Post-9/11 Discourses Of Threat And Constructions Of Terror In The Age Of Obama

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THE NEW CONTAINMENT: THE POST-9/11 G.W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION

In *Containing (Un)American Bodies*, we argue that the post-9/11 presidential administration of George W. Bush, "reinvigorated a series of oppositional pairs through rhetorical means," leading to "modifications of public policy" (2010: 1). Invoking dangers posed to national security in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, President G.W. Bush spoke of "answering every danger and every enemy that threatens the American people," of "mobilizing against threats of a new era," and of waging a "new kind of war" (1). Rhetorically, this effort was initiated through former President Bush's well-rehearsed statement, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (2001), which conveyed to both the American public and the international community that support for the United States was expected - and that failure to demonstrate that support would relegate non-supporters to the category "them" (which is to say, "terrorists"). In practice, "mobilizing against threats" involved identifying dangers both beyond and within the confines of the United States and working to contain them.

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The American public was effectively directed in what to believe and how to act during the G.W. Bush administration through the repetition of an "us/them" message and an attendant series of conflations, both of which served to construct and reinforce meaning in a post-9/11 world. The following remarks from former President Bush highlight specific conflations that reoccurred during his presidency:

> The attacks of September the 11th showed our country that vast oceans no longer protect us from danger. Before that tragic date, we had only hints of al Qaeda's plans and designs. Today in Iraq, we see a threat whose outlines are far more clearly defined, and whose consequences could be far more deadly. Saddam Hussein's actions have put us on notice (Bush 2003).

> The reason I keep insisting that there was a relationship between Iraq and Saddam and al-Qaeda [is] because there was a relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda (Riechman 2004).

An outcome of the consistent conflation of September 11, 2001, terrorism, Afghanistan, and Iraq was that 70 percent of the American public was led to link Saddam Hussein to the September 2001 attacks by September 2003 (Milbank and Deane 2003).

Moreover, intertwined within the president's discourse concerning "foreign" matters (for example, "the War on Terror" and the war in Iraq) were various domestic issues. Same-sex marriage emerged as a regular topic within the president's speeches and was cast as a threat to the existing [heterosexual] marriage structure and to (American) society or (Western) civilization more broadly. During a July 2003 press conference, former President Bush stated: I believe a marriage is between a man and a woman. And I think we ought to codify that one way or the other. And we've got lawyers looking at the best way to do that (Curry 2003).

This statement was reiterated in 2004 as follows:

> I called on Congress to pass, and to send to the states for ratification, an amendment to our Constitution defining and protecting marriage as a union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. The need for that amendment is still urgent, and I repeat that call today (Bush 2004).

Given these remarks and their rhetorical context, the threat of gay men and lesbians (the threat of same-sex desire, in general, and the threat of same-sex marriage, in particular) was soon placed on par with the threat of international terrorism.

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As Jane De Hart has stated regarding the Cold War period, a rigid heterosexuality and strict adherence to traditional gender roles promoted during the Cold War years "constituted a domestic version of containment" (2001: 125). In the same way that "anti-communism required the containment of Sino-Soviet expansion abroad, gender revolution and deviant expression of sexual desire had to be effectively contained at home" (Ibid.). In an eerie statement that anticipated recent rhetorical techniques employed by the G.W. Bush administration, De Hart explains that during the Cold War:

> Promotion of family values, policy makers believed, would assure the stable family life necessary for personal and national security as well as supremacy over the Soviets. [Domestic] containment was part of a new Cold War consensus about the meaning of America (Ibid.).

Through the rhetorical strategies deployed by the G.W. Bush administration, same-sex desire/marriage was effectively re-constructed as un- or anti-American, recalling this earlier moment in U.S. history.

Likewise implicated in the web of conceived threats to the post-September 11th nation were immigrant bodies. Immigration emerged as a central issue during the 2006 mid-term election cycle when Congress advanced several pieces of legislation depicting undocumented immigrants as threatening and "illegal" in two related ways: depicting immigrants as criminals (thus, as residing outside of the law), and depicting them as requiring "legalization" (thus, as demanding containment within the fold of the law). Common to both depictions was the sentiment expressed; namely that so-called "illegal" immigrants were not only *legally* alien but were also foreign to renewed conceptions of Americanness.

The issues of same-sex marriage and immigration also merged together in 2006, providing fuel for some rather noteworthy political advertisements. The following radio ad for one North Carolina congressional district, with mariachi music playing in the background, serves as an illustration: Brad Miller supports gay marriage and sponsored a bill to let American homosexuals bring their foreign homosexual lovers to this country on a marriage visa. If Miller had his way, America would be nothing but one big fiesta for illegal aliens and homosexuals. In this instance, so-called "homosexual lovers" and "illegal immigrants" are represented as parallel or analogous threats, with the merger of the two different groups highlighting the magnitude of the perceived danger.

Narratives such as these provided tools by which the American public was called to action. The 2004 presidential election and the 2006 midterm election serve as two examples of this call in the form of the voting booth.

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During these elections, citizens in numerous states voted to amend their state constitutions to ban same-sex marriage. Importantly, prior to 2002, only 4 states in the United States had any ban on same-sex marriages, civil unions, or other domestic partnership arrangements, whereas by the November 2008 presidential election, only 20 states remained *without* a ban. We contend that the effective manufacture and deployment of "threats," by the G.W. Bush administration, successfully swayed public opinion and voter action from 2003-2008. During these years, former President Bush was consistently on message: an outside threat of "terrorists lurking in the shadows" imperiled the American people, while an internal threat - in the form of same-sex couples and illegal immigrants -simultaneously endangered the "sanctity of marriage" and "jobs of Americans." The nation's borders were conceived to be overly fluid and "routinely violated." The co-mingling of threats and the need to contain them saturated public discourse and the collective American consciousness.

U.S. efforts to contain these perceived threats were multilateral and were "revealed in […] policies, military occupation, state discourse, and overarching rhetoric surrounding citizenship *vis-à-vis* the War on Terror and 9/11" (Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2010: 2). Engin Isin (2004) articulates this phenomenon through the notions of "neurotic power" and "governing through neurosis." According to Isin, "the neurotic citizen […] governs itself through responses to anxieties and uncertainties" (223). He suggests, "the neurotic citizen is not a passive, cynical subject but an active subject whose libidinal energies are channeled toward managing its anxieties and insecurities. The neurotic citizen actively mobilizes affects and emotions and governs itself through them" (232). While Isin articulates the notion of the neurotic citizen as a general subject of modern societies, we can apply Isin's discussion to the post-9/11 United States and the specific anxieties generated by an event, transformed into an ideology and a historical period. In Isin's view (2004), the importance of the neurotic citizen lies in the fact that its wants for security are transformed into rights. Isin states:

> The neurotic citizen develops an intense aversion to the realization that it should be subject to either necessity or anxiety in seeking these rights. The need to eliminate necessity or anxiety from its existence turns its wants into claims. In essence, these claims are impossible because they articulate rights that cannot exist […] The formation of neurotic claims reproduces illusions of the neurotic citizen and enables it to shift responsibility to objects outside itself with hostility (2004: 233).

We will return to these remarks by Isin in the concluding section of the present essay.

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As a final remark regarding central aspects of the post-9/11 G.W. Bush administration's transformation of the events of September 11, 2001 into an ideology involving "9/11" - an ideology promoted and sustained through public policy and voter action - we can note that references to a "new kind of war" and a "new era" notwithstanding, the post-9/11 G.W. Bush United States actually reflects other moments in U.S. history (as suggested above). Most notable, in this regard, is the Cold War period - especially the so-called McCarthy Era - during which time a consistent use of discourse and strategies of containment unfolded; communists and homosexuals were targeted during the Cold War, much as terrorists and gays/lesbians (and immigrants) have been targeted in the War on Terror. We can recall, here, Joseph McCarthy's language from 1951, "If you want to be against McCarthy, boys, you've got to be either a Communist or a cocksucker," and Senator Kenneth Wherry's statement from 1950, "You can't hardly separate homosexuals from [Communist] subversives."

Furthermore, as Peter Kuznick and James Gilbert have argued, "much of what is usually thought of as Cold War culture outlasted the Cold War itself and likely will be with us for a long time" (2001: 2). We similarly maintain that "we should expect the post-September 11, 2001 rhetoric of threats to outlast its specific historical moment […] Indeed, we claim that we can expect to witness the reverberations of this discourse for many years to come" (Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2010: 90).

THE BROWNING OF TERROR: MANIFESTATIONS OF POST-9/11 IDEOLOGY

In light of its rather fluid and expansive construction, otherwise unrelated individuals and groups have been easily merged within the category "terrorist." As we discuss below, this state of affairs held true for presidential candidate Barack Obama himself. During his campaign for the U.S presidency, post-9/11 American anxieties worked to render Obama into a threatening body through questions concerning his patriotism, his middle name (Hussein), and his perceived religious affiliations.

Given the conflation between various domestic groups or individuals and the perceived threat of Middle Eastern terrorists, we maintain that these U.S. populations (same-sex couples and immigrants, in particular) have been effectively "browned" via patterns of discourse arising during the G.W. Bush administration. Browning, we suggest, marks a cyclical process through which bodies are rendered threatening (i.e., "browned") via their constructed association with post-9/11 renderings of terrorists or terrorism. Once "browned," these same bodies are offered as threats in need of containment. Thus, "browning" marks a dialectical and self-supporting process through which the same bodies marked as threats are rendered in need of constraint given their very construction as threatening (or, "browned") bodies. As Kumarini Silva notes, within the neo-liberal state, there is:

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"the potential for random bodies, whether they are the historically brown bodies of Latin American migration, the brown bodies of Asia and the Middle East, the globalized bodies of migratory labor, or the queered bodies of alterity, to fall under the same disciplining and governmental practices" (2010: 167).

In the case of "brown," we can thereby note a shift from "*identity* to *identification*" (167), Silva maintains, and "brown can be conceptualized as a metaphor that […] is employed broadly, if not overtly, to mark deviance" (172). We claim that within a post-9/11 United States, "browning" has been deployed to consolidate and contain individuals and populations perceived as threats, precisely reinforcing fear and insecurity around those rendered "brown." We have dubbed this process, and its attendant anxieties, "the browning of terror." "The browning of terror" marks a purposeful pattern of articulating perceived threats to the security of the national imaginary as originating from "othered" bodies and spaces. Keeping with Omi and Winant (1994) and their notion of the "racial project," we argue that within a post-9/11 frame of reference, browning indeed "becomes a 'racial project,'" working to position "brown" in contrast with the security and safety of the nation and its citizens (Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2010: 73).

As the central process delineating the "new" terrorist threat, "browning" acted to shape responses to Barack Obama during his campaign to become the 44th U.S. President. "Browning" provided a framework through which (the meaning of) Obama's body was conceptualized and reinforced. In the case of Obama, "browning" occurred via questions regarding his patriotism, his name (and thus, his ethnic background), and his religious affiliations. As a presidential candidate and participant in the presidential primaries, Obama was routinely positioned as a Black man, with a Muslim name-effectively placing him at the intersection of historical significances placed on Black, male bodies within the United States and "newer" renderings of threatening bodies as "brown." The combination of his race and questions regarding his patriotism, name, and religion afforded portrayals of Obama as un-American or a threat to Americanness (see Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2010).

Given ways in which Obama endured browning during his run for the White House, it might seem ironic to claim that Obama himself activated the dualistic discourse of "us/them" to press the American public to consider his tenability for the presidency. However, we suggest that it was, in fact, Obama's ability to activate a familiar, long-standing G.W. Bush-inspired narrative-more than Obama's novel messages of "change" and "hope" - that ultimately propelled his historic victory in the 2008 presidential election. Within the final stages of his presidential bid, and within a context of a well-established, Bush-inspired binary framework, Obama placed the unfolding "global economic crisis" and its impact on Americans. Obama positioned "Wall Street" in contrast to "Main Street," and "corporate CEOs" as antithetical to

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"everyday workers." Wall Street executives and corporate CEOs emerged as new [terrorist] threats, easily filling a position created for enemies by a post-9/11 G.W. Bush administration structure. Here are two examples from Obama's speeches delivered during 2008 demonstrating his "new" use of the well-proven binary formula (our emphases):

> Years of pain on *Main Street* have finally trickled up to *Wall Street* and sent us hurtling toward recession, reminding us that [...] we can't prosper as a nation where a *few people* are doing well and *everyone else* is struggling (Obama 2008a).

> Tomorrow you can turn the page on policies that put *greed and irresponsibility* before *hard work and sacrifice*. Tomorrow you can choose policies that invest in our middle class, create new jobs and grow this economy so that everybody has a chance to succeed. Not just *the CEO* but also *the secretary and the janitor*; not just *the factory owner* but t*he men and women who work the factory floor* (Obama 2008b).

While new terms emerged within his speeches, the binary structure of the discourse actually continued the "us/them" narrative rehearsed by President G.W. Bush during the preceding eight years. And while Obama certainly did offer a "newness" of message during his run for the presidency, with language of hope and change, he nonetheless effectively couched the newer elements of his platform within a familiar framework of threat(s) and security.

Within a context of economic collapse, Obama was able to effectively position "greed and irresponsibility" in marked contrast with "hard work and sacrifice." In turn, "greed and irresponsibility" assumed the place of the "un-American," while "hard work and sacrifice" typified the "American." Obama capitalized upon the threat/security binary in a way that continued President Bush's messaging even while providing it with a new angle of hope and change. Thus, Obama did not offer an entirely new message. We contend that mainstream Americans would not likely have heard a completely new message. Rather, the effectiveness of the Obama message was in its anchoring of hope and change within a familiar discourse of threat and containment.

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION: THE CONTINUED BROWNING OF OBAMA AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE TEA PARTY

Although Barack Obama proceeded to win the 2008 presidential election with the majority of both the popular and the electoral vote, Senator John McCain, his contender, obtained 56 million votes and over 170 electoral votes. Election results are

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important insofar as they indicate a good level of support for Obama's challenger, as well as a vocal source of dis-ease with Obama that would reveal itself with "new" forms of browning after Obama's presidential inauguration in 2009. We can see this dis-ease on election night itself in the "visceral and violent reaction emanating from the crowd" during McCain's concession speech, as we discuss elsewhere (Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2010: 78-79), including crowd members shouting "terrorist" at the mention of Obama's name. Crowd members made similar remarks during earlier McCain campaign rallies, linking Obama to perceived terrorist threats. For instance, one McCain supporter remarked, "I can't trust Obama. I have read about him and he's not, he's not uh-he's an Arab" (79).

As we turn to 2009, we can see that many Americans continued to perceive the newly elected and inaugurated President Obama as a threat - a perception fueled, perhaps, by the fact that he was now in command of the world's most powerful office. A central site for the continued browning of Obama, once in office, would be the Tea Party, which emerged early in 2009 as a vocal and visible source of discontent. The first documented Tea Party protests, for instance, occurred less than one month after Obama's inauguration (Zernike 2010). The emergence of the Tea Party is significant for our purposes here, since, although not necessarily a cohesive or formally recognized political party, it is national in scope and has key political supporters, including nationally known politicians such as Sarah Palin and Joe Wilson, and pundits such as Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity. Its supporters also represent a considerable subsection of the American public and enjoy a fair level of political clout.

While public opinion polling has suggested significant ideological differences between Tea Party members and the general American public (for instance, Tea Party supporters report higher levels of disapproval for Obama's handling of the job), demographically, Tea Party supporters share no fundamental differences with the broader American public. As reported by Gallup, "Tea Party supporters skew right politically; but demographically, they are generally representative of the public at large" (Saad 2010). However, as is often the case with subsections of a population, Tea Party supporters seem to be aligned with the American public on a few key issues. Immigration presents the most compelling example, since in both groups approximately four out of ten agree with the statement "legal immigration should decrease," according to a New York Times/CBS News poll. A Gallup poll also revealed that "of Americans who have heard of the new Arizona immigration law (SB 1070), which attempts to combat "illegal" immigration in the state of Arizona, "more are likely to favor it than oppose it," at 51 percent and 39 percent respectively (Jones 2010).

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The issue of immigration provided a springboard for the well-reported incident, in September 2009, in which, as President Obama was addressing a joint session of Congress regarding his proposed Health Care Reform, South Carolina Representative Joe Wilson shouted, "You lie," "after the president denied that health legislation would provide free coverage for illegal immigrants" (CNN 2009b). Representative Steny Hoyer, House Majority Leader at the time, expressed that in his twenty-nine years as a Congressman he had never "heard an outburst of that nature with reference to a president of the United States speaking as a guest of the House and Senate" (Fox News 2009). Notably, Hoyer's twenty-nine years extend over five other U.S. presidencies, several of which comprise two-term administrations. Maureen Dowd, in an opinion piece for *The New York Times*, remarked, "Fair or not, what I heard was an unspoken word in the air: you lie, boy!" (2009), serving to racialize and delegitimize the president. Significantly, in the wake of his outburst, Representative Wilson proceeded to become a staple at Tea Party rallies around the country, as the Tea Party Express endorsed his bid for congressional re-election (Simon 2010). This outburst also recalls the shouts emerging from crowds at McCain's campaign and concession events, constructing Obama as a terrorist, while it points to "newer" inflections to browning given Obama's new position as president and resident of the White House.

We contend that sentiment expressed by Tea Party supporters, also indicative of broader American public sentiment, should be considered from within the particular social, political, and economic context from which it emerged. This context comprises both a long history involving race relations within the United States and relatively recent events (September 11, 2001 being the most significant) that have provided that longer U.S. history with a somewhat different (or, we might say "new") inflection. Since assuming office, President Obama has been consistently "browned," but his "browning" has revealed a distinctive set of anxieties. These anxieties have played themselves out in relation to Obama's Black male body, with all of its U.S. historical significance, as well as his body's position within a post-9/11 framework of threats and containment. Moreover, the so-called "Great Recession" - arguably, the most significant event for the United States since September 11, 2001 - has come to intersect with post-9/11 meaning to inform these newer inflections of browning revealing Obama as a socialist, as lacking manhood, and as maintaining a dubious notion of change.

THE BROWNING OF OBAMA: THE QUESTION OF SOCIALISM

Although the number is much higher among Tea Party supporters, The New York Times/CBS News poll (2010) cited above revealed that more than half of Americans believe President Obama is moving the country towards socialism.

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Perhaps as significant, 20-30 percent of Tea Party supporters and the American public reported thinking that President Obama was born in another country, and one in five Americans held that "Barack Obama is a Muslim" by August 2010 (The Pew Research Center 2010). The idea that President Obama is a socialist or leading the country toward socialism has been a consistent point raised by Tea Party supporters. One of the more controversial of these connections was made by a Tea Party group in Iowa, which in July 2010 displayed a billboard in Mason City showing "large photographs of Obama, Nazi leader Hitler and communist leader Lenin beneath the labels 'Democratic Socialism,' 'National Socialism,' and 'Marxist Socialism'" respectively (Meredith 2010). Beneath the photos is the phrase, "Radical leaders prey on the fearful & naïve" (Meredith 2010). During the 2010 mid-term elections, conservative politicians courted Tea Party sympathizers by stimulating people's fears of a socialist Obama administration. For instance, "at a Tea Party protest in Las Vegas, Joe Heck, a Republican running for Congress, blamed both the Democratic and Republican Parties for moving the country toward 'socialistic tyranny'" (Barstow 2010). Obama as a socialist threat was also a common theme at Tea Party rallies, with signs reading: "Impeach the Muslim Marxist," "Obama: Socialist pig," and "Obama = Socialism. Socialism = Evil."

The perception of Obama as personifying the threat of socialism operates within a framework in which his "Americanness" and U.S. citizenship have already been called into question. Obama's perceived foreignness, within a post-9/11 United States, casts Obama as un- or anti- American. The perceived anti-American "nature" of socialism is, in this regard, not unlike the perceived evil of other post-9/11 threats. However, the fact that Obama is seen as Black *and* perceived as a socialist, as well as the fact that Americans have been immersed in economic recession in tandem with post-9/11 anxieties, have combined to form the notion of a "welfare thug" - someone doling out the hard-earned money of genuine (White) Americans to those undeserving un- or anti- Americans ("illegal" immigrants or [Black] recipients of public support). In this regard, responses to President Obama's initiatives as being socialist, or as posing socialist threats, would not likely have garnered the same sort of reaction had they come from a White (and unquestionably Christian and American) president, even if that president were a Democrat.

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THE BROWNING OF OBAMA: THE QUESTION OF MANHOOD

On August 1, 2010, while discussing Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 on Fox News, Sarah Palin remarked:

> "[Arizona governor] Jan Brewer has the *cojones* that our President does not have to look out for all Americans, not just Arizonans, but all Americans. If our own President will not enforce our federal law, more power to Jan Brewer" (McAuliff 2010).

Liz Peek expressed a similar sentiment in a December 3, 2010 opinion piece for FoxNews.com. She stated:

> [F]ormer President Jimmy Carter dropped by the White House on Wednesday. He must have felt entirely at home. The nation is reeling from self-inflicted embarrassments that have Americans feeling impotent and humiliated - just like the good old days when *he* lived at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue (Peek 2010).

And in his essay for *The Guardian*, titled "Obama the Impotent," Steven Hill (2009) explained what he perceived as the shortcomings of President Obama's administration, along with the failings of the U.S. system of democracy in general. Obama's perceived lack of resolve motivated financial blogger Eric Salzman to remark, in an article titled, "Man Up, Obama, or Make Way for President Palin," that we have not seen such a lack of leadership "in the White House since our 15th president, James Buchanan, stood by and let the country dissolve into Civil War while trying to appease everyone" (qtd. in Reilly 2010).

Images intended to undermine President Obama's manhood have been pervasive. Two graphic examples include illustrations with the following language: "As I'm paying your mortgage, when do I bone your wife?," and "I like weed, coke, and cock" (with a picture of Obama). The tabloid, the *Globe*, promoted a front-page story of an alleged gay cover-up involving President Obama in February 2009. Efforts to emasculate, desexualize, homosexualize, or infantilize President Obama have worked to contain his power and authority. We can recall, here, our earlier comments regarding the U.S. Cold War strategy of promoting adherence to a rigid heterosexuality and traditional gender roles as a means to garner national security. Within a post-9/11 "War on Terror" framework, sexually graphic images of President Obama also conjure reminders of the Abu Ghraib photo scandal in which Iraqi prisoners were shown in demeaning sexualized positions aimed at humiliation and promoting torture, as well as recent reports of Maricopa County (Arizona) Sheriff, Joe Arpaio, "regularly sweep[ing] [undocumented] immigrants and throwing them into prison tents in the desert, making them wear pink underwear for effect" (The

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Economist 2010). Within a longer U.S. history, and in relation to claims involving socialism and welfare, Obama himself is positioned-in the case of statements directed at Obama regarding "boning his wife given payment of his mortgage"-*as* a welfare recipient (as living in rent- or mortgage-free housing), thought to entitle the (White, male) tax payer, and thus owner of the home, to sexual privileges with the (Black) female resident (Michelle Obama). We could even say that these images serve as a reminder of our not-so-distant history of castration and lynching of Black men in the United States-a response, as James Messerschmidt conveys, "to the perceived erosion of white male domination" (2005).

THE BROWNING OF OBAMA: THE QUESTION OF CHANGE

As mentioned previously, we maintain that presidential candidate Barack Obama employed a framework of "security versus threat" in the final stages of his presidential bid. That is, within the "us/them" framework well established by the G.W. Bush administration, Obama placed the unfolding global "economic crisis" and its impact on Americans. However, after assuming office, at least through 2010, this framework virtually disappeared from President Obama's discourse. For instance, in his 2010 State of the Union Address, the President's language was nearly devoid of binaries (mentioning the Main Street/Wall Street dichotomy just once). Instead, his speech offered a consistent call to move forward, move ahead, and change. In fact, the word "change" appeared eleven times in the address, while "future" appeared six times, "education" appeared five times, "prosperity" appeared four times, and derivatives of these terms appeared several more times each (Obama 2010). In contrast, words that consistently appeared in former President G.W. Bush's speeches-words that we might call "trigger words" (security, threat, protection, terrorism, safety, danger) - were either used less frequently or not at all in Obama's first State of the Union Address (see Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2010).

President Obama's use of language regarding change and prosperity might be considered lackluster when placed alongside Bush-era "trigger words." In addition, his very notion of change has been perceived as dubious in various contexts and especially among Tea Party supporters. Illustrating responses to Obama's notion of change have been various interpretations of the word "change" itself. For instance, in February 2010, during a speech delivered at the first Tea Party National Convention in Nashville, in which she criticized the president's policies, Sarah Palin asked the well-reported question: "This was all part of that hope and change and transparency. Now, a year later, I gotta ask the supporters of all that, 'How's that hopey, changey stuff working out?'" (Gonyea 2010). This question became a bumper sticker slogan, appearing on signs at rallies, t-shirts, coffee mugs, and other products.

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We also find examples of anxiety (or some might say, contempt) over Obama's calls for change on rally placards. A few of these signs read: "'Change'-Change it back to the way this country was founded on," "I'll keep my money. You keep the change," "Change We Cannot Afford," and "Chains we can believe in" (transforming the word "change" to "chains" and evoking bondage).

While many of the critical remarks regarding Obama's notion of change correspond to concerns over socialism, plays on the word "change" also indicate other messages. Whereas Bush-era trigger words provided a sense of "enduring" and "constant" aspects of the American nation and American life, Obama's calls for change themselves might be regarded as unwelcome (by many) within a decade book-ended by the collapse of the Twin Towers, on the one end, and the collapse of the economy, on the other end. That is, for many Americans, more comfort might be found in suggestions of constancy, while more anxiety might be found in suggestions to further transform or alter their lives. We could say that this anxiety has only been heightened through the visible presence of a Black man in charge - a perceived anti-American Muslim, moreover - perceived both as a dictator and an incapable leader, and as consistently incapable of protecting and securing the lives and interests of everyday (White, Christian, straight) Americans and the nation.

Much of the language on rally placards can be read either as directed at Obama or as mocking him - "putting him in his place," in both instances. In the case of "Change it back to the way the country was founded on," we can see a call for (White) Americans to "take back the country" - to take it away from Obama, to take it back to a time when a Black man would not have been allowed to serve as President (or to maintain American citizenship or the right to vote). The "you keep the change" message positions the President in the role of service worker (that is, anyone routinely told to "keep the change") and on the receiving end of a direct command. Obama is situated as a contemptible threat-someone aiming to take (white) Americans' money and give it to Blacks (also recalling and evoking the socialism and welfare imagery in the process).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We argue elsewhere (Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2010) that prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks, "Instilled in Americans was the illusion of an open and global society-a society considered to contain the world." However, with the events of September 11, 2001, "the United States government and its citizens began a…process of shutting out the world, reluctant to engage with a newly-revealed *uncontained* world" (8). During the G.W. Bush presidency, the events of September the 11th were transformed into an ideology involving "9/11" via a discourse of threats and

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containment. A unified American lens was constructed - a lens that transformed Americans' ways of seeing the world; a lens that would prevail for many years to come. In the immediate wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, Americans retreated inside their homes, locked their doors, and displayed American flags at their points of entry. At the same time, the U.S. government worked to "secure the borders," formed the Department of Homeland Security, and enacted "the USA Patriot Act."

Not coincidentally, home ownership in the United States reached an all-time high several years later, in 2004 (at 69.2 percent), the average size of the American home grew to 2,349 square feet (Solomon 2010), home prices nearly doubled between 2000 and 2006 (Fleckenstein 2006), and, with the bursting of the housing bubble in 2006, 23 percent of U.S. homes would be worth less than the mortgage loans held on them by September 2010 (Lewis 2010). With nearly 25% of homes standing at zero or negative equity came "death for the McMansion" and demand for more practicality (see Perman 2010; Gentilviso 2010). With this demand, we could say that "security" conceived in the form of a home that one owns (or that has been mortgaged), and even greater security conceived in the form of a bigger home with grander amenities (one's very own retreat), has been exchanged for "security" in the form of a more modest and affordable home (thereby bolstering one's safety and refuge more readily).

It is within *this* environment, in which American perceptions of their own security have been so severely undermined since 2001 - first by "Muslim extremists," and then, by "corporate CEOs" - that we find the entangling of various other perceptions: a Black man residing in the grandest house in the United States (the White House), assuming no mortgage or economic risk to do so, and departing his historic location as a Black man in the United States ("ascended," if you will). Moreover, this man - the President - perceived to be a questionable *man* at that, has not upheld the G.W. Bush discourse or swagger of "us versus them" and "safety versus threat."

We maintain that without the clear articulation of an enemy *by* Obama (or his administration), recent anxieties have found their location *in* Obama (or his administration). Within many contexts, Obama himself has emerged as the paradigmatic enemy "other." For instance, in stating concerns of the Tea Party movement, leader Mark Williams has remarked, "This is about Americans being attacked by their own government" (CNN 2009a). This perception and framing of "attack" can be seen in discourse and imagery of Obama (and in some cases, the Obama administration) as socialist (or supporting socialist policies), impotent (or a "terrorist coddler"), and suspicious change agent (socialist or "welfare thug"). In all cases, Obama has been perceived as an "enemy within."

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In the post-9/11-Great Recession United States, we might do well to recall Isin's notion of the neurotic citizen governing itself "through responses to anxieties and uncertainties" (2004, 223) and enabling shifts of "responsibility to objects outside itself with hostility" (233). We might consider Americans' own attempts to secure borders and garner security in a post-9/11 context, including how some of these attempts have served to construct enemy others. Without the formation of a new ideology via the Obama administration, the lens afforded by the G.W. Bush presidency will continue to inform the way Americans construct and perceive their world. Americans themselves will ensure this continuation insofar as they promote neurotic claims and displace anxiety. Insofar as perception becomes reality, the perceptions and conceptions of President Obama that have emerged from Tea Party supporters reveal views of many more Americans-views that indicate the continuing "browning of terror."

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