for something better, there is no problem we cannot solve, there is no destiny that we cannot fulfill. Our new American majority can end the outrage of unaffordable, unavailable health care in our time. We can bring doctors and patients, workers and businesses, Democrats and Republicans together, and we can tell the drug and insurance industry that, while they get a seat at the table, they don't get to buy every chair, not this time, not now.

Our new majority can end the tax breaks for corporations that ship our jobs overseas and put a middle-class tax cut in the pockets of working Americans who deserve it.

We can stop sending our children to schools with corridors of shame and start putting them on a pathway to success.

We can stop talking about how great teachers are and start rewarding them for their greatness by giving them more pay and more support. We can do this with our new majority.

We can harness the ingenuity of farmers and scientists, citizens and entrepreneurs to free this nation from the tyranny of oil and save our planet from a point of no return.

And when I am president of the United States, we will end this war in Iraq and bring our troops home.

We will end this war in Iraq. We will bring our troops home. We will finish the job -- we will finish the job against Al Qaida in Afghanistan. We will care for our veterans. We will restore our moral standing in the world.

And we will never use 9/11 as a way to scare up votes, because it is not a tactic to win an election. It is a challenge that should unite America and the world against the common threats of the 21st century: terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease.

All of the candidates in this race share these goals. All of the candidates in this race have good ideas and all are patriots who serve this country honorably.

But the reason our campaign has always been different, the reason we began this improbable journey almost a year ago is because it's not just about what I will do as president. It is also about what you, the people who love this country, the citizens of the United States of America, can do to change it.

That's what this election is all about.

That's why tonight belongs to you. It belongs to the organizers, and the volunteers, and the staff who believed in this journey and rallied so many others to join the cause.

We know the battle ahead will be long. But always remember that, no matter what obstacles stand in our way, nothing can stand in the way of the power of millions of voices calling for change.

We have been told we cannot do this by a chorus of cynics. And they will only grow louder and more dissonant in the weeks and months to come.

We've been asked to pause for a reality check. We've been warned against offering the people of this nation false hope. But in the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope.

For when we have faced down impossible odds, when we've been told we're not ready or that we shouldn't try or that we can't, generations of Americans have responded with a simple creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can. Yes, we can. Yes, we can.

It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation: Yes, we can.

It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights: Yes, we can.

It was sung by immigrants as they struck out from distant shores and pioneers who pushed westward against an unforgiving wilderness: Yes, we can.

It was the call of workers who organized, women who reached for the ballot, 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.

And so, tomorrow, as we take the campaign south and west, as we learn that the struggles of the textile workers in Spartanburg are not so different than the plight of the dishwasher in Las Vegas, that the hopes of the little girl who goes to the crumbling school in Dillon are the same as the dreams of the boy who learns on the streets of L.A., we will remember that there is something happening in America, that we are not as divided as our politics suggest, that we are one people, we are one nation.

And, together, we will begin the next great chapter in the American story, with three words that will ring from coast to coast, from sea to shining sea: Yes, we can.

Thank you, New Hampshire. Thank you. Thank you.

Victory speech in South Carolina

Columbia, S.C. | 26 January 2008

Over two weeks ago, we saw the people of Iowa proclaim that our time for change has come. But there were those who doubted this country's desire for something new - who said Iowa was a fluke not to be repeated again.

Well, tonight, the cynics who believed that what began in the snows of Iowa was just an illusion were told a different story by the good people of South Carolina.

After four great contests in every corner of this country, we have the most votes, the most delegates, and the most diverse coalition of Americans we've seen in a long, long time.

They are young and old; rich and poor. They are black and white; Latino and Asian. They are Democrats from Des Moines and Independents from Concord; Republicans from rural Nevada and young people across this country who've never had a reason to participate until now. And in nine days, nearly half the nation will have the chance to join us in saying that we are tired of business-as-usual in Washington, we are hungry for change, and we are ready to believe again.

But if there's anything we've been reminded of since Iowa, it's that the kind of change we seek will not come easy. Partly because we have fine candidates in the field - fierce competitors, worthy of respect. And as contentious as this campaign may get, we have to remember that this is a contest for the Democratic nomination, and that all of us share an abiding desire to end the disastrous policies of the current administration.

But there are real differences between the candidates. We are looking for more than just a change of party in the White House. We're looking to fundamentally change the status quo in Washington - a status quo that extends beyond any particular party. And right now, that status quo is fighting back with everything it's got; with the same old tactics that divide and distract us from solving the problems people face, whether those problems are health care they can't afford or a mortgage they cannot pay.

So this will not be easy. Make no mistake about what we're up against.

We are up against the belief that it's ok for lobbyists to dominate our government - that they are just part of the system in Washington. But we know that the undue influence of lobbyists is part of the problem, and this election is our chance to say that we're not going to let them stand in our way anymore.

We are up against the conventional thinking that says your ability to lead as President comes from longevity in Washington or proximity to the White House. But we know that real leadership is about candor, and judgment, and the ability to rally Americans from all walks of life around a common purpose - a higher purpose.

We are up against decades of bitter partisanship that cause politicians to demonize their opponents instead of coming together to make college affordable or energy cleaner; it's the kind of partisanship where you're not even allowed to say that a Republican had an idea - even if it's one you never agreed with. That kind of politics is bad for our party, it's bad for our country, and this is our chance to end it once and for all.

We are up against the idea that it's acceptable to say anything and do anything to win an election. We know that this is exactly what's wrong with our politics; this is why people don't believe what their leaders say anymore; this is why they tune out. And this election is our chance to give the American people a reason to believe again.

And what we've seen in these last weeks is that we're also up against forces that are not the fault of any one campaign, but feed the habits that prevent us from being who we want to be as a nation. It's the politics that uses religion as a wedge, and patriotism as a bludgeon. A politics that tells us that we have to think, act, and even vote within the confines of the categories that supposedly define us. The assumption that young people are apathetic. The assumption that Republicans won't cross over. The assumption that the wealthy care nothing for the poor, and that the poor don't vote. The assumption that African-Americans can't support the white candidate; whites can't support the African-American candidate; blacks and Latinos can't come together.

But we are here tonight to say that this is not the America we believe in. I did not travel around this state over the last year and see a white South Carolina or a black South Carolina. I saw South Carolina. I saw crumbling schools that are stealing the future of black children and white children. I saw shuttered mills and homes for sale that once belonged to Americans from all walks of life, and men and women of every color and creed who serve together, and fight together, and bleed together under the same proud flag. I saw what America is, and I believe in what this country can be.

That is the country I see. That is the country you see. But now it is up to us to help the entire nation embrace this vision. Because in the end, we are not just up against the ingrained and destructive habits of Washington, we are also struggling against our own doubts, our own fears, and our own cynicism. The change we seek has always required great struggle and

sacrifice. And so this is a battle in our own hearts and minds about what kind of country we want and how hard we're willing to work for it.

So let me remind you tonight that change will not be easy. That change will take time. There will be setbacks, and false starts, and sometimes we will make mistakes. But as hard as it may seem, we cannot lose hope. Because there are people all across this country who are counting us; who can't afford another four years without health care or good schools or decent wages because our leaders couldn't come together and get it done.

Theirs are the stories and voices we carry on from South Carolina.

The mother who can't get Medicaid to cover all the needs of her sick child - she needs us to pass a health care plan that cuts costs and makes health care available and affordable for every single American.

The teacher who works another shift at Dunkin Donuts after school just to make ends meet - she needs us to reform our education system so that she gets better pay, and more support, and her students get the resources they need to achieve their dreams.

The Maytag worker who is now competing with his own teenager for a \$7-an-hour job at Wal-Mart because the factory he gave his life to shut its doors - he needs us to stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship our jobs overseas and start putting them in the pockets of working Americans who deserve it. And struggling homeowners. And seniors who should retire with dignity and respect.

The woman who told me that she hasn't been able to breathe since the day her nephew left for Iraq, or the soldier who doesn't know his child because he's on his third or fourth tour of duty - they need us to come together and put an end to a war that should've never been authorized and never been waged.

The choice in this election is not between regions or religions or genders. It's not about rich versus poor; young versus old; and it is not about black versus white.

It's about the past versus the future.

It's about whether we settle for the same divisions and distractions and drama that passes for politics today, or whether we reach for a politics of common sense, and innovation - a shared sacrifice and shared prosperity.

There are those who will continue to tell us we cannot do this. That we cannot have what we

long for. That we are peddling false hopes.

But here's what I know. I know that when people say we can't overcome all the big money and influence in Washington, I think of the elderly woman who sent me a contribution the other day - an envelope that had a money order for \$3.01 along with a verse of scripture tucked inside. So don't tell us change isn't possible.

When I hear the cynical talk that blacks and whites and Latinos can't join together and work together, I'm reminded of the Latino brothers and sisters I organized with, and stood with, and fought with side by side for jobs and justice on the streets of Chicago. So don't tell us change can't happen.

When I hear that we'll never overcome the racial divide in our politics, I think about that Republican woman who used to work for Strom Thurmond, who's now devoted to educating inner-city children and who went out onto the streets of South Carolina and knocked on doors for this campaign. Don't tell me we can't change.

Yes we can change.

Yes we can heal this nation.

Yes we can seize our future.

And as we leave this state with a new wind at our backs, and take this journey across the country we love with the message we've carried from the plains of Iowa to the hills of New Hampshire; from the Nevada desert to the South Carolina coast; the same message we had when we were up and when we were down - that out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope; and where we are met with cynicism, and doubt, and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people in three simple words:

Yes. We. Can.

Super Tuesday Speech

Illinois | 6 February, 2008

Thank you. (Cheers, applause.) Thank you. Thank you. (Chants of "Obama! Obama!") Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you.

Well, first of all, let me just say I could not have a better senior senator than our great senator from the state of Illinois, Dick Durbin. (Cheers, applause.) I have too many friends to mention each one of them individually. But it is good to be back home. (Cheers, applause.) It is good to be home. It is good to be home. It is good to have Michelle home. (Cheers, applause.) The girls are with us tonight, but we asked them, "Do you want to come on stage?" And Malia, our nine-year-old, said, "Daddy, you know that's not my thing." (Laughter.) So they're upstairs doing what they do. (Laughter.) Before I begin, I just want to send my condolences to the victims of the storms that hit Tennessee and Arkansas today. They are in our thoughts and in our prayers, and we hope that our federal government will respond quickly and rapidly to make sure that they get all the help that they need. (Applause.) The polls are just closing in California. (Cheers, applause.) And the votes are still being counted in cities and towns across America. But there is one thing --AUDIENCE MEMBER: We love you, Barack. MR. OBAMA: You know I love you back. (Laughter, cheers, applause.)

But there is one thing on this February night that we do not need the final results to know. Our time has come. (Cheers, applause.) Our time has come. Our movement is real. (Cheers, applause.) And change is coming to America. (Cheers, applause.) Only a few hundred miles from here, almost one year ago to the day, as Dick said, we stood on the steps of the old state capitol to reaffirm a truth that was spoken there so many generations ago, that a house divided cannot stand -- (cheers) -- that we are more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are and always will be the United States of America. (Cheers, applause.) (Chants of "USA! USA! USA!")

What began as a whisper in Springfield soon carried across the cornfields of Iowa, where farmers and factory workers, students and seniors stood up in numbers we have never seen before. They stood up to say that maybe this year we don't have to settle for politics where scoring points is more important than solving problems. (Cheers, applause.) Maybe this year we can finally start doing something about health care we can't afford. (Cheers.) Maybe this year we can start doing something about mortgages we can't pay. Maybe this year, this time can be different. (Cheers, applause.) Their voices echoed from the hills of New Hampshire to the deserts of Nevada, where teachers and cooks and kitchen workers stood up to say that maybe Washington doesn't have to be run by lobbyists anymore. (Cheers, applause.) Maybe

the voices of the American people can finally be heard again. (Cheers, applause.) They reached the coast of South Carolina, when people said that maybe we don't have to be divided by race and region and gender -- (cheers, applause) -- that the crumbling schools are stealing the future of black children and white children -- (cheers, applause) -- that we can come together and build an America that gives every child everywhere the opportunity to live out their dreams. This time can be different. (Cheers, applause.)

□ And today, on this Tuesday in February, in states north and south, east and west, what began as a whisper in Springfield has swelled to a chorus of millions calling for change. (Cheers, applause.) It's a chorus that cannot be ignored, a chorus that cannot be deterred. This time can be different because this campaign for the presidency of the United States of America is different. (Cheers, applause.) (Chants of "Yes, We Can! Yes, We Can!") It's different not because of me. It's different because of you -- (cheers, applause) -- because you are tired of being disappointed and you're tired of being let down. (Cheers, applause.) You're tired of hearing promises made and plans proposed in the heat of a campaign, only to have nothing change when everyone goes back to Washington. (Cheers, applause.) Nothing changes because lobbyists just write another check or politicians start worrying about how to win the next election instead of why they should -- (cheers, applause) -- or because they focus on who's up and who's down instead of who matters

And while Washington is consumed with the same drama and divisions and distractions, another family puts up a "For sale" sign in their front yard, another factory shuts its doors, another soldier waves goodbye as he leaves on another tour of duty in a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged -- (cheers, applause) -- that goes on and on and on. (Cheers, applause.) But in this election, at this moment, you are standing up all across this country to say, "Not this time" -- (cheers) -- "not this year." (Crowd says in unison, "Not this year.") The stakes are too high and the challenges too great to play the same Washington game with the same Washington players and somehow expect a different result. This time must be different. This time we have to turn the page. This time we have to write a new chapter in American history. (Cheers, applause.) This time we have to seize the moment. (Cheers, applause.)

Now, this isn't about me and it's not about Senator Clinton. As I've said before, she was a friend before this campaign. She'll be a friend after it's over. (Cheers.) I respect her. I respect her as a colleague. I congratulate her on her victories tonight. She's been running an outstanding race. But this fall, this fall we owe the American people a real choice. (Cheers, applause.) We have to choose between change and more of the same. We have to choose between looking backwards and looking forward. (Cheers, applause.) We have to choose

between our future and our past. It's a choice between going into this election with Republicans and independents already united against us or going against their nominee with a campaign that has united Americans of all parties, from all backgrounds, from all races, from all religions, around a common purpose. (Cheers, applause.) It's a choice between having a debate with the other party about who has the most experience in Washington or having one about who's most likely to change Washington -- (cheers, applause) -- because that's a debate that we can win. (Cheers, applause.) It's a choice between a candidate who's taken more money from Washington lobbyists than either Republican in this race and a campaign that has not taken a dime of their money because we have been funded by you. You have funded this campaign. (Cheers, applause.) (Chants of "Yes, We Can! Yes, We Can!")

And if I am your nominee, my opponent will not be able to say that I voted for the war in Iraq, because I didn't -- (cheers) -- or that I gave George Bush the benefit of the doubt on Iran, because I haven't -- (cheers, applause) -- or that I support the Bush doctrine of not talking to leaders we don't like, because I profoundly disagree with that approach. (Cheers, applause.) And he will not be able to say that I wavered on something as fundamental as whether or not it's okay for America to use torture, because it's never okay. That is the choice in this election. (Cheers, applause.) The Republicans running for president have already tied themselves to the past. They speak of a 100-year war in Iraq. They talk about billions more in tax breaks for the wealthiest few, who don't need them and didn't even ask for them, tax breaks that mortgage our children's future on a mountain of debt at a time when there are families who can't pay their medical bills and students who can't pay their tuition. (Cheers, applause.) Those Republicans are running on the politics of yesterday. And that is why our party must be the party of tomorrow. (Cheers, applause.) And that is the party that I intend to lead as president of the United States of America. (Cheers, applause.)

I'll be the president who ends the tax breaks to companies that ship our jobs overseas -- (cheers) -- and start putting them in the pockets of hard-working Americans who deserve them, and struggling homeowners who deserve them and seniors who should retire with dignity and respect, and deserve them. (Cheers, applause.) I'll be the president who finally brings Democrats and Republicans together to make health care affordable and available for every single American. (Cheers, applause.) We will put a college education within the reach of anyone who wants to go. (Cheers, applause.) And instead of just talking about how great our teachers are, we will reward them for their greatness with more pay and better support. (Cheers, applause.) And we will harness the ingenuity of farmers and scientists and entrepreneurs to free this nation from the tyranny of oil once and for all. (Cheers, applause.) And we will invest in solar and wind and biodiesel, clean energy, green energy that can fuel economic development for generations to come. That's what we're going to do when I'm

president of the United States. (Cheers, applause.)

When I'm president, we will put an end to the politics of fear -- (cheers, applause) -- a politics that uses 9/11 as a way to scare up votes. We're going to start seeing 9/11 as a challenge that should unite America and the world against the common threats of the 21st century, terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease. (Cheers, applause.) We can do this. (Cheers, applause.) We can do this. (Crowd says in unison, "Yes, we can.") But it will not be easy. It will require struggle and it will require sacrifice. There will be setbacks, and we will make mistakes. And that is why we need all the help we can get. (Cheers, applause.)

So tonight I want to speak directly to all those Americans who have yet to join this movement but still hunger for change. They know it in their gut. They know we can do better than we're doing. They know that we can take our politics to a higher level. But they're afraid. They've been taught to be cynical. They're doubtful that it can be done. But I'm here to say tonight to all of you who still harbor those doubts, we need you. (Cheers, applause.) We need you to stand with us. (Cheers, applause.) We need you to work with us. (Cheers, applause.) We need you to help us prove that together, ordinary people can still do extraordinary things in the United States of America. (Cheers, applause.) I am blessed to be standing in the city where my own extraordinary journey of service began. (Cheers, applause.) You know, just a few miles from here, down on the south side, in the shadow of a shuttered steel plant, it was there that I learned what it takes to make change happen. I was a young organizer then -- in fact, there are some folks here who I organized with -- a young organizer intent on fighting joblessness and poverty on the south side. And I still remember one of the very first meetings I put together. We had worked on it for days. We had made phone calls. We had knocked on doors. We had put out fliers. But on that night, nobody showed up. (Laughter.) Our volunteers who had worked so hard felt so defeated, they wanted to quit. And to be honest, so did I. But at that moment, I happened to look outside and I saw some young boys tossing stones at a boarded-up apartment building across the street. They were like the boys in so many cities across the country, little boys, but without prospects, without guidance, without hope for the future. And I turned to the volunteers and I asked them, "Before you quit, before you give up, I want you to answer one question: What will happen to those boys if we don't stand up for them?" (Cheers, applause.) And those volunteers, they looked out that window and they saw those boys and they decided that night to keep going, to keep organizing, keep fighting for better schools, fighting for better jobs, fighting for better health care. And I did too. And slowly but surely, in the weeks and months to come, the community began to change.

You see, the challenges we face will not be solved with one meeting in one night. It will not

be resolved on even a Super Duper Tuesday. Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. (Cheers, applause.) We are the change that we seek. We are the hope of those boys who have so little, who've been told that they cannot have what they dream, that they cannot be what they imagine. Yes, they can. (Cheers, applause.) We are the hope of the father who goes to work before dawn and lies awake with doubt that tells him he cannot give his children the same opportunities that someone gave him. Yes, he can. (Crowd says in unison, "Yes, he can.") We are the hope of the woman who hears that her city will not be rebuilt, that she cannot somehow claim the life that was swept away in a terrible storm. Yes, she can. (Crowd says in unison, "Yes, she can.") We are the hope of the future, the answer to the cynics who tell us our house must stand divided, that we cannot come together, that we cannot remake this world as it should be. We know that we have seen something happen over the last several weeks, over the past several months. We know that what began as a whisper has now swelled to a chorus that cannot be ignored -- (cheers, applause) -- that will not be deterred, that will ring out across this land as a hymn that will heal this nation -- (cheers, applause) -- repair this world, make this time different than all the rest. Yes, we can. Let's go to work. Yes, we can. Yes, we can. Yes, we can. (Chants of "Yes, We Can! Yes, We Can!") Thank you, Chicago. Let's go get to work. I love you. (Cheers, applause.)

Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: "A More Perfect Union"

Philadelphia, PA | 18 March, 2008

"We the people, in order to form a more perfect union."

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. Farmers and scholars; statesmen and patriots who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their declaration of independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the spring of 1787.

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.

Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution -

a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.

And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part - through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk - to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign - to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together - unless we perfect our 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.

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 slaveowners - 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.

It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional candidate. But 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.

Throughout the first year of this campaign, against all predictions to the contrary, we saw how hungry the American people were for this message of unity. Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate Flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African Americans and white Americans.

This is not to say that race has not been an issue in the campaign. At various stages in the campaign, some commentators have deemed me either "too black" or "not black enough." We saw racial tensions bubble to the surface during the week before the South Carolina primary. The press has scoured every exit poll for the latest evidence of racial polarization, not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well.

And yet, it has only been in the last couple of weeks that the discussion of race in this campaign has taken a particularly divisive turn.

On one end of the spectrum, we've heard the implication that my candidacy is somehow an exercise in affirmative action; that it's based solely on the desire of wide-eyed liberals to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap. On the other end, we've heard my former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, use incendiary language to express views that have the potential not only to widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation; that rightly offend white and black alike.

I have already condemned, in unequivocal terms, the statements of Reverend Wright that have caused such controversy. For some, nagging questions remain. Did I know him to be an occasionally fierce critic of American domestic and foreign policy? Of course. Did I ever hear him make remarks that could be considered controversial while I sat in church? Yes. Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely - just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests, or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed.

But the remarks that have caused this recent firestorm weren't simply controversial. They weren't simply a religious leader's effort to speak out against perceived injustice. Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country - a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam.

As such, Reverend Wright's comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity; racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems - two wars, a terrorist threat, a falling economy, a chronic health care crisis and potentially devastating climate change; problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all.

Given my background, my politics, and my professed values and ideals, there will no doubt be those for whom my statements of condemnation are not enough. Why associate myself with Reverend Wright in the first place, they may ask? Why not join another church? And I confess that if all that I knew of Reverend Wright were the snippets of those sermons that have run in an endless loop on the television and You Tube, or if Trinity United Church of Christ conformed to the caricatures being peddled by some commentators, there is no doubt that I would react in much the same way

But the truth is, that isn't all that I know of the man. The man I met more than twenty years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith, a man who spoke to me about our obligations to love one another; to care for the sick and lift up the poor. He is a man who served his country as a U.S. Marine; who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and who for over thirty years led a church that serves the community by doing God's work here on Earth - by housing the homeless, ministering to the needy, providing day care services and scholarships and prison ministries, and reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

In my first book, *Dreams From My Father*, I described the experience of my first service at Trinity:

"People began to shout, to rise from their seats and clap and cry out, a forceful wind carrying the reverend's voice up into the rafters....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, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones. Those stories - of survival, and freedom, and hope - became our story, my story; the blood that had spilled was our blood, the tears our tears; 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. Our trials and triumphs became at once unique and universal, black and more than black; in chronicling our journey, the stories and songs gave us a means to reclaim memories that we didn't need to feel shame about...memories that all people might study and cherish - and with which we

could start to rebuild."

That has been my experience at Trinity. Like other predominantly black churches across the country, Trinity embodies the black community in its entirety - the doctor and the welfare mom, the model student and the former gang-banger. Like other black churches, Trinity's services are full of raucous laughter and sometimes bawdy humor. They are full of dancing, clapping, screaming and shouting that may seem jarring to the untrained ear. The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and yes, the bitterness and bias that make up the black experience in America.

And this helps explain, perhaps, my relationship with Reverend Wright. As imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me. He strengthened my faith, officiated my wedding, and baptized my children. Not once in my conversations with him have I heard him talk about any ethnic group in derogatory terms, or treat whites with whom he interacted with anything but courtesy and respect. He contains within him the contradictions - the good and the bad - of the community that he has served diligently for so many years.

I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my white grandmother - a woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe.

These people are a part of me. And they are a part of America, this country that I love.

Some will see this as an attempt to justify or excuse comments that are simply inexcusable. I can assure you it is not. I suppose the politically safe thing would be to move on from this episode and just hope that it fades into the woodwork. We can dismiss Reverend Wright as a crank or a demagogue, just as some have dismissed Geraldine Ferraro, in the aftermath of her recent statements, as harboring some deep-seated racial bias.

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 and 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 into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care, or 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 helped 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 constricted. 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 come after them.

But for all those who scratched and clawed their way to get a piece of the American Dream, 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 - those young men and increasingly young women who we see standing on street corners or languishing in our prisons, without hope or prospects for the future. Even for those blacks who did make it, questions of race, and racism, continue to define their worldview in fundamental ways. For the men and women of Reverend Wright's generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away; nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years. That anger may not get expressed in public, in front of white co-workers or white friends. But it does find voice in the barbershop or around the kitchen table. At times, that anger is exploited by politicians, to gin up votes along racial lines, or to make up for a politician's own failings.

And occasionally it finds voice in the church on Sunday morning, in the pulpit and in the pews. The fact that so many people are surprised to hear that anger in some of Reverend Wright's sermons simply reminds us of the old truism that the most segregated hour in American life occurs on Sunday morning. That anger is not always productive; indeed, all too often it distracts attention from solving real problems; it keeps us from squarely facing our own complicity in our condition, and prevents the African-American community from forging the alliances it needs to bring about real change. But the anger is real; it is powerful; and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races.

In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience - as far as they're concerned, no one's handed them anything, they've built it from scratch. They've worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pension dumped after a lifetime of labor. They are anxious about their futures, and feel their dreams slipping away; in an era of stagnant wages and global competition, opportunity comes to be seen as a zero sum game, in which your dreams come at my expense. So when they are told to bus their children to a school across town; when they hear that an African American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they're told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced, resentment builds over time.

Like the anger within the black community, these resentments aren't always expressed in polite company. But they have helped shape the political landscape for at least a generation. Anger over welfare and affirmative action helped forge the Reagan Coalition. Politicians routinely exploited fears of crime for their own electoral ends. Talk show hosts and conservative commentators built entire careers unmasking bogus claims of racism while dismissing legitimate discussions of racial injustice and inequality as mere political correctness or reverse racism.

Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the real culprits of the middle class squeeze - a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many. And yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist, without recognizing they are grounded in legitimate concerns - this too widens the racial divide, and blocks the path to understanding.

This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have 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.

But I have asserted 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.

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 binding our particular grievances - for better health care, and better schools, and better jobs - to the larger aspirations of all Americans -- the white woman struggling to break the glass ceiling, the white man whose been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family. And it 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.

Ironically, this quintessentially American - and yes, conservative - notion of self-help found frequent expression in Reverend Wright's sermons. But what my former pastor too often failed to understand is that embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society can change.

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 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.

In the white community, the path to a more perfect union means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination - and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past - are real and must be addressed. Not just with words, but with deeds - by investing in our schools and our communities; by enforcing our civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system; by providing this generation with ladders of opportunity that were unavailable for previous generations. It requires all Americans to realize 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.

In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world's great religions demand - that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister's keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.

For we have a choice in this country. We can accept a politics that breeds division, and conflict, and cynicism. We can tackle race only as spectacle - as we did in the OJ trial - or in the wake of tragedy, as we did in the aftermath of Katrina - or as fodder for the nightly news. We can play Reverend Wright's sermons on every channel, every day and talk about them from now until the election, and make the only question in this campaign whether or not the American people think that I somehow believe or sympathize with his most offensive words.

We can pounce on some gaffe by a Hillary supporter as evidence that she's playing the race card, or we can speculate on whether white men will all flock to John McCain in the general election regardless of his policies.

We can do that.

But if we do, I can tell you that in the next election, we'll be talking about some other distraction. And then another one. And then another one. And nothing will change.

That is one option. Or, at this moment, in this election, we can come together and say, "Not this time." This time we want to talk about the crumbling schools that are stealing the future of black children and white children and Asian children and Hispanic children and Native American children. This time we want to reject the cynicism that tells us that these kids can't learn; that those kids who don't look like us are somebody else's problem. The children of America are not those kids, they are our kids, and we will not let them fall behind in a 21st century economy. Not this time.

This time we want to talk about how the lines in the Emergency Room are filled with whites and blacks and Hispanics who do not have health care; who don't have the power on their own to overcome the special interests in Washington, but who can take them on if we do it together.

This time we want to talk about the shuttered mills that once provided a decent life for men and women of every race, and the homes for sale that once belonged to Americans from every religion, every region, every walk of life. This time we want to talk about the fact that the real problem is not that someone who doesn't look like you might take your job; it's that the corporation you work for will ship it overseas for nothing more than a profit.

This time we want to talk about the men and women of every color and creed who serve together, and fight together, and bleed together under the same proud flag. We want to talk about how to bring them home from a war that never should've been authorized and never should've been waged, and we want to talk about how we'll show our patriotism by caring for them, and their families, and giving them the benefits they have earned.

I would not be running for President if I didn't believe with all my heart that this is what the vast majority of Americans want for this country. This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected. And today, whenever I

find myself feeling doubtful or cynical about this possibility, what gives me the most hope is the next generation - the young people whose attitudes and beliefs and openness to change have already made history in this election.

There is one story in particular that I'd like to leave you with today - a story I told when I had the great honor of speaking on Dr. King's birthday at his home church, Ebenezer Baptist, in Atlanta.

There is a young, twenty-three year old white woman named Ashley Baia who organized for our campaign in Florence, South Carolina. She had been working to organize a mostly African-American community since the beginning of this campaign, and one day she was at a roundtable discussion where everyone went around telling their story and why they were there.

And Ashley said that when she 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. They had to file for bankruptcy, and that's when Ashley decided that she had to do something to help her mom.

She knew that food was one of their most expensive costs, and so Ashley convinced her mother that what she really liked and really wanted to eat more than anything else was mustard and relish sandwiches. Because that was the cheapest way to eat.

She did this for a year until her mom got better, and she told everyone at the roundtable that the reason she joined our campaign was so that she could help the millions of other children in the country who want and need to help their parents too.

Now Ashley might have made a different choice. Perhaps somebody told her along the way that the source of her mother's problems were blacks who were on welfare and too lazy to work, or Hispanics who were coming into the country illegally. But she didn't. She sought out allies in her fight against injustice.

Anyway, Ashley finishes her story and then goes around the room and asks everyone else why they're supporting the campaign. They all have different stories and reasons. Many bring up a specific issue. And finally they come to this elderly black man who's been sitting there quietly the entire time. And Ashley asks him why he's there. And he does not bring up a specific issue. He does not say health care or the economy. He does not say education or the war. He does not say that he was there because of Barack Obama. He simply says to everyone

in the room, "I am here because of Ashley."

"I'm here because of Ashley." By itself, that single moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man is not enough. It is not enough to give health care to the sick, or jobs to the jobless, or education to our children.

But it is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger. And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the two-hundred and twenty one years since a band of patriots signed that document in Philadelphia, that is where the perfection begins.