

RACE
AND THE
OBAMA
PHENOMENON

The Vision of a More Perfect Multiracial Union

EDITED BY
G. Reginald Daniel and Hettie V. Williams

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PREFACE

THE CONCEPT OF A MORE PERFECT UNION IS A CONSTANT THEME IN THE political rhetoric of Barack Obama. This is evident from his now historic race speech to his second victory speech delivered on November 7, 2012. "Tonight, more than 200 years after a former colony won the right to determine its own destiny, the task of perfecting our union moves forward," stated the forty-fourth president of the United States upon securing a second term in office following a hard fought political contest. Obama of course borrows this rhetoric from the founding documents of the United States as illustrated in the U.S. Constitution and in Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," delivered in 1863. In this context, the term "multiraciality" has a dual significance. It is reflected in the trope of "a more perfect union" that many commentators have argued is directly connected to questions of Obama's mixed-race background as well as his views about the possibility of cross-racial coalition politics and individual transcendence despite race: "The idea that if you're willing to work hard, it doesn't matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you look like . . . whether you're black or white or Hispanic or Asian or Native American," he states in his November 2012 acceptance speech. How naive or realistic is Obama's vision of a more perfect American union that brings together people across racial, class, and political lines? How can this vision of a more inclusive America be actualized in a society that remains racist at its core.

Race and the Obama Phenomenon: The Vision of a More Perfect Multiracial Union examines Obama's administration during the intervening years, while engaging the voices of some of the most preeminent race scholars writing on the topic. The previously published essays were selected for their stellar analyses in helping elucidate some critical aspect of the central theme of the book—"a more perfect union." Individually, they stand out among the myriad publications on the Obama phenomenon and will remain relevant to any future discussions; combined into an anthology their critical

resonance is augmented. We sought to enhance the volume by also soliciting new original essays from race/gender scholars via a call for papers, to which we received many responses.

Although several chapters in the volume discuss the Obama administration as well as aspects of the 2012 election, many chapters cover material specifically related to the 2008 election. We do not believe the value of the book depends, however, on Obama's administration or the outcome of the 2012 election or on any election at all. In fact, the individual contributions in *Race and the Obama Phenomenon*, as well as the edited volume as a single scholarly contribution, will last beyond the "Obama phenomenon." Indeed, 2008 brought to light many issues that have been with us for a very long time and that this volume will help us understand in the future.

The scholars in *Race and the Obama Phenomenon* interrogate the connection between race, politics, gender, and the Obama phenomenon from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Some of the contributors—such as G. Reginald Daniel and David A. Hollinger—find Obama's vision of a more perfect union a viable plausibility while others—such as David Roediger, Paul Street, and Karanja Keita Carroll—are less sanguine about its viability when contemplating race and the Obama phenomenon. In fact, the essays in this collection are seemingly at odds over the meaning of the Obama phenomenon altogether. It was our intention to bring together competing perspectives on race and the Obama phenomenon given the historic significance of Obama's election and re-election. This dialogue surrounding the meaning of the Obama presidency in U.S. history and society remains ongoing and is currently without consensus. Further, we recognize that Obama's political ascendance and presidency in part represents the larger ethno-racial demographic changes that have taken place in U.S. society in the post-World War II era.

It is important to first situate the Obama phenomenon within the framework of the ever-changing ethno-racial composition of the United States. The cross-racial coalition forged by Obama to twice secure the office of the presidency is only understood through an understanding of what *Time* magazine labeled in 1993 as "the changing face of America." In many respects, the election of the first self-identified African American (with a mixed-race ancestry) to the office of president is reflective of the changing social geography of the U.S. In 1952, the U.S. Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Act, which basically stated that anyone entering the U.S. as an immigrant could apply for citizenship. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Immigration and Nationality Act (or Hart-Celler

Act), which abolished national quotas and allowed naturalized citizens to send for relatives. Census data taken between 1965 and 2005 indicate that of the 40 million foreign-born people living in the United States, the majority came from non-Western societies such as China, the Philippines, India, Vietnam, and Mexico.

The United States is rapidly becoming a nonwhite nation as immigrants from the West Indies, Latin America, Asia, and various countries in Africa have come to populate the society. According to Pew Research polls, 82 percent of the U.S. population increase by 2050 will come from immigrants arriving after 2005 from non-Western (nonwhite) nations and their descendants. Correspondingly, the election of Obama has global implications. People of color from around the world erupted in jubilation, from California to Kenya, upon the election of the first black president in U.S. history.

Obama's mixed-race lineage (he is the son of an African immigrant, who came to the United States in the 1950s, and a white mother from Kansas) represents "the changing face of America." In 2000, the U.S. Census for the first time allowed individuals to select more than one race; the mixed-race population, based on those who opted to select "more than one" race, was calculated at roughly seven million. Interracial marriages have increased by 20 percent since 2000 to compose roughly 8 percent of the total marriages in the United States, while the most recent census (2010) indicated that the mixed-race population has increased to more than nine million. This is roughly a 32 percent gain up from the 2000 number of seven million.

The 2010 census reflects some profound demographic changes in the United States as specifically related to mixed-race Americans. The majority of those who self-identify as mixed-race are Millennials under thirty. This has prompted some pundits to refer to the year 2000 as the beginning of a mixed-race millennium. In 2010, 1.6 million people in the United States checked both black and white on their census forms, a figure 134 percent higher than a decade earlier. The largest groups of mixed-race Americans include the categories of white-black, white-some other race (typically "Hispanic"), white-Asian, white-Native Hawaiian, and white-Native American. The latest data collected by the census bureau also indicate that the majority of children younger than age one in the United States are members of diverse population groups. Some 50.4 percent of the U.S. population under age one, as of July 1, 2011, are members of ethnically diverse populations; this is up from the 49.5 percent estimate revealed in 2010. There are currently 114 million members of diverse populations in the U.S., reflecting 36.6 percent of the U.S. population.

The census data clearly reflect a United States that has become rapidly more diverse in the last few decades. This has political implications. There are five states that have significant percentages of "majority-minority" populations, including Hawai'i (77.1 percent), California (60.3 percent), New Mexico (59.8 percent), and Texas (55.2 percent). This pattern is also evident in Washington, D.C. (64.7 percent). By July 2011, 348 of the nation's 3,143 counties were listed as majority-minority. The largest ethnically diverse county in the nation is Los Angeles County. The U.S. remains the most ethnically diverse nation in the world. The abolition of anti-miscegenation laws and the increase in interracial marriages has contributed greatly to the multi-racial mosaic that is the United States. The society has become increasingly multicultural with the rise in the numbers of diverse populations that reside in the nation, while at the same time becoming increasingly multiracial as individuals have begun to marry across racial boundaries. African Americans constitute 43.9 million (up 1.6 percent since 2010). Latinas/os are the most rapidly expanding "minority" group at 52 million (this population has increased by 3.1 percent since 2010). Asian Americans are the second fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S. at 18.2 million (growing by 3.0 percent since 2010). The cross-racial and cross-generational coalition of voters who secured for Obama a victory in two presidential elections included primarily Latinas/os, African Americans, Jewish Americans, women, and college-age Millennials, some of whom are of the offspring of interracial marriages.

We recognize that the Obama phenomenon is a part of the larger ethno-racial transformation of U.S. society, while at the same time understanding that racism persists in a union not yet made perfect. In his bid for re-election, most national statistics indicate that Obama's opponent Mitt Romney secured 72 percent of the white vote while Obama maintained support from roughly 38 percent of the white vote. These numbers suggest an imperfect union that remains divided by race.

The vitriolic response by some European Americans to the election of an African American president has been evident since the 2008 election. In fact, the election of the first black to the nation's highest office and the world's most powerful nation presents a challenge to both local and global hierarchies of white supremacy. This, in turn, has engendered a sea of white anxiety and, in some cases, white rage, whether implicitly or explicitly expressed in racial terms. The "birthers" (those who deny that Barack Obama was born in the United States) and the "deathers" (those who claim that Obama is a closet socialist seeking to erect death panels via healthcare reform) represent one dimension of the white racial hysteria that has swept

the United State in this "age of Obama." This rage is endemic of the larger lack of civility in many sectors of U.S. society, including the political arena.

The rage we speak of reached deadly proportions on January 8, 2011, when gunman Jared Lee Loughner shot twenty people, killing six, in front of a Safeway supermarket in Casas Adobes, Arizona, during a "Congress on Your Corner" event. One of those wounded was Democratic congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot in the head. Federal judge John Roll and a young member of the Giffords's staff were both killed. The Southern Poverty Law center is one of the only civil rights advocacy groups that have recognized a link between Loughner's ranting and the white supremacist group "American Renaissance." Peter King, Republican congressman from New York, ushered in a new era of McCarthyism with his March 2011 hearings on the Islamic community and their perceived lack of cooperation with authorities in the war on terror or the failed condemnation of Islamic extremists. Yet while his committee recounted heart-wrenching stories of victims of Islamic terrorism, King reportedly previously supported the violent actions of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland in the early 1990s. This Islamophobia is yet another dynamic of the white racial anxiety that is pervasive in the post-9/11 world.

In many respects, the old racism is the new racism, as many European Americans have simply refused to accept the legitimacy of our nation's first black president. This may indicate that the depictions of Barack Obama as a monkey in the *New York Post* and beyond, as well as pimp or gangster, coupled with denunciations of his U.S. citizenship and Christian faith, are manifestations of a growing white racial anxiety and resentment as buttressed by the nation's changing social geography. In Spring Lake, New Jersey, a few weeks before the November 2012 election, a shop owner set up a display that included a poster of the president represented as a witch doctor with a bone through his nose. Clint Eastwood in his speech delivered at the 2012 Republican National Convention, used an empty chair as a prop to represent the president as an absent leader. His address prompted some white extremists around the country to lynch chairs from trees in their front yards. There have been several incidents since the first election in 2008 of people lynching a replica of the president on their front lawns. The imagery of lynching as a symbol is a powerful reminder of the violent regime of white supremacy that once controlled the nation in the Jim Crow era.

The structural inequalities that persist in the United States, particularly in regards to the black experience, have not dissipated with the Obama presidency. The African American high school dropout rate is nearly twice

the national average, as is the black unemployment rate. Black men make up roughly one half of the 2.3 million men incarcerated in the U.S. prison system. In fact, one could argue that the plight of blacks has worsened economically, particularly in terms of unemployment and the decline in black homeownership coupled with the increase in foreclosures. Clearly, the election of a mixed-race self-identified black man is not enough to alleviate structural inequality. What, then, is the significance of the Obama phenomenon beyond the symbolic? Why does the election of a black president matter if racism persists—if, in fact, it has not worsened—as compounded by profound levels of socioeconomic (or class) inequality? These questions are addressed in our text. The fact that a black man can become president of a nation that has historically been, and continues to be, profoundly racist is worthy of sustained scholarly interrogation.

Accordingly, the volume brings together a host of contributors to contemplate the theme of “race and the Obama phenomenon,” along with issues that intersect with race (e.g., gender, identity, class, and privilege). The disciplines represented in this volume include sociology, history, black studies, political science, communication studies, American studies, psychology, and cultural studies more generally. This collection of analyses is unique in its substance and coverage of a wide range of issues related to race and the election of the first African American president. The sections of the book encompass discussions of multiraciality, black identity, gender, and politics in conjunction with the overarching theme of “race and the Obama phenomenon.” Moreover, this is one of the first anthologies to devote complete sections to both the topics of multiraciality and gender, which should contribute meaningful points to discussions on these subjects as they relate to the Obama phenomenon.

There have been a series of books released between 2009 and 2011 comparable to our volume. Scholars and pundits alike have sought to capture the meaning of “race and the Obama phenomenon” since the 2008 election. Surprisingly, none of the earlier works delved into the multifaceted meanings of Barack Obama’s biracial background. *Obama and the Biracial Factor: The Battle for a New American Majority* (2012), edited by Andrew J. Jolivette, was the first book to explore the role of Obama’s mixed-race background in his path to the presidency. It also offers a broad and penetrating view of the importance of race and multiraciality in the ongoing development of U.S. politics at home and abroad. The initial collection of serious texts on race and Obama began to appear in 2009. Prior to that, a host of scholarly journals, such as the *Black Scholar* and the *Journal of Black Studies*, among

others, devoted entire volumes to the subject of race and Obama since 2004. In 2004, Obama gave a keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention and had thus been a “phenomenon” before he was elected president. Obama, likely one of the more prolific writers who ever occupied the White House, wrote two books before he became president: his memoir *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995) and *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006). The first books published about race, Obama, and the election of 2008 were written by pundits, polemicists, and journalists who followed Senator Obama along the campaign trail.

Gwen Ifill, moderator and managing editor of *Washington Week*, and senior correspondent for *The PBS News Hour*, award-winning journalist Bob Woodward, along with David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker*, produced some of the first books written about race, the 2008 election, and Obama as president. Ifill’s *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama* (2009) is an examination of the African American political structure, race, and the rise of Barack Obama in the context of the gains of the civil rights movement. Woodward’s *Obama’s War* (2010) is an examination of the first eighteen months of the Obama administration and policy decisions made about the war in Afghanistan. Remnick’s *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama* (2010) concentrates less on race and more on Obama’s political career, but it does explore the various racial and geographical crosscurrents in Obama’s life. He argues that Obama’s multiple points of origin and reference—his biracial birth and multicultural upbringing—have made him adaptable to any situation. This explains in part Obama’s signature “cool.” It also imbues him with the skills necessary to build a bridge between racial groups.

The focus of much of the aforementioned journalistic literature on Obama, with the exception of Ifill’s work, has emphasized Obama’s rise to power and his foreign and domestic policy as was also the case with *Newsweek* editor Jonathan Alter’s *The Promise, President Obama, Year One* (2010). John Heilemann and Mark Halperin’s *Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime* (2010), although it focuses primarily on key personalities along the campaign trail of 2008, sparked a “racial” controversy by relating statements made by then-Senate majority leader Harry Reid’s racially insensitive comments regarding Obama. Heilemann and Halperin reported in their book that Reid described Obama as an acceptable candidate because he was a “light skinned” black with no “Negro dialect.”

The emergent scholarly literature has been more comprehensive and critical in terms of discussions of race and Obama. The topic of race and the Obama phenomenon has inspired scholars from across the disciplines, including Michael Eric Dyson, Roy L. Brooks, Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Manning Marable. Tim Wise, polemicist, writer, and antiracist activist, has delivered a scathing critique of race in the age of Obama with his text *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama* (2009). In this discourse, Wise highlights the bold reality of racial inequalities in the United States despite the election of a black president. John Kenneth White's more hopeful *Barack Obama's America: How New Conceptions of Race, Family, and Religion Ended the Reagan Era* (2009) concentrates on the demographic shift that helped create "the Obama phenomenon."

Brooks's *Racial Justice in the Age of Obama* (2009) provides a comprehensive discussion of the major theoretical approaches to civil rights and racial justice while illuminating the structural inequalities that remain in U.S. society despite the Obama election. Brooks also attempts to provide some concrete solutions to the problem of inequality in the Obama era. The text by Clarence E. Walker and Gregory D. Smither, entitled *The Preacher and the Politician: Jeremiah Wright, Barack Obama, and Race in America* (2009), situates Reverend Wright and his conflict with Obama within the larger historical context of the African American religious tradition and the history of racial politics. There has also been a proliferation of surveys and anthologies that are much more substantive and critical than the journalistic literature that emerged between the years 2009 and 2011.

Some key surveys and anthologies have been recently authored by scholars from social scientists to historians in the field of race studies. For example, John Bernard Hill's *The First Black President: Barack Obama, Race, Politics, and the American Dream* (2009) is a survey on race, identity, and the meaning of blackness in the context of the civil rights legacy, while cautioning against the misreading of Obama's significance. Thomas J. Sugrue, noted civil rights historian and sociologist, has written of the intellectual influences that have shaped Obama through the post-civil rights era. *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post Racial America* (2010), by Michael Tesler and David O. Sears, examines the presidential contest of 2008 from an interdisciplinary perspective. More importantly, they incorporate a discussion of gender in their chapter "The Paradox of Gender: Traditionalists Support of Hillary Clinton," thereby further expanding the dialogue on race and Obama into the area of gender studies. The more recent

The Election of Barack Obama: Race and Politics in America (2010), by Jason Porterfield, places the election of Obama into the broad context of the history of slavery, race, and civil rights.

The journalistic, survey, and monographic studies of Obama have been joined by some important anthologies. One of the first notable anthologies written about race and Obama was edited by historian and political scientist Manning Marable and civil rights attorney Kristen Clarke. This volume, entitled *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America's New Leadership* (2009), traces the evolution of black leadership and black politics since the civil rights movement, including essays that specifically interrogate the intersection of race and gender. *The Speech: Race and Barack Obama's A More Perfect Union Speech* (2009), edited by Denean Sharpley-Whiting, includes key chapters on the Obama speech by Bakari Kitwana and William Julius Wilson. Social scientists Matthew Hughey and Gregory S. Parks compiled an edited volume entitled *The Obama's and a (Post) Racial America?* (2011), which examines the unconscious anti-black bias harbored by whites in U.S. society, including commentaries by some noted race scholars. These are but a few of the torrent of scholarly publications on race and the Obama phenomenon. For an extensive list of over 400 publications on Obama see Steven F. Riley's *Mixed Race Studies* website: <http://www.mixedracestudies.org/wordpress/?cat=63>.

Moreover, the relevance of race and Obama as a scholarly subject is further indicated with the notion of an "Obama effect." If the election of the first black president has triggered white anxiety and, in the extreme, white rage, it has also produced an effect—particularly among black Americans who have sought political office in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, as well as in the potentiality of a more positive level of black identity formation among young black men. The Bradley effect in black politics has been seemingly supplanted by the Obama effect given the fact that Obama has been elected more than once to the office of the presidency of the United States. The meanings and parameters of this Obama effect are contemplated in this volume through essays related to racial formation, particularly in terms of black politics and identity formation.

HETTIE V. WILLIAMS

G. REGINALD DANIEL

July 2013

4. IN PURSUIT OF SELF

The Identity of an American President and Cosmopolitanism

HETTIE V. WILLIAMS

What do we call a subject who is both more and less than an individual and stronger and weaker than a free agent? (Hale 1994, 445-71)

BARACK OBAMA PROJECTS AN IDENTITY THAT IS FRAGMENTED AS OPPOSED to an identity that is essentialist or unitary. In nearly every public setting where the issue of his race has been introduced, Obama, although he routinely self-identifies (Avila 2010) as an African American, continuously acknowledges his mixed-race heritage. He rarely fails to mention the gratitude he feels towards his white grandparents for raising him. In his autobiography he states, "I can't even hold up my experience as being somehow representative of the black American experience" (Obama 1995, xvi). Obama makes this statement in the same breath in which he claims to be writing about his life as a "black American" (Obama 1995, xvi). Obama's self-identity, as based on his writings, speeches, and public statements, may be characterized as a type of hybrid fluidity as opposed to the hybrid fixity sometimes expressed in black/white multiracial identity. In other words, hybrid fixity tends to focus on one's multiraciality as the primary vehicle for self-identification and actualization. Obama's composite identity includes a mixed-race dimension as merely one component of a more encompassing hybridity, which also embraces his subjectivity as local (African American) and transnational (world citizen). Obama's hybrid fluidity is deployed in his autobiographical writings.

The mutable subjectivities, often illustrated in ethnic autobiographies, are evidenced in Obama's two books. Michael M. J. Fischer contends that ethnic autobiography helps us to better understand contemporary society,

because in these autobiographies there is an illustration of a multifaceted or pluralist concept of the self that serves as a basis for a "wider social ethos of pluralism" (Fischer 1986, 194–233). This chapter presents an understanding of Obama's autobiography as a specific genre of writing often used by members of distinct ethnic groups to express the inexpressible aspects of self-identity through memoir and trauma narrative. In these narratives, the autobiography functions as a mechanism through which ethno-racial subjectivity is materialized, negotiated, and sometimes reformed. Obama's *Dreams from My Father* as a form of ethnic self-life-writing is also a *bildungsroman* (coming of age story) that details his passage into blackness. The book is also analyzed in this chapter as a form of ethnic autobiography that helps to support the notion of Obama's hybrid-fluid sense of self-awareness.

Barack Obama consistently negotiates a range of racial identity positionings that are at times reflective of the shifting understanding of race in contemporary America.¹ Obama has learned to negotiate the fluid contours of self-identity having been born and raised outside of African American culture as expressed in his "many voices." British-Jamaican novelist Zadie Smith, author of *White Teeth* (2000) and *On Beauty* (2005), in her analysis of *Dreams from My Father* describes Obama as a "many-voiced man."

The tale he tells is all about addition. His is the story of a genuinely many-voiced man. If it has a moral it is that each man must be true to his selves, plural. (Z. Smith 2009)

Americans have been forced to rethink race, blackness, and multiraciality in significant ways (DaCosta 2009, 4–5) since November 4, 2008. Smith's assessment of Obama's ethnic autobiographical writing, *Dreams*, helps to demonstrate the notion of Obama as having a fluid sense of self-awareness or "selves." This hybrid fluidity is best expressed in the Obama writings and sometimes in his everyday race talk; and is reflective of what Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin referred to as "double voice."

This chapter examines Barack Obama's journey to self-identity as a racialized subject by incorporating sociological, cultural, and feminist theory with variant forms of philosophical cosmopolitanism. The core argument of this chapter is twofold in that I am asserting the notion of (1) *other black* as contingent upon and in opposition to essentialist notions of blackness, and the phrase (2) *hybrid fluidity* that incorporates multiple subjectivities such as multiraciality and cosmopolitanism. The term "other black" is borrowed from cultural studies theorist Shirley Ann Tate to illustrate the idea

that Obama selects the identity category of black, and represents himself as a black man, while speaking back to blackness. The concept of *hybrid fluidity* includes multiracial identity and variant trajectories of cosmopolitanism. Taken together, these terms help to define Obama's composite sense of self-awareness as: *other black cosmopolitan*. In order to capture Obama's complex self-identity, a discussion of race and the multiracial movement, hybrid identities, linguistic subjectivity, and cosmopolitanism are necessary.

The chapter is divided roughly into six major sections. The first part is an examination of the concept of "other black" as applied to Obama's self-identity, followed by a discussion of race and the multiracial movement in section two. Obama's biography is highlighted in section three while section four concerns race, hybridity, and blackness. Obama as linguistic subject and cosmopolitan are detailed in sections five and six respectively.

OBAMA AND THE CONCEPT OF "OTHER BLACK"

Obama is best described as an "other black"³ cosmopolitan. He may be considered a self-identified black man with a complex sense of self-awareness. This complex sense of self-awareness incorporates identities that go beyond blackness. In her book *Black Skins, Black Masks: Hybridity, Dialogism, Performativity* (2005), British cultural studies scholar Shirley Ann Tate utilizes the phrase "other black" to examine the lives of black/white biracial women in contemporary Britain. Applying the concept of "other black," Tate integrates the theories of Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Homi Bhabha, among others, to advance her theory of the "hybridity of the everyday." Tate utilizes this concept to examine the daily speech patterns of black biracial women "who speak back" to blackness as illustrated in their everyday conversations about race.

Similarly, Obama's sense of self is shaped by his early social experiences, developed outside of the African American community, having been brought up by his white maternal grandparents, and Asian stepfather, along with his mother, in Hawai'i and Indonesia. He has constructed a composite self out of his mixed-race background and his transnational experiences. Obama's self-perception is also in part fashioned in reaction to how he has been/is sometimes perceived by those outside of his immediate family: as a black man and a member of the black community. Yet he occasionally speaks back to blackness.

Obama does not embrace a hybrid self that crystallizes in a multiracial identity nor does his sense of self include identification with multiracial individuals as a part of his broad subjectivity (that is to say hybrid or multiracial fixity is not the locus of his core identity). Rather, as an “other black cosmopolitan” he embraces a broader and more dynamic hybrid sense of self-awareness. He acknowledges his multiracial background but embraces an identity that encompasses his transnational experiences while at the same time being grounded in the African diasporic experience through a visceral connection with the struggles of African Americans. Obama’s “other” blackness challenges essentialist assumptions about blackness, race, and multiraciality by speaking back to blackness but not against blackness as primarily illustrated in his autobiographical narrative *Dreams*. Political scientists Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Melanye Price note that Obama’s ability to articulate the self as “occupying liminal spaces” was integral to his success on the campaign trail (Sinclair-Chapman and Price 2008, 739–45).

Moreover, Obama made an explicit connection to questions of his multiraciality in the statement “A lot of shelter dogs are mutts like me” (Kornreich 2008), which he made as president-elect during his first official news conference November 7, 2008. However clumsily articulated, Obama found a way to acknowledge his mixed-race heritage. He does this in his very first official performance as the forty-fourth president of the United States of America. Obama has been continuously referred to as “no drama Obama” by his campaign team. Thus, this statement was not necessarily a “clumsy” error on the part of a man who has come to be known as a more than elegant speaker. A brief overview of Obama’s biography may help provide some insight into this statement.

Obama’s mother, Stanley “Ann” Dunham, is of European American descent, a white woman originally from Wichita, Kansas. He was raised by both his mother and maternal grandparents in Indonesia and Hawai’i. He has siblings that would presumably self-identity as black-African and a sister from his mother’s second marriage, to an Indonesian man, who could/would easily self-identify as Asian (her husband is Chinese Canadian) but defines herself as “hybrid.” In an interview with Deborah Solomon, Obama’s sister Maya Soetoro-Ng was asked about her brother’s race and responded in such a way:

Solomon: Do you think of your brother as black?

Soetoro-Ng: Yes, because that is how he has named himself. Each of us has a right to name ourselves as we will.

Solomon: Do you think of yourself as white?

Soetoro-Ng: No. I'm half white, half Asian. I think of myself as hybrid. People usually think I'm Latina when they meet me. That's what made me learn Spanish. (Solomon 2008)

Obama speaks quite evocatively of the brief union between his "white" American mother and his "black" African father, originally from Kenya, in *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995).

The inheritance that Obama speaks of is that of a man with a mixed-race ancestry or "divided inheritance" of race bequeathed to him by both his white American mother and black African father. It is in essence the search for a way to name himself "a race." Obama found a way to "name himself" black, as his sister states, without completely relinquishing his mixed-race background. Obama explains in his memoirs how at the end of his parent's marriage he was left in the space in-between: "Even as that spell was broken and the worlds that they thought they'd left behind reclaimed each of them, I occupied the place where their dreams had been" (Obama 1995, 27). The narrative seems largely to be a story of maturation into a black identity but "the place where their dreams had been" is the sanctuary of the hybrid that struggles for actualization through the racial inheritance of his mother and father.

Barack Obama therefore embraces his blackness while at the same time consistently celebrating his multiracial background. David A. Hollinger has commented on how visible Obama's whiteness is and how Obama has made Americans aware of multiraciality:

Press accounts of Obama's life, as well as Obama's own autobiographical writings, render Obama's whiteness hard to miss. No other figure, not even Tiger Woods, has done as much as Obama to make Americans of every education level and social surrounding aware of color-mixing in general. (Hollinger 2008, 1033-37)

Obama's sense of self as understood in this examination is both fluid and contingent upon blackness while rejecting notions of essentialist hybridity (or hybrid fixity)¹ reflected in the "popular" multiracial movement. His counter to this is a hybrid fluidity that is illustrated in his autobiography, speeches, public statements, and other writings, and as a result of his lived experience.

Obama's multilayered identity is an intricate interweaving of the particular and the universal. Obama's cosmopolitanism combines cultural, political,

and visceral trajectories grounded in an identity shaped by his transnational experiences and mixed-race background. He also has a sense of black cosmopolitanism or black collective subjectivity that transcends national and geographical specificity. He rejects what I call essentialist hybridity that he associates with the multiracial movement in general. Cultural and visceral cosmopolitanism (Nava 2007, 3–5) are more thoroughly examined in section six while Obama's connection to his multiracial ancestry is further developed in the next section.

RACE AND THE MULTIRACIAL MOVEMENT

The landmark text by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s* (1986), introduced a contemporary concept of racial formation theory. This theory asserts that race is a multidimensional process of competing race projects, as produced in social relations, shaped by sociopolitical power structures as well as subjective phenomenon articulated in racial identities shaped by perceptions about the body (phenotype), and cultural practices. The concept of "race" today has little to do with biology given the findings of social scientists, historians, and geneticists altogether. The race concept was initially manufactured to justify the enslavement of Africans and regulate black bodies in servitude. Historically, race has been an unstable concept. Most scholars have recognized that race continues to operate at the social level in U.S. society but not as a concrete biological reality.

There remains no consensus among the biological sciences as to what race actually is or how many races exist if human biology is to be considered in discussions about race. The genetic characteristics present in one population are not necessarily absent in another. The notion that race (or mixed race) can be simply understood as ancestry is problematical given the most recent research in human genetics. The idea of mixed race as ancestry may be explained away quite succinctly as Pilar Ossorio and Troy Duster assert:

People whose skin color is perceived as white can have genetic profiles indicating that 80% of their recent ancestry is West African, and people whose skin color is perceived as black can have genetic profiles indicative of predominantly European ancestry. A person with substantial, recent African ancestry may pass as White and may have medically and psychologically consequential social advantages of whiteness. On the

other hand, a person may pass as White but possess medically relevant alleles more commonly associated with Blacks or with African ancestry. (Ossorio and Duster 2005, 116–18)

Ancestry fails to serve as a firm moniker for race or “mixed race,” from one generation to the next, despite arguments to the contrary made by mixed-race studies theorists.

The case of the South African woman Sandra Laing, a woman born in 1955 with a markedly African phenotype of two white parents, was continuously reclassified as first white then as a person of color despite the circumstances of her “white” birth and European “ancestry.” Her white parents fought to have her reclassified as white (her father attesting to his paternity in court) and there appeared no recent evidence of known African ancestry in her “white” parent’s lineage. Scientists at the time argued the “genetic throwback” theory insisting that Laing’s physical features were a result of an unknown “African” ancestor’s DNA, having lain dormant for generations, manifested in Sandra, thereby explaining the difference between nearly pure white parents with an “African” child.⁴ Laing eventually selected to become reclassified as a person of color upon her romantic association and subsequent marriage to a man of African descent.

Troy Duster has further argued that understanding race involves a complex interplay of social and biological realities as coupled with ideology and myths about race as word and idea:

Rather, when race is used as a stratifying practice (which can be apprehended empirically and systematically), there is often a reciprocal interplay of biological outcomes that makes it impossible to disentangle the biological from the social. (Duster 2003, 259–62)

Duster notes that the empirical biological data is not uniformly consistent with the social, ideological, or cultural assumptions about race such as with claims about ancestry.

Race operates at the social level as based on perceptions about human bodies. Race and racism operated in the life of Barack Obama as a man of mixed-race⁵ ancestry with a particular phenotype who could not pass for white. He articulates this in his autobiography when he describes his life as a child not yet realizing, “I needed a race” (Obama 1995, 27). But as Ormi and Winant have argued, racial projects have appeared throughout the modern history of humankind. As a result of these “projects,” race, operating at both

the micro level of individual social experiences, and at the macro level in racial classification systems, has become reconfigured but has not disappeared.

The 1960s activism of African Americans, coupled with changes in U.S. immigration laws, and the global migration of nonwhites into the United States, helped to produce a new "racial project" as predicated on a ternary racial order that acknowledges white, black, and other mono-racial identities as well as multiracial identities. G. Reginald Daniel, in his book *More Than Black*, contends that the emergence of the multiracial identity movement after 1967 can be understood as "a natural outgrowth" of the civil rights activism of the 1960s and is defined by individuals "who resist the one-drop rule and navigate the uncharted waters of multiracial identity" (Daniel 2002, 124). The multiracial movement as advancing a new racial project should be briefly examined here before we can discuss how, and later why, Obama incorporates his multiracial background into his complex sense of self that rests upon a foundation of blackness.

The multiracial movement is a broad-based scholarly, social, and cultural movement that includes a host of support groups, informational, and educational agencies. It engages both the scholars who have advanced mixed-race studies, the fastest growing subfield within ethnic studies, in the academy and dozens of groups such as I-Pride (Interracial/Intercultural Pride), founded in Berkeley, California, in 1979; the Biracial Family Network (BFN), established in 1980 Chicago; the Interracial Family Alliance (IFA) of Houston; the Multiracial Americans of Southern California in Los Angeles (MASC); and Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally). The Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA) is a nationwide multiracial/ethnic organization, based on existing local groups, that was developed in 1988 and is now centered in California.

Matt Kelley, a nineteen-year-old college freshman at Wellesley University in Connecticut, created MAVIN magazine out of his college dorm room in 1999. The MAVIN Foundation, as a 501(c) 3 nonprofit group, became one of the most important associations dedicated to the support of projects and the dissemination of information related to the mixed-race experience. The first major scholarly anthologies dedicated to the study of the mixed-race experience were Maria P. P. Root's *Racially Mixed People in America* (1992), which was followed by *The Multiracial Experience* (1996). These anthologies included essays by some of the foundational scholars associated with the mixed-race studies movement in academia.

The multiracial movement is not monolithic. There have also been proliferations of online journals, blogs, and forums such as "Interracial Voice"

and "Mixed Chics" that exist alongside the aforementioned associations. There are an increasing number of scholarly texts by those who seek to advance knowledge about the mixed-race experience. One of the major goals sought by advocacy groups such as the AMEA and later Project RACE was to make it possible to collect data on multiracial identified individuals on official forms such as the U.S. census. In 2000, the U.S. Census did indeed allow for "a mark more than one" option. This was a significant victory for the multiracial movement in general. Yet, in his 2010 U.S. census form, Obama did not select "more than one" but instead chose the category Black/Negro/African American.

The advocates of a multiracial identity category tend to emphasize ancestry, experience, demographics, and personal expression to determine their identity that hinges upon a *hybrid fixity* (that is, the condition of being of two or more races as the axis of identity). Scholars in support of the multiracial identity label have helped to develop a definition of multiracial identity as determined by ancestry. This definition includes the labeling of "first generation" (one parent who is socially designated as black and one parent who is socially designated as white) and "multigenerational" (those with parents or generations of ancestors with multiracial backgrounds, who have resisted identifying only with the African American community) as multiracial (Daniel 2002, 6-7).

Challengers to the multiracial identity project label these scholars "pro-identity scholars" (Spencer 2006, 91-93). Indeed, the emphasis by multiracial advocacy groups, and some scholars, on personal experience and hybrid "fixity" through ancestry (by drawing lines of delineation that create a distinct multiracial category out of ancestry and social experience) prompted Obama ultimately to reject MAVIN's overtures in such a way when meeting with the Generation Mix college students in his senate offices April 25, 2005:

Well, you know, I don't think that you can consider the issue of mixed race outside of the issue of race. And I do think that racial relations have improved somewhat, and I think to the extent that people of mixed race can be part of those larger movements and those larger concerns then I think that they serve as a useful bridge between cultures . . . What I am always cautious about is persons of mixed race focusing so narrowly on their own unique experiences that they are detached from larger struggles, and I think it's important to try to avoid that sense of exclusivity, and feeling that you're special in some way . . . ultimately the same challenges that all of you face a lot of young people face.⁶

Obama rejects the "exclusivity" of the multiracial category as predicated upon ancestry and experience. This does not mean that he has not found a way to incorporate his own multiracial ancestry into his self-presentation. His more composite sense of self-awareness, as rooted in blackness, is made abundantly clear in his narrative writings. It has been noted by mixed-race studies scholars that individuals of mixed-race ancestry, such as Barack Obama, often, in specific situations, embrace a range of identity formations.

Sociologists David Brunnsma and Kerry Ann Rockquemore have demonstrated, in their comprehensive cross-regional studies of black/white biracials in the United States, that identity formation for these individuals is customarily multidimensional. That is, black/white biracial identity has a tendency towards the interactional and situational as shaped by social perceptions, personal choice, and cultural assumptions. Brunnsma has drawn a distinction between the public categories and private identities of black/white multiracials stating that "black/white biracials understand themselves in a multitude of ways that are rooted in their private and social worlds" (Brunnsma 2006, 555-76).

Furthermore, Rockquemore contends that black/white biracial individual self-understanding contains a range of identity categories such as singular (monoracial), border (biracial), protean (sometimes black, white, or biracial) and transcendent (no single race identified) (Rockquemore and Brunnsma 2002, 335-56). Obama's core identity is thus closest to a combined singular/border (that is at times strategically transcendent) identity as coupled with notions of cosmopolitanism. He certainly does not claim a distinct multiracial or biracial identity that supersedes his blackness. Indeed, Obama has routinely claimed to be black and writes a memoir clearly detailing his passage into a "functional" blackness despite his multiracial experience.

Consequently, the desire of many individuals associated with the multiracial movement to claim Obama as their own is at best highly speculative. This of course does not diminish the choice made by those few individuals who do indeed publically and privately embrace a multiracial identity. However, the notion that Obama is "at his core" multiracial is a gross misreading of *Dreams from My Father*. The denial of Obama's self-affirmation of blackness (in private or otherwise) seems dangerously close to white supremacist and anti-black sentiments regarding African Americans more generally. This attempt to superimpose *hybrid fixity* upon Obama tends to privilege mixed-race identity and ultimately whiteness.

Scholars and activists associated with the multiracial (identity) movement, that is, those that advance the notion of a distinct multiracial category, tend to promote a *hybrid fixity* that hinges upon bloodlines (ancestry) and personal experience. The construction of race as a stratifying practice that defines one as either "multiracial" or "monoracial" is a new race project that is both exclusionary and self-indulgent as is the nature of identity movements. Human ancestry is shared. Indeed, if ancestry overlaps with genetic inheritance (and it does), and mixed-race identity is to be understood as determined by ancestry, "mixed race" constitutes the human community as a whole. Obama's deployment of self-identity is far more progressive than what has been promulgated by the multiracial movement in that he deploys a self-awareness that is an ongoing negotiation between multiple "I" positions that have no firm axis or point of "fixity."

The only evidence we have of Obama's sense of racial self-identity is to be found in his memoirs, his political treatise, and everyday race talk. *Dreams from My Father* is the most comprehensive discussion yet delivered by Obama concerning his personal notions of racial self-identity. To label Obama at his core biracial or mixed race is to call into question the man's own words as having consistently defined himself as a black man with a mixed-race heritage or more composite sense of self-awareness (where the mixed-race component is largely muted by choice). Indeed, Obama does speak of a mixed-race experience in *Dreams* through the metaphor of "two-worlds" but it is an experience that ultimately reinforces his blackness, not a *mixed identity* private or otherwise. Obama is clearly far too self-assured an individual to lurk around in private hiding his true "self" from the world despite the hegemony of the one-drop rule.

In one instance in *Dreams*, upon telling his sister Auma the story of a romantic relationship he had with a white woman, he affirms that to continue his involvement with a white woman was to agree to live in her world stating, "I knew that if we stayed together I'd eventually live in hers. After all, I'd been doing it most of my life. Between the two of us, I was the one who knew how to live as an outsider." If indeed Obama tells us of his "mixed-race experience" in *Dreams*, he also tells us of living the life of an *outsider* within that experience. Thus, what resonates with him most upon his trip to Africa and his personal connections with African Americans is the struggle of black people and blackness despite having lived outside of African American culture.

This attempt to impose a multiracial identity upon Obama hinges upon a hybrid fixity that seeks to delineate the monoracial from the multiracial

as predicated upon a "feeling of in-between" and blood lines. To foist upon Obama a private multiracial identity is a form of sophistry that seeks to make of Obama a type of multiracial mascot for a new race project. The film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (based on the Jack Finney novel *The Body Snatchers*) comes to mind: imposter simulacrum grown from giant plant-like pods invade suburbia masquerading as the people we know. Obama has the typical experience of a mixed-race person but has repeatedly chosen to self-identify as a black man and has consistently called himself black. To believe that he is at his core, or in private, a mixed-race-identified person is tantamount to believing that he is a type of imposter black man or black simulacrum who is hiding his mixed-race identity only to be revealed in private.

If we are to believe the notion that Obama has been forced to capitulate to the one-drop rule that defines anyone as black with one drop of black blood, we must also take into account that perhaps Obama may have indeed chosen to call himself black in reaction to white racism. That is, Obama's refusal to identify with mixed-race categories might very well be a type of reactionary disassociation with whiteness (his white ancestry) and white supremacist beliefs that hold blackness in contempt. Though he does not live it, what resonates with Obama the most is the black experience. Therefore, given the disdain for blackness present in U.S. society it seems more plausible (as blackness is more often than not determined by phenotype) that Obama found community in blackness and with black people not through his mixed-race experience and does not identify himself as merely mixed race in private or public. Despite the "archetypes" and "tropes" of the mixed-race experience that appear in Obama's autobiography he found greater comfort and camaraderie with people who look like him (as he so states).

Tanya Hernandez, among others, contends that U.S. society is increasingly adopting a "multiracial matrix" similar to Latin America in which mixed-race identity serves as a moniker of racial transcendence (Hernandez 2002, 45). This is not to infer that the "multiracial matrix" present throughout Latin American countries affords equality to people of color (in other words, the myth of racial democracy in places such as Brazil has long been abandoned by scholars). One can infer though that the one-drop rule is becoming less hegemonic in U.S. society. In fact, much like the popular multiracial movement, there seems to be a fixation with mixed-race identity like never before in U.S. history while mixed-race people by the millions have begun to self-identify. This is not necessarily a climate in which a

mixed-race president of the most powerful nation on the planet would hide his "true" core identity from the world.

Certainly, had Obama's phenotype been lighter or nearly white, his choice may have been different. The question of phenotype tends to complicate the whole notion of a mixed-race experience altogether for black/white multiracial individuals. Indeed, Obama embarks on a search for "his people" (African Americans that is) at an early age, feeling like a stranger in *Another Country*⁸ among white people. This is the story he tells us in his own words.

Obama relates to us, in his memoirs, a story of blackness as a doing and a becoming. His own sister tells us that she considers herself "hybrid" but her brother has chosen to name himself black. For most individuals, self-identity tends to be fixed while identification is about process. At the same time, identification with one or more "selves" threatens to unseat the very notion of identity. Obama's biography is clearly the story of a man searching for a way to name himself black while maintaining a connection to his multiracial background whenever possible. The title *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* is enunciated through the story he tells us: that the racial inheritance bequeathed to him from his father is blackness. This notion of Obama as a black man is continuously reinforced in his autobiography, stating at the very end his claim to blackness: "The pain I felt was my father's pain. My questions were my brother's questions. Their struggle, my birthright" (Obama 1995, 430). Obama's personal biography is examined in the following section.

THE OBAMA BIOGRAPHY IN PERSPECTIVE⁹

Barack Obama was born August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawai'i, to a white American mother, Stanley "Ann" Dunham, and a black Kenyan father, Barack Hussein Obama, Sr. His parents were students at the East-West Center of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa during the time of Obama's birth. He has seven siblings, including Maya Soetoro Ng, from his mother's second marriage to an Indonesian man, Lolo Soetoro, and a total of six more from his father's marriages to other women (one African wife and a Jewish American woman). Obama was raised primarily by his white American mother and grandparents in Hawai'i after his father left to pursue doctoral studies at Harvard, and later returned to Kenya, when Barack, Jr., was two years old. Ann Dunham married Lolo Soetoro in 1967, another student at

the East-West Center, when Barack was six years old. The family relocated to Jakarta, Indonesia, after Soetoro was forced to return home due to unrest in Indonesia. Obama's sister, Maya, was born August 15, 1970, in Jakarta, Indonesia. Obama attended schools in Indonesia until he was ten years old. His mother sent him back to Hawai'i in 1971 to be raised primarily by his grandparents. He would only see his father once more, although they corresponded with one another, at the age of ten before Barack, Sr., was killed in a car accident in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1982.

Historian Paul Spickard has noted that Pacific Islander Americans who inhabit Hawai'i have complex multiethnic identities based on ancestry, family, practice, and place; and they have a "greater consciousness" than other American groups of being mixed peoples having multiple ethnicities including Samoan, Tongan, Marquesan, Tahitian, Maori, and European (Spickard and Fong 1995, 1365–83). Pacific Islanders are more successful at balancing multiple ethnicities while being "deeply involved" with more than one of these identities at the same time; therefore, Pacific Islander American identity is ultimately situational (Spickard and Fong 1995, 1365–83). In his historical and ethnographic studies of Pacific Islander ethnicity, Spickard has provided several examples of how multiple identities are balanced and negotiated in Hawai'i. Barack Obama, coming of age in Hawai'ian culture, would have learned to balance his multiple selves more proficiently as opposed to if he came of age on the U.S. mainland. Indeed, his memoir suggests that he found ways to incorporate his "multiple selves" into a composite self, including his biracial background as developed in a multiethnic setting that encourages the "balancing" of more than one ethno-racial identity.

The hybrid Obama came of age in Indonesia and the multicultural setting that is Hawai'i, where he struggled to name himself black. For Obama, becoming black in his formative years was at times a difficult process, as noted in his memoirs. On several occasions, he illustrates to his reader the process of being/becoming black out of the sometimes-awkward relationship with white people and whiteness (including the grandparents who raised him). Obama speaks of a search for self and manhood, in his early years that could not come from his grandfather but rather from "some other source."¹⁰ He found a way to become black by watching *Soul Train* and at the basketball courts where he met a cohort of sometimes-angry black youth.

TV movies, the radio; those were the places to start. Pop culture was color coded, after all, an arcade of images from which you could cop a walk, a talk, a step, a style. I couldn't croon like Marvin Gaye, but I

could learn to dance all the Soul Train steps. I couldn't pack a gun like Shaft or Superfly, but I could sure enough curse like Richard Pryor. And I could play basketball, with a consuming passion.¹¹

Obama found camaraderie and community among his black boyhood friends in Hawai'i: "It was there [the basketball court near his grandparents home] that I would meet Ray and the other blacks close to my age who had begun to trickle into the islands, teenagers whose confusion and anger would help shape my own."¹²

Obama, as a college student, continued to search for a sense of self until he moved to Chicago where he became black. He was made aware at an early age that he needed both a race and a community as asserted in his autobiographical narrative *Dreams from My Father*. Two years after graduating from high school, he was still pondering the question, "Where do I belong?"¹³ He articulates this upon receiving a letter from his father:

Two years from graduation, I had no idea what I was going to do with my life, or even where I would live. Hawaii lay behind me like a childhood dream; I could no longer imagine settling there. Whatever my father might say, I knew it was too late to ever truly claim Africa as my home. And if I had come to understand myself as a black American, and was understood as such, that understanding remained unanchored to place. What I needed was a community, I realized, a community that cut deeper than the common despair that black friends and I shared when reading the latest crime statistics, or the high fives I might exchange on a basketball court. A place where I could put down stakes and test my commitments.¹⁴

Barack Obama "named" himself black before leaving Hawai'i for the mainland to pursue his studies at Occidental College, but he remained "unanchored" in blackness.

In his writings, Obama trots out a succession of black friends from childhood to the college years, including Ray, Reggie, Marcus, and Regina in an attempt to legitimate to his readers, and possibly to himself, see, "I have black friends." His quest for place in blackness is at times painful during his awkward early years, from grade school through college and ultimately law school. Indeed, Obama characterizes his early college experience as a time when he, particularly in his first year at Occidental, felt as if he were "living a lie" and continuously "running around in circles" trying to "cover his tracks" when interacting with his black friends.¹⁵ On one occasion he tells Regina,

after giving a public address in association with the divestment campaign against South Africa organized by black students on campus, that he has no “business speaking for black folks.”¹⁶ It is through Regina’s stories that his romanticized vision of black life and community takes shape:

She [Regina] told me about evenings in the kitchen with uncles and cousins and grandparents, the stew of voices bubbling up in laughter. Her voice evoked a vision of black life in all its possibility, a vision that filled me with longing—for place, and a fixed and definite history. As we were getting up to leave, I told Regina I envied her.¹⁷

“For what?”

“I don’t know. For your memories, I guess.”¹⁸

Obama’s quest for self seemed to be ultimately stifled at Occidental. Was he to be forever consigned to live vicariously through Regina’s, and other friends, memories and experiences of blackness in his personal attainment of a black self? This pursuit of self eventually continued beyond Occidental and took him to another space.

The search for community and “place” brought Obama to New York City and Columbia University, where he began to further conceptualize himself as a black man.

And so, when I heard about a transfer program that Occidental had arranged with Columbia University, I’d been quick to apply. I figured that if there weren’t any more black students at Columbia than there were at Oxy, I’d at least be in the heart of a true city, with black neighborhoods in close proximity.¹⁹

It was at Columbia University that Obama became acutely aware of the structural inequalities in American society that he understood to have a deep impact on the ability of African Americans to progress.

But whether because of New York’s density or because of its scale, it was only now that I began to grasp the almost mathematical precision with which America’s race and class problems joined; the depth, the ferocity, of resulting tribal wars; the bile that flowed freely not just out on the streets but in the stalls of Columbia’s bathrooms as well, where no matter how many times the administration tried to paint them over, the walls remained scratched with blunt correspondence between niggers and kikes.²⁰

Obama continues:

It was as if all middle ground had collapsed, utterly. And nowhere, it seemed, was that collapse more apparent than in the black community I had so lovingly imagined and within which I had hope to find refuge. I might meet a black friend at his Midtown law firm, and before heading to lunch at the MoMa, I would look out across the city toward the East River from his high-rise office, imagining a satisfactory life for myself—a vocation, a family, a home. Until I noticed that the only other blacks in the office were messengers or clerks, the only other blacks in the museum the blue-jacketed security guards.²¹

Obama's musings on black people and his search for community in blackness, at times, are romanticized and paternalistic. Nonetheless, his journey into blackness is consummated in New York City. The second Obama, as a black man anchored in place, comes of age in Chicago. Indeed, he became black in Chicago, confirming his entrenchment in blackness through endogamy. He met and married a dark-skinned black woman named Michelle Robinson with roots in Chicago's Southside. The following section examines how Obama came to balance his hybrid self with a functional blackness grounded in the black community²² but never completely dismissing his mixed-race heritage as articulated in both his memoir and his political biography, *The Audacity of Hope*.

RACE, HYBRIDITY, AND FUNCTIONAL BLACKNESS

In her book *Black Skins, Black Masks*, Shirley Ann Tate postulates a space where black as a category is constantly recouped, transformed, and reformed. Obama is both performer and producer of an "other black" identity that is sometimes in opposition to positionings within the larger discourses of blackness. The "larger" discourses about blackness are predicated upon experiences that Obama does not have before and initially after he leaves Hawai'i, beyond his friend Ray's anger or "rage at the white world"²³ on the basketball courts of Hawai'i and, later, Regina's memories of home. It is clear that Obama, with his "African" features and skin tone, could never pass for white. Obama was not completely at ease in his blackness until he learned the language, gesture, and "ways" of his two worlds in his path to self-development.

His embodiment of blackness can be seen in representations of his public self and language. Through his musical sense of language and his ability to harness the creative power of the word *nommo* (Howard 2009, 1–3), we see a black identity deeply connected to the African American experience. Yet his journey into blackness took place within a multicultural setting where he learned to appropriate the languages of his “two worlds.”²⁴ His blackness is, in part, performance. He learned to speak, talk, and perform blackness on his journey into adulthood.²⁵ This homogenizing trajectory (Banita 2010, 24) into blackness has never been completely divorced from Obama’s multiracial self as shaped by his upbringing in multicultural Hawai’i. Further, Obama’s blackness is contingent upon, and in opposition to, essentialist concepts of race while also being connected to his hybrid cosmopolitan subjectivity.

Cultural studies theoretician Homi K. Bhabha postulates hybridity as a “third space” subject position or indeterminate space in between where a constant blurring and questioning of essentialist boundaries occurs.²⁶ Further, Bhabha asserts that this “third space” may be characterized as an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” space where the process of identification takes shape “through another object, an object of otherness” (Bhabha 1990, 207–21). For Obama, blackness, as understood in a multicultural setting by a man with a multiracial background, is at first an object of otherness. Tate, utilizing the theories of Bhabha, has argued that the third space of hybridity is a “dialogical space where speakers thread together discourses to identify with and through objects of otherness” (Tate 2005, 59). Tate examines the discussions by mixed-race women “who speak back to their positioning within blackness” to establish her premise that hybridity is about “the ongoing assemblage of identifications” (Tate 2005, 59).

Neither Bhabha nor Tate understand hybridity as a fixed identity but rather as a process of identification. Obama’s blackness is in part a type of hybrid blackness as understood in relation to his multiracial background and cosmopolitan outlook. Hybridity, as Naomi Pabst contends, “enables us to conceive of a blackness that crosscuts, overlaps, and blends with other categories, racial and otherwise” (Pabst 2009, 112–32). Obama’s blackness blends with other categories.

This process of identification through dialogue is ongoing and not merely about selecting a moniker of self-identity such as “multiracial” or “black” on a public form. Obama repeatedly speaks back to his positioning within blackness from the standpoint of his biracial and multicultural experience through his memoir, political writings, and public speeches. He

embodies the "experience" but not the identity of a multiracial person on many occasions.²⁷ He may have become black through endogamy and by situating himself within the black community, as married to a black woman with dark skin, but his composite identity is far more complex than "black," "white," or "multiracial." The self for Obama is framed broadly as opposed to unitary or essentialist. Bhabha contends that the hybrid "third space" is an ambivalent space where there exists no unity or fixity (Bhabha 1994a, 38–39, 54–56; 1994b, 269–72). This notion of the hybrid pertains to Obama's blackness, which may be seen as the foundation of the self but not the end of the self.

Indeed, blackness does not constitute the beginning, end, or composite of the self for this U.S. president. This blackness is neither unitary nor fixed given that Obama is at times in dialogue with blackness. Obama's black identity may be seen as political or public in that he does indeed situate the self as grounded in the black community and claims a black/African American identity that seems much more nuanced when coupled with his writings, speeches, and everyday race talk. Given that Americans continue to see race through a binary lens, Obama understood that he needed a race (as he states in his memoirs) to become president. This many-voiced man spoke the language of an "other black"²⁸ to secure the highest position in the land.

Obama's blackness has been hotly debated since he entered the political arena. Critics of his blackness have included Stanley Crouch, who wrote a piece in the *New York Daily News* detailing why he believed Obama was not "black like me"; Debra Dickerson, who insisted that Obama did not meet the proper criteria for blackness because he did not descend from African slaves; and *New Republic* columnist Peter Beinart, who defined Obama as a "good black." Questions of Obama's identity have engaged both the far right and liberal Democrats. Joe Biden (who later became Obama's choice for vice president) described Obama as "clean and articulate," while Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid defined Obama's blackness in similar ways in terms of his ability to speak as a proper "Negro."

In an interview with Charlie Rose, Obama himself commented on his blackness in such a way: "If I'm outside your building trying to catch a cab," he told Rose, "they're not saying, oh there's a mixed-race guy." It is interesting to note that Obama's critics on the far right have blackened Obama further as he has become president. Indeed, many on the far right contend that Obama is an alien non-citizen born in Africa. Yale University race scholar Naomi Pabst has noted that to question a person's blackness is to admit

the very blackness of the person under scrutiny: "You have to be black by some definition in order to be "not really black" (Pabst 115). Obama's blackness may also be understood as a doing and a becoming as evidenced in his biographical narratives. One can sense this "otherness" in his memoir *Dreams from My Father* on several occasions (exemplified in his dialogue with "blackness"), and to a lesser extent, in his book *The Audacity of Hope* (through the rhetoric of racial transcendence). Though Obama consistently defines himself as an African American, it is through his writings that we see him struggle with his racial self. As Carly Fraser asserts, "Obama writes in a way that emphasizes the complexities of his background and his desire to embrace all aspects of it" (Fraser 2009, 19–40). This struggle with his racial self is an attempt by Obama to construct a composite identity that includes blackness, mixed-race ancestry, and his transnational experiences. To illustrate this further, it is necessary to examine Obama as linguistic subject.

OBAMA AS LINGUISTIC SUBJECT

Obama wrote, "I learned to slip back and forth between my black and white worlds, understanding that each possessed its own language and customs and structures of meaning, convinced that with a bit of translation on my part the two worlds would eventually cohere" (Obama 1995, 82). This statement encapsulates Obama as linguistic subject. The French linguist Emile Benveniste (1902–76) argued that it is "in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject." The understanding of individual self-identity through the study of language has been the concern of psychology, philosophy, and literary theory for some time. Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) studied literature to examine how human social identity is materialized through language and voice. Bakhtin's ideas are directly applicable to Obama as linguistic subject.

Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the philosophy of language and literature led him to coin phrases such as "heteroglossia" and "dialogism." The former is a combination of the Latin term *hetero* for different and the Greek word *glossa* for tongue/language. Heteroglossia, as utilized by Bakhtin, connotes "different-speech-ness," "another's speech in another language," or the coexistence of distinct varieties of speech within a single linguistic code. More succinctly, heteroglossia constitutes the existence of conflicting discourses within any field of linguistic activity such as with a work of literature (a novel or memoir) or a diversity of voices, styles of discourse, or point of view. The

Obama narratives *Dreams from My Father* and *Audacity of Hope* contain an often conflicting discourse on Obama's racial identity while Obama himself "speaks in tongues" throughout much of *Dreams*. Dorothy J. Hale contends that African American linguistic identity contains a powerful heteroglossia that may be equated with Du Boisian double consciousness (Hale 1994, 445-71). Hale has argued that scholars of African American literature and culture have found a way to read Du Boisian double consciousness through Bakhtinian double voice thereby "transforming the Du Boisian crisis of subaltern invisibility into a Bakhtinian triumph of self-articulation."²⁹ Obama's journey to self-articulation evolves in his *Dreams from My Father*.

On the one hand, *Dreams* is about Obama's journey into blackness, but on the other hand, he continuously tells his reader how he learned to appropriate the language of his two worlds while running around in circles and tripping over his tongue when lamenting the crimes of "white folks." Further, in *Audacity of Hope*, he tells us again how he has never completely harnessed a singular ethno-racial identity through which to understand himself in the world as a "black man of mixed race heritage" stating, "I've never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race, or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe" (Obama 2006, 14, 274).

Mikhail Bakhtin studied novels because it was his contention that the novelist best illustrated the social voices present in language. Bakhtin often understood voice as accent, ventriloquation (internal dialogue of voices or a process through which self-understanding of experience receive linguistic formulation), refraction, or inflection. Voice as a property of language allows for an understanding of human identity as both self-selected and socially determined (both individual and collective). For Bakhtin, human subjects are both voiced and have the ability to "voice." The quality of being "voiced" illustrates the language that speaks the subject into society while the subject's use of *voice* may be used to speak back to the dominant discourses concerning identity. Obama's use of the terms "mutt" and more recently "mongrel" could perhaps be analyzed through Bakhtinian theories of language and subjectivity. For Bakhtin, all language appears dialogic. That is, everything anyone says always exists in response to things that have been said before and in anticipation of things that will be said. Obama's thinking is highly strategic if not anticipatory on questions of race as imbued with hybrid utterances or passages that may employ a single speaker but one or more "voices."

Obama has straddled his two worlds in his early development and as a political figure, from his speech at the 2004 Democratic National

Convention to his first two years as president through 2010. It is as candidate, and later president, that we see Barack H. Obama harness the language of his “two worlds” best. There is a marked difference that speaks to the “many-voiced” man that Obama is—between a speech that he gave at the opening convocation at Howard University and the commencement address that he gave at Southern New Hampshire University while on the campaign trail. The international addresses connect us more to the cosmopolitan Obama (for obvious reasons) while in his speeches to the American public there seem to be greater variations of the black/white Obama navigating between his “two worlds” as predicated upon context and situation. Indeed, his public persona in these public forums presents a self that is at times contradictory. Zadie Smith notes Obama’s talent for dialogue as evidenced in his memoir:

In Dreams from My Father, the new president displays an enviable facility for dialogue . . . Obama can do young Jewish male, black old lady from the South Side, white woman from Kansas, Kenyan elders, white Harvard nerds . . . This new president doesn't just speak for his people. He can speak them. It is a disorienting talent in a president; we're so unused to it. (Z. Smith 2009)

Smith notes, as too few others have, that Barack Obama with his “many-voiced” narrative articulates a plural self with multiple ethno-racial and transnational allegiances. She goes on to state that because Obama is a mixed-race man, born in the space in-between where his parents dreams ended, he had no choice but to “speak in tongues” like all others born in this place “betwixt and between:”³⁰

When your personal multiplicity is printed on your face, in an almost too obviously thematic manner, in your DNA, in your hair and in the neither this nor that beige of your skin—well, anyone can see you come from Dream City . . . You have no choice but to cross borders and speak in tongues. (Z. Smith 2009)

Barack Obama utilizes his “many-voices” to connect with all people beyond the U.S. when he speaks. This is evidenced in Obama as linguistic subject. Obama’s identity is connected to a cosmopolitanism that accepts broad notions of self-identity, but neither rejects nor discards subjective racial identities.

OBAMA THE COSMOPOLITAN

The term "cosmopolitan" is derived from the Greek word *kosmopolites* for "citizen of the world." It has been utilized in reference to a broad range of views about moral, social, and political philosophy since Greek antiquity. A central tenet of most forms of cosmopolitanism is that all human beings can belong to a single community either on political, moral, economic, or cultural terms. Moral and political cosmopolitanism are perhaps more familiar, while cultural cosmopolitanism remains the subject of great debate. The concept of moral cosmopolitanism is a legacy of antiquity that can be traced back to the Cynics and Stoics. The phrase "citizen of the cosmos" was first utilized by the Cynics. Both the Cynics and Stoics saw the world as their community on moral grounds in their appeals for universal human solidarity. The Cynic Diogenes claimed in the fourth century BCE: "I am a citizen of the world." Zeno of Citium, a Stoic, utilizes a similar phrase in his understanding of humanity as belonging to a single moral community.

The Cynics and Stoics did not envision a transnational political entity, as is the case with the type of political cosmopolitanism advanced by the German philosopher of the High Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant. In his *Perpetual Peace* (1795), Kant envisions a "cosmopolitan law" that binds together "citizens of the earth." The Scottish philosopher Adam Smith imagined a type of economic cosmopolitanism as a global free market made up of equal trading partners among all humans (or nations).

The major divergent forms of cosmopolitanism that exist today, as coupled with the aforementioned moral, political, and economic, also include cultural and visceral cosmopolitanism. Cultural cosmopolitanism emphasizes the value of cultural pluralism, the importance of some attachment to culture, and that a person's identity need not be bounded or homogenous. The term "visceral cosmopolitanism" was coined by British cultural studies theoretician Mica Nava in her book *Cultural Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture, and the Normalization of Difference* (2007). In this text, Nava examines gendered, imaginative, and empathetic aspects of cultural and racial difference through a discussion of the vernacular as coupled with cosmopolitanism. Nava introduced the phrase *visceral cosmopolitanism* in this study of race relations in post war Britain. She focuses on romantic relationships between British women and soldiers of African descent in wartime Britain and after, including an examination of the high-profile couple Princess Diana and Dodi Al Fayed. Diana, as world traveler and cosmopolitan, develops a "taboo" romantic connection with Al Fayed (a man of Arab descent). Her emotional connection to Al Fayed is a "structure of feeling" made possible

by her transnational experiences and cosmopolitan outlook. This is not unlike Obama's (initially) largely emotional and "romanticized" connection to blackness and the black experience.

Obama's self-understanding and political philosophy is imbued with multiple trajectories of cosmopolitanism. This includes the moral, political, cultural, and visceral variations as evidenced in his speeches and writings. America as redeemer nation is a constant in the Obama speeches. American political and moral (Christian) values form the basis of the universal and global human community that is advanced by Obama in his political treatise and speeches. In his memoirs, his connection to blackness occurs at first through the visceral or it is a structure of feeling and camaraderie that he develops upon seeking out various African American "role models" and friends. He ends *Dreams* having come to the realization that "their struggle was my struggle." Several pundits, polemicists, and scholarly observers of Obama have defined him as a cosmopolitan.

Barack Obama is viewed as a cosmopolitan by several observers, from John Zogby to Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, and we see in Obama's own words the sentiments of a cosmopolitan. Zogby has contended that

Obama has much more in common with 18 to 29 year olds, a group I call the First Global Citizens . . . Having roots in Kenya, lived in Indonesia and raised in poly-ethnic Hawaii, Obama's background makes him more of a world citizen than perhaps any other president. (Zogby 2009, 45)

This is Fuentes on Obama:

The historical election of Barack Obama—the first "mestizo" to the White House will go a long way toward redeeming the promise of the United States in the eyes of the world . . . For the first time, a mixed-race leader will have come to power north of the border. (Fuentes 2009, 34)

In his first major speech abroad, as a presidential candidate in the summer of 2008, Obama described himself in such a way:

I come to Berlin as so many of my countrymen have come before; although tonight, I speak to you not as a candidate for President, but as a citizen—a proud citizen of the United States, and a fellow citizen of the world.³¹

We see in Obama's speeches and writings a visceral, moral, and political cosmopolitan.

His autobiographical writings indicate notions of a *visceral cosmopolitan*. He tells us in *Audacity of Hope* that he "can't help but view the American experience through the lens of a black man of mixed heritage, forever mindful of how generations of people who looked like me were subjugated and stigmatized," while in *Dreams* he relates a story of becoming black by seeking out connections with black people, watching *Soul Train*, or finding solace in basketball. He does not have Regina's memories of home nor does he completely possess a comparable anger at whites that his friends Ray and Marcus claim. In fact, in one instance in *Dreams*, he ponders the notion that Ray's anger at white people may not always be authentic: "Sometimes, after one of his performances, I would question his judgment, if not his sincerity."³²

Obama obviously does have his own direct experiences with racism while living with his grandparents in Hawai'i and, of course, after he leaves the island. He relates these instances in his writings. The argument here though is that his connection with blackness is at first tenuous and initially accessed largely through the visceral but grows stronger as he proactively appropriates for himself a "race." He remains uncomfortable uttering the phrase "white folks" when railing against the indignities of racism even after coming to the realization of race and racism in the early stages of his self-development. "The term itself was uncomfortable in my mouth first; I felt like a non-native speaker tripping over a difficult phrase. Sometimes I would find myself talking to Ray about *white folks* this or *white folks* that, and I would suddenly remember my mother's smile."³³ The visceral is combined with the moral and political aspects of cosmopolitanism as he becomes Obama the political candidate, and then president.

The sentiments of cosmopolitanism are present in both his national and international public addresses as a constant theme. Barack Obama delivered the commencement address at the University of Notre Dame on May 18, 2009, amid public controversy over his stance on abortion. The common human community shared by all citizens of the world (in terms of the moral and the political) resonates in Obama's words.

In short, we must find a way to live together as one human family. And it's this last challenge that I'd like to talk about today . . . For the major threats we face in the 21st century—whether it's global recession or violent extremism, the spread of nuclear weapons or pandemic disease—

*these things do not discriminate. They do not recognize borders. They do not see color. They do not target specific ethnic groups. Moreover, no one person, or religion, or nation can meet these challenges alone.*³⁴

In his Cairo speech, delivered on June 4, 2009, at Cairo University, the recurrent themes of universal moral community and political cooperation are present:

*I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition.*³⁵

In this same speech, Obama tells his audience that "there must be a sustained effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to respect one another and seek common ground," and that he remains firm in his belief that "the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart."³⁶ The sentiments of a universal morality and transnational political cooperation are echoed in the Nobel Peace Prize lecture delivered by President Obama on December 10, 2009, at Oslo City Hall, in Oslo, Norway. Obama states in this address that mutual cooperation among nations is necessary to combat common global threats and that "America cannot act alone" when confronting such threats.³⁷ This, of course, does not mean that Obama as president has sought to radically change liberal democratic policies to alleviate the suffering of black people (in terms of social and economic disparities). Clearly, he has not. Indeed, his political character is more that of a political pragmatist as opposed to idealistic social reformer.

CONCLUSION

Barack Obama may be seen by some as a calculating individual. He is a savvy, shrewd, and pragmatic politician who gives himself to no one and everyone at the same time. Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Shirley Sherrod were unceremoniously dismissed by the Obama administration amid racial controversies. Wright, Obama's former pastor for twenty years, was discarded for his audacious articulation of black liberation theology. The now-famous Obama speech on race was delivered to specifically salvage

his campaign (again, Obama responds out of necessity) after an incendiary speech by Wright "damning America" surfaced on YouTube. Obama was forced to divest himself of Wright, the quintessential "angry black man," or run the risk of irreparable damage to his carefully crafted bid for president. Sherrod, an African American Department of Agriculture administrator in Georgia, was asked to resign for her alleged mistreatment of white farmers on the basis of race.

Obama is not the first politician of African American descent to use a strategy of racial transcendence to win an election. His rhetoric of transcendence is often strategically deployed and never completely anchored in black social-justice claims (Sinclair-Chapman and Price 2008, 739–45). Of course, his campaign for president may have utilized some of the same techniques as those who came before him, including Shirley Chisholm, Harold Washington, and Jesse Jackson, in terms of his connections to the black community (through the black church and his community organizing experience) but his deployment of racial ambiguity (through his many voices) as opposed to a "black-centered" rhetoric of social justice gained him more white votes than any other black candidate on the national scene ultimately helping him to secure the highest office in the land (Sinclair-Chapman and Price 2008, 739–45).

Obama articulated, in his now-famous race speech, the grievances harbored by African Americans with the demands of "all people" or all Americans while at the same time giving voice to "legitimate" white resentment. This technique flagrantly diminishes the real structural inequalities faced by African Americans past and present but nonetheless proved successful for candidate Obama, with a campaign team that was made up of mostly white operatives of the Democratic party who were outside of the black community. The Obama campaign was not a traditional "black" campaign. His deployment of the rhetoric of racial transcendence in some respects mirrored the composite self that he has managed to forge.

Obama's nuanced and dispassionate engagement with race has been interpreted by some as a type of silence. Naomi Klein has remarked that "no matter how race-neutral Obama tries to be, his actions will be viewed by a large part of the country through the lens of its racial obsessions" (Klein 2009). The far right has fueled enough white racial anxiety about Obama since his election, including the "birthers," "deathers," and "tea-baggers," that fears about his "otherness" have not been quelled. Indeed, according to some national statistics, a large number of Americans continue to believe that Obama is a Muslim and that he was not born in the United States. Klein

goes on to state that because “his most modest, Band-Aid measures are going to be greeted as if he is waging a full-on race war” (Klein 2009).

Obama has, perhaps naively, attempted to use his diverse background to engage wider questions of race, ethnicity, and community. This approach has not sustained nor assuaged white fears about his perceived “foreign” or “alien” character. Indeed, his perceived “otherness” has been exploited by extremists and the far right for the purpose of inciting white rage and personal political gain. Barack Obama occupied the space where his parent’s dreams of a life-long union failed to take shape. The pursuit of self by this U.S. president reflects the nation’s long struggle with race and racism. Our union remains imperfect.

Notes

Other versions of this chapter appear in *Converging Identities: Blackness in the Modern African Diaspora*, ed. Julius O. Adegunle and Hettie V. Williams (Durham: Carolina Academic Publishing, 2013), 115–38.

1. The notion of human identities as partial, contradictory, strategic and ultimately fragmented is not new and has long been associated with feminist, cultural, and postcolonial theory. The work of Donna Haraway (1991) in the “Cyborg Manifesto”; Nancy Hartsock’s writings on feminist historical materialism (1983); and Chela Sandoval’s work on “oppositional consciousness” (1991) engage the concept of identity as a complex affair. Haraway’s assertions on identity infer that subjects negotiate a series of positionings that are never completely fixed on a given positioning (partial), that these positionings may be in conflict (contradictory), and that a subject positions herself/himself according to context or situation at a given moment. Feminist Standpoint theory, which understands knowledge as particular rather than universal, defines subjects as constructed by relational forces rather than as transcendent; Hartsock argues that some perceptions of reality are partial, and Sandoval views the world as a type of topography where groups and individuals may produce themselves as oppositional subjects.
2. In her book *Black Skins, Black Masks: Hybridity, Dialogism, Performativity* (2005), Shirley Ann Tate conceptualizes the notion of an “other black” identity in the lives of mixed-race women of black/white parentage in contemporary England through an examination of the everyday “talk” of these women. Tate utilizes the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Homi K. Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Franz Fanon, and Gayatri Spivak to articulate her notion of the “other black”; such as with her discussion of language as hybrid and performativity in hybridity. The women in Tate’s study project a multidimensional sense of self by simultaneously deploying blackness and mixedness in an interactional “hybridity of the everyday.” My use of this term advances the notion of Barack Obama as an “other black” cosmopolitan as he embraces a public blackness while his narratives and other writings

- (and statements) present a more complex sense of self through a "dialogical space" (written and spoken).
3. The term "essentialist hybridity" will be defined in conjunction with my notion of "fluid hybridity" later in this chapter.
 4. Sandra Laing's story has been the subject of books, documentaries, and feature films, such as the recently released movie *Skin* and the documentary *Skin Deep: The Sandra Laing Story*.
 5. Here, again, I use the term "mixed-race" to connote largely the social understanding of the term as based on claims about ancestry by self-identified multiracial activists and scholars.
 6. This statement was made by Barack Obama to the Generation Mix college students while on tour in 2005. They were invited to his Senate offices and the scene also appears in the film *Changing Daybreak*.
 7. Obama, *Dreams*, 211.
 8. Many scholars, including Zadie Smith, have remarked how Obama's own memoirs are clearly influenced by James Baldwin's *Another Country*.
 9. G. Reginald Daniel, and Hettie V. Williams, "Barack Obama and Multiraciality," *Encyclopedia of African American History*, ed. Joe Trotter (New York: Facts on File, 2011), 20. Some of the information in this section, in terms of the generic biographical material on Barack Obama, was coauthored by this author and G. Reginald Daniel for a forthcoming publication that includes a biographical essay of Barack Obama in relation to his multiracial background.
 10. Obama, *Dreams*, 78.
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. *Ibid.*, 80.
 13. *Ibid.*, 115.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *Ibid.*, 102.
 16. *Ibid.*, 108.
 17. *Ibid.*, 104.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. *Ibid.*, 115.
 20. *Ibid.*, 120–21.
 21. *Ibid.*
 22. G. Reginald Daniel makes the argument in his essay in this volume that, though Obama may be understood as hybrid, it is a hybridity that extends outward from the location of a black identity rooted in the black community.
 23. Obama, *Dreams*, 81–82.
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. Homi K. Bhabha is considered one of the chief architects of understanding hybridity in postcolonial theory. He develops his notion of hybridity in an interview he gave titled "The Third Space" that appears in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (1990), with such works as *The Location of Culture* (1994), and in "Frontliners/Borderposts" in *Displacements: Cultural Identity in Question* (1994).

27. In both *Dreams of My Father* and the *Audacity of Hope*, we find that Obama makes repeated inferences to his mixed heritage and multicultural experience while at the same time claiming a black identity that is not rooted in the "typical" experience of most African Americans. He does this in the opening pages of *Dreams* and once again in the early chapters of *Audacity of Hope*.
28. Shirley Ann Tate utilized the phrase "other black" as applied to her study of mixed-race women in the UK, illustrated in her text *Black Skins, Black Masks*, in the development of her important thesis of hybridity as a dialogical space where these women fashion for themselves a "hybridity of the everyday" through everyday "talk." I appropriate the phrase "other black" from Tate and apply it to the life and writings of Obama, while also understanding that hybridity is about dialogue and "dialogical space" (Tate utilizes the notion that language or dialogue is hybrid from the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin) as evidenced in Obama's writings and speeches. Further, I postulate that Obama frames the self within a transnational and cosmopolitan context, henceforth my notion of Obama as "other black cosmopolitan" is unique in that it presents Obama as having a complex multilayered sense of self that is both dependent upon a public essentialism and hybridity at the same time within a larger cosmopolitan frame.
29. *Ibid.*
30. The use of this phrase "betwixt and between" connotes notions of liminality first advanced by the German born French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold Van Gennep in his important text *Les Rites de Passage* (1909), later borrowed, expanded, and enhanced by anthropologist Victor Turner in his work "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," which appeared in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967). G. Reginald Daniel has applied the concept of liminality understood as a place "betwixt and between" to the multiracial experience in various writings such as with his landmark text *More than Black: Multiracial Identity and the New Racial Order* (2002).
31. Barack Obama, "Address to the People of Berlin," July 24, 2008, *AmericanRhetoric.com*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobamaberlinspeech.htm>.
32. Obama, *Dreams*, 81.
33. *Ibid.*, 80-81.
34. Barack Obama, "Commencement Address at the University of Notre Dame," May 18, 2009, *Americanrhetoric.com*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barack-obamanotredamecommencement.htm>.
35. Barack Obama, "A New Beginning: Speech at Cairo University," June 4, 2009, *Americanrhetoric.com*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamacai-rouniversity.htm>.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Barack Obama, "Nobel Prize for Peace Lecture," December 10, 2009, *Americanrhetoric.com*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobama/barackobama-nobelprizeforpeacelecture.htm>.