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Media Representation of Barack Obama: A Pre- and Post-Election Comparison

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Media representation of Barack Obama: A pre- and post-election comparison

by

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ABSTRACT

Various research concerning presidential elections attempts to explain how voters evaluate candidates. Recent work suggests that, in general, the mass media has great influence on election outcomes. In *The Performance of Politics: Obama's Victory and the Democratic Struggle for Power* (2010), Jeffrey Alexander proposes that campaigns have become theatrical, i.e., politicians resemble actors. Therefore, to achieve success, politicians must employ the media to project positive images of themselves. This paper used Alexander's analogy as inspiration for the comparison of Barack Obama's pre- and post-election media depictions. A content analysis of *New York Times* editorials covering a period of one year following Barack Obama's election was conducted, the findings of which are compared to Alexander's conclusions regarding Obama's pre-election media depiction. Candidate Obama and President Obama, respectively, were found to be framed inconsistently. The results are evidence of more varied and negatively toned media portrayals of Obama since he has become president. The present work explores the circumstances that have fueled such portrayals and elucidates the resulting shift in Barack Obama's image.

CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Barack Obama received significant support very early during his presidential campaign. He made history by becoming the first African-American U.S. presidential candidate to be nominated by a major political party, yet he was not the first African-American to campaign for president (Asante 2007). Asante states that most African-American presidential candidates have had an agenda addressing race and discrimination. Though social problems such as racial discrimination need to be addressed, they are seldom big-ticket issues for mainstream American voters. Obama's platform, however, differed from his predecessors. Instead of rehashing decades-old political disputes over social issues that have been used as wedges among the electorate, Obama's campaign focused on embodying the hope for a better future for "all" Americans. According to Walters (2007), Obama became the "face" of the Democratic Party, despite the fact that his supporters were mostly white. Obama brought the promise of a leader who could bridge the gap between impoverished Americans and empowered government officials (Asante 2007). Furthermore, Obama's platform was progressive, and geared toward a new agenda and a new America (Asante 2007).

With Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton both representing change, American interest in the 2008 Democratic Primary was unprecedented. During the 2008 presidential primary, Senator Obama received more delegate votes than Senator Clinton, however, Senator Clinton won the popular vote among Democrats (Clayton 2009). This election marked the first time in U.S. history that two minorities, an African-American man and a Caucasian woman, progressed so far in a presidential contest. Consider this article from the *New York Times*:

"Right Candidates, Wrong Question"—the title emphasizes the public's interest in a potential

"first black" or "first female" president based on their obvious differences, rather than their

substantive (and similar) ideologies (Steinem 2007). In this fashion, mass media

organizations often cast politicians positively or negatively to incite a reaction from their

audience. Not only do mass media organizations shape our perceptions of candidates for

government office, but they influence the outcome of entire elections.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

After defeating Senator Clinton in a tight race for their party's nomination, Barack

Obama competed against Senator John McCain in the 2008 general election. Obama enlisted

a wide range of media outlets, including, but not limited to, radio stations, television

commercials, and social networks (Alexander 2010; Kenski, Hardy, and Jamieson 2010).

Kenski et al. (2010) argue that the more financial resources a candidate possesses, the more

media coverage he or she will receive. Money allows candidates to promote their platforms

by leveraging a wide range of media such as newspapers, television advertisements, blogs,

and social networks. The media holds significant sway on a candidate's support among

American voters (Alexander 2010; Kenski et al. 2010; Steger 1993). If candidates are

constantly discussed positively in media channels, American voters are more likely to

evaluate and support them. Therefore, the media's "spin" on a candidate, largely affected by

the candidate's financial means, contributes to the outcome of an election—which, in

Obama's case, was a positive one.

Careful examinations of messages disseminated by the mass media enable scholars to

better understand the media portrayal of political candidates. Alexander (2010), for example,

concludes that Obama's favorable image stemmed from the public's belief that he

exemplified a widely held ideal of a post-racial, meritocratic, and just America. Obama

projected the image of a "hero" who could overcome existing political, economic, and social

turmoil. These favorable representations helped to ensure a constituency that believed he

would bring positive change to the United States (Asante 2007). How has Obama's image

changed, if at all, after his election as President? While studies have examined the media

depictions of Obama, to my knowledge, no work has compared his pre and post-election

media depictions. Therefore, the questions that are the center of this thesis are: What are the

similarities and differences between the depictions of Candidate Obama and President

Obama? How have the tones of these depictions changed? Obama's 2008 presidential

campaign and subsequent election was unprecedented; therefore, it is worthwhile to

investigate how the media has depicted him during these periods.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Political actors are interpreted through the "frames" displayed in the mass media.

Frames, in this context, refer to messages that are constructed to influence one's thinking or

perception. In political campaigns, a candidate's desired portrayal and their actual portrayal

may be significantly different. A candidate's image is based not only on his or her own

intentions, but also on those of the opposition—all parties rely on messages dispersed by the

mass media. Alexander (2010) argues that contemporary politicians are seen as political

"actors" who "perform" to create a specific image for their audience. Through their

performances, political actors convince citizens that they are better suited than their

counterparts to fulfill the needs of the people. It can be argued that for a candidate to be

elected, he or she must become an actor for the voting public, whose performances are

narrated by the mass media.

President Obama received positive affirmation from the public during the honeymoon period of his first year in office; however, casual observation led me to suspect that subsequent portrayals of Obama were not as favorable. In an attempt to test this assumption, this study (1) ascertained and described the media frames of Barack Obama's presidency as displayed in a major national newspaper, (2) contrasted these frames with the pre-election frames described by Alexander (2010), and (3) determined whether the overall depictions of President Obama after the election were positive or negative.

This thesis is organized as follows: *Chapter 2* will present a review of relevant literature in order to provide sufficient context to understand the racial politics of the Obama campaign and presidency; *Chapter 3* describes the research design; *Chapter 4* details the media frames identified during my content analysis of post-election newspaper coverage and compares them to the frames in Alexander's pre-election analysis; and *Chapter 5* discusses the findings and their implications.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
2.1 A Short History of Race and American Politics

Throughout U.S. history, African Americans have been underrepresented in elected government positions. Only three of the fifty U.S. states, Mississippi, Illinois, and Massachusetts, have elected an African American to the U.S. Senate and 26 of the 50 states have yet to elect an African American to the U.S. House (Ostermeier 2011). Since 1776, only four African American have been elected to the U.S. Senate: Hiram Revels in 1870, Blanche Bruce in 1874, Carol Mosely-Braun in 1992, and Barack Obama in 2004 (Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Ostermeier 2011). Additionally, eight African Americans have been elected as state governors and eleven as lieutenant governors (Simmonds 2009). This minimal representation of African Americans in politics has occurred because this racial group has been seen historically as less competent than their white counterparts (Hutchings and Valentino 2004). The 2008 presidential campaign marked a significant moment in American politics. For insight into the 2008 candidacy and the presidency of Barack Obama, it is necessary to briefly summarize the history of race in American politics. The main events that will be reviewed are the American Civil War (1861-1865), the New Deal (1933-1934), and the Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968) because these events reveal the roles African Americans have previously played in U.S. politics.

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president (1861-1865) of the United States, was a Republican who is often cited as being an advocate of racial equality in the early United States (Frederickson 1975). When Lincoln was elected to the presidency his party viewed the institution of slavery as inhumane. The Republican Party was the first major political party in America to promote the equal rights of African Americans. Consistent with this

position, President Lincoln ordered the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 which freed

African American slaves and provided full citizenship to former male slaves. Following this

order, he promoted the 13th amendment which was incorporated into the U.S. Constitution to

abolish slavery. The Civil War was symbolic because though blacks lacked citizenship, they

participated in the war for the sake of freedom and racial equality. After African American

males were given the right to vote and hold office, they almost universally supported the

Republican Party due to its leadership of emancipation. Their allegiance to the Republican

Party continued until the 1930s (Hutchings and Valentino 2004).

In the 1930s, the United States experienced the "Great Depression." During this

economic crisis, President Roosevelt, a Democrat, created the New Deal which helped

Americans who were affected by the economic downfall. The New Deal was supported by a

coalition of labor unions, ethnic and racial minorities, and poor people. The New Deal

programs provided jobs for the unemployed, mortgage relief to farmers and homeowners,

and expanded various industries. Considering that Roosevelt aimed to provide labor unions,

ethnic and racial minorities, and poor individuals the opportunity to advance socially and

economically, many Americans, including African Americans became supporters of the

Democratic Party.   At the same time as blacks switched their allegiance to the Democratic

Party, white southerners support decreased (Hutchings and Valentino 2004).

In the late 1960s Richard Nixon adopted the "southern strategy," to encourage

southern whites to join the Republican Party (Hutchings and Valentino 2004). This strategy

exploited southern white voter's latent (and not so latent) animosity toward African

Americans. It aimed to demonstrate that the Republican Party was not supportive of meeting

the needs of members of the African American community. Hutchings and Valentino

acknowledge the argument that some of the attraction of the Republican Party to southern whites was its stand on national defense and the belief that Republicans were superior at managing the economy. However, overall they contend, race was the most important factor in partisan realignment.

According to Hutchings and Valentino (2004) it was not until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s that scholars started to examine the complexities of race in America and American politics. Events during the Civil Rights Movement (e.g. the judicial decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education)* mobilized political leaders and many citizens to work to achieve equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of race or ethnicity. Considering that the Democratic Party consisted of a large number of civil rights proponents, black allegiance to the Democratic Party doubled from 1960 to 1968.

The American Civil War, the New Deal, and the Civil Rights Movement illustrate factors that have caused changes in American politics over time with respect to racial alignment. Both the Republican and Democratic Parties influenced how African Americans perceived American politics and how political ideologies have changed. This historical context aids in our understanding of the political impact of race in American politics in the latter part of the 20th Century.

Even though they were writing before Obama's nomination, Sigelman et al. (1995) provide us one possible explanation for minorities gaining access into political positions. Sigelman and colleagues contend that the situation of race and politics has evolved considering that racial and ethnic minorities are holding political positions, such as mayors. These scholars stated that from 1960-1970, after the civil rights movement, there were 29 African American mayors elected in the United States and this number have quadrupled in

the past couple few decades. While race can be predictive for the political outcomes of racial and ethnic minority candidates, it is not the strongest predictor, rather, a candidate's position on issues is more important to American voters (Sigelman, et al., 1995).

Sigelman et al. (1995) asked individuals who were summoned to jury duty to participate in an experiment where they were to describe two candidates running for the U.S. Senate in another state. Candidate A had similar characteristics to that of George H. W. Bush, while Candidate B was similar to black conservatives such as Clarence Thomas, Thomas Sowell, and Douglas Wilder. Sigelman et al. found that race was not a significant factor in why white voters did not vote for African American political figures because white voters did not report to researchers that they allowed their racial prejudices to influence their vote. Instead these scholars found that voter's political ideologies and party identification influenced which candidate they believe to be better qualified for office. Their study suggests that voters said they prefer candidates who reflect their own ideas and that it does not matter if the candidate is African American, Caucasian, or Hispanic. However, one might counter their argument simply by citing the "Bradley effect"; a voter's intention is not necessarily reflected by their behavior. The Bradley effect will be explained in more detail below. Sigelman et al.'s conclusions differ from much of the research conducted in the same period because they wanted to determine whether or not other extraneous variables could explain why African Americans are not elected as frequently as Caucasians.

Citrin et al. (1990) disagree with Sigelman et al.'s position. They argue that at least up to the 1990s race still mattered to Americans' voting decisions. They examined the contextual factors, such as a candidate's socioeconomic background, that people consider when evaluating candidates for political office. They conclude that when American voters

scrutinize the speeches of politicians, analyze how candidates respond to specific societal issues, or examine candidates' experiences, they are always also cognizant of candidates' race (Citrin et al. 1990; Terkildsen 1993; Moskowitz & Stroh 1994).

To illustrate this point, Citrin et al. used the candidacy of Tom Bradley for the mayor of Los Angeles. Bradley did not fit the typical African American stereotype because he did not focus on racial matters during his political campaign. He appeared to be blind to race (Citrin et al. 1990). In spite of his strengths and a pre-election lead in the polls and among white voters, Bradley did not win the election. Citrin (1990) explained this unexpected outcome by arguing that because Bradley was African American and would have been in a position of power, he was viewed as a threat by social elites and many whites. What has become known as the "Bradley effect" demonstrated that voters are sometimes dishonest during pre-election polls (Citrin 1990; Hutchings and Valentino 2004). The problem of voters misreporting their intentions is important in that it suggests the possibility that many think race should not matter in politics, but in the secrecy of the voting booth some resort to stereotypical beliefs to sway their vote anyhow. This leads to the belief, widely held before the 2008 election, that African American candidates have little chance of success in predominantly white districts and in national elections (Clayton 2007; Cross 2007). This assumption can even influence the decision of voters in primary elections who would otherwise be in favor of a minority candidate had their party's success not been at stake.

Another scholar who disputes Sigelman et al.'s (1995) conclusion is Terkildsen (1993). She studied the role of skin color on voter attitudes and found that white voters discriminated against African-American candidates and responded more positively to African-Americans with fairer skin. Sighelman et al. (1995) and Terkildsen (1993) were

essentially studying the same topics, however, it appears that Terkildsen found that while race relations have improved in contemporary America, it, specifically skin color, still influences political success,. Sigelman and colleagues were examining how African Americans were advancing in politics as measured by an increase in the number of mayors. Terkildsen (1993) stated voters might use skin color as a proxy for the amount of the African American stereotypical qualities possessed by a candidate. In this explanation, darker colored African American men would be judged to hold more of the negative qualities of the racialized stereotypes of laziness, stupidity, and hyper-sexuality (Moskowitz and Stroh 1994). Although Terkildsen (1993) and Moskowitz and Stroh (1994) agree that white voters evaluate black candidates based on their race, Moskowitz and Stroh emphasized stereotypes and biases while Terkildsen suggested how color might influence the application of the stereotype to particular candidates. The evidence strongly supports the notion that racial prejudice impacted white voters' attitudes up to and including the 1980s.

More current research indicates that race still matters in American politics but attitudes are much more sophisticated and subdued. Valentino (2002) calls this new, subdued form of racial prejudice in American politics, racial coding. In this new form, racial cues are implicit and race is not directly mentioned in media messages (Valentino et al. 2002). As an example, if minority groups appear in media messages to be the beneficiaries of government support programs, members of that minority group will likely be more positive toward the political party that seems to want to assist them (Valentino et al. 2002). However, the message whites receive is that minorities are less independent and responsible because they need government assistance. In addition to the negative image of the minority

portrayed, the depiction casts the supporting agency or political party as condoning these negative attributes.

2.2 The Changing Impact of Race on Election Choices

Obama's success demonstrated that something has changed since the 1990s. Perhaps American white voters are less susceptible to the "Bradley" effect today (Novkov 2008). Branton's (2009) research supports this claim.   According to findings from her study of electability and favorability, minority candidates can gain the support of both minority voters and Caucasians. Ideology and socioeconomic interests appear to be more important than race in white voters' election decisions. This is consistent with Sigelman et al. (1995). Some might say that Obama's success alone merits such a claim. Walters (2007), for example, reasoned that if the American majority voted for Obama, then people can no longer claim that disparities exist between African Americans and their white counterparts in politics.

2.3 Background of Barack Obama

Prior to Obama's involvement in politics, he attended both Columbia University and Harvard Law School (Atwater 2007). While attending Harvard University, Obama served as the first African American president of the Harvard Law Review (Atwater 2007:122). He was interested in social and economic injustice and how policies influenced them and he became interested in politics. He studied constitutional laws, which helped in furthering his interest in socioeconomics and the policies that could transform U.S. policies. He spent most of his public service career as a community organizer and Senator in the Illinois State Senate (Atwater 2007). While in the State Senate, Obama worked with both the Democratic and Republican Parties to assist the middle class (Atwater 2007; Burnside & Whitehurst 2007).

He was proactive in working toward racial equality and social welfare legislation (Burnside & Whitehurst 2007). In 2005, he then became a U.S. Senator from Illinois (Atwater 2007).

The 2004 Democratic National Convention was pivotal to Senator Obama becoming a household name (Atwater 2007; Hopkins 2009) and national celebrity (Burnside & Whitehurst 2007). Hopkins (2009) asserted that Obama's speech placed him into the "national consciousness" (369) partially because he rejected the political differences between red (Republican Party) and blue (Democratic Party) America (2009). Obama's appearance at the convention demonstrated his public speaking ability and encouraged the public to look beyond his color during the upcoming election. However, Senator Obama would face many obstacles, some of which could be associated with his status as the first African American man to be nominated by the Democratic Party for the presidency. Many of the challenges he faced stemmed from his complex racial identity. His opponents did not hesitate to disperse negative images and stereotypes in the media that are ascribed to African Americans (Golebiowska 2003).

2.4 Obama's "Blackness" and the African American Voter

Clayton (2007) argued that Obama appealed to voters across both racial and party lines, but he faced unexpected resistance from some African American voters. Initially he appeared as an ideal representative for black voters (Cross 2007). However, some African Americans questioned his "blackness" (Alexander 2010; Clayton 2007; Walters 2007). According to Walters (2007), *blackness* is "an essential concept of black identity, bounded by skin color, biology, history, and culture" (pp. 10). While Obama's skin color would categorize him as African American in the American racial typology, his experiences and background were dissimilar from those of the "typical" African American man. Obama was

raised in a middle class household while many African Americans still grow up in lower class families living in impoverished neighborhoods. His law degree and ivy league experience also set him apart from others of his race (Clayton 2007). Since Obama did not share these commonalities with the majority of African American voters, this group questioned whether or not he was black enough to be trusted (Walters 2007). They wondered whether he was using race as a method to win African American votes? The fact that Obama did not run on a platform specifically aimed at changing racial disparities further added to African American voters' suspicion of him (Alexander 2010). Once Obama's campaign team realized how this rhetoric influenced African Americans' perception of him, they adjusted the message so that it resonated better across racial and class lines (Alexander 2010).

Alexander (2010) argued that for Obama to win support from African American voters, he would have to change the manner and context of his public speaking so it could fit an audience of varied race, class, and educational background. For example, Alexander said that when Obama is engaged in dialogue with Chicago natives, he should speak less Harvard and more Chicago (Alexander 2010). That is, he should communicate in a way that is more accessible to the general public. Obama was cognizant of how he would be perceived by Americans due to his race, political experiences, and political affiliation. He did not present himself as someone who only supported racial issues or class issues but the issues of United States citizens. While doing so, Obama lost favorability among some African American voters. Due to Obama's lack of interest in socioeconomic equality for African Americans as a single item agenda as Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton had, Obama's "blackness" was questioned by African American voters (Alexander 2010).

Herron and Sekhon (2005) argued that African Americans value black candidates. This does not imply that black voters are racist in their selection of candidates, rather, black voters believe that black candidates can better represent the black community as compared to white candidates. The researchers suggest that black voters do not necessarily vote for black candidates based solely on race alone, but rather examine the candidate's political platform in determining if the candidate deserves to be elected. Another argument identified by both Clayton (2007) and Cross (2007) is that even when a black candidate is fit for a specific position in American politics, voters fear that racial factors may determine the electability of said individual. African Americans are infrequently elected for high office, thus, black voters do not wish to jeopardize the chances of electoral victory on the prospect of a black contender. That is, black voters fear casting their ballots for black candidates due to the belief that these contenders will not receive enough votes to win the presidential election (Clayton 2007; Cross 2007).

Herron and Sekhon (2005) concluded that African Americans expressed strong support for African American candidates despite their reduced chances of winning, and Branton (2009) asserted that American voters tend to vote for candidates who that are members of their racial group. Avery (2007) contends that African Americans have difficulty trusting political institutions. Therefore, when voting in governmental elections, African Americans must make a choice between the candidate who will be able to (1) win the general election or (2) the candidate that best represents their race, class, gender, and/or sexuality. The main point Avery provided in his research is that African Americans were displeased with the limited resources that are granted to them as compared to their white counterparts. He argued that African American voters believed that many of the racial disparities they

faced were the product of discrimination and the white power structure that has dominated America. This relates to who blacks vote for because they want to select a candidate who will seek to eliminate some of the struggles that members of the African American community encounter. Similar to Avery, Harris-Lacewell (2003) claimed that African American voters possess the preconceived notion that they do not hold any true value since white racial attitudes shape national politics and public policy. She argued that black individuals believe that their viewpoints on how the country should be improved in terms of equality for all are often ignored (2003). They believe that the black perspective is often marginalized in the political process.

The literature pertaining to Obama's "blackness" is relevant to this thesis because it illustrates that even though his image was favorable to people of varied backgrounds, his complex racial and ethnic identity influenced the presidential general election in unexpected ways (Caswell 2009; McVeigh et al. 2011). African American voters questioned Obama's race loyalty since he was not the typical African American man (not "black" enough). Obama's blackness echoes the dilemma of black voters, a group that struggles with trust, even when considering one of their own. Furthermore, African Americans believed that if they were to vote for Obama, his viewpoints on how he would improve the African American community would not be addressed considering that he was not explicit in racial and ethnic policies. Such logic may have improved the chances of his opponents. While Obama's "blackness" was questioned, his campaign messages were crucial in generating the positive images that allowed him to reach the majority of American voters irrespective of color.

2.5 The 2008 Presidential Candidates and Their Campaign Messages

The 2008 presidential election did not have an incumbent, which increased the probability of success for all presidential contestants (Abramson et al. 2007; Paulson 2009). The Democratic Party had two popular contenders: Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama. The competition between the two spurred significant media coverage (Butler 2009). Butler (2009) argued that the Democratic Party lacked momentum because Senator McCain became the front runner for the Republican Party early on, while Obama and Clinton were brutally competing with one another for the Democratic nomination (Butler 2009; Paulson 2009).

In presidential campaigns, the nominee who receives the most financial support increases his/her chances of being viewed favorably by voters (Alexander 2010; Butler 2009; Caswell 2009; Clayton 2007; Kenski et al. 2010; Steger 1993; McClurg & Holbrook 2009; Shaw 1999). The more financing that contenders possess, the more options are available to them to get their message to the voters (Alexander 2010; Kenski et al 2010; Shaw 1999). Though candidate Obama's electability was an important issue during the Democratic primary, the literature suggests that his fundraising abilities were equally critical to his success. Obama raised over $600 million dollars during the primary and general elections, the most money ever raised by a presidential candidate during one election cycle. Part of the reason for no other previous candidate matching his fundraising was his decision to not use public financing, which allowed him to raise more money. He's the first candidate to do that since public financing became available. The success of this strategy changed the expectations for future presidential elections (Kenski et al 2010).

At best, a candidate should take ownership of policy issues so voters can associate the candidate with the issue (Damore 2004; Damore 2005). That is, if a candidate is a supporter of "pro-choice," the candidate must present himself in a manner that help voters understand his position on specific issues to determine if those issues align with the individuals who vote in the election. Considering that candidate Clinton and candidate Obama were members of the same party, they had to find ways to differentiate their political positions. Hayes (2008) claimed that agenda control is relevant for a political campaign because voters do not necessarily investigate who a candidate is. That is, while these two essentially have similar views, Senator Clinton and Senator Obama had to find ways to differentiate from one another to obtain more favorability over their competition. Successful candidates use policy issues to enhance voters' opinions of them.   For example, if voters are concerned with social equality, they will examine candidates' positions to determine if there is compliance with such a priority.

Alexander (2010) noted that Obama's opponents sometimes drew upon racial cues to suggest that even though he was not explicit about racial issues in contemporary America, once he was elected he would find ways to advance the African American community socially and economically. However, Obama avoided rebuttals that were racially charged, which transformed the use of racialized messages into perceived cheap shots—a stark contrast to politics of previous decades. He focused on the similarities, not the differences, between people with respect to health care, jobs, and education (Obama 2006).

Although Obama did not treat race as a key issue, he was able to embody equality and racial sensitivity. He did this by illustrating that while people vary in regard to socioeconomic status, individuals wanted similar outcomes, which was the ability to live the

"American Dream." He transcended race and overcame an obstacle that has historically

impeded African American politicians. His strategy of avoiding confrontations and

defensiveness about racial issues, allowed him to transcend race and therefore, he was able to

overcome negative responses from American voters.

2.6 It's Not Just Politics, It's Acting

Today, candidates must sell themselves as they sell their platforms, they create a

package. Accordingly, campaigns have become theatrical, and politicians perform to receive

a certain type of response or feeling from their audience. Alexander claims that a candidate's

projection of honesty, prudence, and integrity are more important than the virtues themselves

and trump his or her platform.

In Alexander's view, elections are the only time in a representative democracy when

voters have the opportunity to directly affect governmental decisions and policies. Joining

the voters in the "civil sphere" are the mass media, polling organizations, the electoral

system, and political parties—each playing a part in the scrutiny of candidates. Alexander's

goal in analyzing the 2008 presidential campaign was to describe the interaction of the civil

sphere and the presidential candidates. I used Alexander's conclusions about how President

Obama's image was presented during the 2008 presidential campaign to provide a contrast to

the post-election media frames which emerged from my analysis. Given the importance of

his research to this study, I will further elaborate on his findings later in the manuscript.

2.7 Frames and Framing Effects

Frame analysis is a technique used to analyze media content found in newspapers,

radio programs, advertisements, cartoons, and other sources to determine the material's

underlying meaning (Goffman 1974). "Framing analysis can examine messages as they are

shaped by reporters and editors and by public relations sources attempting to promote an idea

or opinion" (Perkins 2005: 66). According to Goffman (1974), frame analysis is both a

theoretical approach and a methodology.

In light of the reliance of voters on the media's depiction of candidates, it is essential

to understand how messages are constructed and how they influence voters (Gamson &

Modigliani 1989). An image or frame can change individuals' perceptions and ultimately

their attitude toward a politician. Altheide (1997) stated that frames can be understood as a

"border around a picture." Depending on how a picture is framed, the interpretation changes.

He claimed that frames are important because they shape not only media content, but they

help individuals to construct reality. The way the media "frames" people can be fortuitous or

problematic depending on the situation (Altheide 1997). Altheide (1997) explained that

media frames of African Americans whether accurate or not, influence public opinion. Once

an individual's "reality" is constructed, change is difficult.

Candidates use the media to frame themselves positively and their opponents

negatively. For example, Senator Obama often framed Senator McCain as "McSame,"

suggesting that if McCain were elected, his presidency would be similar to that of George W.

Bush (Kenski et al. 2010). Since Obama implied that his counterpart was likely to continue

with his predecessor's policies, the "McSame" frame had a negative effect on American

voters.

2.8 Summary

The literature presented in this chapter has established that African American

presidential candidates have been unsuccessful until 2008 due in part to voters' attitudes

toward their race. African American candidates have been evaluated by white voters as

incompetent, unfit for the political office they sought, and more interested in minority rights than the mutual interests of "all" Americans (Citrin et al. 1990; Moskowitz and Stroh 1994; Terkildsen 1993). While race seemed to be a significant factor in the lack of success of African American political figures in the past, more current research suggests that America is becoming post-racial (Walter 2007). Even in past elections, Sigelman et al. (1995) contend that it may be African American candidates' positions on issues that reduce their support among white voters and not negative prejudices toward their race. More recent research supports this view.

The representation of racial or ethnic minority candidates in the media influences votes. Alexander (2010) concluded that presidential campaigns in general have changed, suggesting that candidates could be considered "actors" whose performances determine their support and electability. Alexander argued that Obama's theatrical performance was pivotal to his success. Research indicates that money raised for a candidate is also critical to his or her electability (Kenski et al. 2010). The more finances that candidates possess, the better able they are to sway media outlets toward a positive framing effect. A large war chest gives candidates the ability to associate themselves with issues that positively influence American voters.

Factors such as race, political performances, money, party platform, presentation of self, and the substance of speeches made to American voters will impact the framing of a political figure. The goal of this research is to compare Alexander's pre-election frames of Obama to my own post-election frames found in the *New York Times* in order to examine whether or not the frames present during the 2008 presidential campaign as compared to those found after Obama's victory will tell a story. My hypothesis for the post election is

that Obama was framed in a more negative light when compared against the pre-election

period. Similar to the arguments of Altheide (1997), it appears that the media highlights

Obama's flaws during the post-election period more readily than his successes. I expect the

media coverage of President Obama has become more negative since the election because he

racially identifies as an African American. The research presented will describe the

change—if any—of the post-election frames in comparison to the pre-election frames.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This section describes the methodology used to determine the post-election framings of Barack Obama as found in editorials from the *New York Times*. These post-election findings will later be compared to the pre-election media portrayal of Obama as described by Alexander (2010).

3.1 Methodology

Content analysis, a systematic method of making inferences from text (Neuman 2006) which allows for the interpretation of underlying messages in media, was selected for this study. I analyzed the *New York Times* archival electronic newspaper texts (available via their website) to determine the post-election frames of President Obama. This newspaper was selected because it is often described as the national newspaper. The *New York Times* is the most respected and widely read paper in the U.S. (Tewksbury & Althaus 2000). The newspaper's editorial columns were chosen to be analyzed because they give the perspective or opinion of the editorial staff instead of the opinion of an individual such as occurs in opinion columns. The editorials are the likely location of the frames that influence voter perceptions (Druckman & Parkin 2005). The editorial board of the *New York Times* meets to discuss what will be written in these columns and as such the editorials represent the views of the newspaper and not specific individuals. This is important for my purposes because it ensures a consistent author perspective throughout the post-election period examined.

3.2 Sample

Between January 2010 and December 2010, 466 *New York Times* editorial columns on Barack Obama were written. This period was chosen to provide sufficient articles, while minimizing the "honeymoon effect" that typically is associated with positive depictions of

presidents at the beginning of their first terms (Barrett & Eshbaugh-Soha 2007; Beckmann &

Godfrey 2007).   Among the articles identified, seven were opinion columns or critiques

rather than editorials—they were deleted from the sampling frame leaving a pool of 459

articles. Of the 459 articles, every fourth article was selected for the sample ($n = 114$). The

unit of analysis was a sentence. A line-by-line analysis was used to identify any content that

referred to President Obama (e.g., President Barack Obama, Mr. Obama, the Obama

administration).

3.3 Coding

Frames were determined by a thematic coding of a random sample of 52 editorials

that mentioned President Obama (separate from sample pool mentioned above). I used open

and axial coding analyses to determine the initial frames. Open coding is the process of

identifying, naming, and categorizing what is found in the text (Neuman 2006). Axial coding

is the process of relating codes to one another and selective coding is finding the core

variable and relating other variables to the core variable (Neuman 2006). I read the

subsample of editorials from the *New York Times* and began identifying several themes and

categorizing the varying ways Obama was framed in the print news media (i.e., open coding).

Similar themes were collapsed into seven categories of frames which is outlined in the results

section (i.e., axial coding). In the process of selective coding, the central frame identified

was entitled "hero." I arrived at this central theme through the process of extracting the

frames found of Barack Obama. Of the seven frames found in the New York Times

editorials, it illustrates the overall theme of a hero. I compared the other frames to the core

frame to understand their similarities and differences. A clear and concise definition and

operationalization of each frame was created so that it could be accurately identified in the

complete sample of articles. After the frames were identified in the pilot sample, the full sample was coded to determine the number of times each frame appeared, what topical category the frame related to (e.g. the economy, war) and the date of its occurrence.

Intercoder reliability utilizes independent coders to corroborate coding schemes and to ensure coding validity (Neuman 2006). Twenty percent of the sampled articles (22 out of 114 articles) were coded by two researchers. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached about the correct coding scheme (Neuman 2006). After this, I coded the entire sample with the agreed upon frames.

In addition to identifying the salient frames, a line-by-line analysis of each sentence relating to Obama was used to determine whether he was cast in a positive, negative, or neutral light as determined by the coders. Sentences identified as expressing a tone were aggregated to the article unit of analysis. Thus, if there were 10 sentences in an editorial pertaining to Obama and seven of the 10 were positive, the tone of the article was recorded as positive. If the article had seven negative and six positive sentences, it was recorded as negative.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

4.1 Post-Election Frames in the *New York Times*

In order of highest frequency to lowest, seven frames were identified in the post-

election content analysis of the *New York Times* editorials: (1) civil hero, (2) vacillator, (3)

ineffective, (4) visionary, (5) transformative leader, (6) promise-keeper, and (7) promise-

breaker. Two or more frames may have appeared in each editorial. Seventy-nine of the 114

articles (69.30 percent) contained identifiable frames. The remaining 35 articles (30.70

percent) contained no identifiable frames. The frequencies of the frames by month of

publication are shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Frequency of Instances of Post-election Frames by Month of Publication

MONTH | FRAME	Civil Hero	Vacillator	Ineffective	Visionary	Transformative Leader	Promise-keeper	Promise-breaker	Total
January	7	3	6	2	2	0	2	22
February	4	4	2	3	1	1	0	15
March	3	4	0	2	2	0	0	11
April	2	5	1	3	1	0	0	12
May	5	1	3	1	1	1	1	13
June	2	2	4	0	1	0	2	11
July	4	2	1	1	3	1	1	13
August	3	1	1	1	3	1	0	10
September	3	2	3	3	1	1	0	13
October	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	6
November	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	5
December	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	4
TOTALS	35	28	24	19	18	5	6	135
%	26%	21%	18%	14%	13%	4%	4%	100%

During the post-election period, President Obama was framed as a civil hero in the

passages where he was presented as a champion of the people. He has championed the rights

of gays and lesbians by overturning the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. The *New York*

Times described him as desiring equality and opportunity of all before the law. To some

citizens his act of acceptance of gay and lesbian soldiers was heroic since the United States is

a predominantly heteronormative society, and least during this period, and frowned upon

same-sex relationships (Padavic and Reskin 2002). Obama has become the voice for many

Americans who are not often heard and because of his position, as president, he feels

compelled to ensure that the changes he makes will be beneficial to many, if not most.

Obama championing gay rights for military persons are one example of a civil hero. A civil

hero is one that the people can trust to protect their liberties. Civil hero is defined as one who

is concerned with the rights of citizens and attempts to implement policies to assure that

those rights are protected. Below are indicators of the civil hero frame as it was presented in

the editorials.

"Civil Hero" Depictions in the the *New York Times*

> (1) "Most recently, Neal Katyal, a deputy solicitor general, tried to persuade a three-judge federal appeals court panel to deny hearings to a group of prisoners who have been held under harsh conditions without adequate review for more than six years. Their prison – at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan – is a much larger version of the Guantanamo Bay Prison that President Obama has ordered close… As President Obama himself has argued, ensuring the fair treatment of detainees advances America's national security interests by denying Al Qaeda and the Taliban an effective recruiting tool" (January 18: p. A20).

> (2) "They [Republicans] claim Mr. Obama's economic policies are a failure and hope American will forget that it was President George W. Bush who turned big budget surpluses into huge deficits and whose contempt for regulation ultimately brought us to the brink of financial collapse. Since Obama was elected, millions of poor children who did not have health insurance got it" (November 2: p. A30).

The civil hero frame presents President Obama in a positive manner. The first quote

demonstrates human rights activism and alludes to improved national security. The second

quote mentioned Obama making an administrative change which encouraged states to expand the number of children offered free or reduced cost of health care insurance. It demonstrates that some poor American citizens, especially children, were not able to receive health insurance until Obama expanded the health care program which was initiated by the Bush administration. Obama transcends socioeconomic barriers with such a cause. The *New York Times* also presented President Obama as one who was concerned with human rights without regard to class, color, or citizenship; for example, Obama assured the American people that the unfair treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay would be brought to an end as he aimed to close the facility. Thirty-five comments (26 percent) identify Obama as a civil hero (see Table 1).

In the various newspaper accounts that identified Obama as a civil hero race was not mentioned, either implicitly or explicitly, as a reason for his accomplishments. Interestingly, while the majority of Obama's frames were those of a civil hero, the second largest frame was that of a vacillator. That is, there were negative reactions toward Obama and how he was conducting his presidency by American citizens. Though Obama was depicted in a favorable light (i.e., civil hero) by the *New York Times* Editorial Staff, there were instances where he was portrayed as indecisive and/or ineffective. As a vacillator, Obama is framed as an individual who is unsure of what to do. The *vacillator* frame portrays an indecisive, ineffective, and/or hesitant leader who is unable to handle issues that seems too challenging to handle by oneself. The following newspaper accounts are instances of the vacillator frame.

"Vacillator" Depictions in the *New York Times*

(1) "On Thursday, President Obama held meetings on immigration reform with immigrant advocates and labor and religious leaders, with Senators

> Charles Schumer and Lindsey graham, and with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. He came out reiterating his "unwavering" commitment to comprehensive immigration reform. We've heard that before; what we'd rather know is when the bill is coming, what it will look like and what he is going to do to get it passed. Enough with the talk" (March 13: p. A18).
>
> (2) "But he spent too much time talking to reluctant Democrats and Republicans who never had the slightest intention of supporting him. He sat on the sidelines while the Republicans bombarded Americans with false but effective talk of death panels and a government takeover of their doctors' offices" (January 21: p. A38).
>
> (3) "Who else has shown such courage in the long struggle for immigration reform? Not President Obama, who has retreated to lip service and vagueness in his calls for reform" (May 30: p. A26).

The vacillator frame has a negative tone. Phrases such as "lip service" and "we've heard it before" imply that Obama is duplicitous and deceitful. These statements are similar to Alexander's contention that Obama attempted to charm Americans without providing substance. The civil hero frame specifically demonstrates the *New York Times* belief that Obama is attempting to make a difference and live up to American voters' expectations. Yet, because he is not clear with the decisions and appear to be hesitant about his intentions during his term in office (i.e., presidency), he is characterized as a vacillator. Caswell (2009) argues that Obama appealed to many Americans because he talked persistently about hope and change; and they were receptive to such oratory, especially in light of their disillusionment with the Bush administration. The civil hero and vacillator frame are competing perspectives because the civil hero depicts Obama as someone who is working against great odds to make changes which will advance the public good, while the vacillator indicates someone who is indecisive, goes back on his word, and/or is weak. There were twenty-eight instances (21 percent) that identified Obama as a vacillator (see Table 1).

The *ineffective* frame is defined as criticism of a leader who fails to meet the public's expectations. While similar to vacillator in its negative depiction of the President, this frame differs because it implies that Obama lacks clarity and succinctness in terms of informing citizens about his decision-making process. The "vacillator" frame portrays President Obama as indecisive and ineffective, while the "ineffective" frame depicts him as making decisions that are not progressive. The following passages are examples of the ineffective frame.

"Ineffective" Depictions in the *New York Times*

> (1) "The Obama administration's anti-foreclosure efforts – which press lenders to reduce interest rates – isn't doing nearly enough" (January 5: p. A20).

> (2) "But President Obama and Congressional Democrats have also clearly failed to explain why reform will make Americans' lives more secure – not less" (January 26: p. A22).

The above editorial quotes portray Obama as unsuccessful in his planning and decision making. The ineffective frame is driven by negative critiques of President Obama. Twenty-four comments (18 percent) depict Obama as ineffective (see Table 1). In this representation of Obama, he is portrayed as making some effort to change policies but his attempts are not fruitful. The *New York Times* stated that Obama was "not doing nearly enough" about problems in the housing market. In the former quote, the editorial discussed how the financial crisis and Great Recession are effecting people's livelihood, specifically within the housing market. Because this is the case, Obama mentioned during his campaign that he would address some of the issues surrounding the housing market. Obama's way of responding to the housing problem was to reduce mortgage rates and a home buyer's tax credit, which some people thought would be a good idea. However, it was not enough

because it did not eliminate the new and existing homes (~3.2 million) that were not being

bought (*New York Times* 2010). In addition, the increase in unemployment was also

contributing to the borrowers not being able to qualify for aid to maintain their mortgage

payments. Instead, the editorial stated that it would have been better to have banks/loan

providers lessen the principal balance, lowering monthly payments, and restoring the equity

of these home (*New York Times* 2010). However, lenders resisted Congressional efforts to

change the law. So while Obama has aimed to resolve this issue, his methods were not

effective.

Though most of the frames specifically state that Obama is not "doing enough," there

were instances when Obama was seen as a failure for situations that he had little to no control

over. For example, during Obama's campaign he mentioned that he wanted to create

healthcare reform to ensure that the 46 million Americans who do not have healthcare for

varying reasons can afford coverage. However, the state of Massachusetts did not support

Obama's efforts due to this state having its own healthcare reform that was implemented in

2006. Though Obama has good ideas, the *New York Times* stated that Obama needs to be

effective in informing American voters about the necessity of this bill and persuade voters

how the bill meets their basic interests.

Visionary is defined as a leader who has clear and distinctive ideas of the direction

the country should take in the future and is able to inspire others to accept his ideas for future

goals.   Indicators of the visionary frame are below.

"Visionary" Depictions in the *New York Times*

(1) "Mr. Obama shocked congress and the space industry when he announced **plans** to abandon the Bush administration's goal of landing astronauts on the Moon by 2020 and terminate development of the rockets and crew capsules needed to get there. Instead, he proposed to rely on commercial companies to

carry astronauts and cargo to the International Space station orbit and called on NASA to develop "game-changing" technologies to make travel to more distant destinations – asteroids and eventually Mars – cheaper and faster" (October 2: p. A18).

(2) "His boldest new idea is to give the federal government powers, in conjunction with state insurance regulators, to reject excessive premium increases" (February 23: p. A26).

(3) "When it was unveiled – in budget documents – in February, we thought President Obama's new approach to human space flight made good sense" (April 16: p. A26).

The visionary frame casts Obama in a positive light. It emphasizes wisdom and forward thinking. Nineteen comments (14 percent) depict Obama as a visionary as illustrated in Table 1. This frame is consistent with Obama's campaign rhetoric concerning his plans for the country and the direction it should take. In this frame, the *New York Times* editorials express the view that Obama has thought of new ways to improve the function of the United States by creating jobs and improving the issues surrounding the housing markets, healthcare, NASA research projects, and the like. For example, the *New York Times* reported that there were concerns that NASA employees had in reference to their employment due to budget documents that they received. And while these employees were concerned about potentially losing their jobs due to the lack of funds, President Obama gave a speech at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida to discuss some of his new plans to mitigate the impact of job losses.

In addition, he [Obama] pledged to spend $40 million to promote job creation and economic development in the state of Florida. At the time of his speech, he began to answer questions that many individuals had in reference to not only jobs but for space travel as well. He called for picking a rocket design for travel by 2015 to other planets such as Mars by the mid-2030s. Some of the ideas Obama had abandoned Bush's goals of landing astronauts on

the moon because he [Obama] proposed that NASA should rely on commercial companies to carry astronauts and cargo to the International Space Station to make travel to space both cheaper and faster. That is, he believed that it would be best to generate plans that would be effective without costing too much money. In addition, the *New York Times* applauds Obama's plans for rescuing the country from the debt that it is currently experiencing.

A *transformative leader* is defined as an individual who identifies the needed change within individuals and social systems. That is, the leader serves as a role model for his/her followers and aims to improve the collective identity of the organization, which in this case is, the United States. Eighteen frames (13 percent) identify Obama as a transformative leader (see Table 1).

"Transformative Leader" Depictions in the *New York Times*

(1) "In recent months, the Obama administration has said and done many of the right things toward building a long-term relationship with Pakistan. It has committed to long-term economic aid" (July 27: p. A18).

(2) "They surely will be sending more, now that the Obama administration has wisely, if belatedly, granted temporary protected status to undocumented Haitians in the United States" (February 1: p. A18).

Obama is a transformative leader because one of his many goals as president was to not only implement new policies and bills to promote equality across racial, gender, class, and sexuality lines but to improve international relationships and to restore the international community's faith in America. For example, the *New York Times* reported the natural disaster (i.e., earthquake) in Haiti in 2010. During this time, the United States, Canada, and other nations tried to outline a recovery plan to aid in creating a "new" Haiti. Donor countries and Haitian leaders examined the ways to promote self-sufficiency, rebuild and maintain the infrastructure of Haiti, and varying mechanisms of improving the economy

through agriculture (i.e., coffee, mango, sugar cane). In addition to developing a recovery

plan, Obama administration granted temporary protected status to undocumented Haitians in

the United States. In addition, to assisting Haitian leaders with their natural disaster,

President Obama and his administration have repaired relationship with countries such as

Pakistan (*New York Times* 2010).

When President Bush was in office (2000-2008), there was not a positive relationship

between the United States and Pakistan. However, since Obama and his administration have

been established, the United States and Pakistan have been working together to eliminate

terrorists, such as Al Qaeda that serves as a threat to both countries. Also, the Obama

administration committed to long-term economic aid and encouraged better relations between

Afghanistan and Pakistan. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, many, if not most,

Americans were frightened about the country's national security. However, Obama was

explicit during his presidential acceptance speech in 2008 that the United States should not

be perceived as an enemy to any country and that better relationships should be developed

among them.

The two examples given of the transformative leader frame illustrate how President

Obama identified a need to change the perceptions foreign individual's had toward the

United States. By rebuilding relationships with countries such as Pakistan and offering

assistance to Haiti during the earthquake, the United States attempted to generate a positive

collective identity. That is, it showed countries that while America is considered an

individualistic society, collectively it is willing to aid those who encounter hardships. It is a

country willing to put aside negative situations that once existed to work together in a

professional manner. One of the goals of Obama was to characterize himself and the country

as an ally to other countries to change individual's perspectives and/or stigmas that they may

have for particular groups (i.e., race, class, sexuality, gender) living within and outside the

United States.

A *promise-keeper* is one who "makes good" on his promises. This frame focuses

primarily on the promises that Obama made during the 2008 presidential campaign and

determines if he stood by what he stated. In the first two years of his presidency, Obama was

able to meet some of his expectations. The passages below are indicators that the *New York*

Times portrayed him as following through with the promises made:

"Promise-keeper" Depictions in the *New York Times*

(1) "President Obama deserves credit for promising the withdrawal and for sticking to it" (August 28: p. A18).

(2) "Most important Mr. Obama needs to clearly explain the stakes to the American people. Mr. Obama took an important step on Monday by issuing, at long last, his own detailed proposals for reform. The most basic facts to keep in mind are that Mr. Obama's plan, which builds on a sound bill already passed by the Senate, would provide coverage to more than 30 million uninsured people while reducing future deficits and beginning to rein in medical costs" (February 23: p. A26).

The *promise-keeper* frame has a positive tone. The second quote is more specific in

implying that one of the focal points of Obama's platform, healthcare reform, is coming to

fruition. Five sample frames (4 percent) identify Obama as a promise-keeper (see Table 1).

In the first quote, the *New York Times* reported that during Obama's presidential campaign he

mentioned that if selected to be the 44th president of the United States, he would bring the

military troops that were in Iraq back to the United States. Under Bush's administration, he

sent soldiers to Iraq in 2003 to look for weapons of mass destructions, however, it was clear

that there were not any weapons there. So it was clear that there were no reason for the

soldiers to be in Iraq and because Americans were made aware of this pointless act by

President Bush, Obama promised American voters he would relieve them of their duties in Iraq.

Though the staff of the *New York Times* credits President Obama with delivering on some of his promises, they criticize him for not following through on others. *Promise-breaker* is defined as an individual who makes a specific promise that he or she did not keep or is unable to keep. Although this frame is related to both the vacillator and disappointment frame, it has been singled out in similar fashion to the promise-keeper frame, as it is weighed against his commitments during the pre-election period.

"Promise-breaker" Depictions in the *New York Times*

(1) "Mr. Obama has done many important things on the environment, and in foreign affairs in preventing the nation's banking system from collapsing in the face of a financial crisis he inherited. But he [Obama] seems to have lost touch with two core issues for Americans: their jobs and their homes" (January 21: p. A38).

(2) "President Obama already has outstanding his pledge to reform the presidential subsidy system that he chose to skirt in his campaign. The President could and should ignite the movement for public alternatives" (September 6: p. A18).

Obama's failure to address promises that were made during the 2008 presidential campaign leaves him at risk of being perceived as a *promise-breaker*, Six instances (4 percent) identify Obama as a promise-breaker. Similar to the disappointment frame, the promise-keeper frame influences how American voters perceive Obama and it could impact his re-election in 2012. If Obama breaks the promises that he made to American citizens, they would view him as untrustworthy. Of the seven frames, promise breaker and promise keeper frames appear as most vital to a president while in office. These two frames may determine the future electability of presidents seeking a second term.

4.2 Tone of Post-Election Editorials of President Obama

After examining the seven frames identified in the *New York Times* editorial PAGES,

I determined if the editorials were written in a certain tone (i.e., negative, positive, neutral).

Many of the editorials reviewed for this study contained an overarching positive tone when

reporting on events surrounding President Obama. Tone in this context is the general attitude

and/or demeanor of a piece of writing (i.e., *New York Times*). The tone of an editorial was

identified using a line- by-line analysis that was independent of that used to classify the

frames themselves. Tone was determined for the editorial as a whole while one article could

have multiple frames.   According to the statistics shown in Table 2, 37 editorials were

evaluated as positive (46.84 percent), 21 negative (26.58 percent), and 21 neutral (26.58

percent). The findings suggest a predominantly positive tone for this year of Obama's

presidency. The negative and neutral editorials about Obama are equivalent in their

occurrence, each individually consisting of approximately one quarter of the sample.

Table 2. Tone of the *New York Times* Articles

MONTH | TONE	Positive	Negative	Neutral
January	6	2	2
February	5	1	2
March	3	1	3
April	2	1	4
May	6	2	1
June	1	5	2
July	3	1	2
August	2	1	3
September	3	2	1
October	2	2	1
November	3	1	0
December	1	2	0
TOTAL	37	21	21
%	46.84%	26.58%	26.58%

Table 2 leads to the conclusion that in the month of January, February, and May, Obama received the most positive affirmation for his performances during this year, while in June the tone became more negative. Editorials in January and February highlighted Obama's implementation of plans to restore the economy after the economic crisis and increase access to health care in the United States. In May, the *New York Times* reported about President Obama's response to international affairs, terrorism, immigration reform, military repeal (i.e., eliminate discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation), and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The "honeymoon" effect is not a valid reason why Obama was depicted with an overall positive tone in the *New York Times.* According to Bernhord, Reenock, and Nordstrom (2003), there are periods where people are prepared to give a new political system a period to establish and prove itself before evaluating its performance. As American citizens elect a new president, they are less likely to have negative attitudes toward the newly elected president for a certain time period, which is typically seven months (Barrett & Eshbaugh-Soha 2007; Beckmann & Godfrey 2007).

While the first three months of editorials in this sample contained more reports concerning political competence, leadership, and integrity, in June the tone became more negative. During this month, the *New York Times* criticized Obama for not addressing immigration reform and other important issues. Additionally, in June the *Times* started commenting on Obama's inability to stand up to opponents, especially regarding immigration reform. In spite of the criticisms, the newspaper printed more positive than negative editorials about Obama during 2010.

4.3 Comparative Analysis of the Pre and Post-Election Periods

Alexander (2010) conducted a frame analysis of the pre-election presidential candidates. Alexander analyzed news media coverage, specifically from the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, for five months (i.e., early summer to early autumn).   He did not give a detailed description of his data source and collection methods, however, he cites numerous media outlets, such as newspapers, television advertisements, radio stations, polls, and blogs, from which he gathered information. Alexander did not specifically state how he operationalized his frames but in his conclusion he mentioned "hero" to describe the presidential candidates as well as the types of hero with which a presidential candidate was associated.

Alexander likens the pre-election campaign atmosphere to that of the theater. Aside from criteria such as experience, much of what candidates have to offer is not real—it is hypothetical. A candidate's image is based on their "acting performance," which suggests that presidential candidates perform in a way that is favorable to their audience. In this context, the audience is American voters. Once a candidate is elected, however, they are held accountable not only for what they promised in their campaign, but also for the expected and impromptu demands of their office. The "acting performance" upon which observers once judged the individual is then supplanted by their "job performance." I distinguished the following seven frames: (1) *civil hero*, (2) *vacillator*, (3) *disappointment*, (4) *visionary*, (5) *transformative leader*, (6) *promise-keeper*, and (7) *promise-breaker* in the *New York Times* editorial. The civil hero and transformative leader frames were common in the pre-election presidential campaign depiction of Obama in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street*

Journal and the post-election depiction of Obama after being elected into office.   The

greater frequencies of these two frames, in conjunction with the visionary and promise-

keeper frames, are indicators that Obama was generally portrayed positively by the *New York*

Times during these time periods.

Alexander's research (2010) on pre-election frames identified the hero frame as the

central and most frequently used frame in the pre-election media portrayals of Obama. In

fact, he asserted that each of the candidates embodied different kinds of heroes:

> "Heroes rise above ordinary political life, and the narratives we spin about
> them allow us to understand how they are able to do so. Stories about heroes
> create meaning by looking back to the past from the present and by projecting
> the plot's next act into the future, all at the same time. In their earlier lives,
> heroes were tested and suffered, usually on behalf of something greater than
> themselves" (Alexander: 64).

Obama became a part of the political sphere in 1996 when he was elected into the Illinois

Senate 13th District (1996-2004). However, in 2000, Obama faced some political adversities

when he attempted to run against Bobby Rush, an incumbent, in a Chicago congressional

race. Obama was not perceived as a "hero" in this setting because members of the black

community in Chicago believed that Mr. Rush was a better advocate for them considering

that he [Rush] was an activist in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

and a leader of the local Black Panther party (Alexander 2010). Rush was perceived to be

the voice for oppressed and vulnerable people against the white power structure and still he

remains a hero to the African American community. Obama was not able to reflect a hero to

this same audience because he was not able to relate to this community. Since his defeat

against Mr. Rush, he served as the United States Senator from Illinois (2005-2008) and as

time progressed, Obama matured politically and aimed to distinguish how he could relate to

most citizens.   When Obama announced that he was going to run in the 2008 presidential

election and he received support from his peers, including Mr. Rush. Alexander (2010)

stated, "Obama has the gift of making people see themselves in him" (Alexander 2010: 65).

While they viewed Obama as a hero based on his political struggles early on in his career,

they also saw Obama as a transformative leader by inspiring Americans to be hopeful for a

better America that will "fight for trust, justice and the American way" (Alexander 2010: 67).

These two frames became dominant themes in Alexander's analysis of candidate

Obama's campaign. The pre-election period, as described by Alexander, involved Obama's

successful "performance" as a political actor; one that resulted in a positive media depiction

that ultimately paved the way for his presidency. Negative frames of Obama—such as race

(through cues), naiveté, and lack of experience—were prevalent in advertisements and

endorsements by Obama's opponents. Contending political parties, rather than the mass

media organizations themselves, were the primary proponents of these negative frames of

Obama. One might argue that, with Obama's comparatively limited political experience, the

mass media was better able to increase his favorability by positively dramatizing his "Yes

We Can" campaign as opposed to nitpicking the negatives of his senatorial career.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
5.1 Summary of the 2008 Presidential Candidacy and Presidency of Obama

At the onset of this study, I expected to see both racial cues and socio-political factors as determinants for a negative shift in post-election media depictions of Obama. While I was unable to isolate any racial cues, my findings suggest that at least in this case, society is quite critical once a "hero" is elected to office. Heroes are expected to surmount the insurmountable, but this expectation is unrealistic with respect to the presidency. Obama's contemporaries had tremendous expectations with regard to economic, political, diplomatic, social, and environmental reform. The positive post-election media frames indicate that Obama is viewed as possessing the characteristics that define a hero, however, when considering the unrealistic expectations that the American public placed on the victor of the 2008 presidential election, it becomes clear that "leader" is perhaps the best way to categorize President Obama. When a person thinks of a hero, a character that may come to mind is "superman" or "batman," however, Obama was limited in his ability to address all of the concerns he outlined during his candidacy. Heroes are depicted as being able to overcome all obstacles even those that seem unmanageable, however, in reality individuals elected into the highest elected office in the United States are unable to address the many challenges that they come across on a day-to-day basis. President Obama and his predecessors should be framed as leaders because while the aim is to make structural and cultural improvements in the United States, there is only so much a president can do during his four- or eight-year term. The three negative frames—vacillator, disappointment, and

promise-breaker—are frames that ground the presidential position in reality, a reality where one is unable to escape criticism.

Alexander's (2010) "hero" mantra, describing the pre-election depiction of the presidential candidates is, in some ways, as unrealistic as the feats of Hercules himself. It is no surprise that in order for presidential candidates to be successful, they must set lofty goals, yet it is unrealistic for the American public to believe that a president is able to decisively bring such goals to fruition—the three branches of government limit even the most heroic of individuals. The majority of voters believed that Obama could erase racial barriers. They believed that Obama could unify American government, where historically, two hands (the Democrats and Republicans) work independently. They believed that Obama was a panacea to social, economic, and international turmoil. Such lofty expectations will invite the kind of criticism that all presidents should expect during a term. I believe that a negative shift in the framing of Obama, following his election, is simply the natural state of affairs with respect to the presidency. The frames identified in the post-election analysis indicate that Obama has been evaluated in the *New York Times* based on his triumphs and failures. The frames found in the post-election editorials do not explicitly position race as a factor affecting President Obama's depiction. Does this mean that Obama's race is insignificant in American politics? No. Sacco (2005) states that the media has a strong influence on American voters' perceptions, ideologies, and assessments of events that are taking place. Considering that the media creates different frames of individuals and events, would it be wrong to assume that the editorial staff themselves are also susceptible to racial influences such as those outlined by Citrin et al. (1990), Terkildsen (1993), and Moskowitz and Stroh (1994)? In the same vein, such influences have an all but absent voice because social progress has rendered racial

cues to be inappropriate in today's media; this gives credence to several of the arguments made by Walters (2007), Novkov (2008), and Branton (2009) that show progress toward a post-racial America. If a modern publication were to use "racial coding", it would be publicly criticized and its reputation would be compromised. It is no longer acceptable to use the form of writing cited by Valentino (2002) in contemporary America. Regardless of these assumptions, one would have a tough time arguing that race is no longer a salient issue in modern American society, thus, race must have some impact on the factors that influence political outcomes and the depictions of the parties involved.

While Valentino (2002) states that racial coding is a negative device, I believe that Barack Obama coded himself, using race, to realize a positive outcome. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama often stated that America and Americans needed a "change." When he spoke of change, he himself embodied a change in racial attitudes. That is, Obama was quite cognizant that if he were to win the election, he would be the first African American president in the United States: one that symbolizes a post-racial, meritocratic America. Transcending color is a powerful skill in modern politics—whether it be that of black and white or red and blue. Most of the presidents and vice presidents prior to Obama identified as white, middle to upper class men who held a more rigid party alignment. Obama framed himself as an exception to the rule with respect to race and the bipartisan political system itself. He is not immune, however, to the American public's expectation of a swift death to the dragons that the United States faces; these are expectations that only the "heroes" of mythology could live up to. It is more appropriate to frame Barack Obama for what he is: a "leader"—a person who will be required to realize the current hopes of the American public.

5.2 Limitations

Time constraints limited the sample to one source, the *New York Times*, and one collection of that data source, editorials. It would have been worthwhile to analyze two major newspaper organizations: one considered being liberal and the other conservative in order to determine if the frames were consistent. The pre-election media frames were pulled from Alexander's work, though he did no thoroughly explain his data source or collection: He implied that he used several media outlets but he did not report the steps that were taken to isolate the themes he viewed as prominent during the pre-election. Alexander also had more time, which enabled him to analyze many more types of media.

5.3 Future Research

The study should be expanded to analyze President Obama's entire term. Even though this research found both positive and negative frames, it would have been valuable to analyze how he is depicted after events such as Osama Bin Laden's elimination. A comparison of the 2008 and the 2012 campaigns might highlight frames that are unique. Observing the overall reputation that Obama has built and its impact on the upcoming campaign would be thought-provoking; How did this affect his campaign strategy? Time is an important variable to consider. That is, when Senator Obama decided to run for the presidency, the United States experienced an economic recession. Could Obama have won the presidency during a period of social and economic stability?

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