Obama and the Representation of Captured Groups

ON A NOVEMBER NIGHT filled with indelible moments, the sight of Jesse Jackson with tears streaming down his face as he stood amidst tens of thousands of Barack Obama supporters in Chicago's Grant Park was particularly poignant and dripping in historical symbolism. Jackson would say the next day that his tears were for Obama's "ascension into leadership, and the price that was paid to get him there."[1] But as a mere spectator standing in the crowd, Jackson's emotions could well have been more mixed. After all, although he was one of the "shoulders of giants" that Obama declared he was standing on as he pursued the presidency, a person who twenty years prior had so energized black voters with his dramatic run for the Democratic party nomination, and a person who established many of the foundations for a future African American candidate to successfully run for the presidency, he and Obama had been consistently at arm's length throughout the campaign.[2]

Part of the distance between the two might have been generational. Obama is thought to symbolize a new era of black electoral politics, with different aspirations and agendas, different historical opportunities, and different understandings of the dynamics between race and power. Whereas Jackson was born, raised, and educated in the segregated South

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For helpful critiques of earlier versions of this afterword, I thank Michael Brown, Tom Kim, Chuck Myers, Sarah Staszak, Al Tillery, Dorian Warren, and Kim Williams.

[1] "Reverend Jesse Jackson Says His Tears for 'Martyrs and Murdered Whose Blood Made Last Night Possible.'" Interview by Michel Martin, *Tell Me More*, NPR News, November 5, 2008. Found at http://www.npr.org/about/press/2008/110508.JesseJackson.html.

[2] Jackson even had a hand in a specific provision of the Democratic Party's nomination rules that ended up benefiting Obama in his quest for the nomination over Senator Hillary Clinton. In the aftermath of his failed run for the Democratic nomination in 1988, Jackson successfully altered the party's nomination rules to allow candidates to receive delegate allocations that were proportional to their vote shares. Jackson wanted his vote totals to amount to an equal percentage of party delegates, and in negotiations with Michael Dukakis he achieved a commitment from the party to change the rules in exchange for his support for the Democratic nominee. In 2008, had it not been for this rule change, Hillary Clinton would likely have been the party nominee. Proportional representation hurt her delegate outcome dramatically in large states like California, where a winner-take-all system would have given her an additional 150 delegates from that state alone. See Caitlyn Dwyer, "A Different Nominee? The Role of the Rules in the 2008 Primaries" (paper presented at Midwest Political Science Association, April 2–5, 2009).

and began his political career as a leader within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Obama grew up in a multiracial family, lived in numerous states and nations, became the first African American editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, and worked in a prestigious corporate law practice and at the University of Chicago Law School before running for elected office. Obama's understanding of race and politics stemmed from growing up in the transition years when the civil disobedience of the civil rights movement gave way to the wheeling and dealing of insider politics.[3] Young enough to be part of a new "hip-hop generation" of black politicians, Obama was able to skillfully combine his own roots in political activism with extensive ties to corporate money and causes. Unlike Jackson, who prominently saw himself as an outsider candidate, an African American candidate, a candidate fighting for the empowerment and inclusion of black voters (as well as the broader Rainbow Coalition), Obama ran as an insider of the democratic process—a senator from Illinois, an ideological centrist with a fairly race-less campaign designed to court the broader universe of voters who are believed to determine presidential campaigns.[4]

The two men were also on different sides of the ideological and strategic debate within the Democratic party. Jackson wanted the party to mobilize its base and advocate policy reforms for those in need of government intervention and regulation. But his position took a hit from his own electoral experiences in the 1980s. When Jackson ran in 1988, despite successful primary victories in a number of southern states as well as Michigan, he received only 14 percent of white primary votes, and party strategists feared that his relationship to the party alienated the so-called Reagan Democrats—white working-class voters who repeatedly crossed over to supply Republican majorities during these years. GOP leaders seized on this perception and portrayed Democrats as unduly influenced by Jackson's pro–civil rights message. By the 1990s, as I have discussed in previous chapters, Democratic Party leaders endorsed efforts to distance the party from Jackson, notably when Bill Clinton very pub-

[3] See Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Crown, 2006). Among important academic works that examine the transition from civil rights activism to insider interest-group and electoral strategies, see Robert Charles Smith, *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post–Civil Rights Era* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); and Katherine Tate, *From Protest to Politics: The New Black Voters in American Elections* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Hanes Walton, Jr., *African American Power and Politics: The Political Context Variable* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[4] See Valerie Sinclair-Chapman and Melanye Price, "Black Politics, the 2008 Election, and the (Im)Possibility of Race Transcendence," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 41 (2008): 739–45; and Ronald W. Walters, "Barack Obama and the Politics of Blackness," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 16.

licly dismissed Jackson in what would forever become known as the "Sister Souljah moment," a term that has since come to constitute and signify when a candidate attacks a friendly constituent group in an effort to appeal to a broader base of American voters.[5] With Clinton and moderate Democrats triumphant, Jackson receded into the background of national politics, his campaign speeches moved out of prime time, and the media focused more attention on his personal relationships than on his place and influence in the Democratic party.

Obama's campaign in 2008 took more pages out of Bill Clinton's playbook than Jesse Jackson's. Both Obama and Clinton ran presidential campaigns that generally avoided engaging with substantive policy issues involving racial inequality while simultaneously maintaining widespread black, Latino, and white liberal support. Both articulated aspirations of broad political reform with universalistic reach, moderated by close ties to Wall Street. Both largely discussed the politics and realities of race in abstractions and obfuscations: an occasional grandly symbolic and strikingly thoughtful speech here, a more commonplace technical parsing of a well-known phrase like "affirmative action" there. Both kept their distance from Jackson and other old guards of the civil rights movement in order to be seen as a nationally viable candidate.[6] And after Obama used a Father's Day speech as an opportunity to preach self-reliance and criticize African American men for not fulfilling their responsibilities, Jackson was caught on tape using pejorative language that attacked the candidate for "talking down to black people." Jackson apologized, and, like Clinton, Obama had his own Sister Souljah moment.

On November 4, 2008, however, none of the tension or ideological differences could detract from the emotion and signal importance of the night. More than two centuries after the United States constitutionally marked African Americans as three-fifths of a person, and less than a half century since the civil rights movement and the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Acts ended the official state endorsement of racism, racial violence, segregation, and political, economic, and societal exclusion, the nation elected Barack Obama as its 44th president.

[5] From Wikipedia: "In United States politics, a Sister Souljah moment is a politician's public repudiation of an allegedly extremist person or group, statement, or position perceived to have some association with the politician or their party. Such an act of repudiation is designed to signal to centrist voters that the politician is not beholden to traditional, and sometimes unpopular, interest groups associated with the party, although such a repudiation runs the risk of alienating some of the politician's allies and the party's base voters" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sister_Souljah_moment (accessed March 16, 2010).

[6] *Saturday Night Live* parodied Obama's campaign dynamic with Jackson and Reverend Al Sharpton in the "Obama Files," wherein the cartooned version of the candidate continually sent the civil rights advocates off to obscure and unknown countries to stay out of the news media's eye.

Given the momentousness of Obama's victory, it was not surprising that we immediately heard from countless directions—from journalists to academics to jurists on the Supreme Court—that America had entered into a new racial era, perhaps even one that is "post-racial," where African Americans can participate and influence electoral politics in more or less the same manner as any other group in America.[7] This is an argument with important substance. Scholars have provided evidence to show that the majority white public opinion has become more ambivalent, increasingly open to contestation and elite action, and will vote for—at least under certain conditions—African American candidates.[8] More than ten thousand African Americans are now elected officials, a nine-fold increase in the last four decades.[9] Racial discourse, meanings, and representations are clearly changing. If we understand race to be a category that is formed and constructed by a variety of influences, particularly elite actors, institutions, and organizations, the national focus for four, possibly eight, years on a black chief executive cannot help but be dramatic.[10] The Obama election is a watershed event in American history that will have significant repercussions for decades.

At the same time, we should not uncritically equate the election of the first African American president with either a post-racial era or the enhanced representation of African American voters.[11] Our knowledge that race and racism are constructed categories means not only that the category is open to improvement but also that constructions are multifaceted, sometimes internally conflicted, and always in flux.[12] As such, an election

[7] Matt Bai, "Is Obama the End of Black Politics?" *New York Times Magazine* (August 6, 2008). See, too, Michael Crowley, "Post-Racial: Even White Supremacists Don't Hate Obama," *New Republic* (March 12, 2008); David Remnick, "The Joshua Generation: Race and the Campaign of Barack Obama," *New Yorker* (November 17, 2008); and Jeffrey Rosen, "Race to the Top: Like it or Not, the President is About to Confront Civil Rights," *New Republic* (May 6, 2009).

[8] See Zoltan L. Hajnal, *Changing White Attitudes Toward Black Leadership* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[9] See Joint Center for Political Studies, "Black Elected Officials: A National Roster" (Washington, D.C.: JCPS, 2004).

[10] See Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[11] Jane Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes,'" *Journal of Politics* 61 (August 1999): 628–57.

[12] See Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, "Racial Orders in American Political Development," *American Political Science Review* 99 (2005): 75–92; and Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.

of the first African American president has the potential to be transformative but also to complicate and obfuscate racial inequality as much as ameliorate it.

This brings us back to Jesse Jackson's presence at Obama's election party. By placing Obama's victory within a historical lineage, it illuminates what has changed and what has not in the two decades since Jackson's last campaign, and in the decade since the publication of *Uneasy Alliances*. The maneuvers of the Clinton administration in the 1990s had the impact of taking so many issues that used to be contested, from crime to affirmative action to welfare, almost entirely off the radar of public debate and scrutiny. As a result, the topic of race and racial inequality dissipated in the campaign discourse in the elections leading up to Obama. Clinton's particular "success" at removing race from the political agenda during his administration—a success that squares with the discussion in this book about the strategic incentives of political party leaders to maintain an active distance from African American voters and interests—quite ironically may very well have opened the door to a new era of race in politics, one in which the Republican party could be "softer and gentler" toward racial minorities, and one in which another African American candidate could run for the Democratic nomination without being immediately deemed divisive and unelectable.[13]

In the time since the Clinton presidency, and in the time since this book was first published, then, much has changed and much has not, and any conclusions about the meaning of Obama's electoral victory need to be reflective of both phenomena. To paraphrase the words of the eminent historian Thomas Holt, we need to explain how the election of Obama can occur at the same time as a number of enduring realities about race, racism, and racial inequality are either not changing or even getting worse.[14] I focus in the rest of this afterword both on some of the enduring realities as well as some of the future possibilities of the Obama presidency. Underlying all of this is a question that provided the original motivation for writing this book—does Obama's election signal the end of the various problems posed by electoral capture and a new era for African American representation?

Obama's election offers the potential for a great transformation, but there is also evidence that the dynamics of the two-party system will con-

[13] See Tasha Philpot, *Race, Republicans, and the Return of the Party of Lincoln* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007). Of course, outside the Democratic party, Colin Powell received considerable national support at the possibility of his running for the Republican party nomination in 1996. He chose not to run.

[14] Holt, *The Problem of Race*, 6. Holt was referring to the serious consideration of Colin Powell as a presidential candidate in the 1990s in the midst of continuing racial inequality and prejudicial acts.

tinue to thwart such potential, limiting the effectiveness of his presidency in representing African American voters, as well as other groups such as gay and lesbian voters, who have witnessed the politics of electoral capture work in opposition to their political interests. That the elections in 2000 and 2004 represented further examples of capture—African Americans voted at around 90 percent for the Democratic party, which did its best to avoid close links to these voters despite the fact that their votes were potentially determinative to both elections in the closest of counts in Florida and Ohio—suggests that the phenomenon of electoral capture is not a historical relic. That a local dispute involving a black professor at Harvard University and a city police officer could provoke a national furor on the part of many whites is just one of the more public examples that suggest that race in America is also not a relic of the twentieth century. That an African American president now presides over institutional foundations that continue to impede racial justice at many different turns, some of which he will likely try to repair and others of which he has no interest in changing, reflects both the tragic ironies of the time and the continuing importance of political and institutional constraints on individual authority.

At the same time, President Obama cannot help but have an impact on race relations and on African American electoral representation. Some of this is through his political maneuverings as the nation's chief executive. He has already begun, for instance, to use a time-honored strategy of promoting civil rights policies through litigation and the courts that he cannot promote through the pulpit.[15] But Obama's biggest impact will likely be beyond his specific acts as president: as an inspiration for those who refuse to take the status quo as insurmountable, who take his rhetorical articulations of change seriously, and who will push the nation's voters and parties to respond to the significant inequalities that remain.

DOES RACE STILL MEAN ANYTHING? RACIAL INEQUALITY IN A "POST-RACIAL" ERA

How many Americans, as they watched the devastation of Hurricane Katrina from their television sets in September 2005, were thinking that America was on the verge of a "post-racial" transformation? The failure of local, state, and federal government officials to come more quickly to the aid of a largely poor African American population that was trapped

[15] See Mark A. Graber, "The Non-Majoritarian Difficulty: Legislative Deference to the Judiciary," *Studies in American Political Development* 7 (1993); and Kevin J. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to* Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

by rising waters led to a public outcry from many circles on all sides of the political spectrum. The national media spotlighted the racial dimension of the natural disaster from its earliest moments— Wolf Blitzer on CNN notably declared while showing footage from New Orleans that "they are so poor, they are so black." The outrage from African Americans was also acute from the beginning, symbolized by music artist Kanye West's claim on national television that "George Bush doesn't care about black people."

The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was catastrophic, unimaginable, and unacceptable in a democracy as wealthy and strong as the United States. As a window on the state of African American and racial politics in America, New Orleans is by no means representative of the full spectrum of race and inequality in America. What Americans watched on television was a distortion that failed to show the increasing diversification of the black experience as well as the experience of people of color. Television did not show the many middle- and upper-middle-class African Americans who got out of New Orleans before the flood. Cameras ignored a variety of intersectional issues such as age, disability, gender, and class in determining who stayed in New Orleans and who got out. Had such a catastrophe hit many other cities, cameras would have shown a far more diverse face of those left behind, reflecting the high numbers of first- and second-generation immigrants from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Mexico.

At the same time, the hurricane's aftermath brought a number of realities about race in the new millennium to public view. First, as with seemingly every national event where race is involved, it exposed a continuing divide in public opinion between African Americans and whites.[16] Whereas 56 percent of whites thought that West's comment was unjustified, only 10 percent of blacks agreed.[17] African Americans were also far more likely than whites to blame President George W. Bush for the failure

[16] Regarding this division in public opinion, see Lawrence D. Bobo, "Racial Attitudes and Relations at the Close of the Twentieth Century," in Neil J. Smelser, William Julius Wilson, and Faith Mitchell, eds., *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2001); Lawrence D. Bobo, "Inequalities That Endure: Racial Ideology, American Politics, and the Peculiar Role of the Social Sciences," in Maria Krysan and Amanda E. Lewis, eds., *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity* (New York: Russell Sage, 2004); Michael Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Michael Dawson, "Structure and Ideology: The Shaping of Black Public Opinion" (unpublished manuscript, 1995); Michael Dawson, Melissa Harris-Lacewell, and Cathy Cohen, "2005 Racial Attitudes and the Katrina Disaster Study" (unpublished manuscript, 2006); and Jennifer Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[17] Dawson et al., "2005 Racial Attitudes."

in New Orleans.[18] In a national survey after the hurricane, 84 percent of black Americans surveyed believed that the government would have responded faster had the majority of the victims not been black (compared to only 20 percent of white respondents). In the same survey, 90 percent of blacks thought Katrina reflected a broader lesson about racial inequality in America (as opposed to 38 percent of whites).[19] On the eve of the 2008 election campaign, this division seemed to linger. A 2007 Gallup poll found that while whites had become more optimistic in the last four decades in their assessments that racial conflict would be resolved, African Americans had become more pessimistic;[20] a Pew Research Center poll that same year found that fewer than half of all blacks (44 percent) thought that life for African Americans would get better in the future, down from the 57 percent who said so in a 1986 survey.[21] Just 20 percent of African Americans thought things were better than they were five years prior, the lowest finding since 1983.

Black political sentiment on the eve of the 2008 election, then, in many ways reflected the degree to which improvements in civil rights and racial equality have slowed in recent decades. Despite important areas of progress, there are extensive socioeconomic indicators that show racial inequality to be stagnant and, in some critical ways, even worsening. The bifurcation of what it means to be black in America, the splitting of African Americans into two tiers—an upwardly mobile black middle class and an increasingly impoverished lower and working class—remains apparent.[22] Moreover, many African Americans are not experiencing the improvements that at least some other racial and ethnic minorities are seeing.[23] Although it has been popular in recent years to argue that the concept of race is changing significantly as a result of the plethora of im-

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[18] Leonie Huddy and Stanley Feldman, "Worlds Apart: Blacks and Whites React to Hurricane Katrina," *Du Bois Review* 3 (2006): 97–113.

[19] Dawson et al., "2005 Racial Attitudes."

[20] Gallup Poll, "Race Relations" (2007).

[21] "Blacks See Growing Values Gap Between Poor and Middle Class," Pew Research Center, November 13, 2007. Found at http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/700/black-public-opinion.

[22] William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). It is important to note that the black middle class is not as upwardly mobile as the white middle class: 45 percent of African American children who start out in middle-class families end up in poor families (the bottom 20 percent of the income scale) as adults—this is in comparison to 16 percent for whites. Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Heidi Shierholz, *The State of Working America, 2008–2009* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 5.

[23] See Michael K. Brown, et al., *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

migrants who are changing the demographic landscape in America, and although this research importantly complicates our understanding of race, we have to be careful to avoid overreaching conclusions. In some areas, to meaningfully discuss race it is necessary to incorporate multiple groups; in other areas, groups intersect in complicated ways; in yet others, we need to separate racial histories and circumstances.[24]

Socioeconomic indicators suggest a wide array of areas in which racial inequality has seen improvements, but also a troubling range of areas where it remains prominent and stagnant. Educational attainment is one example of this. The 2000 Census found that 80 percent of African Americans had a high school diploma, compared to only 50 percent in 1980.[25] African Americans were also more likely to have attained a college diploma—17 percent as opposed to 12 percent in 1993. However, the education attainment gap between whites and blacks remains striking, with 30 percent of whites having received a college diploma. And there is an even greater disparity between whites and blacks aged 25 to 29—twice as many whites in this age group have received college degrees (34 percent to 17 percent). After reading and mathematics test-score gaps between blacks and whites closed during the 1970s and 1980s, this trend reversed in the 1990s, and the racial gap has remained stagnant in the last decade.[26] Black Americans on average attend schools with weaker skilled teachers, leading even the highest-achieving black students to see gaps

[24] For important accounts of how multiracial diversity complicates existing traditional understandings of race in America, see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "From Bi-racial to Tri-racial: Towards a New System of Racial Classification in the United States," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27 (6): 931–50; Rodney E. Hero, *Faces of Inequality: Social Diversity in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 10–38; Taeku Lee, "From Shared Demographic Categories to Common Political Destinies," *Du Bois Review* 4 (2) (2007), 433–56; Taeku Lee, "Race, Immigration, and the Identity-to-Politics Link," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008), 457–78; Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Mark Q. Sawyer and Tianna S. Paschel, "'We Didn't Cross the Color Line, the Color Line Crossed Us," *Du Bois Review* 4 (2) (2007), 303–15; Gary M. Segura and Helena Alves Rodrigues, "Comparative Ethnic Politics in the United States: Beyond Black and White," *Annual Review of Political Science* (9) (2006), 375–95; and Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). For arguments that immigrant groups have been and continue to be racialized in significantly similar ways to African Americans by party organizations, see Luis Ricardo Fraga and David L. Leal, "Playing the 'Latino Card': Race, Ethnicity, and National Party Politics," *Du Bois Review* 1, no. 2 (2004): 297–317; Thomas P. Kim, *The Racial Logic of Politics: Asian Americans and Party Competition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); and Janelle S. Wong, *Democracy's Promise: Immigrants and American Civic Institutions* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

[25] U.S. Census Bureau, "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2003," June 2004, https://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-550.pdf.

[26] See, e.g., Sam Dillon, "'No Child' Law Is Not Closing a Racial Gap," *New York Times*

widening in accomplishments compared to whites.[27] We have also witnessed the resegregation of many of our nation's public schools, particularly in the South, where the percentage of black school children attending majority white schools has dropped from 43 percent in 1988 to 27 percent in 2005; nationally, the percentage of African Americans that attend majority nonwhite schools has risen from 63 percent to 73 percent in that same time period, and from 32 percent to 38 percent in schools that are more than 90 percent nonwhite.[28] In eight states, more than 77 percent of black students attend majority nonwhite schools (California, New York, Maryland, Illinois, Texas, Michigan, Mississippi, and New Jersey); and in four states, a majority of black students attend schools that are more than 90 percent nonwhite (Illinois, New York, Michigan, and Maryland).[29] The proportion of black students attending intensely segregated minority schools, defined as over 90 percent minority population, has more than doubled between 1991 and 2005 in North Carolina, Rhode Island, Arkansas, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Wisconsin.[30]

In 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau found that more than 25 percent of African Americans live under the poverty line (compared to 9 percent of whites)—a percentage that is higher than it was thirty-five years ago.[31] A third of African American children live in poverty, compared to 10 percent of white children, and nearly two-thirds of those children remain in poverty as adults.[32] Twenty percent of African Americans live in neighborhoods classified as "extreme poverty," a percentage that dropped between 1990 and 2000 but nonetheless is strikingly higher than for any other racial group.[33] A decade after white public opinion toward welfare programs led to a slashing of government programs at all levels, the Department of Housing and Urban Development found in 2005 that 45

(April 28, 2009). See, too, Maureen T. Hallinan, "Sociological Perspectives on Black-White Inequalities in American Schooling," *Sociology of Education* 74 (2001): 50–70.

[27] Christopher Jencks and M. Phillips, "America's Next Achievement Test: Closing the Black-White Test Score Gap," *American Prospect* (1998): 44–53; Debra Viadero, "Black-White Gap Widens Faster for High Achievers," *Education Weekly* (April 16, 2008).

[28] Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, "Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New

Integration Strategies" (report of the Civil Rights Project, UCLA, 2007).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Alemayehu Bishaw and Jessica Semegu, U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Reports, ACS-09, *Income, Earnings, and Poverty Data from the 2007 Community Survey* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008).

[32] The first statistic is from Joe Soss, Jacob S. Hacker, and Suzanne Mettler, eds., *Remaking America: Democracy and Public Policy in an Age of Inequality* (New York: Russell Sage, 2007), 8; the latter is from Mishel et al., *State of Working America*, 107.

[33] William Julius Wilson, "The Political and Economic Forces Shaping Concentrated Inequality," *Political Science Quarterly* 123 (Winter 2008/09).

percent of the more than 750,000 homeless people in the United States are African American.[34] The unemployment gap between blacks and whites was reduced from roughly 3 to 1 in the 1980s to roughly 2 to 1 in the early 1990s, but it has stagnated at this level through 2008.[35] Job loss has been particularly acute for African Americans in urban centers, where, as William Julius Wilson has written, many manufacturing jobs have simply disappeared.[36]

Wage differentials between rich and poor, even between extremely rich andrich, have grown dramatically in the last two decades, regardless of race.[37] The Gini coefficient—a statistical device widely used by economists and social scientists to measure societal inequality, with 0 representing perfect equality and 1 representing perfect inequality—has risen in the United States from 0.38 in 1967 to an all-time high of 0.47 in 2006. But this trend has numerous specifics that are linked to race. The percentage of African Americans who are middle class has declined in the last two decades, from 40 percent to 35 percent, while the percentage of African American families who are "very poor" has risen from 24 to 39 percent in those years.[38] Wage differences between blacks and whites have moved further apart since Clinton's election in 1992, as whites in 2007 earned $147 more per week than blacks, while the gap between median household incomes for whites and blacks remains at nearly $20,000—a figure that has not changed, when holding dollars constant, since 1990.[39] In 1998, according to the Survey of Consumer Finances, the net worth of white households on average was $100,700 higher than that of African Americans. By 2007, this gap had increased to $142,600.[40]

[34] Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[35] Bureau of Labor Statistics, various years.

[36] William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

[37] Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[38] Jessica Gordon Nebhard, Steven C. Pitts, and Patrick L. Mason, "African American Intragroup Inequality and Corporate Globalization," in Cecilia A. Conrad, John Whitehead, Patrick Mason, and James Stewart, eds., *African Americans in the U.S. Economy* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 211–214.

[39] U.S. Department of Labor, "Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2007" (Bureau of Labor Studies Report 1008), October 2008; Bishaw and Semegu, "Income, Earnings, and Poverty Data"; Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica Smith, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-233, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2006* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007), http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/p60-233.pdf; and U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, Historical Income Tables—Families, http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/f05.html.

[40] Thomas Shapiro, "Close the Racial Wealth Gap," CNN.com (June 10, 2009), http://

Moreover, although the median net worth of other nonwhites has been rising in the last decade, the net worth of African Americans has been declining in absolute dollars.[41] The poorest African Americans also experienced an absolute decline in income, and they became poorer relative to the poorest whites. The richest African Americans saw an increase in income, but even the highest-earning blacks still lagged considerably behind their white counterparts. Finally, there is extensive evidence that African Americans have been hit hardest by the recession that began in 2008–9, particularly the foreclosure crisis and the rise in unemployment to over 15 percent for blacks—7 points higher than for whites. Reports in the 1990s that middle-class African Americans were more than four times as likely to receive a subprime mortgage than their white counterparts foreshadowed the impact of the recent mortgage crisis on African American homeowners.[42]

Black Americans are twice as likely to die in infancy as whites, and continue to live shorter lives than whites at the same proportion as was seen in the 1950s.[43] Blacks are also more likely to suffer from numerous diseases, such as diabetes, reflecting disparities in diet between races, as well as the significant disparity in health care benefits. A national study recently found that even when African Americans had similar insurance benefits and income levels as whites, they received fewer medical tests and less responsiveness from the medical industry.[44] African Americans account for more than half of the nation's new diagnoses of HIV/AIDS in adults and represented more than half of all HIV deaths in 2002.[45]

Racial profiling and stereotyping by whites remains widespread, whether used by neighbors, employers, or law enforcement officers. Whites continue to flee neighborhoods where blacks (as well as Africans, Latinos, and Asians) reach too high a concentration. Rates of racial segregation for African Americans remain stagnant, and many of the pockets where blacks have found themselves segregated—particularly the nation's poorest cities and their suburbs, such as Detroit, Cleveland, Buf-

www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/06/10/shapiro.wealth/index.html?iref=allsearch. See, too, Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[41] Brian K. Bucks, Arthur B. Kennickell, Traci L. Mach, and Kevin B. Moore, "Changes in U.S. Family Finances from 2004 to 2007: Evidence from the Survey of Consumer Finances," *Federal Reserve Bulletin* (February 2009), 14.

[42] Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race,* 14.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care,* ed. Brian D. Smedley, Adrienne Y. Stith, and Alan R. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2002).

[45] National Minority AIDS Council, *African Americans, Health Disparities, and HIV/ Aids* (report, November 2006).

falo, and East St. Louis—are among the poorest areas in the nation.[46] African American job applicants were less than half as likely to receive callbacks from employers versus whites with equal backgrounds and resumes; whites with a criminal record were equally likely to receive callbacks from employers as African Americans without one.[47] Meanwhile, whereas roughly a third of Latinos and Asian Americans marry a person of another race, and 40 percent of native-born Latinos and 70 percent of native-born Asian Americans marry a person of another race, only 12 percent of African Americans do so. Of those who do intermarry, roughly 90 percent of Latinos and Asian Americans wed someone who is white, while less than 70 percent of black Americans do so.[48]

Few racial disparities have grown as dramatically and strikingly as in criminal punishment and the justice system. As Jonathan Simon has recently written, "The odds of an African American man going to prison today are higher than the odds he will go to college, get married, or go into the military."[49] In 2007, African Americans were only 13 percent of the general population but 55 percent of the prison population. According to a Pew study in 2008, one in eighteen black men over the age of 18 is in jail (compared to one in thirty-six Latino men and one in 106 white men), and one in every nine black men ages 20 to 34 is behind bars.[50] Much of this disparity stems from unequal sentencing and enforcement of national and state drug laws. For example, while blacks make up just 15 percent of illicit drug users, they account for 37 percent of those arrested for drug offenses. They comprise 42 percent of those held in federal prison for drug charges and 62 percent of those in state prisons. Between 1980 and 2000, three times as many African American men were added to the prison system than were added to colleges and universities nationwide.

Thus, although African Americans have achieved much in the past four decades in the areas of education and income, as well as numerous high-

[46] See Douglas S. Massey, "Segregation and Stratification: A Biosocial Perspective," *Du Bois Review* 1 (2004): 1–19; and Mary Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[47] Devah Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 90–91.

[48] Jennifer Lee and Frank D. Bean, "Intermarriage and Multiracial Identification: The Asian American Experience and Implications for Changing Color Lines," in Lee and Zhou, eds., *Asian American Youth*.

[49] Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime: How the War on America Transformed Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 141. See, too, David Garland, *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences* (New York: Russell Sage, 2001).

[50] Pew Center on the States, "One in One Hundred: Behind Bars in America 2008" (February 2008).

level individual successes, with CEOs at top corporations such as AOL Time Warner and American Express, high-profile academics, lawyers, doctors, athletes, media personalities, politicians, and now the president of the United States, it remains empirically meaningful to invoke racial categories in any discussion of inequality.

RACE AND PARTY POLITICS AT THE MILLENNIUM

National politics is another arena in which racial categories remain real and meaningful. Since the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the ever-present racial divide in American politics has only gotten more dramatic. More than 80 percent of African American voters have repeatedly chosen the Democratic Party, a number that has steadily increased in recent years, topped in 2008 with 95 percent of black voters supporting Barack Obama. By contrast, majorities of white Americans continue to quite sizably endorse the Republican Party (56 percent in 2008); Lyndon Johnson's 1964 election is the last time a majority of whites have voted for the Democratic presidential candidate (see figure A.1).

The racial divide continues to have political consequences for African Americans, who in a myriad of electoral and legislative arenas find themselves on the losing side of the democratic process. The Voting Rights Act removed important legal barriers to representation in the political process, but substantive barriers remain. Despite the right to vote, numerous scholars have continued to find that casting a ballot does not always mean equality of representation. In a study of electoral outcomes across the nation in which he counts how often different demographic groups vote for the winning candidate, Zoltan Hajnal has recently concluded, "Across [a] range of different [electoral] contests, blacks are consistently more likely to end up losers."[51] John Griffin and Brian Newman find similar results in congressional legislative and policy battles—that African Americans lose more frequently than whites even when mobilized for a political fight.[52] Dara Strolovitch finds striking amounts of inequality for African Americans and other racial and gender minorities within yet another political sphere, public interest organizations that are devoted to the policy goals of disadvantaged communities.[53]

[51] Zoltan L. Hajnal, "Who Loses in American Democracy? A Count of Votes Demonstrates the Limited Representation of African Americans," *American Political Science Review* 103 (1) (February 2009): 37–57.

[52] John D. Griffin and Brian Newman, *Minority Report: Evaluating Political Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[53] Dara Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
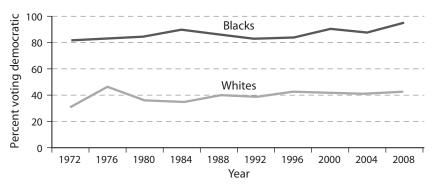
Figure A.1. Voting for Democrats in presidential election by race, 1972–2008. Figures based on exit polling from the *New York Times* between 1972 and 2008.

I have argued in addition that parties produce inequalities by often removing the subject of racial representation from the political agenda and narrowing the possible alternatives. This has certainly been the case in the years leading up to the 2008 election. Most notable about these national elections was how little race came up as a subject. The state of inequality in America, though ever present in so many venues, quite rarely pops its head out into national politics. If national politics, and particularly fierce competition between two parties, is supposed to provide a democratic remedy to inequality, the initial years of the new millennium did not provide it.

Certainly, the elections of 2000 and 2004 were a time of fierce party competition; indeed, they were among the most dramatically competitive in American history. As in many other close campaigns in elections past, however, the pivotal part that black voters could have played in determining the election outcome was never endorsed by either party. The critical states in these elections were Florida in 2000, with more than 2 million black citizens in an election result decided by thousands, and Ohio in 2004, with 1.5 million black citizens in an election count decided by fewer than 140,000 votes. Similar to other eras in American history in which party competition was very close, discussion of race—both race baiting and civil rights promotion—has largely disappeared from campaign agendas. There were some exceptions; moments continue to arise that show national politicians not-so-subtly race baiting, such as the television ad in 2006 against a black candidate for senator of Tennessee, Harold Ford, which implied his sexual admiration for white women. Both parties, meanwhile, had moments of promoting racial diversity as a general symbol, whether through Bill Clinton's national dialogue at the

end of his presidency[54] or when Republican conventions in 2000 and 2004 made efforts to spotlight black and Latino faces.[55] George W. Bush appointed two African Americans as secretary of state during his tenure.

But more than anything, the issue of race just did not appear very often in national campaigns. A number of scholars, in an examination of media coverage of political issues in the last few decades, have found that coverage of race issues during general election campaigns has declined dramatically from the 1970s and early 1980s to "the near-invisibility of race in recent campaigns."[56] Sunshine Hillygus and Todd Shields report that race was absent not only from national campaigns in modern elections through 2004, but also from the elaborate micro-targeting campaigns that increasingly have come to predominate election politics.[57] Hillygus and Shields argue that this removal of race from the national agenda has had an impact on white voters, as has a corresponding dramatic decline in the number of voters defecting from the Democratic to the Republican Party due to racial cross-pressure—a decline they argue reflects candidates' no longer taking or emphasizing divergent positions on race.[58] No white respondent in their study, for instance, offered a racial reason for his or her dislike of John Kerry or the Democratic Party in 2004.[59]

There are both positives and negatives to this type of partisan strategy; it means that candidates are not race baiting and appealing to voters' fears and prejudices, which keeps hateful words and discussions out of national discourse. At the same time, however, it also helps create a false illusion of racial equality in the public mind. Racial inequality has not been a national priority in decades, and between 1984 and 2004 the percentage of white respondents to the National Election Study who believed that "the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should instead help themselves" rose sharply from a third to nearly two-thirds.

But most importantly, avoiding discussion of racial issues in campaigns and legislative battles has clear policy implications for civil rights. The absence of mobilization around civil rights issues in campaigns quite often translates to a similar absence in legislative politics. And there is no better example of this than the politics of crime control. That Democrats

[54] See Claire Jean Kim, "Managing the Racial Breach: Clinton, Black-White Polarization, and the Race Initiative," *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 55–79.

[55] See Philpot, *Race, Republicans*.

[56] Lee Sigelman and Emmett H. Buell, Jr., "Avoidance or Engagement? Issue Convergence in U.S. Presidential Campaigns, 1960–2000," *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (October 2004): 650–61, at 655.

[57] See D. Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G. Shields, *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[58] Hillygus and Shields, *Persuadable Voter*, 142–43.

[59] Ibid., 139.

stopped contesting federal and state laws that were clearly affecting African American men in enormous disproportions has had consequences not just for the continuation of these laws, but also for the electoral fortunes of the party.

In the modern era, crime emerged at the forefront of the national political agenda in the midst of the 1960s civil rights struggles as part of a concerted Republican political strategy, and it remained on the GOP agenda well into the early 1990s, derived more from Republican efforts to make it a civil rights matter with which to combat Democrats than as a response to actual increases in crime rates.[60] In the 1990s, Democrats responded with party platforms that emphasized the need for more police and other "get tough" strategies. This strategy worked quickly to minimize the salience of the issue.[61] In 1994, Americans deemed crime the second most important issue facing the nation; by 2008 crime merited such consideration by only 1 percent of white survey respondents.[62] But it also removed a potential opponent of a policy crisis of epic proportions. Recent elections have illustrated the costs of this strategy for democracy. In the 2000 campaign, around the time of the party conventions, for instance, Democratic candidate Al Gore had a potential opportunity to attack his opponent, Texas governor George W. Bush, for his refusal to grant a stay of execution to Gary Graham, despite Graham's emphatic declarations of innocence in a trial with little evidence beyond a single self-doubting witness and woefully unprepared lawyers. The issue received a sizable amount of national attention due to the dramatic racial disparities in the implementation of the death penalty: since 1976, 34 percent of those executed in the United States have been African American, and African Americans represent 42 percent of those currently on death row. Graham defiantly stated at his execution that "this is what happens to black men in America," and the NAACP called the execution a "gross travesty of justice." Al Gore said merely that he supported the death penalty, although being troubled by the possibility that innocent people will sometimes be executed; specifically with regard to Graham,

[60] See Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Naomi Murakawa, "The Origins of the Carceral Crisis: Racial Order as 'Law and Order,'" in Joseph E. Lowndes et al., eds., *Race and American Political Development* (New York: Routledge, 2008); and Vesla M. Weaver, "Frontlash: Race and the Development of Punitive Crime Policy," *Studies in American Political Development* 21 (September 2007): 230–65.

[61] Rebecca Bohrman and Naomi Murakawa, "Remaking Big Government: Immigration and Crime Control in the United States," in Julia Sudbury, ed., *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Bruce Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America* (New York: Russell Sage, 2006).

[62] According to the 2007 NAACP poll, crime/policing remains the fourth most important issue facing African Americans, at 9 percent.

Gore said that he did "not know the record in Texas. I have not examined the cases. I've always tried to stay away from issues in criminal courts."[63]

Of course, this is an issue that has also had consequences for Democratic Party electoral fortunes. Just months after Gore's equivocation, Democrats found out how consequential the national trend in crime policy was for their party when reports of the numbers of African Americans who were denied voting rights in the state of Florida because of felony disenfranchisement laws far surpassed the thousands of votes that decided the state, and the national election, in favor of George Bush. Because of these felony disfranchisement laws, an estimated 13 percent of all African American men cannot vote, representing more than a third of all Americans who have been disenfranchised for having a felony record. In Florida, more than 600,000 African Americans could not vote due to these laws.[64] But again, as with the Graham matter in the summer, Al Gore continually refused to comment on widespread allegations that blacks in the state had been denied the right to vote both through these laws and through numerous other voting irregularities. Although the *New York Times* reported, for instance, that votes from majority black precincts were four times as likely to have been thrown out in Florida than votes from white precincts—through intimidation and fraud by the state of Florida against black would-be voters—Gore repeatedly refused to get involved.[65] Despite constant calls from the NAACP, from Jesse Jackson, from Gore's campaign manager Donna Brazile, and from federal and state black public officials, Gore at no point made the issue of black voting rights a concern during the dispute over Florida.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Given the content of the four prior presidential elections of the 1990s and 2000s, few could have expected the 2008 election to be such a dramatic victory for racial equality. Certainly,the national pundits who articulate the conventional wisdom of upcoming campaigns did not predict it. In the years leading up to the 2008 election, campaign strategists and media analysts perceived the Clinton approach to race to be successful and continued to call, explicitly or implicitly, for a de-racialized agenda as the way to return the Democratic party to the White House.[66] Typical was

[63] CNN Capital Gang, June 24, 2000, transcript #00062400V40.

[64] Jeff Manza and Christopher Uggen, *Locked Out: Federal Disenfranchisement and American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[65] For an overview of the events, see Tamala M. Edwards, "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?" *Salon* (December 19, 2000).

[66] Though, importantly, see Tavis Smiley and Stephanie Robinson, *Accountable: Making*

New York Times writer Matt Bai, who argued in his own book on the Democrats that the goal for the party was to avoid returning to being "a party defined, culturally, by urban intellectuals and black voters, a coalition of the precious and the poor."[67] In light of this, Obama's racial background was perceived to be an immediate problem. In 2007, John Judis and Ruy Teixeira, authors of the highly influential *Emerging Democratic Majority*, were worried that the two leading candidates for the Democratic party at the time, Obama and Hillary Clinton, did not fit the image of successful party candidates who can appear "to be moderates rather than liberals and whom white working-class voters could envision as 'one of us.'" Judis and Teixeira argued that party candidates "from the Northeast or upper Midwest have been trounced, in part, because they were unable to bridge the political and cultural divide between the Democratic base and the swing voters in the Midwest and border South." They feared that "Obama, a black man from Chicago, will also likely be seen as a cultural liberal; in addition, he could be at a disadvantage among many white voters in the South, lower Midwest, and interior West because of his race."[68]

Given this conventional wisdom, a host of Democratic strategists continued to push the standard line from the Clinton years—avoid race, avoid social issues, and focus on the variety of swing voters. Most of these swing voters were at least implicitly white. Rahm Emanuel and Bruce Reed, in their book *The Plan*, made almost no reference to race or inequality except for a paragraph at the end of the book that celebrated the policies of President Clinton that emphasized corporate investment and enhanced personal responsibility.[69] In *The Thumpin'*, Natfali Bendavid enthusiastically described Emanuel's particular role in helping the Democrats win the 2006 midterm elections with a strategy that avoided the party base in favor of moderate and conservative swing voters.[70] The defining book on the eve of the Bill Clinton era, the Edsalls' *Chain Reaction*, a book that came to define so much of the strategy-making for Clinton's success in 1992, was replaced by a series of strikingly similar books, such as Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, Dave Saunders

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America as Good as Its Promise (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009); and Ronald W. Walters, *Freedom Is Not Enough: Black Voters, Black Candidates, and American Presidential Politics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

[67] Matt Bai, *The Argument: Inside the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 57.

[68] John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, "Back to the Future: The Re-emergence of the Emerging Democratic Majority," *American Prospect* (June 19, 2007).

[69] Rahm Emanuel and Bruce Reed, *The Plan: Big Ideas for America* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006).

[70] Natfali Bendavid, *The Thumpin': How Rahm Emanuel and the Democrats Learned to Be Ruthless and Ended the Republican Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

and Steve Jarding's *Foxes in the Henhouse*, Mark Halperin and John Harris's *The Way to Win*, and Judis and Teixeira's *The Emerging Democratic Majority*.[71] These accounts are not all the same, with some of the authors pushing for a more vigorous return to New Deal–era populism and others emphasizing emergent groups of voters coming from the South and Southwest. But they all advocate that the Democrats target persuadable voters that are of the same race; whether the group is working-class whites, Southern whites, NASCAR dads, office park dads, suburban soccer moms, or techies, all are at least implicitly understood as white voters.[72]

Pundits spouting conventional wisdom tended to follow the surveys and public-opinion polls leading up to 2008, and the polls were not showing marked changes in national racial attitudes. There was little to suggest that just prior to 2008 America was on the precipice of something monumental, perhaps in the way that the mid-twentieth century might have suggested for civil rights possibilities, as reflected in changing white attitudes and the works of popular social scientists such as Gunnar Myrdal and Henry Lee Moon.[73] Instead, as we saw above, black and white attitudes toward race were in many ways dividing further, not moving toward a "post-racial" order. Moreover, most survey research has found that white attitudes toward race and prejudice were strikingly stagnant in the years leading up to 2008, reflecting what attitudes had been for a few decades in the post–civil rights era. National survey trends demonstrated a "great normative shift" in white public opinion in the years after the 1960s, with overt expressions of racial animus and prejudice being rare and not tolerated.[74] White public opinion on issues such as segregation, genetic inferiority, and opposition to voting for a black president has declined dramatically. This normative shift has remained

[71] Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan, 2004); Dave Saunders and Steve Jarding, *Foxes in the Henhouse: How the Republicans Stole the South and the Heartland and What the Democrats Must Do to Run 'Em Out* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); Mark Halperin and John F. Harris, *The Way to Win: Taking the White House in 2008* (New York: Random House, 2006); and John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (New York: Scribner, 2002).

[72] Indeed, it is further striking that immigrant voters are not discussed by these pundits as a new group of voters. See Fraga and Leal, "Playing the 'Latino Card'"; Kim, *The Racial Logic of Party Competition*.

[73] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1944); Henry Lee Moon, *The Balance of Power: The Negro Vote* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948).

[74] Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo, and Maria Krysan, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 312.

stable, but equally stable has been consistent opposition by a majority of white Americans to substantive policies designed to dissipate continuing racial inequities.[75]

Also stagnant has been white expression in national opinion polls of subtle yet meaningful forms of racial prejudice. Whether we label racism as "laissez-faire racism," which Lawrence Bobo defines as "persistent negative stereotyping of African Americans, a tendency to blame blacks for the black-white gap in socioeconomic status, and resistance to meaningful policy efforts meant to ameliorate U.S. racist social conditions and institutions," or as "symbolic racism," which Donald Kinder and David Sears have defined as "a blend of anti-black affect and the kind of traditional American moral values embodied in the Protestant Ethic . . . , a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on moral feelings that blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, the work ethic, obedience and discipline," features of the concept remain alive and well, with little change in the last few decades.[76] Bobo found a significant number of whites continued to hold negative attitudes toward black Americans, concluding that there is a "widespread tendency on the part of whites to view blacks as 'the other.'"[77] Between 1988 and 2008, scholars measured symbolic racism in public opinion polls through a racial resentment scale derived from four survey questions that ask white respondents about the work ethic of African Americans, about the relevance of the legacy of slavery and discrimination, about whether African Americans are seen as getting more than they deserve, and about the extent of discrimination in modern-day society. The findings have found white public opinion on race to be remarkably stable over these two decades, with the median voter firmly on the racially conservative side of the scale.[78]

Not all accounts concluded in the same way. Some political scientists thought that white racial attitudes were more open to opportunities for

[75] See Bobo, "Inequalities That Endure."

[76] Bobo, "Inequalities That Endure," 17; Donald R. Kinder and David O. Sears, "Prejudice and Politics: Symbolic Racism Versus Racial Threats to the Good Life," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40 (1981): 414–31, at 416. Also see Nicholas A. Valentino and David O. Sears, "Old Times There Are Not Forgotten: Race and Partisan Realignment in the Contemporary South," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (2005): 672–88.

[77] Bobo, "Inequalities That Endure," 22.

[78] Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Michael Tesler and David Sears, "Barack Obama and the Two Sides of Symbolic Racism: Explaining the Effects of Racial Resentment in the Primaries and Beyond" (paper presented at the Western Political Science Association, March 19–21, 2009).

black achievement, particularly if the achievement fit other ideological and cultural affinities.[79] Some election watchers felt that changing demographics, particularly what they saw as a shrinking white blue-collar group and increasing numbers of immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, were opening the door to new political strategies and opportunities for the Democratic Party.[80] But they were the exception, and it is important to note that the conventional wisdom still pushed against the idea of a black candidate or a candidate who mobilized black voters. As I argued in previous chapters, the perception of the elites in a party is one of the most critical factors in determining how a party strategically responds to a group of voters. In each historical era, party leaders have disagreed over the proper electoral strategy—voices have come from many directions, some loudly and passionately pushing for a strategy that would incorporate the interests of black voters. But repeatedly, electoral calculus, fused with ambivalent to prejudiced racial attitudes of party leaders, has led parties to reach out to white swing voters with appeals thought to tap into underlying racial animus or at least to avoid raising the issue of race altogether.

To win the nomination in 2008, Barack Obama had to counteract this calculus. That he did is a reminder that no matter the authority and legitimating nature of institutions and the incentives they produce, individuals can challenge and transcend this conventional wisdom with boldness, intelligence, and hard work. True, he succeeded in part by continuing to pursue the politics of the Clinton order. His campaign speeches rarely spoke of detailed promises or gave attention to the many issues raised above that continue to face many Americans, and a disproportionate number of African Americans. He notably avoided civil rights leaders in a variety of formats and spoke little about legacies of discrimination and inequality. At the same time, he did not ignore race. He was forceful in combating subtle or not-so-subtle efforts by his opponents to play the race card (and as such, was often accused by his opponents of doing the same). When he spoke about race, he was masterful at balancing his links to African Americans with his own separation and distance from the generation of civil rights activists who "had lost hope." His speech in Philadelphia was deservedly lauded for its extensive discussion of race and racial inequality. It had been decades since a leading party candidate made a speech on race that received as much attention or was a more specific and elaborate discussion of racial inequality than Obama's. Of

[79] See, e.g., Paul M. Sniderman and Edward G. Carmines, *Reaching Beyond Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[80] Ruy Teixeira, ed., *Red, Blue, and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2008). See in particular the essay by William Frey, "Race, Immigration, and America's Changing Electorate," 79–108.

course, the speech was full of balanced statements, a variety of lines intended to appeal to multiple constituencies; but regardless, it reflected a moment that made issues of race quite transparent in a manner long unseen.

Moreover, Obama's race was continually a presence and often a reference point in his speeches, and it was quite constantly a theme of the public discourse that surrounded the election. As the first African American nominee of the Democratic party, his own words and strategic actions did little to change the way his campaign was consistently viewed and discussed in racial terms by the media, by other politicians, and by voters.[81] Obama did not have to say in his election-night acceptance speech what the *New York Times* declared in its front-page headline the next day: "OBAMA: Racial Barrier Falls in Decisive Victory." Obama did not need to point out that his victory in the South Carolina primary benefited from enthusiastic support from black voters; Bill Clinton did. Obama did not say he was a beneficiary of civil rights policies like affirmative action; Geraldine Ferraro did. Obama is not a Muslim, yet a variety of media, including national news outlets such as FOX News, insinuated that he was. Moreover, unless one avoided just about every consumer chain store in America, from Wal-Mart to Target to Costco, it was just about impossible to ignore the commemorative t-shirts, books, photos, and coffee mugs that singularly celebrated the first African American Democratic party nominee, and later the first African American president.

Correspondingly, Obama's election benefited greatly from enthusiastic black support. As polls that came out during the election—and subsequently—have indicated, black voters saw, and continue to see, Obama as an advocate for greater racial equality and African American representation. African American turnout on Election Day was historic and, combined with equally historic turnout from Latino voters, was critical in Barack Obama's victory. Black and Latino voters came out for Obama in record numbers, with black turnout in particular increasing from 56 percent in 2004 to 65 percent in 2008.[82] The overall percentage turnout of minority voters in the presidential election increased by 3 percent, from 21 percent in 2004 to 24 percent in 2008. Of the 10 million more votes that Obama received in 2008 than John Kerry did in 2004 (resulting in a 4.6 percentage-point swing toward the Democrats from 2004 to 2008), these additional voters were overwhelmingly black and Latino—4.3 million and 2.7 million more, respectively. All things being equal, had black and Latino voters supported Obama at a rate consistent with their sup-

[81] See, for example, Marc Ambinder, "Race Over?" *Atlantic* (January/February 2009).

[82] Walters, *Freedom Is Not Enough*, 173.

port for John Kerry in 2004, the Democrats would have lost.[83] Obama also won enthusiastic turnout from the sizeable minority of whites who, according to survey, can be classified as racial liberals.[84] Many white voters also were influenced by Obama's race. Some, as Michael Tesler and David Sears argue, came out enthusiastically in support of his candidacy because of his racial identity.[85] Others, as Philip Klinkner and Thomas Schaller have pointed out, seemingly turned against Obama for racial reasons, as there were notable pockets—particularly in the South—where the white Democratic vote declined significantly in certain states and numerous counties between 2004 and 2008.[86]

In the early months since the election, black Americans have continued to enthusiastically embrace Obama. One hundred days into his presidency, a *New York Times*/CBS News poll found that 89 percent of African Americans believe Obama cares about their needs, and 78 percent of African Americans believe Obama cares about the interests of African Americans. Whereas only 20 percent of blacks believed race relations were generally good in 1992, 59 percent answered affirmatively in this poll of 2009.

For these reasons, Obama's election and presidency have the potential to be transformative for race relations in a way not seen at least since the second Reconstruction of the 1960s. Because the President's race—despite his own efforts to the contrary—has often dominated national discussion of his performance, personality, and politics, his mere existence has the chance to put racial issues on the public agenda in a way far beyond the wildest dreams of civil rights activists, and to profoundly alter ways in which race is shaped, portrayed, and understood. The form this takes is often halting and dissatisfying, as was exemplified by Obama's attempt to bring a leading Harvard race scholar together with a white Cambridge police officer for a beer and some discussion. It also faces the real potential of backlash, as is apparent in the angry ranting of Glen Beck and others who hope to use race as a catalyst to return conservatives to power. Nonetheless, because political actors such as national party leaders and chief executives are vitally important, not just in representing public preferences but in meaningfully shaping those preferences, Obama's presidency represents a truly historic moment for anyone interested in greater racial equality and the continuing construction of race and difference in America.

[83] Stephen Ansolabehere and Charles Stewart III, "Amazing Race: How Post-Racial Was Obama's Victory?" *Boston Review* (January/February 2009).

[84] Tesler and Sears, "Obama and the Two Sides of Symbolic Racism."

[85] Ibid.

[86] See Philip A. Klinkner and Thomas Schaller, "LBJ's Revenge: The 2008 Election and the Rise of the Great Society Coalition," *Forum* 6(4): 7.

But will this dramatic mobilization lead to actual changes in the ways that African Americans are represented in national politics? As I write this in the first months of the Obama administration, the answer is obviously yet to be known. In part, it depends on how the election results will be interpreted by political elites. After all, as we've seen in this book, African Americans have been pivotal voters in the past and not had their vote "count" in a manner befitting a pivotal voter. This is the classic problem of being a captured group: the votes do not correlate with representation because of the fear by both political parties that policy representation to the group will dissuade greater numbers in the party coalition. Here again, then, perceptions by key strategists will be hugely important in determining the potential leverage of African American votes in the Obama administration and the Democratic party. Some interpretations of Obama's election victory are more helpful to future black representation than others. Indeed, one conclusion—the post-racial argument—could have a variety of consequences. On the one hand, it might be taken to mean that race no longer matters and need not be addressed—a legitimate fear that has been expressed by many civil rights advocates. At the same time, such a conclusion can mean that efforts at racial representation will be a less divisive and politically suicidal stand for a political party to take. Appeals to black Americans can be made within the context of a broader political strategy of party building and winning. With Obama having won, the next candidate for the party nomination might be more willing to advocate on behalf of important civil rights interests, bolstered by the precedent of Obama's legacy. A second conclusion is that Obama's victory reflects changing demographics, the decline of white bigotry, and the increase of a multiracial and post-racial generation of voters. There are a number of implicit assumptions here that need greater scrutiny and complication: these assumptions often presuppose, for instance, that nonwhite immigrants' interests will be the same as those of African Americans and that nonwhite immigrant patterns of racialization will remain static, as well as an assumption of a lack of cultural and/or political assimilation.[87] Nonetheless, this strategy, were it to become a conventional wisdom, could also change partisan calculus in the years ahead.

A more popular explanation, however, is that Obama won because 2008 was a referendum election against President Bush, an incumbent presiding over a terrible economy and an unpopular war and with ap-

[87] See, e.g., Bonilla-Silva, "From Bi-Racial to Tri-Racial?"; Luis R. Fraga and Gary M. Segura, "Culture Clash? Contesting Notions of American Identity and the Effects of Latin American Immigration," *Perspectives on Politics* 4 (2) (2006), 279–87; Taeku Lee, "Race, Immigration"; and Segura and Rodrigues, "Comparative Ethnic Politics in the United States."

proval ratings hovering around 25 percent at the time of the election.[88] As noted political scientist Gary Jacobson has written recently, "the extraordinarily high levels of popular dissatisfaction with the direction of the country, disapproval of Bush, and economic anxiety that peaked just before the election no doubt helped overcome whatever reluctance many voters might have felt to risk electing a president so different from the familiar prototype."[89] Or, as put equally well by the noted comedian and actor Chris Rock, President Bush was so bad, "he's made it hard for a white man to run for president. People are saying, 'After Bush, I'm not sure we can take another chance on a white guy.'"

There are, then, multiple directions in which the Obama victory can be cast, providing some openings for a meaningful mandate, but certainly not clear roads. So far, at least, the transformation is more radically cultural than political. Obama's race remains an ever-present point of cultural discussion among blacks and whites. At the same time, in its earliest days, the Obama administration's forays into questions of race have been timid. Obama has not articulated that he sees the election as a mandate about race or inequality. He has focused, quite understandably, on a series of crises that he found in his lap when he first entered office: a severe economic recession accompanied by failing banking and auto industries, the continuation of two wars, and a series of ongoing scandals from the Bush administration in need of cleanup and repair. When race has come up, his administration has continued the policy stance and rhetoric of the Clinton era, with certain twists.

In one of the administration's first opportunities to discuss race, for instance, the Department of Justice argued on behalf of the defendants in the Supreme Court case *Ricci v. DeStefano*. The handling of this case is potentially instructive of the way in which Obama plans to address race because it involves a legal matter that gets at much of the heart of the civil rights agenda—the ability to use the law to create and maintain a racially diverse workplace. In the last few decades, some of the toughest employment integration cases have come in public works positions such as city-level fire and police departments. In *Ricci*, a group of largely white plaintiffs confronted a long era by which employers have attempted to redress inequality by coming up with employment standards that both fit the requirements of the job and enable the best possible degree of racial and gender equity. The Obama administration's role in *Ricci* has certain parallels to the discussion of Al Gore and crime policy. Both examples reflect a Democratic party that has moved far away from a civil rights agenda,

[88] Gary C. Jacobson, "The 2008 Presidential and Congressional Elections: Anti-Bush Referendum and Prospects for the Democratic Majority," *Political Science Quarterly* 124 (Spring 2009): 3.

[89] Ibid., 13.

and far away from playing an adversarial role in national politics on a matter of critical concern to a disproportionate number of African Americans. In the *Ricci* case, it is difficult to legitimate or even understand such policies—whether legal tests that examine disparate outcomes, affirmative action, or targeted subsidies to minority interests—without explaining them in a historical and political context that illuminates their necessity. The Obama legal team, however, followed the Clinton-Gore-Kerry practice of endorsing the civil rights claim without any explanation as to why. The timidity of Obama's lawyers—their unwillingness to say that this was a case about racial injustice, discrimination, or a legacy of state-sanctioned prejudice—led them to make entirely unconvincing arguments to all involved. Obama's legal team argued quite disingenuously that race was not the issue in the hiring practices; they argued that any group, regardless of race, that was denied equity would have the same right to redress as the black firefighters. But such logic made no sense to anyone and fell flat on its face.

Second, although both liberal and conservative politicians have relied on their own race and identity as a proxy, or a "home style," without translating this form of "descriptive representation" into substantive policy agendas, recent years have seen such a strategy used more and more frequently, with the Obama administration putting it into hyperdrive. One of the more popular and successful strategies of the Republicans in the last couple of decades has been to rely on individuals who are marked as racial minorities to promote conservatism. Specifically, political leaders utilize nonwhite faces as political candidates to gain support from both minority and liberal-to-moderate white voters. From Clarence Thomas's nomination to the Supreme Court in 1991 to Michael Steele as leader of their party, Republicans have consistently had success both mobilizing racial moderates in their own party and demobilizing liberal opposition to conservative candidates by utilizing descriptive forms of representation—claiming that a person's race or ethnicity inherently makes them sympathetic and representative of those in America who look like them.[90] Obama has invoked this form of instrumental politics as well, using his race and his life story descriptively to convince voters—black, white, Latino, Arab, Asian, gay and lesbian—of his sympathies for racial equality without having to actually say or do much of anything of substance. Of course, this is a historic moment in that Obama has at least a limited ability to make his own choices as to how he is perceived. But at the same time, it suggests a potential "new"[91] way in which substantive

[90] See Philpot, *Race, Republicans*.

[91] Recognizing, of course, that white politicians have invoked this strategy many times throughout American history, whether involving African Americans, whites, or ethnic, religious, or gendered minorities.

representation can be denied while retaining enthusiastic support. In speech after speech, Obama begins by telling his audience that he can be trusted because he comes from the same roots as they do and thus understands their concerns. In Philadelphia, he could not disown either his African American heritage or his racist white grandmother. He told his audience in Selma, "Don't tell me that I'm not coming home"; in Cairo, that he shares Muslim ancestry; at the Democratic Convention in 2004, that he shared the experience of race—white and black—and immigration. This is Obama's brilliance. He is hardly the first to do this, but he is quite certainly one of the best. He is, as David Remnick has written, able to unite because he is truly one of so many and is able to articulate such a message to seemingly all. At the same time, in almost all of these speeches, he follows up his language with a critical message that the group must take personal responsibility for its actions. A standard part of Obama's message—one that is consistently shared by his attorney general, Eric Holder—is that the civil rights modern era is no longer about passing new laws, but about changing oneself and one's community.

CONCLUSION

In May 2009 Frank Rich, the popular columnist for the *New York Times*, urged President Obama to be a hero on gay rights—to follow in the footsteps of Lyndon Johnson and pass dramatic and landmark legislation on par with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that would make same-sex marriage legal across the nation. Rich was responding to the unwillingness of the Obama administration to get involved in the debate over gay marriage, in the wake of a number of states either passing pro–gay marriage laws or having their state courts rule to such effect. Obama has angered gay and lesbian organizations from the first day of his presidency, when he asked Rick Warren, who is strongly anti–gay rights, to give the inaugural invocation. Rachel Maddow of MSNBC responded, "If they did that on purpose, if they wanted to have a Sista Souljah moment by throwing the gays under the bus, that's the way you do it." He has further angered them by remaining equivocal on same-sex marriage despite a great deal of activity on the issue across the nation, and by continuing military personnel policies of dismissing openly gay officers.

No group has been faced more clearly with the dynamic of electoral capture in the Obama administration than gays and lesbians. Advocacy of gay rights, and particularly same-sex marriage, had been met with a strong political backlash across the nation, one that led to numerous states attempting to pass laws that denied gay rights in the realm of marriage, adoption, employment, and protection against hate crimes and

other forms of discrimination. Leading Democrats attributed this back-lash to their close defeat in 2004, in which the electoral outcome of states such as Ohio may have rested on the turnout of voters who were moti-vated by anti-gay ballot measures. In 2008, the excitement felt by gay rights advocates over Obama's election—during the campaign he sup-ported same-sex civil unions and a repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act—was dampened by California voters' passing of Proposition 8, which overturned a state court decision legalizing same-sex marriage. When polls suggested that African American and Latino voters had been two of the critical groups in the proposition's passage, national Demo-crats found themselves with a new political issue that potentially cut be-tween coalition members, pitting captured groups against each other and diminishing the policy opportunities for both.

The original point of this book was not to claim that Democrats or Republicans are not doing enough on behalf of African Americans or gay Americans or any other group, but to argue that there is a historical-in-stitutional dynamic that quietly, and yet quite consistently, leads parties to deny representation to groups who are electorally captured. Gay and lesbian voters are currently witnessing firsthand how the party system institutionally creates barriers to political change at the national level. These institutional dynamics, furthermore, are not neutral responses to national public opinion—they were created in specific historical moments to neutralize divisiveness and maintain the status quo. And though cre-ated in a specific political context, both the dominant political parties and the party system have continued to remold and reconstruct understand-ings of race, gender, and sexuality that reflect the institutional structure. What Frank Rich misses in urging Obama to be like Johnson is that John-son, like other politicians who act boldly, was not acting absent an insur-gent movement that laid the groundwork, political pressure, and public mobilization to push the institutional apparatus to a point where such change was politically possible. Barack Obama's policy response so far to both gay rights and civil rights reminds us of how strategic politicians, even the most charismatic and visionary of them, are bound by institu-tions and incentives, and why external forces are consistently necessary to induce such politicians to act boldly.

But Obama's words and his election victory also remind us of the pos-sibilities inherent for individuals who challenge these institutions to suc-ceed in moving the institutions in new directions. Institutions may have rational calculi, and they follow a certain timeless structural logic that legitimates some strategies over others. Particularly when party actors themselves are not stridently opposed to the forms of conventional wis-dom that come from structural incentives, we will see these actors acting conservatively, reinforcing timeless structures, not challenging them. But

the structural logic of party institutions need not be reified. Within the conventional wisdom, there is much room for critical engagement and challenges to strategy. As I have tried to show throughout this book, parties are both the creation of a set of institutional incentives and historical particularities that lead to moments of potential change and potential reification of the existing structures and hierarchies. Political parties are not unified and coherent, nor are voting blocs, and as such, the mechanics of the whole process can be greatly responsive to dynamic leadership, especially when leaders act with the aid of organized and mobilized populations. Barack Obama won because he ignored much of the conventional wisdom and rewrote at least some of it with his actions. But the most lasting impact of President Obama for party politics and representation may be that he engaged and excited so many Americans with his articulation of grandiose aspirations. Whether he abides by his campaign pronouncements of change, or whether he ends up a more conventional political actor, his articulate aspirations have set in motion a generation of people who have believed his words and will eventually demand more than eloquent rhetoric in response.