

The University of Colorado Boulder

PERFECTING OUR UNION:
RHETORICAL ANALYSES ON THE TOPIC OF RACE

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Political Science Honors Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

My undergraduate education has been bookended by competing visions of the United States presented through presidential campaign rhetoric. I arrived as a student at the University of Colorado amid the 2016 general election campaign between former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump; and upon the completion of my undergraduate degree I will have spent the majority of my senior year observing the 2020 Democratic presidential primary. In this time, I have witnessed competing analyses by presidential candidates as to the state of the country as well as the direction they believe it ought to move. Observing one of the most highly contentious elections in American history, as well as a Democratic primary comprised of the largest field of candidates in history, thus piqued my interest in presidential campaign rhetoric and, specifically, how and why presidential candidates present the visions of the country they do.

Presidential campaign rhetoric is unique in that it serves as a barometer for the United States. It reflects collective opinions and beliefs, while at the same time presenting a vision for a possible future direction of the nation – advocating a vision for what ought to be. As such, presidential campaign rhetoric can be analyzed not only as a means of understanding the attitude of the United States at a particular moment, but also as a way of understanding the direction in which the country is moving.

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct a comparative analysis of the rhetorical techniques employed by Democratic presidential candidates specifically on the topic of race. In narrowing my scope of study for this project, I selected the topic of race and the Democratic party in particular for two reasons. First, the history of race, race relations, and racial equality in the United States is inseparable from the history of the United States itself. To understand the

history of the United States, one must understand the history of race in the United States; and so I have selected to focus my study on the topic of race. Second, the Democratic party, since the Civil Rights movement and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, has been widely considered to be the party of racial progress (Black, 2004; Luks and Elms, 2005). For these reasons, I have chosen to focus my study of presidential campaign rhetoric specifically on the topic of race and confined to Democratic candidates for the presidency.

In short, my study seeks to analyze the rhetoric of Democratic presidential candidates on the topic of race to determine how Democratic presidential candidates have discussed the topic of race on the campaign trail, and to determine whether the rhetorical trends can elucidate larger shifts in American politics over the last half century. The remainder of this introduction will present an overview of this project, briefly discussing the research methods used, candidates studied, and the overarching argument presented in this paper.

Overview of Research Methods and Approach

To effectively analyze the rhetoric of Democratic presidential candidates, I utilize a comparative case study approach to evaluate the presidential campaign rhetoric of three candidates – Robert Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama – by examining three major dimensions of their rhetoric. First, I investigate how each candidate uses rhetoric to establish his *credibility on race*. Second, I evaluate the *rhetorical framing* each candidate uses when discussing the topic of race in their campaign rhetoric. For this section, I compare whether candidates use post-racial, race-blind, race-conscious, or humanist rhetorical frames. Third, I examine the *rationality* candidates use to justify their racial vision for the United States as motivated by economic and neoliberal principles, social justice-based values, or whether their

rhetoric lies somewhere in between. To systematically evaluate the rhetoric used by each candidate, I have created a means of categorizing rationality as either neoliberal or social justice-motivated that is explained in greater depth in Chapter 2: Methods. I conclude this thesis with a comparative analysis of the conclusions I draw from each case study.

In this conclusion, I argue that based upon the findings in this study, Democratic presidential candidates have, since the late 1960's, transitioned away from social justice-motivated rationalities to more neoliberal ones; but there is a catch: Obama's 2008 campaign rhetoric indicates that the United States may be shifting back towards social justice-motivated rationalities. This is significant because a shift away from neoliberalism towards more social justice-motivated rationality reveals not only a shift in American political attitudes, but indicates also that a more profound paradigm shift is taking place, slowly altering the intellectual framework that guides how Americans justify their political attitudes. Throughout this thesis, I posit that this shift away from neoliberal rationalities and towards a social-justice motivated alternative is indeed taking place in the United States, and that such a shift would signify that Americans are beginning to formulate and justify their political views based not on what is economically beneficial, but what is just and morally right.

Numerous bodies of scholarship are dedicated to the study of presidential rhetoric. A segment of the those who study presidential rhetoric, however, investigate specifically presidential rhetoric as it appears on the campaign trail. Indeed, of those who study presidential campaign rhetoric, few focus specifically on the topic of race and fewer still investigate the campaign rhetoric of Democratic presidential candidates and their rhetoric on race in particular. It is within this niche of academic literature that my study seeks to make a substantive addition. My thesis builds upon and adds to scholarship within the field by analyzing the rhetoric of three

Democratic presidential candidates – Robert F. Kennedy, William J. Clinton, and Barack H. Obama – whose rhetoric, in so far as I was able to identify, has not yet been analyzed in comparison to one another in the same study. Furthermore, the method I use in this study as a means of analyzing these three candidates represents a novel approach to studying presidential campaign rhetoric. This method entails the combination of three distinct dimensions of rhetorical analysis: (1) how a candidate establishes his or her credibility on the topic of race, (2) how a candidate frames the topic of race, and (3) how a candidate rationalizes his or her racial vision for the country. Moreover, the method by which I evaluate the rationality of each candidate builds upon established practices in Political Theory, advanced specifically by political theorist Wendy Brown. My third dimension of rhetorical analysis – determining how a candidate rationalizes their racial vision for the country – expands upon the work of Brown by providing a method through which one may evaluate alternative rationalities to neoliberalism. In the course of this study, I deploy this model in order to contrast neoliberal rationalities to what I term social justice motivated rationality which could serve as one – but certainly not the only – alternative to neoliberal rationality.

Taken together, my selection of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama; the use of credibility, rhetorical framing, and rationality as my three dimensions of rhetorical analysis; and the use of a dichotomous rationality matrix to weigh the rationality of a candidate as either social justice-motivated or neoliberal, contributes new scholarship to the field of presidential rhetorical analysis as well as political theory. It is my hope that this model of rhetorical analysis particular to the topic of race can be used by future scholars to characterize the rhetoric of political candidates beyond the candidates I analyze as well as the rhetorical topics I engage in this study.

To establish this methodology in greater depth and to explain the techniques of rhetorical analysis I use throughout the remainder of this thesis, we turn first to Chapter 2: Methods.

CHAPTER 2

Methods

Introduction to Methods

This chapter presents an overview of the methods I use throughout this study. In the first section of this chapter, I will discuss the candidates whose rhetoric I analyze and the process by which I selected those candidates. In the second section, I will discuss the process I used to select the speeches I analyzed for each candidate. In the third and final section, I will discuss the three rhetorical dimensions – credibility, rhetorical frame, and rationality – I use to analyze each candidate’s rhetoric on race. In summary, this chapter will follow a *who, what, and how* structure: *Who* the candidates are and why they were selected; *What* the speeches are and why they were selected; and *How* I analyze each of those speeches and why I selected the methods of analysis that I did. I will begin with the following section entitled The Selection of Candidates.

2.1 The Selection of Candidates

Many individuals have campaigned for the Presidency under the auspices of the Democratic party in the nearly sixty year period covered by this thesis. Given the sheer number of Democratic candidates throughout this period, it would be well beyond the scope of this project to discuss the rhetoric of every single candidate who attempted this monumental task. Moreover, such a project would fail to be particularly instructive as most Democratic candidates who have pursued the presidency have not offered distinctive or influential rhetoric on race. I have instead chosen to focus my study of Democratic presidential campaign rhetoric on race to just a few candidates, each of whom was selected because (1) they have stood out as marking

new directions in the framing of race, and (2) they have stood out as historical figures marking important shifts in the history of the Democratic Party and presidential rhetoric on race.

I originally selected four candidates for this study: Robert Kennedy, Bill Clinton, Jesse Jackson, and Barack Obama. However, as a result of the time constraints and the unique public health circumstances surrounding the completion of this thesis, I was unable to do adequate justice to the analysis of Jesse Jackson's rhetoric, and so omitted him from this study. Any future study of this topic should include him in its inquiry for two reasons. First, his rhetorical approach to race represented a new and unique direction for Democratic presidential campaign rhetoric. Second, Jackson was only the second major black candidate for the presidency of the United States after Shirley Chisholm, and went on to win 18.2% of the vote in the 1984 Democratic presidential primary (New York Times). Given that I had to forego discussing Jackson's candidacy and his rhetoric on race, I have instead focused this study on the remaining three candidates: Robert Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama.

I included Robert Kennedy in this project because he not only enjoyed overwhelming support from black Americans as a white politician in the 1960's – which was itself a significant achievement – and was regarded by many, including Michael Riley, the Chairman of Kennedy's Indiana campaign committee, as “the only white politician at the time who enjoyed a degree of trust from the African American community” (Boomhower, 68). Kennedy's connection with race and American politics was described in similar terms by Congressman John Lewis, a prominent civil rights figure and campaign aide to Senator Kennedy, who said when remarking on the aftermath of Martin Luther King's assassination that Kennedy “was one of the few white politicians in America to be able to walk through the heart of the African American community in downtown Atlanta” alongside the casket of Dr. King (Lewis, 2018). Indeed, numerous

historical documents as well as personal testimony by civil rights figures and campaign data make clear that Kennedy was able to bridge racial divides in American politics that few other politicians at the time could. His rhetoric throughout his 1968 presidential campaign also heavily focused on race and racial tensions in the United States. For these reasons, I opted to include Kennedy in this study.

I chose Bill Clinton for this study because of his unique approach to discussing race as a presidential candidate, his wide appeal with both black and white audiences – with significant support from black Americans in particular – and the characterization of Clinton as the first ‘black’ president, a title bestowed by Nobel Laureate and prominent black author Toni Morrison who said of Clinton: “white skin notwithstanding, this is our first black President. Blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children’s lifetime” (Coates, 2015). Clinton’s wide electoral appeal, his strong connection with black Americans in particular, and his unique rhetorical approach to race as evidenced by his campaign rhetoric are the reasons for his inclusion in this study.

I included Barack Obama in this study due to the significant focus on race present throughout his 2008 presidential campaign and his unique position of having been elected the first black president of the United States. Additionally, Obama was widely popular with both black and white audiences, suggesting an appeal that transcended racial lines (Simba, 2009; Todd and Gawiser, 2009). The significance of Obama’s candidacy as the first black American to win the presidency, his wide electoral appeal amongst black and white Americans alike, as well as the topical focus on race that accompanied his candidacy for president, all make him a necessary case for understanding presidential rhetoric on the topic of race.

By analyzing these three figures whose candidacies span nearly a half-century and whose backgrounds and identities vary distinctly, I hope to gain a better understanding of the evolution of Democratic presidential campaign rhetoric on the topic of race, to identify trends that help elucidate why this rhetoric has shifted, and what such a shift means for the current political moment. Having just discussed the selection of candidates for this study, I now turn to the process by which I selected the speeches for each candidate.

2.2 The Selection of Speeches

My selection process for the speeches in this study followed two major steps: first, I identified previously-established collections of significant campaign speeches delivered by the candidate (either an anthology of speeches or through an online speech bank); and second, I reviewed the collection of speeches identified in step one to determine which of those speeches identified by the speech bank or anthology focused clearly on the topic of race and race relations in the United States. The remainder of this section is dedicated to describing this two-step process in greater detail.

The first step I took in identifying the speeches for my candidates was to refer to a previously compiled collection of speeches either in book form or an online speech bank in order to narrow the scope of my search. Given the time constraints placed on this study, it would not have been possible for me to read all of the speeches each candidate delivered throughout the course of his primary and general election campaigns in order to determine the speeches most strongly focused on the topic of race. As such, I relied upon pre-established collections of speeches to aid in the collection of my data. For Clinton, the most significant speeches he delivered throughout his 1992 campaign were compiled by one of his close aides, Stephen A.

Smith, in his book *Preface to the Presidency: Selected Speeches of Bill Clinton 1974-1992*. It was from this collection that I drew the speeches I analyze for Bill Clinton.

For Robert Kennedy and Barack Obama, I identified an online speech bank, *americanrhetoric.com*, that contained many of the most prominent speeches on the topic of race delivered throughout their respective presidential campaigns. To confirm that the collection of speeches compiled by the online speech bank reflected a high quality sample of significant speeches delivered by each candidate, I reviewed previous scholarship that has evaluated campaign rhetoric of Kennedy and Obama specifically; I found that the speeches compiled by the speech bank largely corresponded to the selection of speeches discussed in the scholarship investigating the campaign rhetoric of Obama and Kennedy, and so relied on that speech bank to help winnow the possible speeches I would analyze.

The second step of my speech identification process entailed determining whether a speech concerned the topic of race. After curating a general selection of significant speeches for a candidate, I reviewed each speech in its entirety (with anywhere from six to eight speeches for each candidate) to narrow my selection to speeches focused on the topic of race or those with a substantial racial dimension. To determine if a speech constituted ‘a speech on race’, I weighed a number of contextual and substantive factors, namely the location of a speech, its audience, and its subject matter. These factors are relevant to discerning whether a speech is focused on issues of race because these often codependent factors elucidate multiple contextual factors of the speech beyond simply its rhetorical content.

Indeed, the rhetorical substance of a speech is often influenced by its audience which is itself routinely determined by the location of the address. For this reason, if one exclusively evaluates a speech’s content without understanding the broader context in which the speech was

delivered – and for the purposes of this study, its audience and location – critical information can be missed. For example, Bill Clinton’s ‘Sister Souljah’ moment in which he rebukes extremist views espoused by a prominent black artist occurs before Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition. Many in the news media at the time, as well as Jesse Jackson, believed that Clinton’s critique of Sister Souljah was not aimed at the Rainbow Coalition audience as much as it was intended for a larger audience of white moderates for whom Clinton was attempting to establish himself as a moderate on issues of race (New York Times). Yet simply examining the rhetorical substance of the speech without taking into account its location or audience would leave out important information necessary to fully understand this speech and its impact. Furthermore, in the age of ubiquitous digital media, a speech’s audience is no longer limited to the physical audience before whom it is delivered. And while speakers have throughout history been keenly aware of the impact their speeches may have beyond their immediate audience, this reality has become more significant as information has become more readily accessible. Although there are numerous other contextual factors to a speech – the relevant political, social, and cultural moment, a candidate’s position in the polls, scandals, and the economy to name only a few – I have selected location, audience, and rhetorical substance as the factors by which I evaluate whether a speech is focused on the topic of race.

Furthermore, each speech I selected for this study fulfilled at least two of the three aforementioned conditions in order to be considered a speech focused on the topic of race. For example, Obama’s “Ebenezer Baptist Church Address” was delivered at the congregation of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., arguably the largest civil rights figure in American history, and discussed specifically the topic of race and race relations in the United States. In this way, two of the three contextual factors pertained to the topic of race, and so his speech was included in my study. As

a result of this selection methodology, I selected four speeches for the candidacy of Barack Obama, four speeches for the candidacy of Bill Clinton, and three speeches for the candidacy of Robert Kennedy.

2.3 The Dimensions of Analysis for a Candidate's Rhetoric on Race

Having just discussed the process by which I selected the speeches for each candidate, I will now turn to the three dimensions I used for analyzing the rhetoric of each candidate. Throughout this study, I determine each candidate's rhetorical approach to race by evaluating their rhetoric through three distinct rhetorical dimensions: credibility, rhetorical framing, and rationality. Each of these three rhetorical dimensions invites three corresponding questions by which I analyze the rhetoric of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama. First: *How does a candidate establish his credibility to discuss issues of race on the campaign trail?* Second: *What rhetorical frames does a candidate use to discuss issues of race on the campaign trail?* And third: *How does a candidate rationalize his racial vision for the country?* These three questions guide my analysis of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama's rhetoric on race. Each question, and the methods I use to answer them, are discussed in depth in the remainder of this chapter.

2.4 Dimension One: Credibility

Credibility is the first factor I evaluate when analyzing a candidate's rhetoric on race. The question of credibility in this inquiry is thus: *How does a candidate establish his credibility to discuss issues of race on the campaign trail?* In other words, how does the candidate establish trust or legitimacy with his audience in order to speak authoritatively on the topic of race?

To evaluate the question of how each candidate establishes his credibility on race, I evaluate the individual narratives each candidate weaves into his discussions of race throughout his speeches. For some of the candidates whose rhetoric I evaluate, their credibility is derived from personal experience – particularly their proximity to suffering – as well as personal identity. Credibility is, however, a subjective matter; so each candidate’s rhetoric concerning credibility must be evaluated within the context of the broader campaign rhetoric in which language regarding credibility is used, a candidates personal identity and history, and the audience before whom they are speaking. For these reasons, the narratives each candidate embraces while discussing the topic of race – and the extent to which personal experience, proximity to suffering, and the discussion of personal identity enter into that narrative – contribute to how that candidate establishes his credibility on the topic of race.

2.5 Dimension Two: Rhetorical Framing

I use four rhetorical frames throughout my study to characterize the rhetoric of each candidate on the topic of race. These racial frames are: a race-blind rhetorical frame; a race-conscious rhetorical frame; a post-racial rhetorical frame; and a humanist rhetorical frame. For clarity and future reference, the four rhetorical frames are summarized in the table below:

Table 2.1: Rhetorical frames

Term	Rhetorical Frame
Race-blind	Avoids making racial distinctions; advances the notion that race does not matter
Race-conscious	Makes distinctions on the basis of race; highlights differences in experience based on race
Post-racial	Articulates a world where race no longer matters (also referred to as a colorblind future)
Humanist	Transcends racial distinctions by embracing the value of a common humanity

There is an important distinction to be made between these four rhetorical frames. The first two – race-blind and race conscious – are used in terms of assessing the *current racial situation* of the United States, that is the racial moment in which the candidate is running for the presidency. For Kennedy, that is 1968; for Bill Clinton, 1992; and for Barack Obama, 2008. For example, Bill Clinton may be race-blind in his assessment of the current situation because he avoids making racial distinctions and advances the notion that race does not matter.

The last two rhetorical frames – post-racial and humanist – are used in terms of describing the *racial vision* for the United States each candidate espouses. For example, Robert Kennedy uses humanist rhetorical framing for his racial vision for the United States because he articulates a future where the embrace of common humanity transcends racial distinctions. I regard post-racial and humanist rhetorical frames as social justice-motivated in their rationality, which I discuss in greater depth in the following section.

2.6 Dimension Three: Rationality

Is a candidate's pursuit of social justice or economic prosperity simply a means to an end or an end to itself? This is the question guiding the rationality section of this study. Each of the three candidates whose campaign rhetoric I analyze rationalizes (or justifies) his racial vision for the United States in one of two ways: either through the pursuit of social justice or the pursuit of economic prosperity. In other words: is a candidate pursuing his racial vision for the country because he believes it is the socially just thing to do? Or is he pursuing his racial vision for the country because it yields economic prosperity?

For example, Clinton may pursue social justice (through a post-racial vision for the country) because it ultimately yields greater economic prosperity. In this case, Clinton is

pursuing social justice *to attain* economic prosperity. Social justice is, for him, a means to an end. On the other hand, Kennedy may pursue social justice (through a humanist rhetorical frame and vision for the country) as being a justifiable end to itself. For him, pursuing *social justice needs no further justification*. In this study I refer to this as a candidate's 'rationality' for pursuing his racial vision for the country.

Clinton, Kennedy and Obama each use a different rationality to justify the pursuit of their racial visions for the country. To differentiate these rationalities, I have created a means of categorizing rhetoric as strongly neoliberal, strongly social justice-motivated or somewhere in between. In this study, I use this model in two ways: First, to categorize the rationality present in the speeches of my case studies; and second, as a means of comparing one case to another in terms of the extent to which each candidate embraces neoliberal or social justice-motivated rationality. Before developing this point further, it is important to clarify the terms I use.

- First, I have selected the term 'social justice-motivated' to describe a rationality whose end goal is achieving racial justice, racial equality, or racial unity.
- Second, I have selected the term 'neoliberal' to describe a rationality whose end goal is achieving economic prosperity, economic opportunity, or the development of human capital.

I believe each candidate's rhetoric on racial equality can be largely grouped into the following four categories, and that each category represents the strength with which a candidate either embraces or rejects neoliberal or social justice-motivated rationality:

- 1) The pursuit of social justice for social justice's sake
- 2) The pursuit of economic prosperity for social justice's sake
- 3) The pursuit of social justice for economic prosperity's sake

4) The pursuit of economic prosperity for economic prosperity's sake

I have named these four rationality categories as follows, corresponding to the numbers above:

1) **Strongly social justice-motivated:** "Pursing social justice values for the sake of social justice"

2) **Social justice-motivated through neoliberal means:** "Pursuing economic prosperity for the sake of social justice"

3) **Neoliberal through social justice-means:** "Pursuing social justice for the sake of economic prosperity"

4) **Strongly neoliberal:** "Pursuing economic prosperity for the sake of economic prosperity"

In summary, to identify whether a candidate adopts a neoliberal or social justice-motivated rationality in his rhetoric on race, one must first ask the question: What is his effort – either in the form of a policy recommendation, a collective moral call to action, etc. – chiefly aimed at achieving: economic prosperity or social justice? If the main goal is economic prosperity, neoliberal rationality has encroached. If the main goal is social justice, social justice-motivated rationality prevails.

However, an emphasis on economic prosperity does not always mean neoliberal rationality is the operative ideological rationality. Conversely, an emphasis on achieving social justice does not mean that neoliberal rationality is rejected all together. As such, I argue there is a spectrum on which one's rhetoric can be identified as neoliberal or social justice-motivated, and this spectrum is defined in large part by the "end goal" the candidate articulates. To illustrate this point, I've created both a table and spectrum to help clarify and categorize the rhetoric used by candidates into groups which reflect their embrace of neoliberal or justice-motivated reasoning.

Table 1 groups the different rhetorical approaches into four categories as defined by a candidate’s justification of his racial vision for the United States as pursuing either economic prosperity or social justice. Additionally, these categories can pertain to individual sentences, policy proposals, the argument or arc of a speech, or can be used to categorize a candidate’s rhetoric generally.

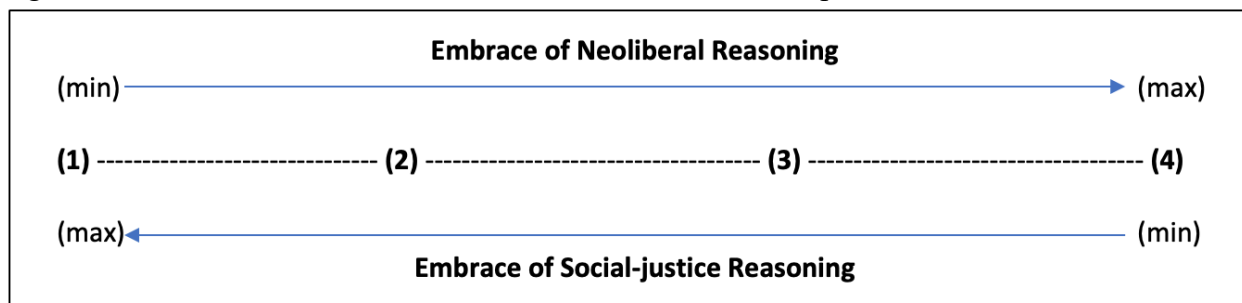
Table 2.2: Neoliberal vs. Justice-oriented Rhetorical Categories*

	Social Justice	Economic Prosperity
Social Justice	Strongly social justice-motivated	Neoliberal through social justice-means
Economic Prosperity	Social justice-motivated through neoliberal means	Strongly Neoliberal

* Each of the following terms in the table should be read using the following convention: “Pursuing Column *Y* (vertical) for the sake of Row *X* (horizontal)”. For example: “Pursuing *Social Justice* for the sake of *Economic Prosperity*”

The above rationalities can also be placed on a spectrum in order to compare candidates regarding the extent to which each embraces a social-justice or neoliberal rationality. Here is that spectrum:

Figure 2.1: Neoliberal vs. Social Justice-Motivated Rhetorical Spectrum*



* The numbers below correspond to positions along the ideological spectrum, indicating the extent to which a candidate embraces neoliberal or social justice-oriented rationality.

- (1) Strongly Social Justice-motivated (2) Social Justice-motivated through Neoliberal means
- (3) Neoliberal through Social Justice-motivated means (4) Strongly Neoliberal

Using these categories, I characterize the rationality with which each of my candidates justifies his racial vision for the United States as either: Strongly social justice-motivated; Social justice-motivated through neoliberal means; Neoliberal through social justice-means; or Strongly Neoliberal. It is important to note that this rationality model builds on the established rhetorical model of political theorist Wendy Brown, whose book, *Undoing the Demos*, evaluates rationality in a similar manner. My approach builds upon the model presented by Brown in that I provide an alternative model for analyzing other rationalities in comparison to neoliberal ones. It is also a novel approach in that, based upon my own research of the field, this method of analyzing rhetoric through rationality has yet to be applied as a means of conducting a comparative case-study analysis of the rhetoric of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama. In this way, I am building upon pre-established practices in the field by adding a new methodology and application to understanding rationality of presidential campaign rhetoric, particularly on the topic of race.

We have just finished discussing Chapter 2: Methods. In the next section, we will turn to the first case study: Robert Kennedy. The chapter on Kennedy will first include a brief introduction to his candidacy, a discussion of the relevant scholarship that has already examined Kennedy's presidential rhetoric, a short preview and background of Kennedy's speeches, and will then be followed by an in-depth analysis of Kennedy's rhetoric on race, specifically evaluating how he establishes credibility on issues of race, how he rhetorically frames the issue of race, and how Kennedy rationalizes his racial future for the United States. This same case-study analysis will be repeated for Clinton and Obama, and will be followed by an overarching discussion of the larger trends of Democratic presidential campaign rhetoric on the topic of race illuminated by my analysis of the individual case studies.

CHAPTER 3

Kennedy

In this chapter, I will discuss the campaign rhetoric of Robert F. Kennedy. He campaigned in the 1968 Democratic presidential primary, and although his campaign was brief, it is notable for its rhetoric on race. Throughout his campaign, Kennedy focused significantly on topics of social justice and racial equality, and his arguments for both were strongly rooted in a sense of morality and justice. This is notable because this is *not* the dominant way in which racial issues are now discussed by Democratic candidates. Indeed, Kennedy differs from many of his Democratic successors because he so strongly focuses on the moral imperative and inherent justice of pursuing social justice and racial equality. The notion that pursuing social justice and racial equality is simply morally right and that such reasoning ought to supersede any other reasons for doing so, economic or otherwise, is one of the major distinguishing factors between Kennedy, and the candidacies of Clinton and Obama.

Over the course of this chapter, I will argue that the rationality behind Kennedy's rhetoric on race is strongly justice-motivated and that his rhetorical frames are both race-conscious and humanist. This is important because *the combination of these three rhetorical dimensions – a race-conscious, humanist, and strongly justice-motivated rationality – mark a distinct and unique rhetorical approach to Democratic presidential campaign rhetoric*, not only when compared to the other candidates in this study, but Democratic presidential rhetoric in general since Kennedy's candidacy. Indeed, Kennedy's rhetoric on race is characterized by three principle characteristics: first, how he unflinchingly recognizes social injustice and racial inequality; second, how he prescribes a vision for the future where a shared sense of humanity

transcends racial distinctions; and third, how he justifies this approach simply because it is the morally right thing to do. Furthermore, I will argue later that Clinton and Obama move away from this rhetorical approach to the topic of race – departing from a humanist frame and strongly justice-motivated rationality in particular – towards more economically motivated rationalities and post-racial frames. This shift away from Kennedy’s justice-motivated rationality towards the economically influenced rationalities employed by Clinton and Obama likewise speaks to a larger shift in Democratic presidential campaign rhetoric over the last half-century which I evaluate at greater length in the Discussion section of this thesis.

We will begin this chapter with a brief introduction of Kennedy’s candidacy, a review of the relevant literature on Kennedy’s rhetoric, and a discussion of the background of each of Kennedy’s speeches I review. I will then discuss each of the rhetorical dimensions of Kennedy’s rhetoric on race in depth, and conclude with the idea that Kennedy embraced a unique rhetorical approach to race and that democratic presidential candidates have since shifted away from this approach. Let us begin with a brief introduction of Kennedy’s candidacy.

Introduction to the Candidacy of Robert F. Kennedy

Senator Robert Francis Kennedy launched his campaign for the presidency of the United States on March 16, 1968 from the same Senate caucus room his brother began his own presidential campaign just eight years earlier (Lee, 140). However, after delivering a victory speech to his supporters on eve the California Democratic Primary three months later, Kennedy was assassinated. Over the course of his tragically brief presidential candidacy, Robert F. Kennedy, a Senator of New York and former Attorney General of the United States, would deliver sixty-two speeches in the primary states of Indiana, Nebraska, California, Oregon, South

Dakota, and the District of Columbia, advocating for an embrace of common humanity, an end to the war in Vietnam, aid for the poor, and the advancement of civil rights, among many other issues (Lee, 140). In this chapter, I evaluate Kennedy's rhetoric specifically on the topic of race in the United States by analyzing three speeches he gives both as a presidential candidate and United States Senator by evaluating Kennedy through three major rhetorical dimensions: first, how he establishes credibility on the issue of race; second, how he frames the issue of race; and third, how he justifies his racial vision for the United States.

Kennedy establishes his credibility on race by creating a shared sense of suffering with his audience, and he achieves this in two distinct ways. First, he uses personal examples, such as the loss of his brother as well as the discrimination his family faced due to their Irish-Catholic heritage, to create a shared experience of suffering between himself and his audience. Kennedy's use of personal experience – from his brother's assassination to his family's own history – is important not only to this study but to a larger understanding of presidential rhetoric because it exemplifies the importance of establishing a basis of connection through one's own personal experience in order to create trust with the audience. When trust cannot be established through one's own personal experience, however, it is necessary for the speaker to seek other inroads through which to connect with his or her audience. One alternative way a speaker can establish trust with the audience is to speak openly and acknowledge the lived experiences of the audience to cultivate a sense that the speaker, while unable to relate personally to the problems of the audience, nonetheless understands the issues they face. Indeed, the second way Kennedy connects to the suffering of his audience is through speaking about and acknowledging their suffering, and thereby creating a sense of a shared understanding rooted in empathy.

Turning to the second rhetorical dimension, *Kennedy frames the issue of race by combining two distinct rhetorical frames: the first, a race-conscious rhetorical frame, and the second a humanist rhetorical frame.* Indeed, he adopts a race-conscious rhetorical frame to discuss the current historical moment, acknowledging the struggles and suffering specific to particular racial groups. At the same time, however, Kennedy also employs a humanist rhetorical frame to make moral claims about how society ought to be and to describe his racial vision for the United States. He regularly intertwines these two frames and often makes a race-conscious diagnosis of problems afflicting American society only to follow those claims with a humanist vision for progress.

Finally, Kennedy justifies his racial vision for the United States by using social justice-motivated rationality. This is to say that Kennedy argues for a humanist moral vision on the basis that it is the ‘right’ and morally just thing to do, clearly embracing the strongly social justice-motivated rationality presented in Chapter 2: Methods. Before discussing each of the three aforementioned characteristics of Kennedy’s rhetoric on race, it is helpful to understand the relevant literature and scholarship concerning Robert Kennedy’s rhetorical style.

3.1 Literature Discussion

There is a continuing debate among scholars of presidential campaign rhetoric over the rhetorical style and techniques employed by Robert Kennedy in his 1968 presidential campaign. The first of these is the argument that, as a presidential candidate, Kennedy’s rhetoric reflects the Jeremiadic rhetorical tradition. The American rhetorical form of the Jeremiad arose from the early North American Puritan rhetorical tradition of the “political sermon” which intertwined religious dogma with practical guidance and advice on public affairs, focusing on the morality of

individuals, often in the context of sin and repentance (Murphy, 1990). The Jeremiadic tradition is a politically moderate rhetorical path, arguing for moral reflection and an alteration in societal values rather than pursuing systemic change. Scholars such as John M. Murphy and Celeste Condit, both of whom analyze Kennedy's 1968 campaign rhetoric, argue that by embracing the jeremiadic rhetorical tradition, Kennedy was perceived to be a more radical activist than he truly was in that he advocated for a 'cleansing of the soul' of the nation rather than the systemic change necessary to begin to dismantle institutionalized racism and classism.

Similar to the Jeremiadic rhetorical tradition is epideictic rhetoric, the exact definition of which is still debated among the academic community (Condit, 1985). Michelle Condit synthesizes a variety of the current conceptions of epideictic as serving a "three-fold set of paired functions" for both the speaker and his or her audience: understanding and definition, sharing and creation of community, and entertainment and display (Condit, 284). The epideictic, similar to the Jeremiad, also has an emphasis on a "humane vision" which is prevalent throughout Kennedy's rhetoric. In other academic analyses of Kennedy's campaign rhetoric, scholars frequently remark on Kennedy's "humane" rhetorical vision, with some characterizing it as confirming evidence of Kennedy's embrace of epideictic rhetoric while others forego such a conclusion (Condit 1985; Lee 1981; Murphy 1990).

Still other interpretations of Kennedy's rhetoric focus particularly on the topic of race and civil rights, discuss the underlying similarities between the rhetoric of Kennedy and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with one analysis discussing specifically their shared use of tragedy (Sussman, 2008). Additional analyses of Kennedy's rhetoric focus on his use of language regarding violence in the United States while others characterize his rhetorical approach as embodying a "New Politics" (Martin, 2009; Lee, 1981). Indeed, there is no clear consensus on

Kennedy's rhetorical approach among the relatively small amount of scholarship that investigates Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign rhetoric, with still far less scholarship on the issue of Kennedy's rhetorical approach to issues of race in particular. For this reason, my analysis of Kennedy both diverges from and adds to the field in that I evaluate his rhetoric by combining three metrics to understand his approach to race. The combination of these three particular rhetorical metrics to analyze the rhetoric of Kennedy – as well as Clinton and Obama – is a new addition to the field of presidential campaign rhetoric. In this chapter, I evaluate Kennedy's campaign rhetoric by examining three particular dimensions of his rhetoric on race: first, how Kennedy establishes credibility with his audience on the topic race; second, how Kennedy adopts a race-conscious and humanist frame to issues of race; and third, how Kennedy justifies his framing of race through justice-motivated rationality. Before discussing each of these in depth, however, I will briefly provide background on each of the speeches I analyze for Kennedy in order to contextualize his rhetoric on race.

3.2 The Speeches of Robert F. Kennedy

3.2.1 "Day of Affirmation Address"

In what is considered by many to be his most significant speech, then Senator Robert F. Kennedy addressed the National Union of South African Students on June 7, 1966 commemorating the University of South Africa's Day of Affirmation (Gottheimer, 282). As Attorney General, Kennedy was widely known to have been a fervent supporter of civil rights, despite incidents such as his authorization of the wiretapping of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and as a result of his publicly pro-civil rights message, the government of South Africa was highly skeptical and concerned about a visit from Kennedy, denying him a visa for five months,

banishing the students who invited him and refusing to grant travel visas for up to sixty foreign journalists (282).

The South African Press was split among pro and anti-apartheid lines with respect to the coverage of his visit (282). Pro-apartheid papers described Kennedy as a “troublemaker” who came to south Africa to join a “breeding nest of vipers” and that his trip was an exercise motivated purely by his own potential political gain “to advance his political ambitions at home ... to capture the Negro vote” (282). Despite the negative coverage of Kennedy’s visit by the papers, he elicited excitement and support from the students at the University of South Africa to such a degree that upon his arrival, he was “engulfed” by the crowd and the 1,600 seat-hall where his speech was delivered was sold out (282). In his speech, Kennedy remarked extensively on issues of racial inequality and freedom in global terms, and illustrated similarities between the struggles for racial equality in South Africa and the racial moment taking place in the United States. As such, Kennedy’s “Day of Affirmation Address” is a relevant speech for my inquiry in that its substance focuses squarely on the issues of race and race relations. Although Kennedy was a Senator at the time of this address, his humanist racial vision for the United States and his use of a race-conscious rhetorical frame foreshadow the rhetorical approach and many of the same themes he later raises as a presidential candidate in the 1968 Democratic presidential primary.

3.2.2 “*Statement on the Death of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*”

As Robert Kennedy was preparing to make a campaign speech at Ball State University, on April 4, 1968, a white assassin shot Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as he stood on the balcony outside his motel room on the second floor of the black-owned Lorraine Motel in Memphis,

Tennessee (Boomhower, 61). While boarding a flight to his next campaign stop – the opening of his headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana – Kennedy learned that King had been shot, and, upon landing, was informed that King had died (63). David Murry, a reporter who was seated across from Kennedy when he heard of King’s death, later recalled observing Kennedy’s reaction: “It was unbearable to watch him ... to know that he was thinking about his brother getting it in the same way” (64).

At the airport, Kennedy decided to forego his planned visit to the campaign headquarters and instead go directly to the site of one of his planned rallies, located at Seventeenth and Broadway in Indianapolis, a location described by Charles “Snooky” Hendrix, the president of the Radical Action Program, as the “heart of the ghetto” (63). Consistent with his wide-ranging support from black Americans at the time, Kennedy had “solid support” among “even the most radical elements of Indianapolis’s African American Community”, of which Hendrix was a part (63). There was significant debate among his advisors and warnings from the Mayor of Indianapolis that going into the heart of the black ghetto would endanger Kennedy (65). Remarking upon the campaign’s decision-making on whether Kennedy should address the crowd waiting for him, Congressman John Lewis, a major figure in the civil rights movement and advisor to the Kennedy campaign at the time, described the situation: “You can’t have a crowd like this come, and something like this happen, and send them home without anything at all. Kennedy had to speak, for his own sake and for the sake of these people” (65). It was decided that Kennedy would address the crowd, and that he would inform them of King’s death (65).

Across the nation, reports of King’s assassination resulted in violence and riots in more than a hundred American cities; and President Johnson called up more than four thousand federal troops to quell the violence in the nation’s capital (68). After Kennedy’s speech, however, the

streets in Indianapolis, the 26th largest city in the country, remained peaceful (Indiana Census; Boomhower, 68).

This speech is relevant for my inquiry in that it is focused on the topic of race in the United States in a number of different fashions. First, the setting of Kennedy's speech involves an undeniable racial dimension, namely a white politician addressing a majority black audience about the death of the most prominent figure in the civil rights movement. Second, the rhetorical substance of the speech is focused on the present state of race relations and violence in the United States. Third, Kennedy made an effort throughout the speech to present a moral vision for race relations in America. In delivering "Remarks on the Death of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.," Kennedy assumed the role of both 'politician and preacher' on the issue of race relations in the United States: describing race in terms of both what *is* and what *ought to be*. White and black Americans alike who witnessed the speech described what they experienced in "religious terms" (68). As put by Reverend Deer in recounting the experience, "they were in common grief together; they share[d] a common experience; he reminded them of that; he communicated" (68). This six-minute, entirely improvised speech delivered on the flatbed of a truck in downtown Indianapolis is widely recognized as one of the greatest public addresses of the modern era (4).

3.2.3 "*The Mindless Menace of Violence*"

On the morning of April 5, 1968, the day after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Senator Robert F. Kennedy delivered a speech denouncing the 'mindless menace of violence' that had once again "[stained] our land and every one of our lives" in the United States (Martin, 20). In his address to the Cleveland City Club, Kennedy spoke of race relations and the

need for peace in light of repeated assassinations and continuous violence in the United States. The speech was a major turning point for Kennedy's campaign; after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. racial justice and reconciliation became such a central theme of the Kennedy campaign that it "made Vietnam almost a subordinate issue" (Wiltcover, 145). Although there were political reasons that made a pivot towards racial justice a pragmatic political move – namely, President Johnson dropping out and the increasing viability of peace talks in Vietnam – it was a move prompted by Kennedy's nature as a politician who listened to his heart (Wiltcover, 145).

Kennedy's "Mindless Menace of Violence" speech is relevant to my project in that the context and historical moment, as well as the rhetorical substance of the speech, all relate to the topic of race in the United States. First, the context of the speech and its historical moment have a clear racial dimension, namely that the impetus for the speech arose from the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the most prominent black civil rights activist of the era. While his death alone carries an undeniable racial dimension, the fact that King was killed by a white assassin makes race and racial tensions in the United States an issue Kennedy cannot – and does not – ignore. For this reason, the substance of the speech is largely dedicated to discussing violence in the United States. Indeed, so strong was the desire for Kennedy to address the issue of violence and race relations amid the fallout of King's death that one scholar mentions that the speech was delivered in response to the "plea" from "concerned Negro leaders...[wanting] him to do something to help them discourage an outbreak of retaliatory violence" (Witcover, 142). Written by Kennedy along with his speechwriters, "primarily Adam Walinski, Jeff Greenfield, and Ted Sorensen", it was considered the "best written text of the campaign, and perhaps of Kennedy's career" (Murphy, 407).

Exactly two months after delivering ‘The Mindless Menace of Violence’, Kennedy would go on to win the California primary, becoming the presumptive Democratic nominee for the presidency. Robert Kennedy was killed immediately after delivering his victory speech at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles California, shot by an assassin while walking through the hotel kitchen.

Having discussed the context and background of each of Kennedy’s speeches, we turn now to the first dimension of rhetorical analysis: credibility.

3.3 Kennedy’s Credibility on Race

Credibility on race is the first rhetorical dimension I will evaluate for Kennedy’s rhetoric on race. In each of the aforementioned speeches, Kennedy *establishes his credibility on race by tapping into a shared proximity to suffering between himself and his audience*. Moreover, Kennedy’s use of language and personal anecdotes to express a shared proximity to suffering – particularly of people from different racial backgrounds – is a core tenet of his rhetoric on race throughout each of the three speeches I analyze.

To explicate this phenomenon, I have divided Kennedy’s use of proximity to suffering as a means of establishing his credibility on race into two distinct categories: the first relates to Kennedy’s use of *personal examples* to create a shared experience of suffering between himself and his audience; the second is Kennedy’s description of *the suffering of others* to create a shared understanding of suffering between himself and his audience. It is important to note that Kennedy’s use of either of these two strategies to establish his credibility on race is deeply context-dependent. This is to say that whether Kennedy chooses to establish his credibility by

way of personal experience with suffering or of the shared understanding of others' suffering depends on his audience and the historical moment of his speech.

Despite the different contexts of the three speeches I analyze, Kennedy uses a shared proximity to suffering – either through describing his own personal experience of suffering or discussing the suffering of others to establish his understanding of suffering that he himself had not experienced – to establish his credibility on race. And in this section, I substantiate and further develop this argument by providing data in the form of excerpts from Kennedy's three aforementioned speeches, with each illustrating how Kennedy establishes his credibility on race by utilizing one of the two strategies described above. We turn first to Kennedy's use of personal examples.

3.3.1 Credibility: Kennedy's Proximity to and Knowledge of Suffering through Personal Experience

Kennedy most clearly utilizes personal experience to establish his credibility on the topic of race in his "Day of Affirmation Address" and his "Statement on the Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.". While the latter establishes a powerful and deeply personal shared sense of suffering in the form of loss, the former is significant as well in that Kennedy employs a personal example of suffering to legitimize his criticism of discrimination on the basis of 'nationality, social class, or race'.

In his "Day of Affirmation Address" Kennedy uses a personal example – his family's Irish-Catholic heritage – to further establish his legitimacy to make claims about the immoral and unjust nature of discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, or class. By describing his family's experience with ethnic discrimination, Kennedy *creates a sense of shared experience with discrimination and suffering between* himself and his audience, a group of South African

youth who experienced racial discrimination by way of South Africa's system of apartheid. Indeed, discussing his family's own experience with discrimination not only lends him credibility on the issue, but also allows him to establish a deeper connection with his audience by way of shared experience.

For two centuries, my own country has struggled to overcome the self-imposed handicap of prejudice and discrimination based on nationality, on social class or race -- discrimination profoundly repugnant to the theory and to the command of our Constitution. Even as my father grew up in Boston, Massachusetts, signs told him: "No Irish Need Apply" (Gottheimer, 284).

This quote is helpful in understanding Kennedy's desire to connect with his audience to further his credibility and therefore the efficacy of the arguments he makes. By referring to his family's own struggle with discrimination, Kennedy dispels the perception that his exceptional wealth and privilege have emancipated his family from the evils of racial and ethnic discrimination. As such, Kennedy invoking his family's brush with ethnic discrimination serves a twofold purpose: to further establish his credibility to speak to matters of racial and ethnic discrimination, and to disarm the critic who would contend that the Kennedy family's wealth and privilege shielded them from ethnic discrimination and thus give him no basis to champion racial justice.

The second example of Kennedy's use of personal proximity to suffering takes place in his "Statement on the Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.". In relaying the news of Dr. King's assassination, he tells the crowd that he "can feel in his own heart the same kind of feeling" of pain and loss because he, too, had a member of his family killed, and "he was killed by a white man". By mentioning his own personal experience with the terrible pain of having a loved one assassinated, Kennedy taps *into the collective suffering, pain, and shared understanding of loss he has with his audience*. Indeed, these few extemporaneously delivered lines exhibit the most clear case of Kennedy tapping into a deeply personal and painful memory to establish a common

bond based in suffering and pain with his audience. Furthermore, Kennedy's reference to the assassination of his President Kennedy is made even greater by the fact that, prior to this speech, he had never spoken publicly about his brother's death. Remarking on the impact of Kennedy's use of personal experience to create a bond of common suffering with his audience, John M. Murphy said: "unlike other leaders who responded to the assassination, Senator Kennedy had the personal authority to inveigh against such violence. As he stated in Indianapolis, he spoke as a victim, as a man who had suffered and survived" (Murphy, 410).

Moreover, by referencing the death of President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy forms a sincere, heartfelt, and human bond with his audience that gives him standing to not only speak of assassination, but also to speak to the larger themes of hatred and violence which so personally affected him. The bond he forms levels him with his audience, allowing him to speak to black Americans in the crowd as equals united by pain and suffering. Having established this credibility with his audience, he asks sincerely and with effect, in a way no other white politician could at the time, that his audience make an effort to "understand" and "get beyond" these "rather difficult times." It is a request that few would heed given the circumstances; but given the bond of common suffering, the credibility and thus trust he shares with his audience, and considering that his call to action comes from his own still broken heart, his request carries with it a sincerity that makes his appeal real, emotionally raw, and effective.

For those of you who are black and are tempted to fill with – be filled with hatred and mistrust of the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I would only say that I can also feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed, but he was killed by a white man. But we have to make an effort in the United States. We have to make an effort to understand, to go beyond, or go beyond these rather difficult times (Boomhower, 67).

This example is the strongest evidence of Kennedy using personal experience – particularly experience that pertains to suffering – to connect with the pain of his audience. As a speaker, the

pain and suffering he shares with his audience affords him trust, credibility, and also engenders a sense of shared empathy – that the audience feels for his loss as he feels for theirs. This shared experience with grief is important because it highlights a larger theme present in the rhetoric of Democratic presidential candidates throughout this study: that a common understanding of pain and hardship yields greater trust in a candidate for office. In Kennedy’s case, this is true for how he is able to understand and empathize with the pain of the black community in their moment of loss. For Clinton, a similar experience of suffering connects him to the black community; his childhood experience with abject poverty and deprivation allows him to empathize with the economic hardship and struggle faced by those in his audience.

Moreover, the notion of a shared sense of suffering and pain as the basis of credibility for a candidate, particularly on the topic of race, speaks to the larger story of race in the United States. Indeed, the history of race and race relations in the United States is one of suffering: native Americans suffering the devastation of their society by colonists; African slaves suffering the horrors of chattel slavery to the benefit of white slaveowners; black Americans suffering under the yoke and oppression of Jim Crow laws; Irish, Italian, and German Americans suffering from ethnic discrimination in an industrializing America; Asian Americans suffering from discriminatory immigration laws and internment in camps throughout World War II; and Hispanic Americans suffering from a racist politics of immigration and discrimination. It is neither my hope nor my intention to describe each form of racial and ethnic suffering either in this chapter or in this study. Nor is it my aim to equate relative to one another the levels of suffering endured by various groups in the United States. But it is vital to this study to understand that the basis for Kennedy’s credibility – as well as Clinton and Obama’s – on the topic of race emerges from a shared sense of suffering. In Kennedy’s case, his experience with

suffering is in part a vestige of his family's ethnic heritage, but, most of all, his shared personal experience with suffering comes in the comparison of the pain he endured because of his brother's assassination, and the pain and suffering felt by his audience upon learning of King's assassination. It is thus Kennedy's own proximity to suffering that allows him to establish a connection with his audience that transcends race and connects on a human level to a shared sense of pain. In the next section, I will discuss how Kennedy goes beyond his own personal proximity to suffering and instead uses an alternative rhetorical technique – acknowledging and describing the experiences of others – to establish credibility for himself on the topic of race.

3.3.2 *Credibility: Kennedy's Proximity to Suffering by Acknowledging the Experience of Others*

The second way Kennedy establishes his credibility on race is by explicitly identifying the suffering of others. Indeed, by describing and calling attention to *the suffering of others*, often the poor as well as black Americans, Kennedy creates a *shared understanding of suffering* between himself and his audience. While this is clearly a different form of proximity to suffering than the way Kennedy relates through personal experience, he further establishes credibility on race by demonstrating that he understands the suffering of his audience and their needs. In other words, Kennedy's ability to establish a mutual understanding of suffering is a two-way street – that *he* understands his audience's suffering and that *they* understand the fact that he understands their suffering – which lends him both trust and credibility on the topic of race.

One example of Kennedy demonstrating his understanding of suffering, particularly of black Americans, occurs in his "Day of Affirmation Address". In the following quote, Kennedy demonstrates a palpable impatience with the slow progress for black Americans. He discusses issues relevant to black Americans both in terms of the current state of affairs, such as a lack of

job training and racial inequality, and in terms of what must be done in the future. Additionally, the urgency with which he advocates for ‘much, much, more .. to be done’ is consistent with a theme of advocacy and a sincere frustration and anger concerning the slow advance of civil rights central to Kennedy’s political persona. Indeed, Kennedy’s recognition of suffering experienced by black Americans paired with the urgency with which he approaches the issue gives him a tremendous amount of legitimacy and trust with his audience. Moreover his demonstration of the suffering of black Americans and his sincere advocacy is made all the more significant because so few white politicians were speaking in these terms about the conditions of black Americans at the time.

In the last five years we have done more to assure equality to our Negro citizens, and to help the deprived both white and black, than in the hundred years before that time. But much, much more remains to be done. For there are millions of Negroes untrained for the simplest of jobs, and thousands every day denied their full and equal rights under the law; and the violence of the disinherited, the insulted, the injured, looms over the streets of Harlem and of Watts and of the South Side Chicago (Gottheimer, 284).

Other instances of Kennedy squarely addressing the suffering of others in terms of race take place in “The Mindless Menace of Violence”. In calling out the “violence of institutions” particularly in terms of the violence of institutions towards people on the basis of race, Kennedy again establishes his understanding of the suffering of people of color (Martin, 20). He does this by explicitly acknowledging the institutional dimension in the United States, namely the “indifference, inaction, and decay” that “poisons the relation between men because their skin has different colors” (20). Indeed, by demonstrating his understanding of this particular brand of violence – the violence of institutions – Kennedy demonstrates that he understands the suffering that arises from such violence, empathizing with the experience of his audience.

For there is another kind of violence, slower but just as deadly, destructive as the shot or the bomb in the night. This is the violence of institutions -- indifference, inaction, and decay. This is the violence that afflicts the poor, that poisons relations between men

because their skin has different colors... This is the breaking of a man's spirit by denying him the chance to stand as a father and as a man amongst other men (Martin, 20).

Later in the same speech, Kennedy continues to use the theme of a common recognition of suffering when he asks whether Americans are able to recognize their common humanity and in turn acknowledge and come to terms with their common suffering. This is slightly different from the previous example in that he is not explicitly identifying the suffering of black Americans specifically. However, his emphasis on the need to recognize not only common humanity, but the underlying common suffering that exists, is consistent with his effort to establish his credibility with his audience by recognizing common suffering.

For all this there are no final answers for those of us who are American citizens. Yet we know what we must do, and that is to achieve true justice among all of our fellow citizens... The question is whether we can find in our own midst and in our own hearts that leadership of humane purpose that will recognize the terrible truths of our existence (Martin, 21).

In this section, I discussed how Kennedy connects to suffering in two different ways to establish his credibility on race. First, he uses his own personal experience with suffering – through his brother’s death and his family’s ethnic heritage – to relate to the suffering of his audience. This is particularly notable in Kennedy’s “Remarks on the Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” and his “Day of Affirmation Address” in which he uses his experience with assassination to connect with a grieving audience of black Americans and his family’s experience with ethnic discrimination to relate to a crowd of young South Africans enduring apartheid. Second, Kennedy establishes credibility on the topic of race by discussing the pain and suffering of others and particularly minorities in the United States – a rhetorical move few white politicians embraced at the time. This second method afforded Kennedy credibility in the sense that, while he did not have the same lived experience as black Americans, he *understood* the injustice and the issues they faced

more than most other white politicians at the time. In the next section, I turn to the *second* dimension of my rhetorical analysis of Kennedy: his use of rhetorical frames.

3.4 Kennedy's Rhetorical Framing: Race-conscious and Humanist

Kennedy's rhetorical framing when discussing topics of race is both race-conscious and humanist. This is to say that, when discussing race in the United States, Kennedy consciously acknowledges racial disparities and distinctions while also making moral claims about racial equality in terms of 'humanity' and 'human beings'. Moreover, Kennedy often interweaves the use of race-conscious and humanist language, highlighting racial inequalities with race-specific vocabulary (white, black, etc.) and then makes a rhetorical pivot, embracing a humanist worldview where the value of common humanity is placed above all else. It is important to recall here the distinction between race-blind and humanist.

A race blind approach ignores racial differences and has no regard for race or racial characteristics, whereas a humanist approach does not necessarily ignore race or racial characteristics as much as it emphasizes and elevates being human over any other considerations, including those based on race. In this section, I argue that Kennedy embraces both a race-conscious and humanist rhetorical approach when he addresses his audience on issues of race. Moreover, I argue that his race-conscious and humanist rhetorical approach is one he consistently adopts, irrespective of audience or setting. Indeed, whether in South Africa addressing a throng of excited students or somberly remarking on the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Kennedy consciously makes distinctions on the basis of race, calling out inequalities using race-specific language while at the same time transcending race and appealing to his audience's sense of basic humanity. To explain this further, I have divided this section into two

parts in which I provide evidence from each of Kennedy's three speeches which illustrate both a race-conscious and humanist approach to his rhetoric on race.

3.4.1 Kennedy's Race-conscious Rhetorical Framing

Kennedy's race-conscious rhetorical frame is the first of two rhetorical frames I will evaluate for Kennedy's rhetoric on race. In this excerpt from "Remarks on the Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.," Kennedy makes explicit appeals to his audience on the basis of their race, cognizant of the inescapable racial dimension of King's assassination. It is important to note here that Kennedy *is race-conscious because he makes explicit appeals to his audience on the basis of race* and that he *explicitly acknowledges racial disparities*. Indeed, he acknowledges the pain and suffering felt by his audience of predominantly black Americans using race-specific language to call out how uniquely painful King's death is for the black community and the feelings it could and likely does evoke, namely "bitterness ... hatred, and a desire for revenge" (Boomhower, 66). Moreover, in keeping with his race-conscious rhetorical style, Kennedy goes on to remark specifically that "evidently... there were white people who were responsible" for King's death, using race-conscious language not only to describe those impacted by the assassination, but to characterize the assassin as well. Beyond simply identifying the racial components and ramifications of King's assassination, Kennedy addresses the possible direction in which the country could move in response to King's death: "black people amongst blacks, and white amongst whites, filled with hatred for one another" (66). Unsurprisingly, this vision is also depicted using race-conscious language. While there are a number of other rhetorical elements at play in this quote, this much is clear: Kennedy does not shy from race-conscious language, even in the most delicate and sensitive of circumstances.

For those of you who are black – considering the evidence evidently is that there were white people who were responsible – you can be filled with bitterness, and with hatred, and a desire for revenge. We can move in that direction as a country in greater polarization – black people amongst blacks and white amongst whites, filled with hatred toward one another. (Boomhower, 66)

Kennedy’s use of race-conscious rhetoric in his “Remarks on the Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” continues throughout the remainder of his speech and appears even at the climax of his remarks. In the following example drawn from the crescendo of his speech, Kennedy makes a plea for the United States to embrace unity, compassion, understanding, and a common dedication to the pursuit of justice “towards all who suffer in our country”. Yet he does not end there; he makes the intentional move of further specifying the racial status of those “who suffer in our country”, adding “whether they be white, or whether they be black” (Boomhower, 66).

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness, but is love, and wisdom, and compassion toward one another; and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black. (Boomhower, 67)

In opting to specify the black-white racial divide at the climax of his speech, it is clear that Kennedy’s choice to identify race is a conscious decision, and one which he believed important enough to mention as a part of his central message. In his closing words, Kennedy again utilizes race-conscious language to make his case that a vast majority of not only Americans in general, but “black people and white people”, specifically, want to live together in harmony (67).

But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings that abide in our land. (Boomhower, 67)

Kennedy’s race-conscious rhetorical style is not isolated to his eulogy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., however. The following quote is taken from Kennedy’s “Mindless Menace of Violence”, delivered later that day at the Cleveland City Club in Cleveland, Ohio. And while this quote

precedes a rhetorical shift from a race-conscious to humanist framing of race, Kennedy nonetheless makes the intentional decision to make a reference to racial identities: “It’s not the concern of any one race. The victims of the violence are black and white, rich and poor, young and old, famous and unknown (Martin, 20).” Each of these examples – as well as numerous others which for brevity’s sake have been omitted from this section – demonstrate that a hallmark of Kennedy’s rhetoric is the race-conscious approach he takes when addressing issues of race.

However, accurately characterizing Kennedy’s rhetoric on race requires examining another distinctive feature of his rhetorical approach: his use of humanist language when discussing race. Indeed, humanist rhetoric appears consistently, often immediately before or after a race-conscious remark. In the following section ‘Kennedy’s Humanist Framing’, I provide a number of examples from each of the three speeches I analyze for Kennedy, concluding that Kennedy’s race-conscious and humanist rhetorical framing is unique to him and emblematic of a candidate who makes an effort to see differences while at the same time making an appeal to a transcendent sense of common humanity.

3.4.2 Kennedy’s Humanist Framing

In addition to a race-conscious frame, Kennedy likewise adopts a humanist frame to his rhetoric on race, often in the form of moral claims concerning “all of humanity” – pushing his audience to recognize a shared sense of common humanity between all people. His use of this rhetorical frame is not only ubiquitous in each of the speeches I analyze, it is also his most recognizable and unique rhetorical feature concerning his rhetoric on race. In arguing the integral role humanism plays in Kennedy’s rhetoric on race, I analyze its occurrence in all three speeches – “The Mindless Menace of Violence”, “Day of Affirmation Address”, and “Remarks on the

Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” – and conclude that Kennedy’s humanist rhetorical frame is one of his most prominent and distinguishing rhetorical features.

Kennedy’s use of a humanist frame when discussing race in “The Mindless Menace of Violence” appears frequently throughout his address. Kennedy’s most explicit emphasis on shared humanity appears in the very beginning of the speech when he first begins to discuss the victims of violence. He frames the victims not as simply black or white or the lack thereof (though he does specifically mention race which is consistent with his other race-conscious frame). Rather, he says that “most important of all” the victims of violence are *human beings*: “It’s not the concern of any one race. The victims of the violence are black and white, rich and poor, young and old, famous and unknown. They are, most important of all, human beings whom other human beings loved and needed” (Martin, 20). Kennedy’s rhetoric in this example can arguably be characterized as conveying a sense of empathy and a sincere care for human beings of all races because he so rarely focuses on one race in particular without folding it into a larger concern for all human beings.

His use of a humanist frame again arises when he launches into criticism of the current societal moment: one of profound division and polarization which is an underlying theme through a majority of Kennedy’s rhetoric. And in the following quote, similar themes of Kennedy’s emphasis on embracing common humanity are present.

We learn, at the last, to look at our brothers as alien, alien men with whom we share a city, but not a community, men bound to us in common dwelling, but not in a common effort. We learn to share only a common fear -- only a common desire to retreat from each other -- only a common impulse to meet disagreement with force. (Martin, 20)

Importantly, however, is the intentional use of the word ‘alien’ which explicitly and intentionally conjures images of those who do not share our common humanity, literally someone who is alien to us. This contrast between alien and common humanity serves to further highlight the

distinction Kennedy intends to draw between those who we deem ‘other’ and furthers his point to recognize the need for shared community and common humanity.

Given that Kennedy’s speech is delivered in the shadow of Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination, he also uses a humanist frame when discussing larger themes of society and leadership. This is relevant to my discussion on race in that upon King’s death, Kennedy became to a large degree the final, major living symbol of the civil rights movement. Indeed, there existed a sense that, after King had been assassinated, “Kennedy represented the ‘last hope’ for the poor and dispossessed” and that he “was the only white politician at the time who enjoyed a degree of trust from the African American community” (Boomhower, 68). Given the new mantle of leadership he assumed in the wake of King’s assassination, Kennedy calls for “leadership of humane purpose”, leadership concerned with the well-being of humanity in a passage that carries with it undertones of racial equality that cannot be ignored.

The question is not what programs we should seek to enact. The question is whether we can find in our own midst and in our own hearts that leadership of humane purpose that will recognize the terrible truths of our existence. (Martin, 21)

His vision for humane leadership which “[recognizes] the terrible truths of our own existence” i.e. the injustices and lack of common humanity amongst humankind, is consistent not only with a humanist rhetorical frame, but is also emblematic of his attempts to establish a common understanding of suffering with his audience. Finally, the last major reference to humanity and the embrace of a humanistic frame in “The Mindless Menace of Violence” arises in Kennedy’s critique of society’s indifference and zero-sum-game mentality: “Too often we excuse those who are willing to build their own lives on the shattered dreams of other *human beings*” (Martin, 20). The implicit reference to racist policies and attitudes in this example is clear, and yet again represents a remarkably consistent use of a humanist rhetorical framing throughout his speech.

Kennedy's humanist frame on race also appears regularly throughout his "Day of Affirmation Address". Its ubiquity as a theme begins in the first few lines of his speech, where Kennedy's dedication to a humanist frame – not only with regard to race, but also justice – can be clearly seen as grounded in his commitment to a humanist worldview: "We must recognize the full human equality of all of our people before God, before the law, and in the councils of government" (Gottheimer, 283). His steadfast embrace of a humanist rhetorical frame regarding race continues for the remainder of the speech and is applied in a variety of contexts.

Another example of Kennedy's embrace of a humanist rhetorical frame on the topic of race is present in the following passage in which Kennedy calls out the "imperfections of human justice and the inadequacy of human compassion". Notable here is his emphasis on the word "human" before the words justice and compassion. His emphasis on not simply justice, but *human* justice, and the same with respect to compassion indicates an intentional choice on Kennedy's part to extend the central themes of his campaign – justice, compassion and morality – to *all human beings*. In this spirit, it is unsurprising that he follows with a call to "wipe away the unnecessary suffering of our fellow human beings at home and around the world" and makes his argument in terms of human beings in general, grounding his rhetoric in a sense of comradeship and commonality amongst our 'fellow human beings'. Furthermore, Kennedy's moral call to action to stop "the unnecessary sufferings of our fellow human beings" also exemplifies his effort to create a common understanding of human suffering, regardless of race (Gottheimer, 286).

...[injustices] reflect ... the inadequacy of human compassion, the defectiveness of our sensibility toward the sufferings of our fellows; they mark the limit of our ability to use knowledge for the well-being of our fellow human beings throughout the world. And therefore they call upon ... a shared determination to wipe away the unnecessary sufferings of our fellow human beings at home and around the world. (Gottheimer, 286)

Later in the speech, Kennedy raises again the theme of common humanity, and on this occasion, denounces racial divisions that impede the recognition of common humanity. Moreover, Kennedy explicitly calls out institutions which frustrate the recognition of humanity, namely race, social class, religion and ignorance. In the following passage, it is evident that Kennedy's use of humanistic language is tied up in a larger social commentary regarding the underlying structures that prevent common humanity from being fully realized by the population itself.

... if we, within our own country or in our relationships with others, deny individual integrity, human dignity, and the common humanity of man. If we would lead outside our own borders ... if we would meet our responsibilities to mankind, we must first, all of us, demolish the borders which history has erected between men within our own nations -- barriers of race and religion, social class and ignorance. (Gottheimer, 287)

Kennedy uses similar language on yet another occasion in the following passage, taking a humanist rhetorical approach to race and applying it to the current state of the world, one in which "new technology and communications bring men together", increasing interdependency and thereby increasing the need for individuals to see one another as human beings (Gottheimer, 285).

Everywhere new technology and communications brings men and nations closer together, the concerns of one inevitably becomes the concerns of all. And our new closeness is stripping away the false masks, the illusion of differences which is the root of injustice and of hate and of war. Only earthbound man still clings to the dark and poisoning superstition that his world is bounded by the nearest hill, his universe ends at river shore, his common humanity is enclosed in the tight circle of those who share his town or his views and the color of his skin. (Gottheimer, 285)

In this quote, Kennedy also denounces those who fail to embrace a shared sense of humanity solely on the basis of a difference in skin color. His humanist argument furthers the notion that people should forgo artificial distinctions and illusions of difference – the "false masks" – that prevent people from fully embracing their shared humanity. Indeed, Kennedy's rhetorical approach to race is put on full display in this speech; he recognizes that racial distinctions and

inequalities equalities exist (rhetoric that is race-conscious) while at the same time envisioning a future that is deeply humanist in its persuasion, one in which common humanity transcends racial distinctions. Yet Kennedy recognizes such a future is far off, noting that “we recognize also that justice between men and nations is imperfect, and the humanity sometimes progresses very slowly indeed” (Gottheimer, 285). In short, Kennedy’s “Day of Affirmation Address” is one in which he fully embraces a humanist approach to rhetoric on race, foreshowing the rhetoric he would deploy on the campaign trail as a candidate for president nearly two years later.

My final pieces of evidence supporting Kennedy’s humanist rhetoric on race appear in his “Remarks on the Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” And, although significantly shorter than his affirmation day address and delivered under markedly different circumstances, Kennedy describes race using remarkably similar humanist framing; and in the second line of his speech, Kennedy frames King’s work on civil rights through humanist rhetoric: “Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings” (Boomhower, 68). Notably, he does not say “Americans” in reference to King’s work, but rather makes the conscious choice to use the term “human beings”. Indeed, the pursuit of justice for ‘human beings’ and humanity as a whole was a mission shared by both Kennedy and King. In another significant passage, Kennedy again makes the rhetorical choice to use the term “human beings” over “Americans”:

But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings that abide in our land. (Boomhower, 68)

Kennedy’s use of the phrase “all human beings” is important in that it is consistent with a core principle and rhetorical move that he adopts both as a Senator and throughout his presidential campaign. Rather than rooting the pursuit of justice for people on the basis of nationality i.e. we

ought to pursue justice for all *Americans*, Kennedy takes a different approach. In using the phrase “all human beings” Kennedy grounds his calls for justice, compassion, and understanding in a sense of shared and common humanity. It is a decision that Kennedy consciously makes in his rhetoric on race, class, and justice; and his appeals to common humanity over common nationality further his political persona as someone who is deeply concerned about people regardless of background, in turn evoking a sense of empathy, kindness, and genuine care associated with his candidacy. Kennedy’s deep sense of empathy and morality likewise finds voice in his embrace of justice motivated-rationality.

3.5 *Kennedy’s Social Justice-Motivated Rationality*

This section concerns Kennedy’s *rationality*, the third dimension of rhetoric I analyze. We have just discussed the first two dimensions of Kennedy’s rhetoric: namely, how a candidate establishes his *credibility* to speak on issues of race, and the *rhetorical framing* he uses to discuss race. Rationality differs from these other rhetorical dimensions in that it concerns how Kennedy *justifies his racial vision for the United States*. Using the categorization model presented in Table 1, I conclude that the *rationality present in Kennedy’s rhetoric on race is strongly social justice-motivated*. This is to say that, based upon my analysis of Kennedy’s three speeches, it is clear that he justifies the pursuit of his humanist racial vision for the United States using social justice-motivated rationality. In this section, I substantiate this argument by providing examples from Kennedy’s speeches that confirm his rhetoric as strongly justice-motivated in nature.

Kennedy exemplifies a candidate whose rhetoric is strongly social justice-motivated because he justifies his pursuit of a humanist racial vision for the United States on the basis that it is the ‘right’ or ‘just’ thing to do. And this rationality is clearly presented throughout his

rhetoric, specifically in his “Day of Affirmation Address”. In the following quote, Kennedy explains in explicit terms his justification for why “we must recognize full human equality of our people” before the law:

And most important of all, all of the panoply of government power has been committed to the goal of equality before the law, as we are now committing ourselves to the achievement of equal opportunity in fact. We must recognize the full human equality of all of our people before God, before the law, and in the councils of government. We must do this, not because it is economically advantageous, although it is; not because the laws of God command it, although they do; not because people in other lands wish it so. We must do it for the single and fundamental reason that it is the right thing to do. (Gottheimer, 285)

Indeed, in grounding his pursuit of equality in the notion that it is simply the right thing to do, Kennedy is *pursuing social justice* (“recognizing the full human equality of all our people ... before the law”) *for the sake of social justice* (“because it is the right thing to do”). It is likewise important to note that, for Kennedy, his vision of justice and equality is deeply humanistic in nature evidenced by the fact that he argues for equality not just for black Americans or white Americans, but rather for “full human equality”, irrespective of race. This rhetorical approach is consistent with the humanist and race-conscious rhetorical frames examined throughout the speeches I analyze in this chapter. Yet the above example is not the only instance in which Kennedy demonstrates this strongly justice-motivated rationality. He makes a similar, albeit less explicit claim in his “Day of Affirmation Address”, noting that:

More than this, I think that we could agree on what kind of a world we would all want to build. It would be a world of independent nations, moving toward international community, each of which protected and respected the basic human freedoms. It would be a world which demanded of each government that it accept its responsibility to ensure social justice. (Gottheimer, 286)

In this quote, Kennedy is laying out a clear moral vision in humanist terms. It is a ‘moral vision’ because he describes “what kind of a world” we would want to build; it is humanist because his language is universal, choosing not to specify with regard to race or class but rather to employ

broad language in terms of what “we would all want” and grounding that in “basic human freedoms”. Finally, Kennedy’s moral vision is backed by a justice-motivated rationality because he makes clear that it is the responsibility of a government to pursue social justice for its people. Kennedy again articulates his belief that governments ought to pursue justice in the form of equality for all their people (a humanist view) in another passage from his “Day of Affirmation Address”:

At the heart of that Western freedom and democracy is the belief that the individual man, the child of God, is the touchstone of value, and all society, all groups and states exist for that person's benefit. Therefore, the enlargement of liberty for individual human beings must be the supreme goal and the abiding practice of any Western society. (Gottheimer, 283)

In stating that “the individual man” lies “at heart of Western freedom and democracy” and that the “supreme goal” of any society ought to be the enlargement of liberty for that individual, Kennedy is yet again presenting a strongly social justice-motivated line of reasoning. The final example of social justice-motivated rationality in Kennedy’s “Day of Affirmation Address” confirms his rhetorical pattern, repeating similar themes of universality and the emphasis he places on the pursuit of justice and particularly racial justice:

What is important, however, is that all nations must march toward increasing freedom, toward justice for all, toward a society strong and flexible enough to meet the demands of all of its people -- whatever their race -- and the demands that the world of immense and dizzying change that face us all. (Gottheimer, 285)

When taken together, the four aforementioned examples serve to illustrate how Kennedy’s rhetoric on race is both humanist in its vision and strongly social justice-motivated in its rationality: advocating for the pursuit of justice in the form of human equality for the sake of justice because it the “right thing to do”.

3.6 Conclusion

Robert Kennedy's rhetorical approach to the issue of race is unique because he combines the three rhetorical dimensions – credibility, framing, and rationality – unlike Clinton, Obama, and indeed most Democratic presidential candidates over the last sixty years. The coalescence of credibility based in personal experience and a connection to the experience of others, a race-conscious and humanist frame, and a strongly social justice-motivated rationality all mark a rhetoric on race that is not only unique in its style, but emblematic of an America in which morality and social justice transcend economic considerations. As a candidate, Kennedy was uniquely positioned to embody a conception of America in which people understand, empathize with, and recognize the suffering of other human beings not because it is in their best interest to do so, but simply because it is the right and just thing to do. *Kennedy's proximity to suffering, his unflinching willingness to identify racial disparities, and his racial vision for the United States based in the exaltation of human value defines his rhetoric on race.*

In short, the findings of my study on Kennedy's campaign rhetoric are that his proximity to suffering serves as the basis for his credibility on the topic of race; that Kennedy squarely addresses racial inequalities that exist in the United States (a race-conscious rhetorical frame) while also advocating for a future in which the recognition and embrace of common humanity is valued above any other social distinction e.g., race, class, religion, etc. (a humanist rhetorical frame); and that Kennedy justifies this approach not by saying that it is the profitable or politically expedient thing to do, but rather that it is the 'right' thing to do. It is this powerful combination of rhetorical factors – a strong credibility on the issue of race, a willingness to recognize and call out racial inequalities, a humanist vision in which one's value as a human being is placed above racial identity, and a justification of this vision as being the 'right' and

‘just’ thing to do – that makes Kennedy such an iconic and significant rhetorical figure on the issue of race. Further still, Kennedy’s rhetoric signifies just how far values in the United States – at least by the measure of presidential campaign rhetoric – have shifted since the 1968 Democratic presidential primary. Indeed, Kennedy’s rhetoric is the shore from which presidential campaign rhetoric and American values have drifted over the past sixty years.

Once moored by values of social justice, an understanding of human value, and the notion that change must be pursued in America because it is right and just, Democratic presidential campaign rhetoric has been pulled into a riptide of economic rationality – becoming untethered from the values espoused by Kennedy’s 1968 campaign, and instead becoming inundated, submerged, and drowned by the slow, creeping tide of market rationality.

Having just finished discussing Robert Kennedy’s rhetorical approach to race during his 1968 presidential campaign, we will now turn to Chapter 4: Neoliberalism. In order to analyze Obama and Clinton, we must first understand what neoliberal rationality is and how it takes shape in the rationalities of these two candidates. The next section will be dedicated to discussing Neoliberalism, its multiple forms, and the ways in which Neoliberal rationality reframes issues of social justice from being pursued for the sake of justice to instead being pursued for the purpose of economic prosperity.

CHAPTER 4

Neoliberalism

In this section, I discuss neoliberalism in terms of the theory, policy, and rationality necessary to understand the neoliberal elements present in the campaign rhetoric of the candidates I analyze – particularly the rhetoric of Clinton and Obama. It is important to note here that neoliberal thought and rationality is not only a phenomenon in Democratic presidential campaign rhetoric; it is, more broadly, a political and economic ideology which became widely adopted in the United States over the course of the 1970's and 1980's. Throughout the late 20th century, the proliferation of neoliberalism prompted an entirely new school of thought that argued for a novel arrangement between the individual, the state, and the economy. It proposed a *reduced* role for government in the market while also contending that people should take up greater responsibility in engaging with the market themselves – that they should invest in their own human capital and that the government should help them to do so. However, neoliberals are quick to note that the government 'nudging' people to take up greater personal responsibility and invest in themselves should occur only if by doing so the government does not interfere with the free market.

Understanding neoliberalism is necessary for this study because Clinton and Obama feature neoliberal rationality – a particular form of neoliberalism – throughout much of their rhetoric on race. In order to make sense of neoliberalism as a whole, in this chapter I will discuss the multiple facets of neoliberalism – that is, neoliberalism as an ideology, set of policies, and a rationality – to help explain the neoliberal characteristics that emerge especially within Clinton's candidacy. I will begin my discussion of neoliberalism with a brief overview of neoliberalism as

an ideology. I will then discuss neoliberalism as a set of policies, drawing upon the tripartite division in Steger and Roy's *Neoliberalism: A Brief Introduction*, and will evaluate the three core policy principles advanced by neoliberals: deregulation, liberalization, and privatization. Finally, I will discuss neoliberalism as a form of reasoning, basing my discussion on the conception of neoliberal reasoning proposed by political theorist Wendy Brown in her book, *Undoing the Demos*. I will then conclude this section with a brief summary of how multiple forms of neoliberalism and neoliberal ideology enter into the campaign rhetoric of Bill Clinton. To begin, let us turn to the first dimension of neoliberalism I discuss: neoliberalism as an ideology.

4.1 Neoliberalism as an Ideology

Neoliberalism is an ideology – a way of thinking about the world that is widely accepted as truth by significant swaths of society – that places the production and exchange of goods at the heart of the human experience (Steger and Roy, 12). For neoliberals, the market is the stage on which this exchange occurs; and, as a result, neoliberal ideology presents a vision of the world opposed to any obstacles that would jeopardize the market or stifle the commerce and competition driving it. Indeed, the idea that the market should be left undisturbed, and that any threat or inhibition to the production and exchange of goods (e.g. government regulation, trade unions, tariffs, etc.) should be eliminated is a central tenet of neoliberal ideology.

Fundamental to the creation of the market in neoliberal ideology is the State's role in establishing clear property rights: utilizing its monopoly on violence to define who owns what; to maintain the rule of law ensuring those property rights are secure; and to invent institutions of government to aid in the functioning of markets and free trade (Harvey, 64). The role of property

rights in neoliberalism cannot be overstated; for without clear distinctions on ownership and a strong rule of law to secure the ownership of goods, a stable free market cannot form.

Equally if not more important to the maintenance of the free market in neoliberalism is the concept of individual freedoms secured and protected by the State. The most important of these freedoms include the freedom of action, expression, and choice, which in turn allow individuals to participate in the market, creating both consumers and producers free to engage with one another and the market (Harvey, 64). With the State having secured the freedoms necessary for individuals to participate in the market, two additional core neoliberal beliefs arise. Because all actors in the market enjoy these freedoms secured by the state, neoliberals presume all individuals (including corporations which are defined as such) to have the same access to the same information, assuming no informational or power asymmetry which would otherwise interfere with one's ability to make rational economic decisions for his or herself (Harvey, 68). Rooted in this first assumption is the second core belief: that individual success or failure in the neoliberal system is the sole result of one's capacity to take advantage of opportunities presented by the market. In other words, experiencing economic hardship is a consequence of not investing in one's self (in one's own human capital through education or training, for example) rather than any systemic factor, such as institutionalized racist practices or class exclusions (Harvey, 66). In essence, neoliberal ideology exalts the market and an individual's success or failure is determined by the extent to which he or she takes advantage of opportunities presented by the market.

The need for competition, the undisturbed production and exchange of goods, and a free and unrestrained market is so fundamental to neoliberal ideology that the role of the State itself is redefined to suit its purposes. In situations where ground rules for market competition are not

clearly defined or where they do not exist whatsoever, the State should, according to neoliberal theory, use its power to “impose or invent market systems,” such as the creation of a market for pollution rights (Harvey, 65). In this way, the neoliberal State is one that not only declines to restrain the market, but goes so far as to take an active role in nurturing and expanding that market where none before existed. Indeed, it is this newly defined role of the state – one which exists to serve the needs of the market rather than the other way around – as well as individual freedoms, strong property rights, competition, and a free market undisturbed by government intervention that constitute the basic foundation for neoliberal ideology. In summary, neoliberalism is an ideology which focuses on the development, expansion, and preservation of free markets and redefines the role of the state to meet this demand. It also reinvents the role of the individual as a market actor whose goals and actions become indistinguishable from the actions of firms, emphasizing the development of human capital, individual responsibility, and the focus on increasing one’s standing in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Now that we have established a broad understanding of neoliberal theory, let us turn to our next section: neoliberalism as policy and governance.

4.2 Neoliberalism as Policy and Governance

A second way of understanding neoliberalism is in terms of policy and governance. In this section, I will discuss the core policies of neoliberalism – deregulation, liberalization, and privatization – as well as the modes of governance neoliberal ideology entails. We will begin by discussing the first major policy prescription advanced by neoliberalism: deregulation.

4.2.1 Deregulation

A core pillar of neoliberal theory is the argument that the government should deregulate sections of the economy burdened by regulation in order to allow for the free production and exchange of goods and services. In theory, a freely competitive marketplace where consumers can make choices as rational actors does not necessitate government intervention as competition will yield the highest quality products at the lowest price while consumers act as a check on actions by corporations that harm public goods. For example, a neoliberal argument for deregulation and indeed the complete elimination of environmental regulations could be presented in the following example of a local company that indiscriminately pollutes a nearby river and demonstrates how market actors (consumers) serve as a check on those who harm public goods. Consider the following example commonly cited by neoliberals: a company that pollutes into the local river will lose its customers and eventually go out of business because citizens will act in their own self-interest, realize the water they rely upon is polluted, identify the company at fault, and move their business elsewhere; there is no need for the government to intervene and tell the business to stop polluting. This example draws upon the assumptions at the core of the neoliberal theory of deregulation: that people are rational actors operating free from informational or power asymmetries with bountiful alternatives to which they may turn when a producer acts sub-optimally (Harvey, 68). It also demonstrates the fundamental neoliberal idea that citizens are consumers in all aspects of life and that, under this assumption, deregulation is unnecessary so long as those consumers can act freely within the framework provided by the free market.

Apart from the example of pollution, neoliberal deregulation claims to remedy numerous alternative and common negative externalities, such as the abridgement of workers' rights,

monopolies, wage discrepancies, and other market failures. In each of these cases, neoliberal theory claims that by deregulating sectors, allowing citizens to engage with the market freely as market actors, and to allow firms to freely compete with one another without government intervention, the benefits of such a system will be realized by everyone and a rising tide will indeed lift all boats.

4.2.2 Liberalization

Neoliberals advocate for the liberalization of markets in the form of reducing trade barriers, tariffs, quotas, or any other economic tool that could hinder the free exchange of goods. Consistent with the neoliberal position on trade liberalization, a government or institution ought to adopt liberal trade practices (as has taken place within the European Union over the last 60 years) and make an explicit effort to reduce barriers to trade in order to facilitate exchange, generate market growth, and yield greater profits. Any artificial barriers to trade imposed by states that impede the free exchange of goods, services and capital should, according to the neoliberal, be eliminated as such barriers prevent a rising tide from lifting all boats.

4.2.3 Privatization

Neoliberalism argues not only for the deregulation of sectors and the liberalization of markets, but also the privatization of public goods. A strong neoliberal view on privatization would argue that all responsibilities assumed by the State except for taxation, the creation and enforcement of laws, and national security should be conducted by the private sector and as a result be subject to market forces. Common neoliberal arguments for the privatization of goods

are rooted in the claim that private firms can provide the same services the State does in a more efficient manner.

Now that we have discussed the three very general dimensions of neoliberal policy, it is important to understand how neoliberal thought appears in governance or ‘governmentalities’ apart from simply appearing in particular spheres of policy. For this, we turn to our next section: Governance and Governmentalities.

4.2.4 Governance and Governmentalities

Neoliberalism as a mode of governance is centered on what Michal Foucault referred to as 'governmentalities': "certain modes of governance based on particular premises, logics, and power relations" (Steger and Roy, 12). More specifically, these governmentalities are based on a particular set of values that embrace competition, decentralization, and self-interest (12). Neoliberal governance often encourages the injection of an entrepreneurial approach to government services, entities, and bureaucracies, and often the ‘slimming down’ of those services, entities, and bureaucracies themselves. Indeed, one can observe this neoliberal rhetoric on full display in President Bill Clinton’s state of the union address delivered on January 23rd, 1996 in which he claimed: "the era of big government is over. We know big government does not have all the answers. We know there's not a program for every problem. We have worked to give the American people a smaller, less bureaucratic government in Washington ... the era of big government is over" (Clinton). The concept of a smaller government less able to restrict its citizens from opportunities that would allow them to create capital and enter the market falls squarely into the neoliberal camp of government administration, as well as policy.

In summary, neoliberal policy and governmentalities seek to reduce the size and role of government and its intervention in the market. It advocates allowing firms and individuals to conduct the exchange of goods, services and capital free from government regulation, free from international trade restrictions such as tariffs or quotas, and promotes the privatization of government services wherever possible. Finally, neoliberal governance attempts to dismantle government bureaucracies and inject neoliberal market values such as competition and self-interest into government services and agencies when such agencies are unable to be eliminated or privatized. In order to fully understand neoliberalism and how it enters into presidential campaign rhetoric, we must address the third and final aspect of neoliberalism: neoliberalism as a rationality.

4.3 Neoliberalism as a Rationality

Apart from its ideology, set of policies, or mode of governance, neoliberal rationality has taken root deep within the American psyche, reframing how the individual perceives political, as well as entirely non-monetary aspects of life, by injecting economic and market-oriented rationality into spheres of life heretofore untainted by such reasoning. This form of rationality *is the most significant way in which neoliberalism will manifest in candidates's rhetoric on race* – that is, injecting neoliberal and market-oriented rationality into issues of race and social justice otherwise insulated from such reasoning.

Since the early 1970's, American public consciousness has become increasingly saturated with this particular form of reasoning which “configures all aspects of existence in economic terms” (Brown, 17). Indeed, neoliberalism has come to shape the manner in which individuals conceptualize fundamental democratic values such as freedom and liberty; it has slowly and

methodically inverted public support for government intervention in the market; it has changed what society deems as acceptable roles and responsibilities for private firms and public institutions; and it has fundamentally restructured how individuals understand the relationship between the State and the economy, and their beliefs regarding which should serve the other.

As a rationality which configures the human experience in exclusively economic terms, neoliberal thought invariably conditions individuals to assume the role of market actors in an increasingly competitive marketplace. What's more, neoliberal rationality transforms aspects of life which have been historically free from market-oriented rationality – higher education, interpersonal relationships, extracurricular involvement, etc. – into marketplaces in which the individual becomes a market actor whose goals are commensurate with and guided by the neoliberal values of competition, improving one's relative position, developing competitive advantage, and, above all else, increasing one's human capital to the fullest. These are the two major ideological centers of mass around which neoliberal rationality orbits: the injection of market-rationality into all spheres of life and the evolution of human beings into human capital who operate in these newly-economized spheres.

An important distinction to be made when considering neoliberalism's reconfiguration of human existence in economic and market terms is that neoliberalism does not necessarily *marketize* all spheres of life. Rather it 'disseminates the *model of the market*' to all domains and activities, thus requiring the transformation of humans into market actors operating by way of market rationality in areas of human existence whose model is now dominated by market values (Brown, 31). In short, neoliberal rationality reduces human beings to human capital while disseminating market rationality to new spheres of life, spawning new arenas in which the continuous competition for increased capital unfolds.

One apt example of neoliberal thought expanding market rationality into an otherwise non-economized sphere is the way in which individuals in the United States have come to conceptualize the value and role of higher education. According to the neoliberal values of competition, improving relative position, and increasing one's human capital, pursuing higher education should be evaluated as an investment: it should attempt to generate the greatest possible return on investment (ROI), pose as little risk as possible, and yield bountiful returns, often in the form of lucrative employment after graduation. Not surprisingly, this neoliberal perspective on higher education is ubiquitous in the United States today. One frequent example of the internalization of this mentality by students can be seen in degree choice, where either prospective students or those recently enrolled will investigate which degree program will yield the greatest income post-graduation, and make their decision accordingly.

Institutions of higher education, adopt this same rationality, advertising their time-to-degree and average salary for students post-graduation on admissions flyers, pamphlets, and prospective student campus tours, framing such statistics as clear markers of success – of good ROI – and the reason for why students should select their university (Brown, 182). Moreover, public and private universities alike spend huge sums on career development centers tasked with honing students' interview skills, identifying resume-building internships for students to enhance their employability, and cultivating a network of professionals at the local, national, and international level which students can leverage for post-graduation employment. These assets are likewise marketed to prospective and enrolled students as ways they may further gain from investing in such an education, not dissimilar to the same strategies companies employ when attempting to promote themselves to attain capital from investors and to promote successful activity to shareholders. In the context of a democratic society, such a perspective on higher

education is evidence of neoliberal thought having seeped into the very institutions which serve as the bastions against it.

Compare this rationality of the value of higher education to that which is advertised by the liberal arts: that the attainment of higher education should be done in the pursuit of becoming a more informed citizen, one who is able to think critically, dissect complex ideas, present coherent arguments and articulate through verbal and written mediums new and critical thought. For today's students to present such an argument for attending college on the aforementioned basis alone would be at best discounted as ignorant and unaware of the implications of assuming such financial risk without evaluating subsequent employment – or wasteful, imprudent, and reckless at worst. Wendy Brown in her book *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* characterizes such a decision, one which discards the neoliberal rationality in favor of one based on decidedly more political grounds as the following: “Indeed, no capital save a suicidal one, can freely choose its activities and life course or be indifferent to the innovations of its competitors or parameters of success in a world of scarcity or inequality” (Brown, 41).

By examining neoliberal rationality in this way, it becomes possible to see the extent to which it has seeped into public consciousness and, in turn, begun to envelop aspects of society whose existence are not explicitly monetary but nonetheless have become subjugated to neoliberal rationality. In the case of higher education, this transformation is especially stark. Neoliberal rationality has changed how individuals in the United States and American society as a whole perceive the role of higher education: shifting the goal of the institution from one which is political in essence (to educate the public to produce a more informed democratic society) to one which is economic (to prepare the public for careers to boost the economy). In this example in particular, the

effects of neoliberal rationality are on full display: markedly political and non-economized aspects of democratic life assuming economic and market-oriented characteristics which serve to further entrench neoliberal rationality.

Indeed, the economic and the political are the two competing and independent ideological centers of mass around which aspects of life in a democratic society have orbited. Where Keynesian theory, classical liberalism, communism, socialism and other forms of political-economic arrangements have throughout history shifted these two ideological centers of gravity towards and away from one another, neoliberalism strips those concepts which revolve solidly and traditionally around the political – values such as freedom, liberty, rights, and personhood – and pulls them into orbit around the economic: masquerading freedom as a lack of government regulation, liberty as weakened government intervention in markets, rights as the capacity of companies to operate without unionization of workers, and personhood as the equating of corporations with individuals. It is the force infusing all political values with neoliberal, market-oriented rationality, ‘reconfiguring all aspects of existence in economic terms’, and leaving the political center of society gaunt and solitary as democratic values are slowly pulled towards an economic singularity.

Of the three different forms of neoliberalism discussed throughout this chapter, neoliberal rationality is the most important for my study of campaign rhetoric. Through the 1980’s and culminating in Clinton’s 1992 campaign in particular, there occurs a dramatic shift among democratic candidates towards neoliberal rationality as the principle justification for their vision of racial equality. This means that candidates are increasingly placing the expansion of the market, the development of human capital, and

the pursuit of economic prosperity at the heart of their reasoning for why the country ought to pursue racial equality and social justice. Such a shift in rationality is telling not only for the state of democratic presidential candidates and their means of justification for their racial visions; it also tells us about a larger shift in how the American people justify the pursuit of democratic values – such as social justice and equality. The transition towards neoliberal rationality invites a larger question for the people of the United States and indeed those all around the world who have come to embrace neoliberal rationality: is economic prosperity a means to an end, or an end to itself? And, conversely, should social justice and the pursuit of racial equality be a means to an end or an end to itself? Based upon the rhetoric of Clinton's 1992 campaign, his answer is clear: social justice and the pursuit of racial equality are a means to an end, namely greater economic prosperity for all. To discuss this further we turn next to Chapter 5: Clinton, who embraced neoliberal rationality as a fundamental aspect of his rhetoric on race.

CHAPTER 5

Clinton

In this chapter, I will discuss the campaign rhetoric of William Jefferson Clinton. He campaigned for the presidency in 1992, and went on to win the presidency as well as a second term in 1996. When compared to Robert Kennedy's strongly social justice-focused 1968 campaign, Bill Clinton's rhetoric on race – both in the Democratic primary and the general election – represents a significant departure from the deeply social justice and morality based approach embraced by Kennedy. Indeed, much of Clinton's rhetoric on race is rooted in a broader argument for economic equality and opportunity for all. Throughout this chapter, I argue that the rhetoric he uses over the course of his presidential campaign is deeply neoliberal – advocating for a revival of individual responsibility in return for the government's help to create opportunity for American citizens by providing them with expanded access to education, job training, and safer neighborhoods. Clinton refers to this throughout his campaign as his “New Covenant” for America: a mutually beneficial bargain between the government and its people in which people take up greater responsibility in exchange for greater access to opportunity.

I will argue that Clinton's emphasis on personal responsibility and the need to reinvest in America pervades both his primary and general election campaigns, manifesting in his rhetoric on race, and specifically a neoliberal rationality on race, that makes him the most strongly neoliberal candidate I analyze in this study. Clinton's embrace of neoliberal rationality on the topic of race is important to this study not only because it serves as a defining characteristic of his rhetorical approach, but also because it elucidates a larger shift in American thought since the 1960's – one which entailed a rising prominence of economic reasoning in everyday American

life. Indeed, the America in which Bill Clinton competed for the presidency differed profoundly from that of Kennedy's candidacy 1968. Prior to Clinton's 1992 campaign, the Reagan and Bush era produced a widespread embrace of neoliberal policy and rationality, injecting economic values and rationality into new aspects American life. By the time of Clinton's candidacy, economic values had begun to enter into issues of justice, morality, and not least how presidential candidates address the topic of race in the United States. As we will see throughout this chapter, Clinton's rhetoric on race signifies a distinct departure in discussing race on the campaign trail to that of Robert Kennedy, and indeed a more strongly neoliberal approach than that of Barack Obama. We will begin our discussion of the candidacy of Bill Clinton with a short introduction to Clinton's candidacy followed by a review of the relevant literature concerning the rhetoric throughout his 1992 presidential campaign. We will then evaluate Clinton's campaign rhetoric using the same three dimensions as I utilized for Kennedy – credibility, framing, and rationality – and I will conclude with a discussion of the broad themes present throughout Clinton's campaign. Let us now turn to an introduction to Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign.

Introduction to the Candidacy of William J. Clinton

The rhetoric employed by Bill Clinton throughout his 1992 presidential campaign is unique in that it combines three distinct features: first, the establishment of credibility through personal experience; second, race-blind and post-racial rhetorical framing; and third, a strongly-neoliberal rationality to justifying his post-racial vision for the country. Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign has been the subject of much interest within the academic community, with numerous studies, books, and journal articles dedicated to analyzing the rhetoric of the often-described 'comeback kid' and the 'first black president'. Yet, despite a large body of

scholarship on his rhetorical techniques, there is little scholarship on the content of Bill Clinton's rhetoric on race. In this chapter, I seek to characterize Clinton's rhetoric on race, using examples from four speeches he delivers throughout the course of his presidential campaign: namely, "An Administration that Looks Like America", "Our American Community", "Rebuild America", and "One Nation Again".

Having analyzed each of these speeches – each of which focuses particularly on the topic of race in the United States – I conclude that Clinton uses his own personal experience with childhood poverty and thus a particular proximity to suffering to establish his credibility on race; that Clinton uses race-blind and post-racial rhetorical frames to discuss the topic of race; and that Clinton rationalizes his post-racial future for the United States in strongly neoliberal terms, advocating for the pursuit of economic opportunity and success not because it is the 'socially just' or 'morally right' thing to do, but because it will yield greater economic prosperity for all. In this way, Clinton's rhetoric on race is a means to an end: one of economic success shared by all regardless of race. To preface this in-depth analysis of Clinton's rhetoric, the following section will discuss the relevant academic debates surrounding Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign rhetoric, followed by a brief background on each of the speeches I analyze for Clinton. Thereafter, I will provide examples from each of Clinton's four speeches to substantiate my arguments concerning his rhetorical approach, and I will conclude with a brief overall discussion of Clinton's rhetoric on race throughout his 1992 presidential campaign.

5.1 Literature Discussion

Clinton's 1992 campaign rhetoric has been extensively studied by scholars and a multitude of perspectives exist regarding his many rhetorical techniques. One prominent

approach analyzes Clinton's campaign rhetoric through the lens of the "American Jeremiad". Similar to Robert Kennedy's rhetoric, Clinton's campaign rhetoric is understood as an expression of the American Jeremiadic rhetorical tradition, particularly with respect to his policy speeches (Smith, 76). This interpretation argues that jeremiad prescribes how America is comprised of a collection of "chosen people" who can overcome difficulties facing society by "restoring their covenant, returning to their sacred mission, or reaffirming the central truth" (Smith, 81). This notion of an American exceptionalism infused with religious language and a notion of collective civic destiny forms the core ideological foundation upon which the jeremiadic tradition is based. Indeed, the central message of the Clinton 1992 campaign was framed as a "The New Covenant" between the Americans and their government, providing strong evidence for an jeremiadic interpretation of Clinton's rhetoric.

Another interpretation of Clinton's 1992 campaign rhetoric is offered by evaluating Clinton's "stylistically driven persona" on the campaign trail through the frame of Aristotelian rhetorical techniques, classically referred to as *dicta* (Carpenter, 102). While this approach does not explicitly evaluate Clinton's rhetoric on race, it does (similar to the scholarship on Clinton as an example of a jeremiad) focus its analysis on Clinton's discussion of policy throughout his campaign (Carpenter). This type of analysis, which evaluates Clinton's rhetoric in terms of his embrace of Aristotelian rhetorical phenomena, admittedly foregoes contending with the substance of his speeches and instead analyzes exclusively his use of those Aristotelian rhetorical techniques (Carpenter, 128). Other scholars have taken a similarly technical approach to analyzing Clinton's rhetoric, opting to evaluate specifically the language he deploys in evading scandals that arose on the 1992 campaign trail. In one study in particular, Greta A. Marlow deconstructs two "public apologies" Clinton made in an effort to "inoculate" public concern over

his character (Marlow, 151). Further scholarship evaluating Clinton's rhetorical character analyzes his use of campaign speeches to portray himself as a "transformational leader" by outlining a clear vision for the country, namely through his presentation of a "New Covenant" for America that is "[inspiring], intellectually stimulating, ... and appealing to the average voter" (Bass, 1985; Wendt and Fairhurst, 1994).

Still further scholarship on Clinton's rhetoric concerning his character and background discusses how he frames his political narrative as "the man from hope" who emerged from a broken childhood home, relying upon his work ethic and a deep religious faith to pull himself up by his bootstraps (Rostneck, 223). Investigating Clinton's use of personal narrative – particularly with respect to his childhood hardships and suffering – is a theme that I build upon in my own evaluation of his rhetoric. However, in his analysis of Clinton's use of narrative, Rostneck evaluates Clinton's use of his childhood hardship through the medium of a documentary presented by the Clinton campaign rather than his campaign rhetoric (Rostneck). Other scholarship evaluates Clinton's rhetoric in terms that more closely resemble the approach I adopt in this inquiry, with one study in particular investigating Clinton and the Democrats's use of language such as "family values", "opportunity" and "responsibility" in speeches critical to shaping public opinion regarding Clinton and the Democratic party (Cloud, 403-404).

While there is a significant body of scholarship studying Clinton's rhetoric on the campaign trail, little research has been conducted regarding Clinton's rhetoric on the topic of race. Indeed, research examining Clinton's relationship with race on the campaign trail often focuses on comparisons between Clinton's electoral support from black and white Americans, but few focus on his rhetoric 'on race' in particular. Overall, despite the wealth of scholarship on the topic, there is little consensus on the rhetorical techniques Clinton uses over the course of his

1992 presidential campaign, with still less research into his rhetorical approach to the topic of race. To further contextualize Clinton’s rhetoric on race, let us now turn to the four speeches I analyze throughout this Chapter in which Clinton addresses specifically the topic of race in the United States.

5.2 Clinton’s Speeches

This section will provide a brief background on each of the four speeches I selected for Clinton over the course of his 1992 campaign which illustrate his rhetorical approach to the topic of race. Each of these speeches is delivered in distinct contexts and to a variety of different audiences; but despite the starkly different locations and audiences of each of the speeches, Clinton demonstrates a remarkably consistent rhetorical approach – hardly changing his messaging whether his audience is comprised of welcoming NAACP members or skeptical, midwestern “Reagan Democrats”. Each of these four speeches is described in detail below, beginning with the first speech, “An Administration that Looks Like America”.

5.2.1 “An Administration that Looks Like America”

On July 11, 1992, Bill Clinton, the Democratic nominee for president, delivered this address to the NAACP National Convention in Nashville, Tennessee alongside his vice-presidential candidate Tennessee Senator Al Gore. Both Clinton and Senator Gore were warmly received by the crowd of over two thousand black delegates attending the NAACP convention (Smith, 205). Ross Perot, a third-party candidate running a robust presidential campaign, addressed the same group earlier in the day and upset many of the delegates with “racial references that were considered insensitive” (205). The speech delivered by Clinton, however,

won him a standing ovation, with Benjamin Hooks, the Executive Director of the NAACP, noting how Clinton and Gore “[ate] the same cornbread” and that black people would support Clinton’s campaign because they “genuinely like them [Clinton and Gore] and their civil rights records” (205).

This speech is relevant to my study of Clinton’s rhetoric on race in that not only is he addressing the NAACP, one of the most prominent identity-based interest groups in the country on the issue of race, but he also discusses race and racial progress using predominantly economic language. This combination of the significance of the setting and context of the speech, combined with the actual substance of his remarks to the NAACP national convention, makes this not only a relevant speech for my inquiry, but a classic showcase of neoliberal rhetoric and rationality.

5.2.2 “*Our American Community*”

Bill Clinton delivered this speech before the Democratic Leadership Council in New Orleans, Louisiana on May 2, 1992 during the Democratic presidential primary campaign. Clinton had long been involved with the Democratic Leadership Council and its sister organizations (Smith, 144). He had participated in the founding of the organization before his presidential run, and the Progressive Policy Institute had helped to develop several major public policy positions adopted by his campaign (144). His audience of over one thousand was comprised predominantly of white, affluent activists who were not part of the Democratic party’s regular rank and file (144). Clinton’s nearly hour-long speech to the Democratic Leadership council – which Jesse Jackson had once called the “Democratic Leisure Club” – diverged significantly from the speech the crowd had anticipated. Speaking without a prepared text and from only a few scribbled notes on a legal-pad, Clinton delivered a major speech on his vision

for racial reconciliation in America (144). The New York Times described the speech as “one of the most powerful speeches of his career” (144).

This speech is relevant to my analysis of Bill Clinton’s rhetoric on race in a number of ways. First, the content of his speech is squarely focused on the topic of race, thereby providing a significant quantity of Clinton’s rhetoric on race from a candidate who seldom addresses the topic of race outright. Second, the setting and audience of the speech is likewise noteworthy. The fact that Clinton decided to deliver a major speech on race to a largely white audience offers an interesting window into Clinton’s rhetorical strategy concerning the topic of race. However, this speech is not the only occasion in which Clinton chooses to address the issue of race before an almost exclusively white audience. Yet another important aspect of this speech is the reaction by the press which depicted this speech on race relations in the United States in the wake of the Los Angeles riots as not only one of his most significant of the campaign, but also one of his finest rhetorical moments (144).

5.2.3 “*Rebuild America*”

On June 13, 1992, Bill Clinton delivered his “Rebuild America” address to the Rainbow Coalition National Convention in Washington, D.C.. The Rainbow Coalition, a multi-racial political organization, was founded by Jesse Jackson, one of his primary opponents in the 1992 Democratic primary, and his speech before Jackson’s Coalition produced his now widely known ‘Sister Souljah’ moment. Throughout his thirty-three minute address to the predominantly black audience, Clinton’s remarks received a relatively warm reception (Smith, 183). However, that reception changed “markedly” when, in discussing his own recent missteps on race, Clinton sharply criticized the remarks on comments made by rap singer Sister Souljah who spoke at the

Rainbow Coalition National Convention the evening before (1992). His criticism of Sister Souljah drew scathing criticism from Jackson who later dubbed Clinton's speech as a "Machiavellian maneuver" (New York Times). In the speech, Clinton denounced the rhetoric of singer Sister Souljah who, in response to the recent violence in Los Angeles, publicly suggested the idea of having gang members kill white people and made a number of discriminatory remarks against white Americans (New York Times). This speech marked a key moment for the Clinton candidacy on the issue of race in that it allowed him to distance himself from Jackson and the perceived radicalism associated with Jackson's candidacy and the Rainbow Coalition by criticizing the remarks of Sister Souljah rather than directly calling out Jackson and his Rainbow Coalition organization.

This speech is relevant to my study of Clinton's rhetoric on race in that he uses this speech as an opportunity to secure a moderate public position on the issue of race by addressing comments of Sister Souljah. Furthermore, this speech is a prime example of Clinton's embrace of neoliberalism and his emphasis on economic language when discussing the topic of race. Indeed, in addressing the Rainbow Coalition, which strongly focused on achieving racial harmony, equality and social change in the United States, Clinton's speech is largely rooted in neoliberal rationality and promoting neoliberal policy. Clinton's embrace of neoliberalism in this context in particular, paired with his comments condemning Sister Souljah, make this speech necessary for understanding Clinton's rhetorical approach to race in his 1992 presidential campaign.

5.2.4 *“One Nation Again”*

“One Nation Again” was delivered by Bill Clinton on March 12, 1992 at Macomb County Community College in Warren, Michigan. Even in the midst of an intense Democratic primary campaign, Bill Clinton understood that winning the presidency required winning back the “Reagan Democrats” who, in Macomb County, had begun to perceive the Democratic party as overly concerned with “social programs for blacks” and forgetting the “middle class values of hard work and family” (Smith, 125). Before campaigning heavily in the industrial Midwest, Clinton had focused on winning black and white voters alike in Southern primary states by “preaching racial harmony, personal responsibility, and welfare reform” (125). Clinton was attempting to pitch the same message to the largely white working-class families of the Midwest, particularly those in Illinois and Michigan (125). In keeping with the same themes of racial reconciliation he advocated in the South, Clinton delivered a major speech to the white working-class voters of the Detroit suburb, focusing heavily on the need for racial reconciliation.

This speech is significant in the study of Clinton’s rhetoric on race in that his language he uses before an audience of predominantly white working class voters, who voted overwhelming Republican in the last several presidential elections, provides some of the strongest rhetoric on race Clinton uses throughout the Democratic primary campaign. Indeed, in this speech, Clinton fully embraces a race-blind rhetorical approach, asking his audience to both “decide that race is not the problem” anymore while also explaining how economic advancement for white Americans necessarily entails commensurate advancement for black Americans. It is a rare example of a white politician – particularly one who actively avoids the topic of race – squarely addressing the issue of race and racial inequality before a white audience, and is therefore of interest to my study of Clinton’s rhetoric on race.

Now that we have established a general background for the Clinton campaign as well as the speeches I analyze for Clinton in this study, we will now turn to the topic of evaluating Clinton's rhetoric on race in-depth, beginning with how Clinton establishes his credibility on the topic of race.

5.3 Clinton's Credibility on Race as established through his childhood experience with suffering

In speeches delivered as a presidential candidate in both the Democratic primary and general election, Bill Clinton uses his experience with childhood poverty and his southern heritage to establish his credibility to remark on issues of race in the United States. This is notably different from how Kennedy establishes his credibility, namely because Clinton's credibility comes from his experience with poverty and his southern heritage whereas Kennedy was neither poor nor from the South. Yet similarities exist between the two men; both Kennedy and Clinton related to others by sharing their own proximity to suffering in order to connect with their audiences and establish credibility for themselves.

Clinton's childhood experience with poverty, deprivation, and his southern heritage appear consistently throughout each of the speeches I analyze, often preceding claims he makes regarding race in the United States. And while Clinton's rhetoric is often race-blind in nature, he nonetheless establishes credibility to remark on issues of poverty and race by sharing his own story.

One clear example of Clinton recalling his own experience with poverty and deprivation as a child to establish credibility on the issue of race occurs in his "An Administration that Looks Like America" address which he delivered before the NAACP National Convention as the Democratic nominee. To illustrate this point, it is worth quoting Clinton at length:

I just want to say one personal word in closing. The feelings I have about civil rights are rooted very much in my background. When my mother was widowed, she moved in, as so many people do, with her parents. And I lived with my grandparents till I was four. My granddaddy had a grade-school education, ran a country store in a little town called Hope. ... Most of his customers were black. That was back in the late forties and early fifties. I first got to know just about all I know about human nature sitting in that store trying to steal cookies out of the Jackson's cookie jar, watching people come in and out who worked hard and did the best they could, sometimes needed credit. I watched my grandfather relate to people as people. ... I was raised to believe that if I didn't respect everybody and want everybody to live up to their God-given potential that someday somebody might not want me to, either. (Smith, 210)

Here Clinton speaks to a theme that is present throughout the entirety of his presidential campaign: that his background on civil rights, and thus his credibility to speak on the issue of race, comes from his own personal childhood experience with poverty. Indeed, he makes this argument in unambiguous terms in the first two lines of the speech: "I just wanted to say a *personal* word in closing. The feelings I have about civil rights are rooted very much in my own background" (210). In describing his own background of growing up fatherless in an unconventional household, and learning about "human nature" from his grandfather, who he specifically notes had only a "grade-school education", Clinton is describing his own proximity to southern poverty and suffering that allows him to connect with his audience and establish a credibility to speak on the issue of civil rights and race. Moreover, by noting that he has first-hand experience with poverty and that his personal experience has informed his understanding of civil rights, Clinton creates legitimacy for himself as a candidate and orator as well as inviting the feeling that he has a similar story with roots in poverty and depravation; implicit in this quote is the notion that his experience with poverty and depravation is to some degree similar to the suffering and poverty understood by his audience who have been subjected to many of the same conditions, but, in their case, as the product of racial inequalities in the United States. In short, Clinton anchors his credibility on race – particularly with respect to black Americans as he

mentions in his example – on his own background of poverty and deprivation, and the subsequent understanding that experience afforded him.

Another example of Clinton couching his knowledge of civil rights and race in his experience of southern poverty and suffering occurs in a nearly identical anecdote he delivers while addressing the Democratic Leadership Council.

We must begin with the hard truth that race is at the root of much of this. In the 1950's when I was a little boy I can remember the racial tensions beginning to flair in the open in my state. I had the virtue of being raised until I was four by a grandfather who had only a fourth-grade education, but who believed passionately in the cause of equal rights. (Smith 146).

In this passage, Bill Clinton's rhetoric describes his views on race not as being informed by and developed through his political experience or education, but rather as a moral understanding he adopted from his grandfather. This is a continuation of Clinton's rhetoric on race in that he explicitly roots his views on race within his own experience of poverty and his family's familiarity with deprivation and lack of education. It is precisely Clinton's focus on his own personal experience with poverty that help to establish credibility with his audience to speak not only on the issue of race, but on issues tangential to racial inequality such as poverty and injustice.

Unsurprisingly, Clinton again makes use of his childhood experience with poverty to establish credibility for himself on the issue of race in his speech to the Rainbow Coalition on June 13, 1992. In the following passage, Clinton yet again remarks upon his childhood experience in the South and his proximity to suffering as a result.

I have seen the hatred and division of the South that Jesse Jackson and I grew up in. And I was just lucky enough to be raised until I was four by a grandfather with a grade school education who believed that all people were created equal. Who showed me by the life he lived how to treat people without regard to race and told me that discrimination and segregation were morally wrong ... I learned more from my granddaddy with his grade school education about that and how to live than I did from all the professors I had at

Georgetown and Oxford and Yale. In the wisdom of a simple working man's heart I learned something that many of our youngest people today who are role models no longer believe. (Smith, 193)

There are several notable sections of this passage that allow Clinton to create a meaningful connection with his audience by way of articulating his childhood experience. First, he remarks upon the lack of education in his household, particularly with respect to his grandfather who raised him, and how his views and moral disposition on race arise from the teachings of his grandfather. Indeed, Clinton goes so far as to mention that he “learned more from [his] granddaddy with his grade school education ... than [he] did from all the professors he had at Georgetown, Oxford and Yale” (Smith, 193). This is key for Clinton in that he is not only basing his moral positions on race in his own experience of poverty and the subsequent lack of education in his family, he also makes a concerted effort to distance himself from the perceived elitism associated with institutions such as Georgetown, Oxford, and Yale. By rhetorically couching his views on race in his experience of poverty while at the same time distancing himself from elite institutions, Clinton makes clear his desire to establish himself as a ‘man of the people’ by way of his Southern roots and his connection with the working poor, namely his grandfather, who shaped his moral views. And it is through this aspect of his own personal story that connects with his audience through his own experience with suffering.

Likewise notable in the above passage is Clinton going out of his way to liken his childhood to that of Jesse Jackson’s, describing the “hatred and division” of the “South that Jesse Jackson and I grew up in” (Smith, 193). By linking his own proximity to the “hatred and division of the South” through Jackson’s experience of the same, Clinton taps into Jackson’s credibility on the issue of race as informed by Jackson’s understanding of the suffering of the South, and uses it to bolster his own legitimacy on race. Further still, Clinton taps his Southern heritage to

bolster his credibility on the topic of race even when addressing a majority white audience as he did in his “One Nation Again” speech, noting “One of the reasons that we could never get our act together in the South is that we were so polarized over race for so long” (Smith, 131). Through both of these examples – Clinton likening his experience of Southern heritage to Jackson’s when addressing a majority black audience and remarking upon his proximity to racial polarization in the South when addressing a majority white audience – it is clear that Clinton uses proximity to racial issues specific to the South and indeed his own Southern upbringing as a means of further establishing his credibility on race.

Yet another example of Clinton using his childhood experience in poverty as a basis for establishing a common bond with his audience occurs again in the same speech. In his passage, Clinton creates for himself a basis of credibility from which he can remark on issues of poverty, race, inequality and injustice before his audience of predominately black Americans. In speaking to his childhood experience of abject poverty and deprivations, he humbles himself before his audience, even going so far as to frame his experience with poverty as a competition between himself and Ross Perot, one of his opponents in the race for the presidency, as to who has been most severely subjected to the consequences of poverty. By speaking of his own suffering, Clinton establishes a sense with his audience that he, too, has suffered, albeit in a different way than those who suffer due to their race rather than their economic status.

An election which may be turned on such important findings as that discovered by the Washington Post reporter who travelled the 35 miles of farmland and cattle ranches and pine trees between my hometown of Hope, Arkansas and Ross Perot's hometown of Texarkana, Texas and concluded that after all I had even more humble beginnings than he did. Or the reporter ... who somehow got me to speculate about whether I would be the last person ever to run for president who once lived in a home without an indoor toilet. (Smith, 184)

Indeed, articulating the suffering and neglect Clinton experienced as a child lends him the legitimacy and ‘standing’ to speak on the subject while at the same time providing him with a basis for a deeper emotional connection with his audience through a familiarity of shared experience of suffering. And although the suffering he experienced was economic in nature and not a result of racism and discrimination, it nonetheless highlights many of the same outcomes that his audience has endured as a result of racism and structural discrimination: poverty, deprivation, neglect, and a lack of opportunity.

In still another example from his “Rebuild America” address, Bill Clinton seeks to further establish his credibility to speak on issues of race, poverty and inequality by criticizing comments by Vice President Quayle which described Clinton as leading a “cultural elite”. Interestingly, Clinton’s response to this criticism of elitism differs from comments he makes earlier in the speech in that he uses Quayle’s comments as a means of increasing his own proximity to racial discrimination.

[Vice President Quayle] said the other day ... that I was leading a cultural elite, Jesse's part of a cultural elite, Mario Cuomo, specifically, singled out, is part of a cultural elite -- Mario Cuomo who graduated first in his class at St. John's Law School and did not get a Wall Street law firm to offer him a job because he was the son of an Italian immigrant grocer who worked his fingers to the bone. (Smith, 186)

In responding to Quayle’s criticism, Clinton *affirms a connection* between himself and others Quayle dubbed as members of the ‘elite’, namely Jesse Jackson and Mario Cuomo, the then-governor of New York. Before grouping himself in with these men, however, Clinton makes the conscious choice to remark on Cuomo’s own experience with ethnic discrimination. By grouping himself with these two men, and by extension their experience with racial and ethnic discrimination, Clinton makes a clear and implicit effort to associate himself with the

suffering experienced by his majority black audience to develop credibility, trust, and a sense of mutual understanding.

In summary, Clinton establishes credibility for himself on the issue of race by describing his proximity to hardships – poverty, deprivation, and a lack of opportunity and education – with which both he and his audience are familiar. It is important to highlight that while Clinton’s experience clearly differs from that of black Americans – namely in that the poverty, hardship, and suffering he experienced as a child were not a result of his race – his references to childhood hardship and suffering, particularly with respect to his experience with poverty, nonetheless *create a bond of common understanding between himself and members of his audience based on the fact that he, too, has suffered and understands the suffering of his audience – even if it is not a direct result of his race.* This shared sense of suffering is similarly present in Kennedy’s rhetoric; indeed both he and Clinton, albeit through different personal experiences, make an effort to connect with their audience by way of shared experience with hardship and suffering: Kennedy through the loss of his brother and his family’s experience with discrimination, and Clinton through his childhood experience with poverty.

Furthermore, Clinton makes a concerted effort not only to establish his credibility through suffering, but also by distancing himself from the idea that he is elitist. On the several occasions that he distances himself from notions of elitism – specifically as it relates to his education – Clinton yet again attempts to create a common bond with his audience through not only a shared understanding of suffering, but a shared distance from elite institutions. Having discussed the means by which Clinton establishes his credibility on the topic of race, we turn now to the second dimension of rhetorical analysis – rhetorical framing – to understand Clinton’s choice of race-blind and post-racial framing.

5.4 Clinton's Rhetorical Framing: Race-blind and Post-racial

In this section, I argue that Bill Clinton adopts race-blind and post-racial rhetorical framing when addressing issues of race in major campaign speeches in both his democratic primary and general election campaigns. Before examining his use of race-blind and post-racial rhetoric in greater depth, it is important to differentiate Clinton's use of race-blind language from his use of a post-racial rhetorical frame. Throughout the four speeches I analyze, which span his primary and general election campaigns, Clinton uses *race-blind* language in order *to avoid explicitly naming racial or ethnic groups*. I argue that this is a deliberate choice Clinton makes, and that by doing so he hopes to deliver a consistent message to both black and white Americans alike. This differs, however, from the post-racial vision he advocates in the same speeches. Indeed, Clinton uses *post-racial* language *to envision a new racial future for the United States* where race is no longer a relevant distinguishing factor between Americans. Furthermore, Clinton's use of race-blind and post-racial rhetorical frames is often intertwined throughout his speeches, indicating that he not only perceives race to be an irrelevant barrier, but also an immaterial distinction that undermines economic progress for the United States as a whole. In arguing this point, I independently evaluate Clinton's race-blind and post-racial rhetorical frames and conclude that he firmly avoids racial distinctions in his campaign rhetoric, both in addressing relevant political issues and in his racial vision for the future of the United States.

5.4.1 Clinton's Race-blind framing

As a presidential candidate, Clinton embraces race-blind rhetorical framing to intentionally avoid identifying particular racial subgroups and instead opts to use broad, unspecific language to refer to black Americans in particular. Furthermore, in the rare event that

Clinton does explicitly name racial identities, such specificity is often immediately followed by the inclusion of those identities into a larger race-blind message, utilizing language that spans racial groups. Indeed, Clinton's race-blind rhetorical approach is prevalent throughout each of the four speeches I analyze; and in this section, I analyze Clinton's use of race-blind language beginning with his "Our American Community" address, delivered in the midst of the Democratic presidential primary campaign on March, 2 1992.

Bill Clinton uses race-blind rhetoric on a consistent basis throughout "Our American Community", but there exists a handful of cases where his use of such language is exceptionally clear. The first instance of this occurs when Clinton distinguishes between "those of us who live in the mainstream of America" and those who do not (Smith, 146). His use of this language – those who live in the "other America" – is often used to avoid identifying black Americans in particular, as is clear in the following passage:

We have made a great deal of progress for those of us who live in the mainstream of America. But what has happened beneath that? Beneath that are those who are not part of our community, whose values have been shredded by the hard knife of experience, where there is the disintegration of family and neighborhood and jobs and the rise of drugs and guns and gangs. (Smith, 146-147)

First, it is clear that in referring to those "who are not a part of our community", Clinton is referring to black Americans who, in the 1990's, were disproportionately subjected to 'the rise of drugs, guns, and gangs' (Phillips, 2002). Yet, rather than using race-identifying language to highlight the fact that it is indeed black Americans that Clinton is referring to, he instead opts to use broad, unspecific in-group/out-group language, describing those black Americans as "those who are not a part of our community" and outside "the mainstream of America". In these words, the implication is clear that it is the black community Clinton is referring to, but he nonetheless explicitly chooses to avoid using racially-specific language. Clinton employs similar race-blind

language later in the same speech, avoiding racially-specific terminology and instead using terms such as “these areas” and “the other America” to refer to impoverished inner city communities, the implication being that this “other America” he is referring to is black, inner-city America.

If you look at the next thing we have to do, which is to bring some jobs back into these areas, you will see that investment alone won't work...That's why this empowerment agenda of the DLC must be at the core of any serious attempt to revitalize the other America. (Smith, 153)

Indeed, Clinton's rhetoric in this passage is consistent with his use of race-blind language throughout this speech and illustrates that, as a candidate, he clearly understands the issues facing black Americans and the black community but nevertheless decides to forego racially-specific language in favor of more sterile terms whose language is so broad and implication so clear that he need not be racially specific to articulate his point to his audience.

Yet another example of Clinton's embrace of race-blind (and additionally, in this example, class-blind) language in place of racially-specific rhetoric occurs in the latter portion of his speech in which he denounces the 'us versus them' rhetorical phenomenon present in American politics. To illustrate his use of race-blind language in this example, it is worth quoting Clinton at length:

...“If it happens somewhere, why doesn't it happen everywhere? I'll tell you why: Because there aren't enough of “us” and there's too much of “them.” “Them.” “Them” is the dread word in American politics. The republicans blame all the problems on “them.” Sometimes the Democrats say, “We're going to help ‘them.’” People don't need help as “them”; they need to be a part of “us,” of defining their own future. We've got to stop blaming “them” or helping “them” and say, “Hey, come on, be a part of us. Be a part of our gang, it's a good gang. It will bring America back. (Smith, 153)

In this passage in particular, Clinton denounces the use of unspecific, intentionally alienating political language that isolates rather than includes, while embracing that very same language in the alternative he proposes. By saying “we've got to stop blaming them” and say “hey, come on, be a part of us”, Clinton utilizes race-blind language to argue for a more inclusive use of political

language. Yet another important phenomenon present in this passage is that, similar to the previous two examples and consistent with his use of race-blind language, Clinton utilizes context to give rise to a specific implication which allows his audience to *understand to whom he is referring when he employs race-blind language*. And in this example in particular, Clinton consciously sets the groundwork for his race-blind (as well as class blind) language, describing how “Republicans blame all the problems on ‘them’” and that, likewise, Democrats sometimes say “we are going to help ‘them’” (Smith, 153). In short, this quote exemplifies Clinton’s use of the race blind term, “them”, to refer to black Americans – as well as the poor, the disenfranchised etc.. Moreover, in denouncing us-versus-them political language, Clinton embraces the very rhetorical approach he seeks to criticize: whereas he blames Democrats for using the language of “us” and “them”, in his own rhetoric he simply reframes the race-blind ‘them’ in terms of ‘us’.

Clinton likewise employs race-blind language in his “An Administration that Looks Like America Speech” address to the NAACP. The fact that Clinton does not depart from his usual race-blind rhetorical framing given his audience – almost exclusively comprised of members of the NAACP, whose work focuses on the advancement of *specifically black Americans* – makes his use of a race-blind rhetorical frame particularly remarkable.

A clear instance of Clinton’s embrace of race-blind rhetoric in this speech occurs when he describes the prospect of his presidency and what it would mean for the American people:

We’re going to give you an administration ... that knows the promise and the pain of this country, one that will involve all other Americans in the struggle to make our nation the best again, one that will rebuild, reunite, and renew the spirit and the lives of the American people. (Smith, 206)

The most notable aspect of this passage is not his emphasis on how he understands the “promise and pain of this country” – which is consistent with his desire to articulate his understanding of

the suffering of others – but rather his conscious and explicit choice to use the term “all other Americans” when referring to those who have been ‘left out’ in a speech before the NAACP who represent a group of Americans – black Americans – who have been routinely and systematically left out of American life. Given the context of this address, his audience, and his placement of the term “other Americans”, it is clear that Clinton is in this case referring to black Americans in particular but refuses to use specific language to do so. And while he may also be grouping other Americans who have been ‘left out’ in his use of the broad term “other Americans”, it is clear that in this quote he is referring to black Americans.

Clinton embraces another form of race-blind rhetoric in this speech when describing economic hardship. In the following passage, Clinton chooses to equate the economic hardship experienced by people across the country ‘regardless of race’. Indeed, this is not the same form of race-blind rhetoric as cited in the previous example (which focused more specifically on his choice to avoid race-specific language). Instead, Clinton’s use of race-blind rhetoric in the this example demonstrates that he not only *decides to forego racially-specific language* in his speeches, but that he *makes a concerted effort to avoid racial distinctions at all*, and certainly with respect to economic hardship.

It’s harder now for the farmers and the small business people. It’s harder for the factory workers ... It’s harder for the members of the NAACP in the big cities and in the rural areas. It’s harder for people without regard to race. Senator Gore and I just came from his hometown of Carthage, Tennessee. It was so hot out there on the courthouse lawn, but people showed up by the thousands. And every one of them was nodding their head when I said it’s harder now than it used to be. (Smith, 207)

This is one of the most clear examples of Clinton’s race-blind approach to rhetoric. Indeed, he goes so far as to discard the issue of race before the NAACP, demonstrating his conviction that race is not the real issue at play; rather economic inequality and the lack of opportunity for all people – farmers, small business people, factory workers, and members of the NAACP – is the

greatest hurdle that must be overcome. Yet in claiming that “it’s harder now than it used to be”, for everyone, regardless of race, Clinton ignores the disproportionate distribution of opportunity, success and indeed economic hardship that exists in the United States. Clinton’s use of race-blind language to not only avoid identifying particular racial groups, but also to glaze over racial inequalities and instead frame them in economic terms is not isolated to his speech to the NAACP. It is equally if not more prevalent in his “One Nation Again” speech, delivered to an almost entirely white audience in Macomb, County Michigan. Before examining Clinton’s rhetoric on race in “One Nation Again”, however, it is important to recognize a key characteristic and trend of Clinton’s rhetoric: that in his speeches to both the NAACP – with a majority black audience – and the crowd in Macomb, County – a majority white audience – *Clinton adopts almost identical language on the issue of race, demonstrating that his race-blind rhetorical strategy is an approach that is itself race-blind, delivered in the same form before audiences both white and black alike.*

In “One Nation Again”, Clinton makes clear his embrace of race-blind rhetoric in a speech focused on the need for racial reconciliation in which he argues that “people” (white people) must relinquish racial biases and distinctions, and recognize that our common problems are not racial, but rather economic in nature. Notable as well is the fact that in the following quote, Clinton remarks *on his own* rhetoric on race by describing how he delivers the same speech in the South and before all his audiences, regardless of racial background. It is a remarkable example of a presidential candidate describing his own rhetoric on race while delivering an address on the issue of racial reconciliation:

You can’t do any of this unless we are prepared to give up some of the prejudices we all had in the eighties, or a lot of people did. The problems are not racial in nature. This is a crisis of economics, of values. It has nothing to do with race. This is the message, the message that I just gave you, that I just gave to the South ... The systems that are killing

us are not racial in nature. This is a crisis of values, of education, and of organization. (Smith, 130-131).

With phrasing such as “it has nothing to do with race” and “the systems that are killing us are not racial in nature”, Clinton fully embraces a race-blind rhetorical approach both with respect to his audience and the issues. That is, he foregoes identifying race directly with respect to those before whom he is delivering his address and likewise does not identify race with respect to policy. Still another example of Clinton’s race-blind rhetoric appears when he presents the voters of Macomb county with a deal: he will restore “economic leadership” and rebuild the middle class, but that at the same time he will help ‘everybody’ in the country:

And the one thing that is going to pull this country together is somebody has got to come back to the so-called Reagan Democratic areas and say, “Look, I’ll give you your values back, I’ll restore the economic leadership, I’ll help you build the middle class back,” but you’ve got to say, “OK, let’s do it with everybody in this country.” (Smith, 132)

Here, Clinton discusses the need for his predominantly white audience of “Reagan Democrats” to arrive at a compromise between economic opportunity and racial equality. This is one of the most noteworthy parts of the speech because Clinton squarely addresses the issue of race with his predominantly white audience of “Reagan Democrats”, but carefully employs race-blind language such as “everybody in this country” when referring to race. It’s important to note that because of the racial context, his use of “everybody in this country” is clearly referring to non-white Americans.

Finally, in “Rebuild America,” Clinton embraces race-blind rhetoric before an audience who explicitly embrace and honor racial identities, so much so that Jesse Jackson, the founder of the organization, named it the “Rainbow Coalition”. While he uses race-blind phrasing throughout his remarks, Clinton’s most explicit use of race-blind language occurs when describing the Los Angeles riots which occurred in response to the beating of Rodney King:

The real story of Los Angeles is in these people we stood up and clapped for. ... Let's not forget folks, most people who live in that city did not burn, or loot, or riot. ... Even the poorest children were sitting in their houses when they could have been looting goods because their parent told them it was wrong to steal from their neighbors. ... They could have gotten away with it and they didn't and they were poor. They really live by family values ... And we ought to honor that. (Smith, 186)

In referencing the in Los Angeles riots, Clinton does not explicitly identifying the black community whatsoever. He instead uses 'people' and '[poor] children' in broad terms to avoid taking aim at the black community, and instead includes black Americans – whom he is clearly referencing – with the rest of the 'people' in Los Angeles. He then goes on to talk about the families he's "really worried about" without actually mentioning that he's worried about black families or white families or Latino families or Asian families etc. Indeed, Clinton's race-blind language in this case presents an intentional effort of not only avoiding identification on the basis of race, but also a clear effort on his part to group all people together, avoiding talking about one group in particular while it is clearly the case that he is referencing those black Americans living in Los Angeles.

In summary, Clinton fully embraces a race-blind rhetorical frame when discussing issues of race and race relations on the campaign trail, regardless of the racial background of his audience. Before black and white audiences alike, Clinton declines to specify racial differences and instead selects broad, sterile, and unspecific language to refer to particular racial groups when the context of the speech makes it clear to which racial groups he is referring. Furthermore, Clinton's race-blind framing signifies a profound difference between his rhetorical framing and that used by Robert Kennedy throughout his 1968 presidential campaign. Whereas Kennedy embraces a *race-conscious framing not only with respect to identifying racial differences* (e.g. white Americans, black Americans, etc.) but also *making distinctions between the white and black experience in America*. Clinton, on the other hand, not only avoids identifying racial

groups in general, he also equates the experience between black and white Americans, most clearly when he makes the statement that “it’s harder for people [now] without regard to race”. Clinton’s race-blind rhetorical framing marks a distinct shift away from the race-conscious framing of Kennedy. It is a rhetorical evolution that speaks not only to the difference in rhetorical approach between Clinton and Kennedy, but a larger transformation of American thought. Now that we have finished our discussion of Clinton’s race-blind rhetorical framing, let us now turn to the second aspect of Clinton’s language in framing race on the campaign trail: his use of post-racial rhetorical framing to discuss his racial vision for the United States.

5.4.2 *Clinton’s Post-Racial Rhetorical Framing*

In addition to embracing a race-blind rhetorical frame, Clinton likewise *employs post-racial rhetorical framing to envision a new racial future for the United States where race is no longer a relevant distinguishing factor*. In articulating this vision, Clinton often asks his audience to ‘get beyond race’ and move past racial distinctions so as to allow the United States to fully realize some other objective such as unity or economic prosperity. Indeed, Clinton adopts post-racial rhetoric throughout many of the speeches I analyze, but his most prominent use of post-racial rhetoric occurs in “One Nation Again” and “Rebuild America”. Drawing upon examples from these two speeches in particular, I argue in this section that Clinton *articulates a post-racial vision for the future of the United States using language that asks his audience to transcend racial differences in an effort to realize a post-racial future*.

Over the course of his “One Nation Again” address, Clinton unambiguously embraces post-racial rhetorical frames to discuss his racial vision for the United States. This post-racial vision is often intertwined with economic rationality, emphasizing the need for individual

responsibility, the pursuit of opportunity, and the ultimate goal of shared economic success.

Clinton's post-racial rhetorical frame and vision for the country is made clear in the following passage in which he describes witnessing the realization of a racially harmonious future based on the value of work and opportunity. Moreover, Clinton makes the case that if only the United States could achieve the post-racial future he envisions that racial distinctions would become obsolete and give way to a racially transcendent pursuit of economic prosperity:

In Chicago today I went to a little business, one hundred and seven employees – blacks, Puerto Ricans, other Hispanics, a guy from Romania fixing to cast his vote for me, Poles – all of them together. And you know what they said? They work and they went to school at work, at a big GED program. And they all talked about how the more education they got, the more their wages went up, the more fun it was to be working with all different kinds of people. It's amazing how, when your life works, you don't feel those resentments. It's amazing when you work with people who share your values, and who are winning, all the reservations that you might have kind of fade away. (Smith, 132)

Clinton's rhetoric in this passage fully embodies his post-racial vision for the nation – one in which “blacks, Puerto Ricans, other Hispanics” Romanians and Poles all come together around the neoliberal pursuit of opportunity, education, and higher wages (Smith, 132). This is to say that by focusing on individual work, education, and an increase of wages, people will be able to relinquish “those resentments” and how if the United States collectively embraced a common set of neoliberal values, “[those] reservations you might have might ... fade away” (Smith, 132). For Clinton, his race-blind vision is delivered through neoliberal rationality, a dimension to Clinton's rhetoric discussed at length in the following section of this chapter.

Yet another example of Clinton's post-racial rhetorical framing occurs in his closing remarks of the same speech. It is in these final words that Clinton makes one of his strongest post-racial appeals, directly asking his audience to “forget about race and be one nation again”:

So I just hope and I pray that each of you in your own way and all of the people who live here will think about that. What would it take for this country to embrace a democrat again

based on opportunity, responsibility, people-based politics? And let's forget about race and be one nation again. (Smith, 133)

This quote represents his most explicit and unvarnished use of post-racial framing to describe his post-racial vision for the United States. Furthermore, the neoliberal ideological underpinnings present in Clinton's rhetoric – regarding himself as a democrat whose message is based in “opportunity, responsibility, and people based politics” – represents a direct appeal to the neoliberal tendencies of his audience, the “so-called Reagan Democrats” who he and the Democratic party were attempting to court. It is important to note how in this example Clinton asks an almost exclusively white audience to “forget about race”, a bridge he declines to cross with predominantly black audiences.

Finally, in the same speech, Clinton takes an alternative rhetorical approach in convincing his audience to embrace the race-blind future he advocates. In the following passage, Clinton outlines the inevitability of a multiracial and multiethnic future for the United States and that transcending racial divisions will be necessary in order to make a difference in the country:

But what I'm telling you, there is nothing I can do to get out of the fact that we have got to come together around values and across racial lines. And if we're not prepared to do it we are not going to make a difference in this country, because, if you look at who's going to be filling the jobs of tomorrow, they are people whose children are doing bullet drills instead of fire drills in school, who are working hard and are still poor, who are living in substandard housing and who need these empowerment strategies. (Smith, 132)

In depicting the inescapability of a multiracial future for the United States before his majority white audience, Clinton articulates a post-racial vision of society as a means to an end. Clinton urges his audience to accept his post-racial vision for the United States in order to achieve some other goal, namely to “make a difference in this country”. By framing his post-racial vision of the United States in these terms, it becomes clear that Clinton believes that pursuing a post-racial America where individuals come together “around values and across racial lines” ought not to be pursued because it is the right or just thing to do, but instead because realizing this vision enables

Americans to achieve some other goal. Indeed, this theme is not limited to this speech or white audiences as Clinton adopts identical rhetoric when addressing the Rainbow Coalition on the same topic:

One of the things that the Democrats I think have to stand and draw the line on, and one of the things that I have to tell you about, is that I do not believe we have any hope of doing what we have to do in America unless we can come together and cross racial lines again. (Smith, 131)

Based upon Clinton's rhetoric from both the above example as well as his post-racial rhetoric in his "One Nation Again" address, it is clear that Clinton's post-racial vision arises from his belief that, in the future, American progress and the implementation of policy will be contingent on the American people's ability to come together across racial lines.

Evidenced by the excerpts discussed in this section as well as numerous other examples omitted from this section for the sake of brevity, Bill Clinton routinely embraces a post-racial rhetorical frame when discussing the topic of race in the United States. In keeping with his shift away from the rhetorical strategies of Robert Kennedy, Clinton's post-racial rhetorical framing and vision for the United States differs starkly from the humanist vision presented by Kennedy in his 1968 presidential campaign. The first and most obvious way in which Clinton and Kennedy differ concerns their choice of language to depict their racial vision for the country. Whereas Kennedy uses humanist language to envision a future in which one's status as a human being transcends any other feature – including race, Clinton's post-racial language depicts a future in which race simply no longer matters. Having finished our discussion of Clinton's rhetorical framing, let us now turn to the final dimension of rhetorical analysis for Clinton: rationality.

5.5 Clinton's Neoliberal Rationality

Turning now to the third dimension of rhetorical analysis, I argue that Clinton's rationality is *strongly neoliberal* because he justifies his pursuit of social justice on the basis that it yields economic prosperity. That is, *Clinton is pursuing social justice for the sake of economic prosperity, not for the sake of justice itself*. Clinton's strongly neoliberal rationality is present throughout each of his four speeches I analyze, and he not only embraces neoliberal rationality with respect to racial justice and equality, but also interweaves neoliberal policy and governmentalities throughout much of his rhetoric on race. More specifically, Clinton often accompanies his rhetoric on race with neoliberal conceptions of responsibility, opportunity, and enhancing one's human capital. In the following pages, I explicate my analysis of Clinton as a strongly neoliberal rhetorical figure by providing a variety of examples in which Clinton explicitly advocates for racial justice and equality in economic and specifically neoliberal terms.

The most clear example of Clinton's neoliberal rationality on issues of racial justice and equality occurs in his speech before the NAACP. In the following quote, Clinton adopts neoliberal rationality by basing his central call for civil rights around market-based principles and rationality: "What I want to do is to make economic empowerment and opportunity the civil rights issue of the 1990's" (Smith, 208). This is a clear example of neoliberal rationality in that Clinton bases his conception of civil rights – an issue framed through a solidly moral and justice-motivated lens by Kennedy – in entirely economic and market-oriented terms. That is to say Clinton foregoes embracing civil rights in terms of justice and morality, instead favoring of an economic and neoliberal conception of civil rights. And although economic empowerment is certainly not incompatible with civil rights (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign is a prime example of this), Clinton's push to make economic opportunity and

empowerment the *central* aspect of civil rights in the 1990's demonstrates a clear and full embrace of neoliberal rationality with respect to race.

Another example of Clinton's neoliberal rationality on the issue of race is present in his "One Nation Again" address. In this example, Clinton attempts to persuade his audience of predominately white 'Reagan Democrats' that in order to rebuild the middle class, they would have to concede that revitalization of 'their' America would entail the revitalization of the 'other America', i.e. for racial minorities and particularly black Americans, who Clinton often refers to using the race-blind term "the other America".

And the one thing that is going to pull this country together is somebody has got to come back to the so-called Reagan Democratic areas and say, "Look, I'll give you your values back, I'll restore the economic leadership, I'll help you build the middle class back," but you've got to say, "OK, let's do it with everybody in this country." (Smith, 132)

This passage from Clinton's speech indicates he is aware of the reticence that white, working-class voters of the Midwest feel with respect to helping minorities through government programs and investment. However, Clinton nonetheless squarely addresses the issue of race with these voters and explains the 'deal' he is making with them on the issue of race: that if the voters in Macomb country want to benefit from Clinton's vision of universal economic opportunity and improvement, they must also accept the reality that such a vision includes lifting up minorities in the United States. The basic underlying logic of this passage is that the pursuit and acceptance of racial justice and equality should be undertaken for the sake of economic prosperity; it exemplifies a strongly neoliberal rationality which justifies the pursuit of social equality in terms of eventual economic gains. Clinton adopts this strongly neoliberal rationality later in the speech, and again justifies giving up "prejudices" in order to confront a "crisis of economics". This example serves as yet another instance of Clinton's strongly neoliberal rationality in justifying the pursuit of racial equality for the sake of economic prosperity.

You can't do any of this unless we are prepared to give up some of the prejudices we all had in the eighties, or a lot of people did. The problems are not racial in nature. This is a crisis of economics, of values. It has nothing to do with race. (Smith, 130-131)

By explicitly noting that he understands the prejudices harbored by his audience and claiming it necessary that they relinquish racial prejudices to contend with the economic crisis, Clinton yet again embraces strongly neoliberal rationality by providing an *economic* argument to *justify* why his audience should “give up” racial prejudices and pursue a degree of *racial equality*.

Still other instances of Clinton's neoliberal rationality are evident in his “Rebuild America” address in which Clinton again unambiguously embraces neoliberal rationality: “Investing in our people is not simply the right thing to do morally and politically; it's also good economic sense” (Smith, 189). Here, Clinton's justification for ‘investing in our people’ is solidly based in the pursuit of economic prosperity – not simply because it is the ‘right’ or ‘just’ thing to do. And while “our people” may at first glance not entail specific racial connotations, when examined in the larger context of the speech it becomes clear that a reference to race does exist. Indeed, much of Clinton's rhetoric on investment in this speech is aimed at revitalizing the “other America”, which, as previously discussed throughout this chapter, is clearly a veiled reference to black America.

In summary, Clinton's strongly neoliberal rationality represents a *significant shift* from the strongly justice-motivated rationality of Kennedy's 1968 campaign. Indeed, Clinton's neoliberal rationality is the antithesis of Kennedy's social justice-motivated rationality. Whereas Clinton justifies his racial vision in terms of it being a means to achieving economic ends, Kennedy's pursuit of his racial vision is an end to itself: arguing that the pursuit of a humanist racial vision of the country needs no further justification; that it is a worthy pursuit in and of itself. The distinction between Clinton and Kennedy on this point is not only significant in that

they embody fundamentally opposing rationalities, but also because this difference represents an overall shift in American politics away from justice oriented rationality and justice-oriented politics. When viewed in this way, Clinton's rhetoric signifies a complete reformation of American politics towards neoliberal and economic oriented rationality and away from the social justice-motivated rationality of the Civil Rights movement and the Democratic presidential rhetoric of the late 1960's.

5.6 Conclusion

Bill Clinton's rhetoric on race in his 1992 campaign is unique in that he strongly embraces neoliberal rationality and race-blind framing. Indeed, Clinton's neoliberal approach is the strongest of all the candidates in this study, marking his 1992 campaign as a departure not only from the justice-motivated rationality of Kennedy's 1968 campaign, but also a difference in approach from Obama's more tempered embrace of neoliberal principles in his 2008 presidential campaign. The most telling aspects of Clinton's candidacy, however, surface when his rhetoric is compared to Kennedy's in particular. When viewed together, the rhetorical shift from Kennedy's 1968 campaign to Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign not only demonstrates a profound difference in the rhetorical strategy and linguistic approach – it also speaks to a larger shift in American politics. Indeed, the shift away from the justice-motivated rationality of the Kennedy campaign towards the strongly neoliberal rationality embodied by Clinton's 1992 campaign is *emblematic of an America that has become more concerned with economic considerations rather than pursuing matters of justice on a plainly moral basis*. Whereas Kennedy's rhetoric on race is guided by a deep commitment to humanist ideals and strong justice-motivated rationality, Clinton's rhetoric embraces the idea of racial distinctions not as something to be transcended for

moral reasons, but as a barrier which must be overcome to achieve some larger goal – namely, economic prosperity. This political paradigm shift away from reasoning motivated by conceptions of justice and morality and towards economic and market-oriented rationality maps onto the larger shifts in American political thought from the 1960's to the early 1990's: specifically, the overall embrace of neoliberalism. Indeed, Clinton's rhetoric on race serves to elucidate this paradigm shift towards neoliberalism and reflects the attitudes and beliefs of a new American political landscape shaped in large part by neoliberal ideology, policy, and rationality.

We have just finished discussing the rhetoric on race of our second candidate, Bill Clinton. We now turn to the final candidate evaluated in this study: Barack Obama. Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign represents a less staunchly neoliberal approach to topics of race, but also a less fervently justice-motivated approach to racial equality. Obama's rhetoric on race blends the two approaches this study has covered thus far: combining both neoliberal and justice-motivated rationality with race-conscious and post-racial frames. His rhetorical style lands somewhere in-between the rhetorical poles personified by the candidacies of Clinton and Kennedy and represents a new vision for America: one embodied by a young, charismatic, black candidate who mixes neoliberal and justice-motivated rationalities to chart a new racial direction for the United States.

CHAPTER 6

Obama

In this chapter, I analyze the rhetoric of Barack H. Obama. My study of Obama's rhetoric on race will focus specifically on his 2008 presidential campaign spanning both the Democratic primary and general election. The candidacy of Barack Obama is of interest to this study for numerous reasons, not the least of which is its significance on the topic of race. Indeed, Barack Obama was the first black nominee for president of a major political party, the first black president of the United States, and a man whose candidacy embodied a new era in American politics. Yet beyond the symbolic significance of Obama's candidacy, his rhetoric on the topic of race over the course of his 2008 presidential campaign is both substantial and unique. His rhetoric on race marks a departure from the strongly neoliberal rhetoric of the 1990's championed by Bill Clinton, but not so drastic a departure as to return fully to the justice-motivated spirit of the Civil Rights era in which Robert Kennedy launched his campaign for president. Rather, Obama's rhetoric on race represents a blend of these two political paradigms: signifying both a novel rhetorical direction on the topic of race in presidential campaign rhetoric, as well speaking to a larger shift in American politics towards a new coexistence of neoliberalism and justice-motivated rationality.

I will begin this chapter with a short discussion of the relevant scholarship evaluating the rhetorical strategies used by Obama in his 2008 presidential campaign. I will then provide a brief background on each of the speeches I analyze of Obama followed by a detailed analysis of each of the three rhetorical dimensions by which I analyze each of the candidates in this study: credibility, rhetorical framing, and rationality. I will then conclude with a general discussion of

the trends present in Obama's rhetoric and will explore what those trends tell us about the current state of presidential politics in the United States. Let us begin with a discussion of the relevant scholarship surrounding Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign.

6.1 Literature Discussion

Many scholars have debated the rhetorical techniques Obama used throughout his 2008 presidential campaign without coming to consensus. One body of literature analyzes Obama's 2008 campaign rhetoric through individual qualitative analysis of his speeches, with many analyses exploring the rhetoric in Obama's "A More Perfect Union" (Frank, 2008; Terril, 2009; Jones, 2011). This body of scholarship often focuses its analysis on the context, language, and overall narrative of the address in question, as well as the particular rhetorical techniques Obama employs. However, as these studies do not encompass multiple speeches, larger trends regarding Obama's campaign rhetoric remain the subject of other inquiries.

Another body of literature does, however, address Obama's rhetoric throughout the campaign but conducts rhetorical analysis using quantitative rather than qualitative techniques. For example, one study published in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* examines Obama's 2008 campaign using a computational analysis to examine his 183 speeches – and nearly 11,500 distinct words – delivered throughout the campaign (Coe and Reitzes, 2010). Among those who analyze Obama's rhetoric using these techniques, a loose consensus has formed that Obama's 2008 campaign rhetoric focused heavily on policy appeals (Coe and Reitzes, 2010; Hart, Childers, and Lind 2013). Yet these findings largely contradict studies that analyze the rhetoric of Obama's 2008 campaign through an interpretive lens. While there is no clear agreement among these inquiries, they differ from the conclusions of the aforementioned quantitative

studies, concluding that Obama explicitly works to infuse his rhetoric with moral and religious language rather than embracing a predominately policy-oriented rhetorical approach.

Indeed, the body of literature which adopts an interpretative analytical approach to Obama's rhetoric has likewise been unable to reach a consensus regarding the rhetorical techniques he adopts throughout the course of his 2008 campaign for president. For instance, one study carefully examines five of Obama's campaign speeches, arguing that he makes a clear rhetorical effort to articulate a "pragmatic moral voice" through his candidacy and with which he could strongly contrast himself with the rhetoric and actions of the Bush administration (Jenkins and Cos, 2010). Still others argue that Obama's rhetorical techniques are rooted instead in biblical language and references to the Exodus journey as well as proverbial language more broadly, arguing that his wide rhetorical appeal was largely the result of his accessible and memorable biblical and proverbial rhetoric (Mieder, 2009; Murphy 2011).

In addition, there is little consensus on how Obama addresses the topic of race. One particular field of scholarship argues that Obama adopts an intentionally 'deracialized' approach throughout his 2008 primary and general election campaign (Bai 2008; Clayton, 2010). Yet other scholarship articulates an alternative interpretation of Obama's rhetoric, positing that Obama adopts a rhetorical campaign strategy fundamentally based on race (McIlwain 2013). One study in particular asserts that Obama embraced a "racial distinction strategy" in which he carefully ties his own personal biography on race into a larger story of race in the United States as a whole. Still other scholarship focuses on how Obama's own racial identity necessitated a more moderated rhetorical approach that insulated him from being too closely aligned with one particular racial group (Dilliplane, 2012). In summary, the collage of conclusions surrounding Obama's rhetoric – ranging from pragmatic to proverbial, deracialized to racially distinct –

indicates that the body of scholarship investigating Obama's 2008 campaign rhetoric has yet to come to a widely accepted consensus on his rhetorical techniques, and much less to conclusion concerning Obama's rhetoric on race.

My inquiry combines three dimensions of rhetorical analysis, each of which is studied in various levels of depth within the present scholarship. In my analysis of Obama – consistent with my analysis of each of the candidates whose rhetoric I study – I examine his rhetoric in three distinct ways that endeavor to elucidate a more comprehensive understanding of Obama's rhetoric on race. In this pursuit, I evaluate Obama's rhetoric on the following three questions. First, how does Obama establish his credibility on the issue of race? Second, how does Obama frame the issue of race? And third, how does Obama rationalize his post-racial vision for the United States?

In this chapter, I examine each of these questions and use excerpts from three of Obama's major campaign speeches concerning the topic of race to conclude that Obama *establishes his credibility through his own personal experience and racial heritage, that he uses both race-conscious and post-racial rhetorical frames, and that Obama uses neoliberal rationality to justify his racial vision for the United States*. By understanding Obama's rhetoric on race through these three rhetorical dimensions, one can begin to see a larger trend in American politics, namely the beginning of a slight retreat from the strongly neoliberal rhetoric embraced by Clinton's 1992 campaign, but not yet a complete return to the social justice-motivated reasoning of Robert Kennedy. We now turn to a brief discussion of each of the speeches I analyze for Obama to contextualize his rhetoric on race.

6.2 *The Speeches of Barack H. Obama*

In this section, I will analyze three speeches Barack Obama delivered over the course of his 2008 presidential campaign in addition to the keynote address he delivered as a state-senator from Illinois at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. The background and historical moment of each speech, as well as its relevance to this study, will be briefly discussed, beginning with Obama's "A More Perfect Union" address.

6.2.1 *"A More Perfect Union"*

Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech clearly exemplifies his rhetorical approach on race in each of the three dimensions I analyze. In the speech, he uses his own racial heritage as a means of informing his views and establishing credibility on race; he adopts both a race-conscious and post-racial rhetorical framing of race; and he embraces neoliberal rationality in framing his post-racial vision for the United States. Obama delivered "A More Perfect Union" on June 1 2007, addressing race relations and racial tensions that had emerged in the context of the 2008 presidential campaign. Obama's central message focused on the need for America to address longstanding and unresolved racism and racial inequalities in the United States. Obama delivered the speech in response to comments made by his former pastor, reverend Jeremiah Right, whose sermons had made incendiary and controversial statements regarding race relations, American foreign policy, and other topics of national concern (New York Times).

Beyond simply its content or the historic context, "A More Perfect Union" is a uniquely important speech in understanding presidential rhetoric on race because of the man who delivered it. Then-Senator Barack Obama, who went on to become the first black president of the United States, had unique standing and credibility in giving such a speech on race. Being the

“son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas”, Obama’s own biracial heritage embodies the racial divide between black and white Americans. And with that divide the center of attention, his own identity afforded him a unique platform and credibility to speak on the topic of race relations as a candidate for the presidency who could sympathize with the experiences of black and white America alike.

In summary, speech is relevant to my inquiry because it is a speech dedicated in its entirety to the issue of race relations in the United States. Furthermore, it is a speech on race delivered by a biracial candidate whose own racial identity forms not only the basis for his credibility on the topic of race, but embodies the racial divide in the United States which Obama explicitly discusses. It is a powerful and substantive address on the topic of race that clearly demonstrates Obama’s use of personal narrative, race-conscious and post-racial language, and neoliberal rationality to justify a new racial vision for the United States.

6.2.2 “*Ebenezer Baptist Church Address*”

Obama’s “Ebenezer Baptist Church Address” demonstrates his rhetorical consistency on the topic of race in that he draws upon personal experience to establish credibility on race, adopts a race-conscious and post-racial rhetorical frame, and uses neoliberal rationality to justify his racial vision for the country. Delivered on January 20, 2008, Obama’s speech focused on addressing the topic of race before a predominately black audience at the former congregation of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (New York Times). The historical moment of the speech is likewise notable in that Obama delivered the speech the night before the South Carolina Democratic primary, attempting, as the New York Times described, “to draw significant support from African-Americans while maintaining the appeal of a candidate who seeks to transcend

race” (New York Times). This speech is relevant to my study of Obama’s rhetoric in that Obama focuses squarely on the topic of race and relations in the United States and does so in a manner consistent with his rhetorical style throughout the 2008 presidential campaign, namely through his use of personal experience as a means of establishing credibility on race, embracing race-conscious and post-racial rhetorical frames, and adopting neoliberal rationality to justify his racial vision for the United States.

6.2.3 “*Father’s Day Address*”

Delivered to the Apostolic Church of God in Chicago on June 15, 2008, Obama’s “Father’s Day Address” further illuminates his rhetorical approach to race. Consistent with Obama’s rhetoric on race, the establishment of credibility through personal experience and his use of neoliberal conceptions of responsibility to achieve his vision for a post-racial society play a central thematic role throughout the speech. His speech focuses specifically on the topic of fatherlessness, and throughout the speech Obama makes references to his own experience of fatherlessness and the impact that has had on his life. It is in this context of parenthood that Obama embraces a neoliberal conception of personal responsibility as well as neoliberal policy recommendations to influence individuals to assume greater responsibility in family life. This speech pertains to my study of Obama’s rhetoric on race in that he remains consistent in his rhetorical techniques – basing his credibility in personal experience, adopting race-conscious and post-racial rhetoric, and justifying his racial vision using neoliberal rationality – while at the same times strongly embracing his own suffering with fatherlessness to connect with his audience.

6.2.4 “2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address”

Obama’s address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention is a relevant and important speech for my inquiry because it foreshadows many of the same rhetorical themes Obama embraces in his 2008 presidential campaign, namely his emphasis on his personal experience with issues of race as well as his post-racial vision for the United States. Cited as the “speech of a lifetime” and “speech that made Obama”, his address focuses on themes of racial unity and explores his own racial identity as an embodiment of the complexity and depth of race in American society (Glasrud and Wintz, 2010; New York Times, 2016). Indeed, the value of this speech as a part of this inquiry details the consistency of Obama’s rhetoric on race, demonstrating his enduring faith in America’s ability to be a truly unified nation amid differences in race, class, gender and political persuasion.

Having discussed the background of each of the speeches I analyze in this chapter, we now turn to the first dimension of rhetorical analysis: how Obama establishes his credibility on race.

6.3 Obama’s Credibility on Race

In this section, I will evaluate Obama’s 2008 campaign rhetoric through our first dimension of rhetorical analysis: establishing credibility. Obama’s credibility on race is predominately derived from the experiences that emerge from his own racial identity, one which encompasses the experiences of both white and black America. This unique racial heritage – being the “son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas” – affords Obama a legitimacy to remark on issues of racial identity because he is able to genuinely relate to the realities of black and white Americans alike. Indeed, Obama’s rhetorical approach to his “A

More Perfect Union” speech is based largely on his own racial identity which he uses to dissect and examine the root causes of the feelings harbored by white and black Americans that “may not get expressed in public” but nonetheless shape the racial divide in the United States. This is notably different from the ways in which Clinton and Kennedy establish their credibility on the topic of race in that neither of those two men had the ability to speak to the experience of black and white Americans from a position of identity which is connected to both. In addition to rooting his credibility on the topic of race in his own experience as a black American with a proximity to both the white and black experience in America, Obama’s identity establishes credibility for himself as he has proximity to and understanding of the suffering of both black and white Americans. While Obama’s emphasis on racial identity and thus his proximity to suffering may differ depending on the context of his speech, it remains clear that Obama’s credibility on the issue of race is derived by the his own experience as a black American whose own experience affords him a proximity to and understanding of suffering of black and white Americans alike.

6.3.1 Credibility: Obama’s personal proximity to race and suffering through his racial heritage

The rhetorical approach Obama adopts to establish his credibility on the issue of race arises through a discussion of his biracial heritage and his experience as a black American. Examined at length in “A More Perfect Union”, Obama illustrates how his personal experience informs not only his understanding of racial divisions in the United States, but also the underlying social and structural factors which give rise to such divisions. Yet before launching into a nuanced repudiation of Reverend Wright’s comments which were central to the impetus of the speech, Obama discusses how his own background undergirds his belief that America can

overcome racial intolerance and racism. Within the first four minutes of the speech, Obama reflects on his racial identity as being a fusion of both the black and white experience in America, as well as his family's multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural composition. Indeed, this affords Obama a legitimacy to make claims about multiculturalism and a post racial existence (which I discuss in greater depth in the following section) towards which he hopes to lead the country. To illustrate this, it is worth quoting Obama at length:

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 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. (New York Times)

In this quote, Obama establishes his credibility to remark on the issue of racial tension in the United States because, by virtue of his own racial heritage, he embodies those very tensions. Moreover, Obama not only establishes credibility in this passage, he also connects with several distinct racial groups: he connects with white Americans through the experience of his mother and maternal grandparents; he connects with the immigrant community through his father's immigrant experience; and he connects with the African-American community through the background of his wife, Michelle Obama, explicitly referencing how she and their daughters "carry...the blood of slaves and slaveowners" (Politico). By demonstrating his personal bond with different racial and ethnic groups, Obama casts his own identity as an embodiment of the racial differences in American society. Coalescing the multitude of attitudes and histories involved with each racial and ethnic group, Obama establishes for himself a personal credibility and legitimacy to speak to the feelings of each group, ultimately presenting the argument that the

United States must reconcile racial differences in the pursuit of common goals. Indeed, this argument is best presented in his own words:

It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional of candidates. 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. (Politico)

Furthermore, Obama's racial background not only serves as a basis for his credibility on the topic of race, but also forms the rhetorical foundation of his repudiation of Wright's comments. In the following passage, Obama consciously weaves together Wright's comments, legitimate feelings within the black community, and his white grandmother's utterances of cringeworthy racial stereotypes all of which are framed as aspects of himself that he cannot disown:

I can no more disown [Reverend Wright] than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can disown 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 her by 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 part of America, this country that I love. (New York Times)

Equating the inability to disown his own grandmother to Reverend Wright and the black community as a whole, Obama depicts his own racial identity as embodying fully the complexities and flaws of both black and white America; and, for Obama, Wright's comments reflect an unwelcome albeit inseparable aspect of his black identity. By embracing his black identity while at the same time condemning Wright's comments, Obama avoids completely distancing himself from the black community in his refutation of Wright. This rhetorical decision thereby affords him the rhetorical flexibility to retain the trust and support of the black community while also delivering the repudiation he felt was politically necessary. Indeed, Obama's rhetoric on race surrounding Wright's comments exemplify how, consistent with his

past rhetoric, Obama draws upon his own racial identity to provide him with the trust and credibility to remark on – and in this case criticize – issues of race in American life.

Obama’s use of his own racial identity to establish credibility on the issue of race is also a predominant rhetorical theme throughout in his 2004 Democratic National Convention address. Obama’s emphasis on his own racial background plays such a prominent role in setting the tone for the speech that he launches into a description of his racial background within the first three sentences. The story Obama proceeds to tell – one which encapsulates the story of an immigrant fleeing poverty; the story of the white working class during World War II; and a classic telling of the ‘American Dream’ – becomes a hallmark of Obama’s rhetoric on race in his presidential campaign four years later. For this reason, it is worth quoting Obama at length:

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... [My mother] 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 my grandfather signed up for duty; joined Patton’s army, 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 F.H.A., and later moved west all the way to Hawaii in search of opportunity. 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. (Washington Post)

Obama’s unique background on race –one which spans the black-white racial divide in the United States while also remaining accessible to working class Americans and immigrants – not only provides him with a basis to establish credibility with his audience of white and black alike, but it affords him the legitimacy speak about the American dream and the racial divide from the perspective of an individual who embodies those very things. Furthermore, Obama’s credibility as having been derived from his own personal background allows him to speak to issues of race, racial tension, and racial reconciliation in personal terms, a rhetorical skill he deploys later in “A More Perfect Union” to diagnose America’s problems on race and prescribe a path forward. Yet

Obama's invocation of racial identity to connect with his audience and to establish credibility on the topic of race was not without issue. Indeed, in his "Ebenezer Baptist Church Address," he remarks on the criticism he received regarding his embrace of his racial identity in understanding a community's issues: "That was when I wasn't black enough. Now I'm too black. You remember that." (Americanrhetoric.com). Despite the criticism, Obama continued to use references to his racial identity throughout the campaign to establish his credibility on the issue of race.

In summary, Obama establishes his credibility to discuss issues of race throughout his 2008 presidential campaign by tapping into his own identity. As a black American with a biracial heritage, Obama had a proximity to the experience of both black and white Americans alike. Through this connection, he was able to credibly discuss the suffering he observed as being connected to both the black and white reality in America, and thereby engender trust with his audience because he genuinely understands the suffering of those groups. Moreover, this extends beyond white and black Americans; Obama discusses the immigrant experience (to which he is connected through both his father's lineage) as well as working class Americans. The diversity of Obama's identity and therefore his proximity to the suffering of people from a diverse set of backgrounds affords Obama the ability to connect – through a common proximity to suffering – to a number of racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

The manner in which Obama establishes his credibility on the topic of race – through the proximity to the suffering of others through his own identity – differs starkly from how Clinton and Kennedy establish their credibility on race. Indeed, Obama's connection to issues of race in the United States is derived from his own racial identity; he need not connect to the experience of another racial group through a shared experience of loss (as with Kennedy) or a shared

experience with poverty (as with Clinton). For both Clinton and Kennedy, their connection to the experience of non-white racial groups in the United States requires a secondary degree of connection apart from shared racial identity. As such, Kennedy and Clinton use alternative connections to suffering (through loss or poverty) to connect with other racial groups whereas Obama enjoys an inherent connection to discuss issues pertinent to that group because he is himself a member of that racial group. For this reason, how Obama establishes his credibility to discuss issues of race in the United States marks a departure from how Clinton and Kennedy establish their own. Having just finished our discussion of the first dimension of rhetorical analysis (credibility) we turn now to the second dimension: rhetorical framing.

6.4 Obama's Rhetorical Framing: Race-conscious and Post-racial

Obama's rhetorical framing on the topic of race is both race-conscious and post-racial. His rhetoric is race-conscious because he explicitly identifies racial identity and makes distinctions on the basis of race rather than using broad, unspecific language to avoid making racial distinctions. Obama is also post-racial in his racial vision for the United States, often describing in his speeches a future America in which race is no longer a determining factor for Americans. In this section, I argue that Obama embraces both a race-conscious and post-racial rhetorical framing on the topic of race by providing excerpts from his speeches.

6.4.1 Obama's Race-conscious Rhetorical Framing

Throughout his 2008 presidential campaign, Obama embraces a race-conscious rhetorical frame to discuss issues of race on the campaign trail. That is to say that he is willing to discuss racial disparities and tensions while also referring to the racial identity of groups or individuals

when discussing the topic of race. By contrast, Bill Clinton adopted a *race-blind* rhetorical approach routinely throughout his 1992 presidential campaign, and rather than specifying racial identities, he adopted broad, unspecific language such as “the other America”. Obama’s race-conscious rhetorical approach, one which he embraces consistently throughout his campaign, is most clearly present in his “A More Perfect Union” address in which he remarks specifically on racial tensions in the United States and makes an explicitly race-conscious effort to distinguish between the black and white experience in America while describing his inseparable connection to both. The first example of Obama’s race blind language from his “A More Perfect Union” address is exemplified by when he unflinchingly confronts issues of racial tension rather than avoiding mentioning their presence:

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 not yet made perfect. (Politico)

By explicitly calling out the unresolved “complexities” of race that not only exist in the United States, he demonstrates his race-conscious rhetorical approach. This is to say that Obama is not only truly conscious of racial inequalities in the United States, but that he is also willing to confront these unresolved complexities in an effort to perfect our union. Beyond identifying the nation’s need to work through unresolved racial issues, Obama’s embraces a race-conscious approach to rhetoric in a multitude of fashions: using race-specific language to discuss current issues in the United States such as healthcare and inequality, addressing the racist history of the United States, and examining the racial undercurrents of both black and white America which contribute to America’s racial tension. To illustrate the ubiquity of Obama’s race-conscious rhetoric in “A More Perfect Union” I will examine his use of race-conscious rhetoric in

discussing relevant political issues, American history, and the racial undercurrents that exist in the black and white communities.

Obama embraces a race-conscious rhetorical approach in “A More Perfect Union” when discussing contemporary issues, particularly healthcare and education. In the following passage, such an approach is evident in Obama explicitly calling out the racial background of those in lines at emergency rooms across the United States:

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. (New York Times)

Indeed, in this example it is evident how Obama makes an effort to identify multiple racial groups – “whites, blacks, and Hispanics” – in describing those who are impacted by a lack of healthcare coverage, clearly exemplifying a race-conscious rhetorical approach. Another example of Obama using similarly race-conscious language occurs when he discusses America’s dilapidated schools and the racist prejudices towards students that exist in the United States:

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. (New York Times)

Obama again uses race-conscious language in regards to contemporary political problems such as segregation in schools and the resulting achievement gap. In the following example, Obama – consistent with his rhetoric on race – again adopts racially-conscious language to describe the disparities that exist specifically between black and white students as a result of school segregation:

Segregated schools were and are inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them, 50 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. (New York Times)

By explicitly identifying the white-black divide of the achievement gap, Obama is yet again embracing race-conscious and racially-specific language to describe current political issues.

But Obama's race-conscious rhetorical approach extends to his discussion of larger themes of American history, and particularly racist American institutions that systematically denied opportunity to black Americans. In the following quote, Obama not only uses race-conscious rhetoric, but calls on his audience to be similarly race-conscious in their evaluation of American history, asking that Americans recognize that current inequalities remain rooted in racist systems whose effects continue to impact black Americans:

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 between the African-American community and the larger American community today can be traced directly to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. (New York Times)

Indeed, this passage exemplifies Obama's clear embrace of race-conscious rhetoric because he squarely addresses "disparities between the African American community and the larger American community", naming the African American community in particular and illustrating the historical roots of those disparities. Compare this rhetoric to Bill Clinton's use of needing to bring "the other America" into "mainstream America", and it becomes clear that Obama is willing to specifically identify racial groups and embrace race-conscious rhetoric whereas Clinton adopts a race-blind approach when addressing similar themes. Yet Obama's race-conscious discussion of American history continues, further demonstrating his race-conscious rhetorical approach by discussing in depth how systematic discrimination resulted in a lack of generational wealth for black families:

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 the fire department — 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 blacks and whites, and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persist in so many of today's urban and rural communities. (New York Times)

In describing the struggle of black Americans as a result of the oppression of racist systems, Obama again adopts race-conscious language in arguing for the white community in particular to recognize for themselves this reality that black Americans face. Obama's race-conscious approach is present not only in his own diagnosis of the racial moment of the United States, but also in how he believes America can move forward, namely by the white community recognizing (in a race-conscious manner) that the struggles of the black community are legitimate and must be remedied:

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. (New York Times)

However, Obama embraces race-conscious language when addressing the undercurrents of racial tension in the United States in white communities as well. To illustrate this point, it is worth quoting Obama at length in his dissection of the roots of racial anger in white communities in which he again is racially-conscious in his language:

Like the anger within the black community, these [white] 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. (New York Times)

In this example, Obama is racially conscious in the same two ways that are the prevailing instantiations of his race-conscious approach: being racially specific and race-conscious with his

language – namely identifying racial groups as black, white, etc. rather than using broad language such as ‘people’ – and also making an effort to examine racial tensions by focusing consciously on those tensions in particular racial groups, such as the anger that exists in the white community as well as the black community. This is yet again exemplified by the following quote:

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. (New York Times)

Obama’s use of a race-conscious approach specifically with his language as well as with the substance of his speech demonstrates a candidate who willingly and unflinchingly examines racial disparities by recognizing those disparities, naming those disparities, and evaluating the history of those disparities, all of which encompasses his race-conscious rhetorical approach. Altogether, Obama’s explicit identification of race and his frank discussion of the roots of racial tension in both white and black America in “A More Perfect Union” provides the strongest evidence for Obama’s race-conscious rhetorical approach to the topic of race.

Still other examples of Obama’s race-conscious rhetorical approach exist in the other speeches I examine in this case study. For example, similar race-conscious language appears in Obama’s “Ebenezer Baptist Church Address” in which he consciously identifies the racial disparities on education:

We have an empathy deficit when we’re still sending our children down corridors of shame, schools in the forgotten corners of America where the color of your skin still affects the content of your education... And for most of this country’s history, we in the African-American community have been at the receiving end of man’s inhumanity to man ... All of us understand intimately the insidious role that race still sometimes plays on the job and in the schools, in our health care system, and in our criminal justice system. (americanrhetoric.com)

In this passage, Obama's consistency with respect to his use of race-conscious language is clear in that he identifies that it is the African-American community in particular who has been at "the receiving end" of inhumanity and that racism still pervades education, healthcare, and criminal justice. His explicit recognition and identification of race and its continued role in so many aspects of American life serves to further illustrate his use of a race-conscious rhetorical frame. And in other speeches, such as his "Father's Day Address", Obama's embrace of a race-conscious rhetorical approach remains consistent, as evidenced by his description of fatherlessness in the black community:

But if we are honest with ourselves, we'll admit that too many fathers are also missing... Too many fathers are M.I.A. Too many fathers are AWOL, missing from too many lives and too many homes... You and I know this is true everywhere, but nowhere is it more true than in the African-American community. (Politico)

In summary, Obama strongly and consistently embraces a race-conscious rhetorical frame when discussing race on the campaign trail. Such rhetoric is present in each of the speeches I analyze and demonstrates that Obama was able to capitalize on his unique credibility to discuss the issues of race in American life and to do so by explicitly identifying racial groups, recognizing and discussing openly the history of racism in the United States, and consciously discussing race in his effort to move towards a post-racial vision of America and realize the possibility of a more perfect union.

6.4.2 Obama's Post-racial Framing

In addition to his race-conscious rhetoric, Obama also adopts a post-racial rhetorical frame when addressing the topic of race throughout his 2008 presidential campaign. His post-racial rhetoric often depicts an America where racial equality is fully achieved and distinctions between individuals or groups are no longer made on the basis of race. Moreover, Obama

invokes post-racial rhetoric in each of the speeches I analyze over the course of the Democratic primary as well as general election campaigns. Yet Obama's use of a post-racial rhetorical frame to discuss his racial vision for the United States was present before his 2008 presidential run. Indeed, he delivered the same post-racial message as a relatively unknown state senator from Illinois who addressed the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

In his 2004 keynote address to the Democratic National Convention, then Illinois State Senator Barack Obama presented a vision of the United States where the distinctions between 'black' America', 'white' America, and other 'Americas' no longer exist; rather, Obama depicts a United States of America where racial differences are transcended to realize a singular, post-racial vision of America: "There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America — there's the United States of America" (Washington Post). Obama continues to describe his racial vision in greater depth throughout the speech, illustrating the idea of "one American family" in proverbial language where individuals care for one another regardless of racial or ethnic background. To fully appreciate the breadth of Obama's racial vision, it is worth quoting his speech at length:

If there is 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 an Arab American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties. It is that fundamental belief, it is that fundamental belief, I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper that makes this country work. It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams and yet still come together as one American family. (Washington Post)

This passage is important for understanding the post-racial rhetorical frame Obama adopts throughout the 2008 campaign in that it provides insight into the goal towards which his larger racial message is striving: an America in which people value one another as family members and forego racial differences. Indeed, this vision is summarized by one line at the crescendo of his speech: "We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us

defending the United States of America” (Washington Post). This vision of a truly United States is the central message of Obama’s 2004 Democratic National Convention address and foreshadows the same post-racial vision of America that Obama invokes in many of his race-focused speeches throughout his 2008 campaign for president.

Of all Obama’s speeches throughout the 2008 campaign, his post-racial rhetorical frame is most strongly embraced in his “A More Perfect Union” address; and over the course of the speech, Obama invokes this vision in a multitude of ways. First, Obama likens his own racial heritage to the post racial-vision he espouses. This is a common theme for Obama, and the notion that his own racial identity is itself comprised of multiple different identities or ‘Americas’ – his father’s identity as a black immigrant from Kenya; his mother as having come from a white working class family, etc. – provides him the credibility to claim that his own background is itself a testament to the post-racial America he envisions for the country :

It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional of candidates. 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. (New York Times)

In casting his own background as the embodiment of a post-racial America – one where people embrace that “we are truly one” despite racial differences that might suggest otherwise – Obama makes the case for a post-racial America in terms of his story and candidacy. Furthermore, Obama frames his post-racial vision for the United States as one which the United States already has the capacity to achieve – that all Americans want to achieve a better future for our children and grandchildren – and that by embracing his post-racial vision for the country, such a vision becomes possible. Obama’s rhetoric in the following example demonstrates this point, presenting the case that through the realization of a post-racial society is the only means by which the United States can “solve the challenges of our time”:

I chose to run for president 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 — toward a better future for our children and our grandchildren. (New York Times)

This description of a post-racial vision departs from Obama’s original conception of a post-racial society – in which there is no ‘white’ America, or ‘black’ America, or ‘Asian’ America, or ‘Latino’ America – in that Obama, in the above quote, is describing a post-racial vision for America *as a means to an end*, with the end goal being the ability to solve societal challenges. His use of this particular form of a post-racial rhetorical frame – one in which the realization of a post-racial America is in the pursuit of some other goal thereafter – is continually employed throughout the 2008 presidential campaign and before audiences of all racial backgrounds. In another quote from his “A More Perfect Union” address, Obama explicitly outlines what the black community must do to play their part in realizing his post-racial vision of the United States:

But [for the African-American community] 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 who has been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family. (New York Times)

Indeed, he makes similar claims for what the white community must do to play their part as in realizing a “more perfect union”, noting how they, too, must “[acknowledge] that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people” (New York Times). Obama’s post racial-vision for the United States plays such a predominant role in his speech that the title, “A More Perfect Union”, is understood to be representative of the post-racial union Obama is advocating for to both black and white Americans alike. In the following passage, Obama summarizes his speech by articulating his racial vision in biblical terms, using

the same language as in his 2004 Democratic National Convention address, to call for a realization of the “common stake we have in one another” as the unifying force underpinning his post-racial vision:

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. (New York Times)

After discussing his post-racial vision for the country, Obama makes the rhetorical – and very much political – choice to frame his own candidacy and presidential campaign as the vessel which could deliver a post-racial vision for the country. He explicitly makes this case in denouncing the rhetoric of Reverend Wright, and explains how Wright’s “profound mistake” was thinking that the United States was incapable of achieving the post-racial vision Obama advocates. Indeed, Obama repudiates Wright and makes the case for a post-racial America as being realized through his own candidacy in the same breath, illustrated by the following passage:

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 had been made; as if this country — a country that has made it possible for one of his own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black, Latino and Asian, rich and poor, young and old — is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. But what we know — what we have seen — is that America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope — the audacity to hope — for what we can and must achieve tomorrow. (New York Times)

This quote from “A More Perfect Union” encapsulates much of Obama’s rhetorical approach to race in that he is not only embracing a post-racial rhetorical frame and vision for the United States as the basis for his argument; he is also using race-conscious language, incorporating his own background, and presenting his racial vision in neoliberal terms of achievement. Yet amid

the numerous rhetorical elements at play, Obama's vision and rhetorical framing of a post-racial America clearly shines through.

The final and perhaps most intriguing instance of Obama's post-racial rhetorical frame and vision for the United States in "A More Perfect Union" appears in his use of the 'Ashley' example: the story of a young white woman and old black man who transcend race to join in embracing a common vision of progress for the country. It is a story that Obama recounts on multiple occasions throughout his presidential campaign, and appears twice in the speeches I analyze, first in his "Ebenezer Baptist Church Address" and again in his "A More Perfect Union" speech. It is a useful example for Obama because it serves not only to demonstrate his vision and exemplify its possibility; it also speaks to how Obama's campaign and his candidacy serve as the path towards the post-racial vision he advocates. To understand the impact of this example, it is worth quoting at length:

There is a young, 23-year-old white woman named Ashley Baia who organized for our campaign in Florence, S.C. 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 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." ... 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. (New York Times)

This example strikes at the heart of Obama's post-racial vision because it demonstrates that people of different age groups, genders, and racial backgrounds can unite around a common ideal, foregoing racial distinctions in the pursuit of a larger goal. It is a miniature realization of Obama's post-racial America, and at the same time the strongest case for his candidacy as the means by which the United States can achieve that vision. Indeed, Obama's Ashley story, as well

as the quotes preceding it in this analysis demonstrate how Obama's "A More Perfect Union Address" fully embodies his post-racial rhetorical frame and vision for the United States.

Obama's post-racial rhetorical frame also finds voice in his depiction of the racial future of the United States in his "Ebenezer Baptist Church Address". Before a predominantly black audience at the congregation of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Obama presents the same post-racial vision for America, albeit in more explicitly religious terms than he uses in either his "2004 Democratic National Convention address" or his "A More Perfect Union" speech. Ever-present in his depiction of a post-racial America is the concept of mutuality and a common destiny, which he articulates in the following passage:

Maybe if white folks marched because they'd come to understand that their freedom was wrapped up in the freedom of others, that they too had a stake in the impending battle, the walls would begin to sway, and if enough Americans were awakened to injustice, if they joined together North and South, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, then perhaps that wall would come tumbling down, and justice would flow like waters of righteousness, like a mighty stream. (americanrhetoric.com)

In this quote, as in similar language adopted in "A More Perfect Union", Obama makes the argument that the full realization of freedom in the United States necessitates the recognition of mutual need and connection. This plays into his vision of a post-racial future of the United States in that Obama clearly states that the true realization of freedom can only occur when Americans "join together" and achieve a truly post-racial society. Indeed, on that occasion, he claims, "that wall would come tumbling down". His rhetoric in this example is deeply post-racial while, at the same time, veiled in religious appeals to a deeply religious audience. Indeed, in making his case for a post-racial vision, Obama invokes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "we are our brother's keeper and our sister's keeper, that in the words of Dr. King, 'We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny'" (americanrhetoric.com). He continues with similar post-racial language in

the closing remarks of his address, arguing for the recognition of mutuality and the need to come together to realize his vision for a united and post-racial America:

Brothers and sisters, we cannot walk alone. In the struggle for justice and for equality, we cannot walk alone. In the struggle for opportunity and justice, we cannot walk alone. In the struggle to heal this nation and repair the world, we cannot walk alone. So I ask you to walk with me and march with me and join your voices with mine, and together we will sing the song that tears down the walls that divide us and lift up an America that is truly indivisible with liberty and justice for all. (americanrhetoric.com)

This passage demonstrates Obama's case for societal unification (and thus the realization of a post-racial vision for the United States) in the pursuit of some larger goal, cited in this example as "healing this nation and repairing the world" but in his "A More Perfect Union" speech, Obama employs slightly different language, with more specific policy goals such as providing "jobs for the jobless" as well as education and widely available healthcare.

In concluding this section, Obama's post-racial rhetoric and vision for the country is abundantly clear: his rhetoric articulates a vision for the United States in which race is transcended by Americans's realization of a common destiny, their embrace of a conception of America as one "family", and a shared pursuit of opportunity and freedom. Obama's racial vision for the country differs from Kennedy in that he is not arguing for a racial vision in which the value of human beings transcends all other distinctions, but rather he depicts a racial future in which people forego differences and come together for the sake of unity instead of for the sake of human value. Indeed, Obama's post-racial rhetorical vision for the United States more closely resembles that of Clinton in that both candidates articulate a future in which Americans go beyond race to unify around concepts of civil religion (e.g. realizing a more perfect union), or around economic values (e.g. increasing economic prosperity for all). It is in this duality of Obama's approach – vacillating between unification as a means to an end, and on other occasions, as an end to itself – that makes Obama's rhetoric on race unique, and likewise marks a

larger shift in American political thought discussed in greater length in the following section. Having finished our discussion of Obama's rhetorical framing, we turn now to the final dimension of rhetorical analysis for Obama: his rationality.

6.5 Obama's Neoliberal through Social Justice Means Rationality

In the previous section, I discussed how Obama describes his racial vision for the United States through a post-racial rhetorical frame. In this section, I examine the third dimension of rhetoric: rationality. I argue that Obama does not embrace a consistent rationality throughout his 2008 campaign with respect to his post-racial vision for the country. This is to say that in a number of speeches throughout his campaign, Obama's pursuit of a post-racial vision for the country is clearly in service of a larger goal: to achieve greater economic opportunity and prosperity in the United States. Yet in other instances, Obama clearly makes the case for a post-racial vision for the country on exclusively moral grounds, indeed pursuing a post-racial vision for the United States because doing so is a justifiable end in and of itself. Indeed, Obama adopts neoliberal as well as social justice-motivated rationality when discussing race on the campaign trail. This section focuses on how the rationality behind Obama's post-racial vision for the country is less clear than the rationality other candidates evaluated in this study and how Obama adopts multiple rationalities to justify his racial vision for the country throughout the course of his presidential campaign.

Unlike Clinton and Kennedy – whose rhetoric and rationality concerning their racial visions for the country remains unchanged throughout their presidential campaigns – Obama's approach is more nuanced and less consistent, altering depending on his audience and even within the same speech. For example, Obama's rationality in his "Ebenezer Baptist Church

Address” vacillates between being strongly social-justice motivated and strongly neoliberal. At one point in the speech, he quotes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in saying that “unity is the call of the hour” and justifies the pursuit of that unity on the basis that it is the morally righteous thing to do. Yet in that same speech, he references the ‘Ashley example’ of a post racial America and claims that such a vision for America is how the United States will begin to “give jobs to the jobless” and “education to our children” – employing clearly neoliberal rationality aimed at achieving a more economically prosperous America. More often than not, however, Obama’s rhetoric leans more neoliberal than social justice-motivated in its rationality. In the four speeches I analyze, Obama does embrace social justice-motivated rationality, but he more frequently embraces a post-racial vision for the country as a means of achieving greater economic prosperity for the United States. For this reason, *I categorize Obama’s rhetoric as “neoliberal through social justice means”*. In this section, I provide evidence to support this claim with quotes from Obama’s speeches that demonstrate this rationality.

Obama’s strongest embrace of neoliberal-through-social-justice-means rationality appears in his “A More Perfect Union Address”. He clearly embraces this rationality when denouncing Reverend Wright, claiming that his comments were “divisive at a time when we need unity”. Notably, Obama then goes on to frame the need for a post-racial sense of “unity” as a means of confronting “two wars, a terrorist threat, a failing economy, a chronic health care crisis and potentially devastating climate change” rather than on the basis that fulfils the moral imperative of Americans to do so. By framing unity as a means of realizing some other goal, particularly those that are economic in nature, Obama embraces a “neoliberal-through-social-justice-means” rationality: justifying the need for people to come together across racial lines as a

means of achieving economic prosperity. To fully illustrate this point, it is worth quoting Obama at length:

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. (New York Times)

In this passage, Obama makes clear that the “problems that confront us all” affect people regardless of their race. As such, he implores the American people to unify and go beyond racial distinctions *in order to* achieve another goal. The fact that racial unity and a post-racial vision for the United States is not in and of itself the goal, but rather that such vision is in service of yet another objective – solving a set of monumental problems, and particularly economic ones, – clearly demonstrates a neoliberal-through-social-justice-means rationality.

Another example of this rationality in “A More Perfect Union” occurs when Obama is addressing racial tensions in the United States as distracting Americans from larger economic issues or, as he describes it, “the real culprits of the middle class squeeze” (New York Times). In the following quote, Obama again advocates for people to go beyond race to solve economic issues, yet another example of neoliberal-through-social-justice-means rationality: “Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the real culprits of the middle class squeeze...” (New York Times). Obama embraces the same form of rationality when describing how investing in his conception of post-racial America will “ultimately help all of America prosper”:

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. (New York Times)

In this passage, Obama is justifying his post-racial vision for the future in neoliberal terms because he rationalizes investing in the “health, welfare and education of black and brown and white children” not as simply the right or socially just thing to do, but instead as a decision that “will ultimately help all of America prosper”. It is a clear example of neoliberal-through-social-justice-means, that is pursuing a measure of social justice (literally investing in a post racial future) as a means of achieving a neoliberal conception of prosperity. Indeed, the case for Obama’s neoliberal rationality is bolstered by his own justification for investing in education in particular. In the following quote, Obama justifies investing in our nation’s future, again not because it is simply the morally right thing to do, but so as not to allow America’s children to “fall behind in a 21st century economy”: “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.” (New York Times).

Yet another example of Obama’s neoliberal-through-social-justice-means rationality appears later in the speech when he discusses how to address current incidents of discrimination. In this example in particular, Obama not only uses neoliberal rationality and language (embracing the neoliberal conception of investment in human capital and opportunity), he also fully embraces the notion of investment and the fair implementation of civil rights laws *as a means of providing opportunity* to future generations:

[current incidents of discrimination] 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. (New York Times)

To frame civil rights, fairness in the criminal justice system, and investment in schools and communities not solely as the morally right thing to do, but as a means of providing opportunity

clearly indicates a neoliberal attitude and more specifically a neoliberal rationality which uses social justice (civil rights laws, the fairness of a criminal justice system, etc.) as a means of realizing that neoliberal future.

Still another instance of neoliberal-through-social-justice-means rationality in Obama's "A More Perfect Union" address occurs when he discusses the fundamental failure of Wright's idea that American society could not change. Importantly, Obama embraces a neoliberal approach to this idea of change, namely in that he believes that this change should be rooted in an idea of self-help: that people must take it upon themselves as individuals responsible for this change in order for it to take place:

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. (New York Times)

This passage clearly references Obama's conception of a post-racial future for the United States — rooted in his argument that society indeed *can* change and that such a change is towards the realization of a post-racial America — but is also deeply neoliberal in its conception of self-help: a core tenant of neoliberal thought with respect to the individual.

In summary, Obama's "A More Perfect Union Address" frames the realization of 'a more perfect union' (Obama's conception of a completely racially equal and post-racial America) as a necessary step towards achieving a more economically prosperous America. This rationality is also present in his "Ebenezer Baptist Church Address". More specifically, the neoliberal conception of self-help that appears throughout his speech with a particular focus on the role of the black community in realizing Obama's post-racial America and the resulting expansion of opportunity and economic prosperity. The following passage illustrates the self-help, post-racial,

and neoliberal conceptions of opportunity and economic prosperity in Obama's neoliberal-through-social-justice-means:

And yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that none of our hands are entirely clean. If we're honest with ourselves, we'll acknowledge that our own community has not always been true to King's vision of a beloved community...For too long, some of us have seen immigrants only as competitors for jobs instead of companions in the fight for opportunity. (americanrhetoric.com)

Yet another example from the same address touches on the same idea that individuals in the black community in particular must take up the mantle of personal responsibility to make "the changes that are needed" in society. This again is very much a neoliberal conception of personal responsibility in the pursuit of a future in which opportunity is expanded for all:

Changes that are needed are not just a matter of tinkering around the edges. They will not come if politicians simply tell us what we want to hear. All of us will be called upon to make some sacrifice. None of us will be exempt from responsibility. We've had to fight to fix our schools, but we also have to challenge ourselves to be better parents, and turn off the television set, and put away the video game, and our men have to be home with our children. That, too, is part of the challenge that we must make. (americanrhetoric.com)

Obama also finishes his "Ebenezer Baptist Church Address" by again recounting the story of Ashley, a white campaign volunteer in South Carolina, and an old black man both of whom transcend differences in race, gender, and age to pursue economic opportunity, improved education, and improved healthcare. It is yet another example of neoliberal-through-social-justice-means rationality in that Obama is describing his post racial vision for the United States (as embodied by the Ashley example) as a means of confronting other societal challenges. Such a vision for the country is a means to an end, one in which society can finally begin to provide "healthcare to the sick, jobs to the jobless, and education to our children":

Now, by itself, that single moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man, that's not enough to change a country. By itself, it's not enough to give health care to the sick or jobs to the jobless or education to our children, but it is where we begin. (americanrhetoric.com)

While Obama embraces neoliberal-through-social-justice-means rationality throughout his “Ebenezer Baptist Church Address”, he also embraces strongly social-justice motivated rationality, albeit on far fewer occasions through the speech. The following passage exemplifies Obama adopting such rationality in quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

“Unity is the great need of the hour.” That’s what Dr. King said. It is the great need of this hour as well, not because it sounds pleasant, not because it makes us feel good, but because it's the only way we can overcome the essential deficit that exists in this country. I’m not talking about the budget deficit. I’m not talking about the trade deficit. Talking about the moral deficit in this country ... (americanrhetoric.com)

In making the case that people need to come together to overcome the ‘moral deficit’ rather than the trade or budget deficit that exists in the United States, Obama is embracing a social-justice motivated rationality which argues for the pursuit of unity not in the service of some other objective, but rather because pursuing unity and coming together across racial lines to embrace a post-racial vision for the United States is the morally right and socially just thing to do.

In conclusion, Obama’s “Ebenezer Baptist Church Address” exemplifies two key aspects behind Obama’s rationality on race. First, his rationality in this address is consistent with that in his “A More Perfect Union” speech in that he envisions a post-racial America as a necessary means of achieving economic prosperity. Second, while Obama clearly embraces a neoliberal with social-justice means form of rationality to justify his vision for a post-racial American society, he also occasionally embraces strongly social justice-motivated rhetoric as well. The fact that Obama embraces both rationalities – albeit embracing a neoliberal rationalization far more often than its social justice-motivated counterpart – demonstrates how his rhetoric on race is more nuanced and less consistent than the rationalities embraced by Clinton or Kennedy. I would posit that Obama makes this rhetorical move because he believes that while issues of race can be discussed through economic terms, there are, in the end, issues of morality and justice. This is to

say that, Obama believes in a social-justice motivated rationality, but the political paradigm in which his campaign is taking place restricts his ability to fully lead on the issue of race by way of social justice-motivated rationality; with neoliberal rationality still the dominant rationality, Obama must work within the neoliberal framework to appeal to a broader swath of the electorate even when discussing issues of race that he may believe are more deserving of a social justice-motivated approach. Indeed, the strongest examples of Obama's use of social justice-motivated rationality occur when he evokes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and rhetoric of the Civil Rights era – the same era in which social justice-motivated rationality was in the ascendant and as such found voice in the rhetoric of the first candidate in this study, Robert Kennedy. And while Obama's rationality is neoliberal-with-justice-motivated features, I believe it is highly likely that Obama was, as a candidate, more social justice-motivated than his rhetoric lets on. Indeed, Obama's embrace of a predominantly neoliberal frame but still including explicit examples of social justice-motivated rationality indicates that Obama might have been unable to fully embrace the rationality commensurate with his beliefs as a result of the dominant neoliberal political paradigm present during his 2008 presidential campaign. Having just finished our final discussion of Obama's 2008 presidential rhetoric, we turn now to the conclusion of this chapter in which I will discuss how president Obama's rhetoric on race marks a departure from that of Kennedy and Clinton in how he establishes his credibility on race but most prominently through his rationality. Furthermore, I will conclude with a broader discussion of how Obama's rationality indicates the beginning of a shift away from the neoliberal dominance of the 1990's and early 2000's towards a more social-justice motivated rationality, but that his ability to do so was limited by the dominant neoliberal paradigm.

6.6 Conclusion

In evaluating Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign rhetoric, I found that he establishes his credibility on the topic of race through his own racial identity, that he uses race-conscious and post-racial rhetorical framing, and that he embraces neoliberal-through-social-justice-means rationality. With regard to the first rhetorical dimension, Obama marks a departure from Clinton and Kennedy in that he bases his credibility in his own personal connection with race through his racial heritage, whereas Kennedy basis his credibility in his experience of shared loss and Clinton on his connection to poverty. Although Obama's rhetoric is unique in this sense, he embodies a continuation of a trend present throughout the candidacies of both Kennedy and Clinton: that each candidate's establishment of credibility is based in significant part on their ability to connect to the suffering of others, whether that proximity arises as a result of connecting over a mutual understanding of loss (as with Kennedy), poverty (as with Clinton), or the hardships experienced due to one's racial identity (Obama).

Regarding the second rhetorical dimension, Obama's rhetorical framing is a blend of the framing employed by Kennedy and Clinton. Indeed, Obama uses race-conscious rhetorical framing when discussing the current racial situation in the United States (as Kennedy does) while using post-racial framing to discuss his racial vision for the country (as Clinton does). In this way, Obama's rhetoric reflects an interesting rhetorical combination amounting to a rhetorical approach which unflinchingly identifies racial disparities in the United States but also seeks to get beyond those racial differences in the pursuit of both justice-motivated and neoliberal goals.

Concerning the third dimension of rhetorical analysis, Obama embraces both neoliberal as well as social-justice-motivated rationality, but adopts neoliberal rationality more frequently than its social-justice motivated counterpart. This finding is significant for a number of reasons.

First, it indicates the genesis of a larger shift away from the neoliberal rationality so dominant in the 1990's and early 2000's. Moreover, Obama's attempt to push the country in a more social-justice motivated direction while still embracing neoliberal rationality provides a larger lesson: that a shift in rationality is a slow process, and even those who wish to lead the country in a different direction (as Obama's rhetoric suggests he does), the progress that candidate can make in shifting the rationality of the Democratic party and the country nonetheless remains confined by the dominant paradigm in which their candidacy takes place. This idea – that Obama's rhetoric indicates a larger shift in the direction of American political thought, but that the progression and speed of this shift is limited by the dominant political paradigm – is one of the central lessons of this thesis, described in greater detail in the final chapter: Discussion.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion

We have spent the last several chapters evaluating how Robert Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama discuss the topic of race throughout their respective presidential campaigns. Each candidate's rhetoric was analyzed through three major rhetorical dimensions – credibility, framing, and rationality – and no two candidates used the same rhetorical strategies across all three dimensions. In other words, each candidate's rhetoric was unique; and throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will review the findings of my study concerning each candidate across the three aforementioned rhetorical strategies and will describe the larger implications of this study and its findings. To remind us of the conclusions drawn from each chapter, I will briefly summarize the rhetorical techniques I found to be employed by each candidate, beginning with Robert Kennedy.

Kennedy's rhetoric on race was characterized by the use of *personal tragedy to establish credibility with his audience, race-conscious and humanist rhetorical framing, and social justice-motivated rationality*. Bill Clinton, however, represented a distinct departure from Kennedy's rhetorical approach in every dimension I analyze. Clinton's rhetoric on race was characterized by his *personal experience with poverty to establish credibility with his audience, race-blind and post-racial rhetorical framing, and neoliberal rationality*. The vast difference between the rhetorical strategies of Kennedy and Clinton represents the greatest difference between two candidates in this study. Barack Obama, the final candidate I analyzed, embraced a unique and 'middle of the road' approach to rhetoric on race in that he used rhetorical strategies employed by both Kennedy and Clinton. Obama's rhetoric on race was characterized by *his use*

of personal identity to establish credibility with his audience, race-conscious and post-racial framing, and neoliberal rationality with justice-motivated features.

Evaluating the rhetoric of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama through the dimensions of credibility, rhetorical framing, and rationality, allows for not only a deeper understanding of how each candidate spoke of race in their respective campaigns, but also helps to elucidate large-scale shifts in the American political landscape. This is important because it signifies that the conclusions of this thesis extend beyond the information gleaned by evaluating each candidate's rhetoric. Indeed, they suggest an evolution in the American political paradigm, and understanding this paradigm shift could help to explain the current political moment as well as where American politics might be heading in the future.

To preview the remainder of this chapter, I will first discuss the conclusions I draw with respect to Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama and how each candidate used the three rhetorical dimensions studied over the course of this thesis to explore issues of race on the campaign trail. I will then conclude with a broader discussion about how, when viewed together, the rhetorical strategies of Kennedy, Clinton and Obama – particularly concerning rationality – elucidate a paradigm shift in American political thought away from the staunch neoliberalism of the late 20th century and early 21st century towards a more social justice-motivated political future.

7.1 Credibility and suffering

In summarizing my conclusions regarding credibility – the first rhetorical dimension I analyze – I found that Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama each establish their credibility on race by creating a sense of proximity to and awareness of the suffering of their audience. Beginning with the first candidate I analyze, Kennedy establishes his credibility on the issue of race by *tapping*

into a shared proximity to suffering between himself and his audience. Indeed, Kennedy taps into this shared proximity to suffering and uses personal examples to do so – most notably by discussing his own proximity to his brother’s death in “Remarks on the Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”. But when Kennedy does not have personal examples through which to relate to his audience’s suffering, he makes an effort *to describe the suffering of others* to create a shared understanding of suffering between himself and the audience. In short, Kennedy used suffering that he can relate to personally, as well as demonstrating that he understands the suffering of others, to establish his credibility to discuss issues of race on the 1968 campaign trail. Despite their differences in rationality and framing, Clinton shares a similar emphasis on suffering, drawing upon his own personal examples to establish his credibility on the topic of race.

More specifically, Clinton establishes his credibility on issues of race by discussing *his childhood hardship and suffering particularly with respect to his experience with poverty* to create a bond of common understanding between himself and his audience based on the fact that he, too, has suffered and understands the suffering his audience endures – even if it is not a direct result of his race. Notably different from Kennedy, who was raised in a far wealthier household, Clinton’s personal examples of suffering stem from his childhood, rather than his experience as a public servant or painful events that occurred during his adulthood.

Obama establishes his credibility on issues of race by discussing his own racial identity. This identity encompassed his status as the first black presidential candidate of a major political party as well as his own proximity to the experience of black and white Americans alike through his biracial heritage. This discussion allows Obama not only to speak credibly on the experience of black and white Americans, but also to relate to the issues both groups confront. Although more explicit in the cases of Clinton and Kennedy, Obama uses his connection to the experience

of black and white Americans to relate to the suffering of individuals from each racial group. He does this most notably in his “A More Perfect Union” address, but it is nonetheless a consistent theme throughout his rhetoric.

After studying Kennedy, Clinton and Obama, I have concluded that each candidate seeks, at least in significant measure, to establish his credibility to speak on issues of race in the United States by relating to the suffering of their audiences. There are a number of possible explanations for why a candidate might attempt to establish a connection with their audience based on a shared experience or common understanding of suffering. I suggest that, at least in the cases of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama, relating to the suffering of one’s audience helps to establish a degree of trust between a speaker and his audience. Indeed, from the perspective of an audience member, the notion that this candidate, too, has suffered helps to create a sincere sense of trust between the audience and that candidate.

Moreover, issues of race in particular might often strike a more personal tone across a broader swath of people than other issues discussed on the campaign trail, such as commercial rezoning or the renaming of post offices. As such, I suggest that as particular political issues take on a greater personal dimension for members of the audience, it is incumbent upon the speaker to relate more personally to their audience in order to establish trust and credibility on that topic. It is therefore unsurprising that on issues of race and race relations in the United States, Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama each endeavor to connect on a personal level with their audience as race carries a highly personal dimension for many Americans.

Having analyzed multiple candidates, I posit that this conclusion regarding suffering suggests a larger trend within campaign rhetoric, namely that a common proximity to suffering might be one of several ways candidates can establish trust with their audience beyond issues of

race alone. I believe my conclusions on this topic in particular could provide useful perspective to candidates as well as campaign strategists, consultants, and aides on how to improve a candidate's connection with their audience. Indeed, based upon my findings on the credibility dimension of rhetorical analysis, candidates, regardless of racial backgrounds or their favored rationality, may yield a deeper and more sincere connection with their audience – particularly on campaign issues with a significant personal dimension – by discussing their own experience with suffering.

7.2 Rhetorical Framing

My results on the second dimension of rhetorical analysis – rhetorical framing – demonstrated that there is not, in so far as I was able to determine, a clear trend with respect to how candidates use rhetorical frames to discuss the issue of race. In my study of Kennedy, I found that he used *race-conscious and humanist framing*. Clinton, on the other hand, adopted an entirely different set of rhetorical frames from Kennedy, using *race-blind and post-racial framing*. Further still, Obama embraced rhetorical frames used by both candidates, adopting *race-conscious and post-racial framing*. Although I was unable to identify a strong rhetorical trend with respect to the rhetorical framing of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama's rhetoric on race, I found two interesting coincidences on the topic of these candidates and their rhetorical framing that could warrant further research. The first concerns Obama's framing on race.

In using both race-conscious and post-racial rhetorical framing, Obama's rhetoric combines aspects of Kennedy's rhetoric on race (race-conscious framing) as well as Clinton's (a post-racial vision for the country). The notion that Obama's rhetoric resembles a moderated combination of both Clinton and Kennedy's rhetorical strategies appears again in his *rationality*,

in which he exhibits both social justice-motivated as well as neoliberal rationality. It would be interesting – and indeed of value in understanding further the trends between these candidates – to see if Obama’s rhetoric continues to represent a mix of the rhetorical strategies employed by Clinton and Kennedy beyond the issue of race.

The second interesting conclusion I arrived at which I believe warrants further investigation is the question of whether race-conscious and humanist rhetorical frames are more likely to be embraced by social justice-motivated candidates rather than neoliberal ones. I arrived at the first question after considering what rhetorical frames a social justice-motivated rationality may necessitate. If, for example, a candidate advocates for social justice and adopts social-justice motivated rationality, would it not be likely that that candidate would need to specify those instances of injustice they seek to remedy? And if this candidate is advocating for social justice and adopting social-justice-motivated rationality on the topic of race in particular, would it not be likely for that candidate to use language that specifies and explicitly identifies the race or races of groups or individuals facing injustice? It is precisely this line of reasoning that leads me to suspect that social justice-motivated rationality may entail race-conscious rhetorical framing. However, given the time constraints of this study, I was unable to investigate this question in depth and believe future studies should consider doing so.

7.3 Rationality

Over the course of this study, I analyzed the rationality of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama and found that each candidate embraces a different rationality to justify their racial vision for the United States. Kennedy embraces social justice-motivated rationality; Clinton embraces neoliberal rationality; and Obama lands between the two, albeit more neoliberal than social-

justice motivated, with a rationality that is neoliberal with social justice-motivated features. But what do these rationalities tell us about those candidates, the overall political landscape of the United States at the time, or even the future political landscape? Central to this question is the assertion that I make throughout this thesis: that the rationality of each candidate reflects the political landscape in which he ran for the presidency.

Kennedy embarked on his presidential campaign at the end of the 1960's – a decade in American politics in which Civil Rights and the Vietnam War were foundational issues. Both of these major events in American politics, which were so influential to the political landscape of the 1960's, carry with them significant questions of justice and morality. That is, the Civil Rights movement as well as the Vietnam War brought to the fore questions of morality, justice, and social equality that were responded to with social justice motivated rationalities. Indeed, the idea that Civil Rights in the United States should be pursued not because it is economically beneficial, but instead because it is the *morally right thing to do* was a central attitude at the time; it is therefore unsurprising that Kennedy adopts similar rationality in his campaign, particularly when considering that Kennedy, both as a senator and presidential candidate, was closely involved with the Civil Rights Movement.

In a similar fashion, Clinton's rationality on race echoes larger political ideologies relevant at the time of his presidential campaign. During the late 1970's and certainly throughout the Reagan and Bush era of the 1980's and early 1990's, neoliberal thought reigned as the dominant political ideology in the United States. It is therefore unsurprising that the neoliberal undercurrents of American political life in 1992 find voice in Clinton's campaign rhetoric and, particularly, his rationality. Moreover, as a three-term governor of Arkansas before pursuing the

presidency, Clinton's political career unfolded in the same neoliberal landscape that extended into his presidential candidacy.

Obama's rationality on race, however, follows the same trend but carries with it an important distinction from the rationalities of Clinton and Kennedy. Whereas Clinton and Kennedy occupy the extremes on the rationality spectrum exhibited in Chapter 2: Methods – with Clinton on the strongly neoliberal side and Kennedy on the opposing strongly social-justice motivated pole – Obama's rationality exists between the two: indeed neoliberal, but with social justice-motivated features. This indicates a significant difference from the rationalities of Clinton and Kennedy in that Obama's rhetoric reflects the beginning of a shift *away* from the staunch neoliberal perspectives that dominated the American political landscape in the 1980's and 1990's. Indeed, by embracing a neoliberal rationality but importantly still incorporating social justice-motivated features in his rhetoric, Obama signifies a different direction in which American politics may be moving: one away from a full embrace of neoliberal rationality, but at the same time one which has not yet completely returned to the strongly social justice motivated reasoning of the late 1960's.

Indeed from the rhetoric of each of these three candidates we can glean an understanding of larger trends in American political thought that find expression through the candidates' rationalities. We can do this for two reasons: first, either a candidate is so influenced by the current political moment that he adopts the rationality borne out of that political moment (as is the case with Kennedy and Clinton and the relevant political ideologies and rationalities of their time i.e. social-justice motivated rationality and neoliberalism, respectively). Second, a candidate embraces the rationality of the moment in which they run for office because it is the politically popular or expedient thing to do, but this rationality does not necessarily reflect their own views

or their inherent rationality. Each of these two premises rests on the idea that a candidate's rhetoric coincides with the political moment either because those candidates are genuinely influenced by it, or because it is politically expedient.

But what if a candidate's rationality – such as Obama – does not fully embrace one form of rationality? What does it say about Obama to have a neoliberal but also social-justice motivated rationality? I conclude this can mean one of three things. First, it could indicate that a larger directional shift in rationality is taking place (e.g., from a neoliberal rationality towards a social justice-motivated rationality); alternatively, a candidate could be embracing a particular rationality for political gain and, on occasion, their genuine rationality happens to shine through, complicating the process of cleanly defining where a candidate's rationality falls for those who analyze their speeches. Still a third possibility exists: that a candidate is genuinely trying, through their rhetoric, to shift rationality in a different direction, but this candidate is confined by the dominant political rationality and thus limited to operating within the accepted political framework. Based upon my study of Obama's rhetoric, I believe he embodies the third possibility: a candidate who is attempting to lead the United States in a more social justice-motivated direction but who is restricted to working within the neoliberal ideological framework carried over by the 1980's and 1990's.

But what, then, in the long run does this tell us about American politics? If we accept the idea that presidential rhetoric – particularly with respect to a candidate's rationality – tells us about the state of the political moment, but also where we might be heading, the rationalities of presidential candidates especially on issues with a profound social justice component such as race allow us to peer into the current American ideological landscape to understand both where the United States is in terms of major political trends, and also where we might be headed. It is

important to note here that I speak of shifts not in terms of opinions of individuals or the hot topic of the day. Rather, these ideological changes as identified by shifts in rationality represent larger and more significant ideological evolutions. They speak to shifts in political climate, not weather. Whereas weather shifts on a daily basis – new political topics coming into the zeitgeist, the hot-button issue of the day, etc. – climate determines weather and shifts more gradually over time. Indeed, as American politics shifts from a social justice-motivated political climate, to a more neoliberal one, so too will shift the daily issues – and indeed the rhetoric describing these issues.

Just as the social justice-motivated political climate of the late 1960's resulted in the routine discussion of social justice issues and the use of social justice-motivated rationality in Kennedy's speeches, so too did the neoliberal political climate of the early 1990's focus the presidential rhetoric on economic issues backed by neoliberal rationality the likes of which are ubiquitous throughout Clinton's rhetoric (and most prominently before audiences such as the Rainbow Coalition whose focus is explicitly social justice-motivated and where Clinton spent the vast majority of his speech addressing economic issues rather than topics of social justice).

It is important to mention however that this finding does not entail that candidates simply parrot public opinion or the prevailing rationality of the time. Candidates are indeed constrained to working within the political paradigm in which their candidacy is taking place; but they are still able to 'move the needle' towards an alternative form of rationality. However, changes in political climate do not happen all at once; they change slowly over time. As such, leaders who are attempting to move the Democratic party and indeed the country in one direction or another through their presidential campaign rhetoric – Clinton towards a more neoliberal rationality and Obama a more justice oriented one – are still able to change the political climate through their

rhetoric. But this happens slowly. In summarizing this idea, a candidate's rationality is often a product of their political paradigm, but they are not confined indefinitely to that paradigm. Their margin of leadership on issues – of race or otherwise – is simply limited by what rationalities are acceptable within the political climate of the time. For this reason, one can understand a candidate's rationality both as a means of identifying the current political paradigm, as well as the direction in which that paradigm might be shifting.

In concluding that the rationality of presidential candidates elucidates larger shifts in the climate of political ideologies in the United States, we return to the case of Obama whose rhetoric is neither entirely neoliberal nor entirely social justice motivated. Based upon my study of Obama, his largely neoliberal but also partly social-justice motivated rationality speaks to a shift away from the dominant neoliberal political climate of the 1990's, 2000's and early 2010's towards a more social justice motivated politics of the future. And indeed this is borne out by the presidential rhetoric of the 2016 and indeed 2020 Democratic presidential primaries.

In 2016, what was predominantly a contest between Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders can be understood as a continuation of the pivot towards social justice motivated rationality – at least in the Democratic party – hinted at by Obama's 2008 campaign rhetoric. With Senator Sanders – a self-ascribed democratic socialist who consistently embraces justice-oriented rationality – capturing a major swatch of the democratic electorate in the 2016 Democratic primary, one could make the case that this pivot towards justice-oriented rationality is beginning to find voice through electoral victories in the Democratic party. And further still, with the 2020 Democratic primary still in progress at the time of the writing of this thesis, many prominent candidates such as Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and indeed Senator Sanders yet again, are embracing a more social-justice

motivated rationality. It is therefore possible that, based upon the analysis of rationalities of Democratic presidential candidates on race from 1968 to the present day, one can conclude that the Democratic party and the United States as a whole is indeed moving towards a larger embrace of social-justice rationality. This conclusion is drawn, however, without regard to the rhetoric of Republican presidential candidates and evaluates only one topic – race and race relations in the United States – of the numerous different issues discussed by presidential candidates. Nonetheless, I posit that based upon my research in this study, a shift is indeed taking place in American politics: one which has arisen in response to the dominance of neoliberal ideology over the last forty years and one that demands the pursuit of a new political direction for the United States rooted in the ideals of common humanity and the pursuit of social justice not because it is economically beneficial, but simply because it is the morally right and just thing to do.

CONCLUSION

After spending the last several months studying the rhetoric of Kennedy, Clinton, and Obama, I have come to realize a number of significant undercurrents in American politics. The first of these is that rhetoric and leadership on rhetoric matter. As we have seen throughout this study, rhetoric can tell us about the current state of American politics as a candidate's language and rationality are inevitably influenced by the political moment in which their candidacy unfolds. But rhetoric can also tell us about where the country is heading politically, indicating the larger directional shifts within our political climate. And this is most clearly evident in the rhetoric of Barack Obama.

Whereas some candidates attempt to shift their party and the country towards a more complete embrace of the dominant political paradigm – as Clinton does with the Democratic party towards more neoliberal rationalities – Obama is emblematic of a candidate whose rhetoric attempts to lead the country in an alternative direction. And, this finding is both sobering and hopeful: it tells us that political paradigms – the climate of our politics – are strong and difficult to shift; but they are not static. Political paradigms can and do shift, and rhetoric plays a significant role in that shift.

But how might we as a society move towards a greater embrace of justice and morality in our politics? And how might we participate in this shift as citizens? I believe we must take the bedrock elements of our political climate – conceptions of freedom, liberty, and education – and just as neoliberal rationality masquerades freedom as a lack of government regulation, liberty as weakened government intervention in markets, rights as the capacity of companies to operate without unionization of workers, and personhood as the equating of corporations with individuals, so too must we reframe these fundamental aspects of American politics with

conceptions of morality and justice: recasting freedom not as merely restrained government regulation, but also the ability for an American to get healthcare if she needs it – for without her health, she is not truly free. Redefining liberty to include the capacity for a young student to attend school free from violence – for without is safety, he is not truly free. Reevaluating how we think about education, not only in terms of increasing one’s human capital and employability, but in the understanding that education and critical thought is vital for a democratic society, one with the capacity to ponder not only whether the emperor has clothes, but whether we need an emperor at all. For this, too, makes us more free.

These slight changes in how we as Americans think about, interact with, and indeed rationalize those routine aspects of politics to which we are so accustomed may well be the vessel through which we shift our political paradigm – one defined by a politics more concerned with issues of justice and morality; one in which conceptions of freedom and liberty and education are expanded to prioritize human value over profit; and one in which we may continue the noble, just, and quintessentially American project of perfecting our union.

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