ABSTRACT

Barack Obama and the Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism:
Race, Economy, Security, and the Exceptional Rhetorical Apparatus of Sovereign Power

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This thesis examines President Barack Obama's use of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism to establish authority for the exercise of sovereign power. I perform a close reading of three speeches to examine how Obama uses American exceptionalism to garner authority on issues of race, the economy, and national security. Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech demonstrates how Obama deploys the rhetoric of American exceptionalism to limit the rhetorical force of racial anger. The 2011 State of the Union illustrates how Obama rhetorically manipulates time to defend neoliberal economics through the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Obama's "Our Security, Our Values" speech shows how Obama uses the rhetoric of the rule of law to establish American exceptionalism as a durable rhetorical framework for ongoing actions in the war on terror. Together, these speeches demonstrate the importance of understanding how American exceptionalism functions in Obama's rhetoric as a foundation for sovereign power.

Barack Obama and the Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism:
Race, Economy, Security, and the Exceptional Rhetorical Apparatus of Sovereign Power

by

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A Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

The Rhetorical Exigency of Obama's American Exceptionalism

Introduction

Robert Schlesinger, opinion editor at *U.S. News and World Report*, opined that, "only one sitting president in the last 82 years has publicly uttered the magical phrase 'American exceptionalism.'" "The only president to publicly discuss (and for that matter embrace) 'American exceptionalism,'" Schlesinger writes, "is Barack Obama." In the remark Schlesinger points to, Obama outlines the contours of his unique vision of American exceptionalism:

> I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism. I'm enormously proud of my country and its role and history in the world. … [T]he United States remains the largest economy in the world. We have unmatched military capability. And I think that we have a core set of values that are enshrined in our Constitution, in our body of law, in our democratic practices, in our belief in free speech and equality, that, though imperfect, are exceptional.[1]

Obama outlines a vision of American exceptionalism that is historically nuanced, self-aware, and appreciative of difference. By establishing a relationship between American exceptionalism and other nationalist exceptionalisms, Obama implicitly contrasts a larger narrative about absolutist American supremacy with a balanced, inter-subjective image of American exceptionalism. Despite this nuanced articulation, Obama's American exceptionalism remains firmly committed to the political and economic realities of American hegemony and the exceptional American democratic values of freedom and equality, "that, though imperfect, are exceptional."

While it is certainly true that "the United States remains the largest economy in the world," and enjoys "unmatched military capability," for Obama, what makes America exceptional has as much to do with its democratic principles as the political and economic realities of American power. The United States' place in history, "though imperfect," emanates directly from the values that constitute the American experiment in democracy. The principles of "free speech and equality" are rhetorically interwoven with a proud declaration of America's military and economic hegemony. Obama's rhetorical articulation of American exceptionalism arises, therefore, out of the nexus between American power and American democracy. My thesis critically examines Obama's rhetorical deployment of American exceptionalism as a means of establishing sovereign authority and presidential power. I engage in a study of three speeches that provide examples of American exceptionalism in Obama's public address to demonstrate how Obama's rhetoric articulates a democratic vision of American exceptionalism.

This investigation provides a few key insights concerning Obama's rhetoric and a better understanding of Obama's presidency. Grasping why Obama chooses to rhetorically articulate his presidential leadership through the rhetorical framework of American exceptionalism helps scholars understand the vision of governance Obama brings to the table. It can also help them comprehend what did or did not resonate with voters who elected Obama and help critics interpret and analyze Obama's rhetoric during the remainder of his career. I also hope my thesis can contribute to the historical study of American democratic politics. Determining why American exceptionalism functions as a persuasive rhetorical device in American political culture is essential to engaging in an ongoing analysis of how American politicians and citizens understand their country's place in history.

Finally, this thesis offers a significant inquiry into the study of rhetoric at large. The field of rhetoric is heavily invested in the values and principles of liberal democracy. As Robert L. Ivie argues, the greatest "hope" offered by the field of rhetorical study lies in the possibility of "strengthening the means of democratic dissent and deliberation," and "reinforcing democratic values."[2] When rhetorical critics analyze public address, they often begin with the assumption that their task is to bring rhetoric in line with the values of democracy. However, if the values of democracy are also the rhetorical glue that holds American exceptionalism together, rhetorical scholars face a tougher challenge when analyzing the rhetoric of American exceptionalism itself. Because rhetorical study is itself entangled in the discursive matrix through which American exceptionalism becomes intelligible, critically analyzing the rhetorical functions of American exceptionalism could mean fundamentally re-evaluating the democratic principles through which rhetorical criticism attempts to analyze public address.

Justification and Research Questions

As the United States enters the 2012 election cycle, I believe this thesis will provide a timely and unique intervention into the study of Obama's presidency. More generally, I hope my thesis will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between rhetorical theory and democratic political philosophy. Toward this end, I engage three sets of questions as I analyze Obama's public address: questions about American exceptionalism as a rhetorical concept, questions about Obama's American exceptionalism specifically, and questions about the overall implications of Obama's American exceptionalism for the study of rhetoric.

The first set of questions deals with the subject of American exceptionalism itself: What does it mean to be an American exceptionalist, and how does American exceptionalism manifest rhetorically? By looking at the way Obama draws on the legacy of American exceptionalism to craft his own unique brand of American exceptionalism, my thesis points toward the salience of American exceptionalism as a potential rhetorical framework capable of spanning across multiple cross sections of American political culture. As Vanessa B. Beasley notes, American exceptionalism functions ideographically, cutting across the political spectrum of the United States to provide presidents with a diverse reservoir of rhetorical resources from the legacy of American civil religion.[3] There is no such thing as a single rhetorical structure called 'American exceptionalism.' Rather, there exists a multiplicity of American exceptionalisms that are performed rhetorically by various orators in a diverse set of political and rhetorical situations that emerge throughout the vast legacy of American public address. This thesis attempts to come to terms with how Obama draws on the broader rhetorical reservoir of American exceptionalism to craft a particular vision of American exceptionalism to suit his rhetorical needs in various situations.

Obama's rhetoric must be understood within the ambiguous terrain of exceptionalism as a concept. Any discussion of exceptionalism bumps up against a conceptual ambiguity inherent in the word "exception." Two definitions of exceptionalism must be fleshed out. The first understanding of exceptionalism implies that a nation is historically unique or extraordinary. The second refers to the status of making an exception to a rule or norm. These two meanings overlap as American exceptionalism is used to describe both why America is an exceptional nation with extraordinary democratic values and why America's status as an exceptional nation

requires making occasional exceptions to the application of America's extraordinary democratic values. These two definitions of the word "exceptional" overlap when discussing American exceptionalism in a political and rhetorical context. The *mythos* of America's greatness can justify overlooking practices that cast a shadow on America's legacy as the light that guides the rest of the world. In this regard, the rhetoric of American exceptionalism deploys America's status as an exceptional nation with exceptional values to justify making exceptions to American democratic values. The conceptual tension of American exceptionalism is located, therefore, at what Russell Lowell Riley identifies as the dilemma of America's lasting historical "dissonance between a creed of equality and customs of inquality."[4] The rhetorical danger posed by American exceptionalism lies in the possibility that presidents can perpetually use the rhetoric of American exceptionalism to undermine the country's democratic practices in the process of creating a political and legal global order supposedly built around those democratic norms.

The questions outlined above are important for establishing a ground upon which to rhetorically interrogate the expansion of the institutional power of the American executive. The institution of the American presidency is situated as a unique or exceptional facet of America's historical experiment in democracy. This position indicates that all presidents must, in one way or another, portray their leadership as a contingent actualization of universal democratic principles—they are both the exceptional recipients and agents of America's democratic promise. The dual articulation of exceptionalism as justification of exceptions made to legal or political norms and exceptionalism as that which makes a given nation historically unique thus constitutes a crucial site for interrogating the relationship between the institution of the American

presidency and the expansion of this institution's power through rhetorical means. Developing an acute awareness of the rhetorical trajectory of exceptionalism in American democratic discourse is crucial in developing the intellectual tools capable of addressing the gap between the rhetorically articulated norms of American democratic discourse and the historical reality of US politics. By tracking how exceptionalism calls on certain abstract symbolic values to describe particular concrete actions or policies, rhetorical analysis of American exceptionalism offers a means of critically intervening in the gap between America's professed ideals and the reality of American politics.

The second set of questions deals with President Obama specifically. What are the rhetorical or discursive features of Obama's exceptionalism, or, in other words, how does exceptionalism manifest in Obama's rhetoric? What are some of the rhetorical situations that give rise to Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism, and how do these different rhetorical situations call into being distinctive discursive articulations of American exceptionalism? Does Obama have a specific rhetorical style in which he articulates American exceptionalism?

I chose to focus on Obama for two main reasons. First, Obama offers a vision of American exceptionalism that is couched in progressive, democratic values such as inclusion, unity, optimism, and the rule of law.[5] Despite this progressive rhetoric, Obama has nonetheless continued a model of presidential authority that is less than progressive, especially when it comes to American actions in the war on terror. Tom Engelhardt, a teaching fellow at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California Berkeley, argues in his book *The American Way of War: How Bush's Wars Became Obama's* that "Obama didn't just inherit the presidency. He went for it. And he isn't just sitting atop it. He's actively using it. He's wielding power…[I]n his war policies in

Afghanistan and Pakistan, his imperial avatar is already plunging deep into the dark, distinctly opaque valley of death."[6] Analyzing Obama's unique vision of American exceptionalism helps demonstrate how Obama establishes and expands presidential authority rhetorically by drawing from a broad array of American values, including values that are traditionally thought of as progressive.

Second, the historical significance of the Obama election makes Obama an important figure in any scholarly discussion of American exceptionalism. As the first non-white president of the United States of America, Obama obviously embodies an exception to the historical norms of racial exclusion in American politics. Yet it could also be said that the fact that an African-American now occupies the chief executive office of a country with a pervasive legacy of institutionalized racism indicates an inherent capacity for US democratic institutions to overcome inequality and injustice. In this way, Obama's presidency fits into the constellation of democratic principles that make up the American political landscape. "Obama's presidency," according to theologian Johnny Bernard Hill, is "not a freak of nature or an anomaly in American racial politics. Rather, it represents a natural development in the historical, political, and cultural saga of America as an experiment with justice, freedom, and liberty."[7] Obama reflects both the unity and the tension between the dual definitions of exceptionalism. "Obama's presidency makes little sense," Hill argues, "apart from both the image of the American Dream as a metaphor for the perceived promise and possibility reflected in American society and the black freedom struggle that has come to define the very heart and soul of American democratic ideals."[8] Obama thus represents the tension between the exceptional nature of the promise of American democracy and the possibility of historical exceptions to that promise. My thesis explores the question of whether

American exceptionalism works to either elucidate or obscure the gap between the promises and the practices of American democracy.

The third set of questions I employ deals with the theoretical implications of Obama's exceptionalism on the relationship between rhetorical study and the values of American democracy. If exceptionalism provides a salient rhetorical vehicle for packaging non-democratic governmental practices as democratic, how should rhetorical critics go about interpreting presidential rhetoric about the exceptional nature of American democratic values? If the public's belief in American exceptionalism is a rhetorical constraint that all presidents must deal with, could it still be appropriate for rhetorical critics to subject the rhetorical deployment of American exceptionalism to axiological critique? Or, rather, is the discipline of rhetoric so firmly entrenched in the discursive matrix of American democratic principles that critics should think of American exceptionalism as a necessary rhetorical construct, regardless of the ethical or ideological implications involved in rhetorically constructing America as an exceptional nation?

Regarding the practical implications of my argument for the act of rhetorical criticism, my thesis interrogates a number of the field's historical, ideological, and theoretical assumptions about presidential rhetoric as I engage in a critique of Obama's rhetoric. In my discussion of Obama's rhetoric on race relations in America, I interrogate the value of democratic consensus by looking at how the unity promised by democratic consensus politics limits the rhetorical force of racial anger. In my analysis of Obama's economic rhetoric, I discuss how the democratic values of inclusion and participation are manipulated to help instantiate an ideology of neoliberalism. In my chapter on security, I look at how the democratic rhetoric of rule of law has come to replace the rhetoric of fear

in the rhetorical framework used by the President to justify expansive executive actions in the war on terror. American exceptionalism and the field of rhetoric are both coded in the discourse of democratic liberalism. A better understanding of Obama's rhetorical articulation of American exceptionalism requires a closer examination of rhetoric's relationship with democratic political philosophy. If the field of rhetoric dogmatically adheres to democratic concepts such as openness, reflexivity, inclusion, historical sensitivity, and individual participation in democratic deliberation, these seemingly benign democratic ideals and principles could also function as blind spots in the registers of rhetorical practice. My rhetorical analysis of Obama's speeches indicates that these disciplinary blinders could potentially shield rhetorical critics from fully analyzing the way the rhetoric of American exceptionalism serves the formal institutions of democracy while ultimately emptying these institutions of the values they claim to represent.

Method

The biggest methodological challenge I faced in writing my thesis was articulating an analysis of Obama's discourse that satisfies the political, ethical, and historical imperatives of critique while retaining a scholarly focus on the uniquely rhetorical features of Obama's leadership. Toward this end, I performed a close textual analysis of three speeches by Obama informed by critical theory. My primary critical interlocutor is Giorgio Agamben, whose work on the state of exception and sovereign power forms the primary theoretical basis of my argument. However, I also bring the theoretical lenses of Marxism and critical race theory to the table in order to study the economic and racial dimensions of Obama's rhetoric.

The method of close reading is useful for me because such an analysis encourages a critical focus on the rhetorical valence of particular texts. This method allowed me to produce a critical analysis of the overarching theoretical concepts that emerge within a given text while hopefully avoiding the intellectual pitfalls of theoretical abstraction. Michael Leff describes the interlocking relationship between empirical textual particularity and symbolic conceptual interpretation as a central feature of the practice of close reading. Rhetorical "interpretation," Leff argues, "requires an exercise of judgment at some level of abstraction, and it eventuates in something we might call theoretical understanding of the particular case. Paradoxically, then, the effort to displace theory with action leads from action back to theory."[9] The critical standards of close reading articulated by Leff hold that any conceptual interpretation must emerge from an analysis of the particular rhetorical trajectory of a given text. A close reading of Obama's speeches reveals a conceptual manifestation of American exceptionalism that is not simply present within the discourse, but integral to the rhetorical action of the text itself. By applying the theoretical tenets of close reading, I engage in an analysis of Obama's rhetoric that tracks how American exceptionalism itself is integral to the trajectory of symbolic action within Obama's public address.

Although the nature of close reading suggests that no one theory should rigidly inform my analysis, I do place my close reading in conversation with the writings of a diverse constellation of critical and rhetorical scholars. The theoretical constellation out of which my critique emerges offers a series of interventions into the intellectual and discursive foundations of liberal democracy and American political identity. Three distinct but interlocking theoretical characteristics inform my understanding of the role of rhetorical criticism. First, my analysis begins by challenging the taken-for-granted

presumptions and presuppositions of liberal democracy. The move to challenge the intellectual presumptions of liberal democratic thought shapes the contours of the overarching theoretical trajectory of my work. Although I believe the next two facets of my approach are unique methodological concerns that are theoretically valuable when considered independently of this first goal, they could also be understood as a means of enacting this overarching theoretical approach.

The second characteristic of my approach to rhetorical critique is an understanding of presidential rhetoric as intimately linked with the expansion of sovereign executive power. I place Giorgio Agamben's critique of sovereign power in conversation with the study of presidential rhetoric by analyzing the means through which sovereign executive power is established, articulated, and justified via rhetoric. In so doing, I offer a method of rhetorical criticism focused less on how particular rhetorical changes are enacted at the level of political culture, and more on how particular rhetorical continuities demonstrate paradigms of governance manifest in public address.

Third, my analysis calls into question the methodological strategy of treating rhetoric as a conduit for a pragmatic understanding of politics as the 'art of the possible,' by exposing 'the possible' itself as a rhetorical function of liberal democratic ideology. Although I have isolated three distinct features of my method, I recognize that these features blend into one another and work together to form a unique assemblage of critical interrogation. I do not conceive of these features as discrete. Nor are these features external theoretical structures that can be simply grafted onto rhetorical analysis. Instead, these features emerge out of my situatedness as a rhetorical critic engaging in close rhetorical analysis of particular rhetorical texts. As such, I recognize that my method, like any method, is necessarily incomplete, imperfect, and constantly in the process of

being created. I will now elaborate on the meaning and significance of each of these theoretical contributions.

First, challenging the habitual presuppositions of liberal democracy requires interrogating a number of rhetoric's disciplinary assumptions and presuppositions about democratic discourse and political philosophy. By analyzing the discursive trajectory of Obama's exceptionalist rhetoric as it is deployed to discuss the economy, race, and national security, I investigate the field's early defense of candidate Obama's rhetoric as an exemplary manifestation of liberal democratic political philosophy. I attempt to show in my review of literature that current rhetorical scholarship on Obama reflects a series of problematic critical presuppositions that are rooted in the hegemonic discourse of neoliberal democratic ideology. In the conclusion, I argue that the desire to describe Obama as an exemplary figure of democratic discourse reflects a deeper anxiety about the relationship between presidential rhetoric and the values of American democracy that ultimately hinders the critical potential of rhetorical study at large. Unless this relationship is critically examined, the field of rhetoric risks producing criticism that falls short of the political, historical, and ethical potential of rhetorical critique.

Debates over the nature of presidential rhetoric have long been framed in terms of competing democratic values. To explain some of these assumptions as they relate to my method, I turn to how rhetorical scholars and others have treated the premises of democracy in relationship to presidential address. Jeffery K. Tulis' theory of the rhetorical presidency holds that the historical expansion of the president's oratorical role challenges the original democratic norms of the founding fathers as outlined in the Constitution.[10] Mel Laracey responds to Tulis, arguing that what Tulis describes as a constitutional norm against presidential rhetoric only reflects half of the founding fathers'

views of presidential rhetoric. Presidential rhetorical leadership is, therefore, not a violation of US democratic values, but rather a modern manifestation of early democratic political philosophy, a "venerable American political concept – talking – and listening – to the people."[11] Stephen Lucas echoes Laracey's argument that the rhetorical presidency is a modern manifestation of a "venerable American political concept," but grounds his argument in George Washington's performative address in the 18th century. Lucas argues for the existence of a multiplicity of rhetorical presidencies that emerge from a variety of understandings of American democracy that constitute the layered text of American political culture.[12]

By locating the continuity of presidential rhetoric within the democratic vision of the founders, Laracey and Lucas demonstrate the degree to which the expansion of executive power is intimately linked to the democratic values that define what is exceptional or unique about America's experiment in democracy. The rhetorical presidency, according to Tulis, allows for demagoguery to triumph over the originary constitutional values of American democracy. The presidential rhetoric model outlined by Lucas and Laracey counters this argument by adding an important theoretical understanding of the way presidential rhetoric serves as a form of symbolic leadership that works through the interpretation and articulation of the public's democratic desires. The intellectual foundations of presidential rhetorical leadership emerge out of the philosophical origins of American democracy. The study of presidential rhetoric points toward the nexus between presidential speechmaking and the democratic values of popular deliberation embedded in the foundations of the American democratic experiment.

Filtering rhetorical theory through the intellectual presuppositions of liberal democracy risks placing rhetorical appeals to democracy beyond the scope of critical examination. Martin J. Medhurst argues that "liberty, freedom, democracy, equality, and justice…embody in the constitutional and political orders what grace, charity, repentance, judgment, and mercy embody in the divine order. They are…the 'god terms' of American politics."[13] The inherent danger of any 'god term' is that when people, policies, institutions, or discourses don the mantle of the transcendent, they simultaneously claim a move from the realm of the profane into the realm of the sacred, and therefore, a move outside of politics itself. That which is deemed sacred can be treated as a simple fact of life, beyond the scope of human doubt. The transcendent mantle of democracy functions problematically to shield supposedly democratic institutions from public scrutiny, neutralizing or impeding the deliberative functions of democracy itself. Philosopher Alain Badiou's description of "*democracy*" as "the dominant emblem of contemporary political society," is similarly useful. Badiou's argument is that the principles of democracy become posited as untouchable because democracy becomes an empty signifier of political legitimacy. Regardless of what position is argued, as long as the position is presented as an expression of democratic deliberation, the position is treated as an acceptable form of political discourse.[14]

For Badiou, democracy is problematic because it puts the pleasure-seeking behavior of individuals over an intellectual concern for truth. In this way, Badiou's critique challenges the idea that the manifestation of democratic desires in presidential public address necessarily constitutes a democratic phenomenon. "The capacity of the democratic emblem to do harm," according to Badiou, "lies in the subjective type it molds; and…the crucial traits of the democratic type are egoism and desire for petty

enjoyments."[15] The idea that the democratic function of presidential rhetoric is to interpret and represent the desires of the people remains trapped in this model of subjective desire. Democratic ideology situates the individual citizen's freedom to pursue their desires as the primary goalpost of political progress, and allows egoistic conceptions of freedom and self-expression to trump collective social concerns for justice and equality.

Because the democratic emblem emphasizes the pleasure-seeking function of politics rather than the truth-seeking function, liberal democracy ultimately threatens to undermine rhetoric as a site of intellectual critical praxis. Raymie McKerrow articulates a vision of critical rhetorical praxis in which "the analysis of social praxis must, if it is to accomplish its transformative goal, deal in concrete terms with those relations which are 'real' – which do in fact constrain discourse, and do so in ways that are seldom seen without such analysis."[16] McKerrow's and Badiou's arguments merge in an important way to describe how critical analysis of political rhetoric becomes difficult, if not impossible, when the emblem of democratic self-expression comes to stand in for meaningful political critique. My approach to the study of Obama's American exceptionalism begins, therefore, by challenging the application of the values of liberal democratic thought to the study of rhetoric in order to gain a clearer picture of the rhetorical dimensions of power at work in the current American configuration of liberal democracy.

What does this challenge mean for the practice of rhetorical criticism? First, as Badiou's critique above indicates, our approach to rhetoric must be willing to risk undermining the god terms of democracy. Rhetorical critics tend to judge rhetoric positively or negatively according to standards of democratic discourse. A given

rhetorical text is often judged positively if it represents democratic values or contributes to democratic discourse, and negatively if it represents anti-democratic values or hinders democratic discourse. Challenging the democratic presuppositions of rhetorical theory could encourage critics to question the assumption that a more democratically oriented field of political discourse is intrinsically desirable.

This does not mean, however, that critics should refuse to talk about the way democratic values become articulated in texts. Instead, it means critics should refuse to view rhetorical traits such as inclusivity, prudence, consensus, coherence, equality, and justice as value neutral terms. It is important to examine the way these particular symbolic features of democratic liberal ideology both emerge from and articulate to discursive networks of power and knowledge. This also means looking at the ways that these discursive appeals to democracy contribute to the material realities of political domination. Challenging these democratic principles might require a closer examination of the way rhetoricians discuss the rhetorical principles of openness, reflexivity, historical sensitivity, agency, popular sovereignty, the rule of law, and deliberative governance. For example, appeals to democratic inclusion are often used to solicit minority groups to identify with the mainstream political consensus, while effacing their direct political interests. In short, democratic principles do not always live up to the *mythos* of democracy. Methodologically, this means demonstrating how the rhetorical action in Obama's speeches works to facilitate democratic consensus even while such appeals to democracy may reduce the principles upon which that action relies.

In my attempt to challenge the democratic presuppositions of rhetoric, I draw on a variety of sources of critical rhetorical inspiration to inform my methodology. My critique pulls from post-Marxist theory, for example, in my chapter on Obama's 2011

State of the Union address. I draw on the work of rhetorical scholar Dana Cloud and political scientist Jodi Dean to discuss the ideological force of neoliberalism at work in Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism.[17] My theoretical critique of Obama's democratic exceptionalism also draws upon critical race theory. My reading of Obama's "A More Perfect Union" employs Frank B. Wilderson III's rhetorical study of white supremacy and whiteness to discuss how Obama's analogizing of black subjects with middle class white subjects functions as a rhetorical trope of white supremacy by rhetorically effacing the unique violence carried out on the black community through the institutions of slavery, Jim Crow, and the American penal system.[18]

While my rhetorical analysis throughout the thesis reflects undertones of post-Marxism and critical race theory, my primary theoretical lens of analysis is Giorgio Agamben's theory of sovereign power and the state of exception. As such, the second key feature of my method is an understanding of presidential rhetoric as a conduit of sovereign power. Toward this end, I place philosopher Giorgio Agamben's critique of sovereign power in conversation with the study of presidential public address. Agamben argues that exceptionalism is a paradigmatic feature of liberal theories of sovereignty, naming this paradigm "the state of exception." The state of exception, in Agamben's account, is a political paradigm of government that symbolizes the ever-expanding capacity for executive power, military violence, and police control in both modern constitutional democracies and historical totalitarian regimes.[19]

The state of exception works through the maintenance of the fiction that the executive, as an embodiment of the political will of the community, is imbued with the exceptional power of deciding on the gap between norm and reality or between law and exception. By identifying the executive as the sovereign agent that decides when the law

may need to be suspended in order to uphold the constitutional order, Agamben marks a fundamental aporia at the heart of all theories of popular sovereignty. In order to claim a monopoly over violence, the sovereign must ensure the executive's legal right to engage in behaviors that have otherwise been deemed unlawful. The sovereign, the person who must ultimately decide on the law's application, must necessarily be both inside and outside of the law. The paradox of the state of exception indicates that the source of the executive's power is necessarily extra-juridical:

> The state of necessity on which the state of exception is founded, cannot have a juridical form…[I]f exceptional measures are the results of periods of political crisis and, as such, must be understood on political and not juridico-constitutional grounds….then they find themselves in the paradoxical position of being juridical measures that cannot be understood in legal terms, and the state of exception appears as the legal form of what cannot have legal form.[20]

Here, Agamben's account dovetails with Tulis' description of the paradoxes of the rhetorical presidency. Tulis argues that the modern rhetorical presidency's demagogic expansion of presidential leadership demonstrates that the popular nature of the president's authority makes it difficult, if not impossible, for presidents to ever truly be constrained by the law.[21] Constitutional democracies require popular consent to be considered legitimate. However, the ground upon which this popular consent is derived is ultimately extra-legal and, therefore, extra-constitutional. "Rhetorical leadership," Tulis declares, "is a form of executive discretion…leadership includes both the power to further popular will and the power to counteract it, according to necessity."[22] While Agamben provides a lucid account of the structural features of sovereignty that allow for the perpetual expansion of executive power, Tulis describes how these features of sovereignty are rhetorically mapped onto the contours of the American political scene.

Taken together, these accounts point to the fundamentally rhetorical nature of executive power in American democracy.

My approach attends to the particular rhetorical strategies used by Obama to expand the power of the executive. One of these strategies is the use of crisis rhetoric. Tulis argues that the ongoing use of rhetorical appeals to crisis is a fundamental feature of the expansion of executive power under the modern rhetorical presidency. According to Tulis, "If crisis politics are now routine, we may be losing the ability as a people to distinguish genuine from spurious crises. Intended to ameliorate crises, the rhetorical presidency is now the creator of crises, or pseudo-crises."[23] Agamben takes this argument a step further, arguing that crisis politics have not only become routine, they are now the overarching paradigm of liberal sovereign power. "The state of exception," Agamben declares, "has by now become the rule."[24]

A critical interrogation of exceptional rhetorics in this vein engages presidential address as an enduring paradigmatic feature of sovereign power rather than a contingent articulation of the public's inner desires. This approach suggests that the concepts of crisis, emergency, and necessity, are more than temporally bound rhetorical situations that require the contingent response of democratic leaders. Instead, these concepts constitute ongoing rhetorical conduits of political coherence that facilitate the institutional expansion of executive power beyond the scope of democratic contestation. Through rhetorical criticism, I seek to challenge the sovereign appeals to the immediacy of crisis by exposing the ideological process of mediation through which crises become rhetorically constituted.

The third critical theoretical distinction that defines my critical approach is a challenge to the idea of rhetoric as a conduit of politics understood as the 'art of the

possible.' In this thesis, I seek to expose 'the possible' itself as a rhetorical function of democratic ideology rather than a value neutral expression of fact or a predetermined rhetorical constraint. For some scholars, the link between rhetoric and the art of the possible is precisely what distinguishes rhetoric from other fields of study. For example, Medhurst contrasts the rhetorical scholarship of Bruce Gronbeck and Thomas Benson with the political scholarship of Tulis:

> As scholars of rhetoric, they are primarily concerned not with how rhetoric has debased the presidency but with how presidents, in their roles as chief executive, commander-in-chief, party leader, campaigner, and head of state, have attempted to use rhetoric to their advantage as political leaders. Here emphasis is placed on politics as the art of the possible and the accumulation of sufficient power to transform the possible into the actual.[25]

Whereas Tulis is concerned with "the nature, scope, and function of the presidency as a constitutional office," rhetorical scholars concerned with politics as the art of the possible are instead concerned with how presidents use rhetoric at a given moment in time to achieve certain ends.[26] However, I believe it is dangerous for critics to separate utilitarian judgments about whether a president took the best course of rhetorical action from a historical and political critique of the scope of presidential power. It is important to remember that the possible is always rhetorically arranged against a rhetorical construction of the impossible. If presidents can only do what it is possible to do, that means that it is impossible for them to do (or in the case of rhetorical address, say) certain things if they wish to maintain political power. On one level, it is correct to assert that the ideological constraints that shape the audience's perspective limits politically minded actors who cannot cross certain thresholds if they wish to be elected. However, when the president appeals to these audiences, they are not simply accessing the audience in an external political reality; they also participate in and change the ideological and rhetorical

constitution of the audience they are attempting to persuade. Rhetors not only respond to pre-existing political possibilities, they also shape and reinforce the rhetorical conditions upon which those possibilities emerge. Such machinations destabilize the ground of the art of the possible.

As such, my method of critique begins with the assumption that political success is not necessarily an indicator of rhetorical success. This does not mean that critics should stop analyzing why certain speeches were politically successful or unsuccessful. It does, however, mean supplementing questions of political utility with critiques of ideology and sovereign power. This methodological distinction treats the concept of possibility not as a neutral, pre-given fact, but rather as a means through which political ideology is established and rhetorically reinforced. Critics must ask not only how politicians produce consensus, but also whether producing this consensus required means that are rhetorically desirable.

The inherent danger of the theoretical position I have just put forward is that such a model of rhetoric risks becoming either naïve and utopian or absolutist and unreasonable. However, I believe this is a risk that rhetorical critics must be willing to take. Embracing pragmatism for pragmatism's sake risks sacrificing the rhetorical critic's capacity for meaningful critical judgment at an equally naïve altar of political utility. This does not mean that rhetorical critics should abandon the study of politics. Instead, by calling on critics to analyze not simply whether a rhetorical action was effective or ineffective, but also whether the rhetorical action was politically and ideologically desirable, the method I propose contributes to an understanding of critique as inherently political. My methodological approach will call on me to analyze the ideological, ethical, historical, and political function of Obama's rhetoric because I

believe that there is more to the politics of rhetorical criticism than simply being on the winner's side of history.

Review of Literature

In writing my thesis, I have attempted to survey the extant rhetorical scholarship on Obama's public address. I believe that the current rhetorical scholarship on Obama reflects some of the basic presuppositions of liberal democracy briefly outlined in the method section of this chapter. By challenging the field of rhetoric's investment in the values of liberal democracy, I hope my thesis can provide a meaningful intervention in the current trajectory of scholarship on Obama's rhetoric. In this review of literature, I will identify three basic arguments that recur throughout the extant scholarly work on Obama. First, Obama's rhetoric contributes to democratic discourse because it is inclusive. Here, Obama's rhetoric is seen as providing a historically sensitive and inclusive vision of American identity that takes into account the multiplicity of viewpoints that make up the diverse scene of US democracy. Second, Obama's rhetoric contributes to democratic discourse because it provides audiences with a sense of agency that inspires common people to challenge elite government structures. Third, Obama's rhetoric contributes to democratic discourse by promoting hope over fear. Critics have embraced the idea that Obama challenges warfare by promoting an idealistic, democratic politics of hope. Such a politics of hope is largely seen as a welcome alternative to a pessimistic anti-democratic rhetoric of fear. These features of Obama's discourse are subject to critical examination in my analysis chapters as I discuss the way Obama rhetorically articulates American exceptionalism through the discursive registers of American democracy.

I will first focus on the tendency of rhetorical critics to defend Obama's rhetoric as a source of historically inclusive democratic discourse. David A. Frank and Mark Lawrence McPhail's collaborative criticism of Obama's address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention represents one of the earliest attempts by rhetorical scholars to come to terms with democratic implications of Obama's nascent rhetorical strategy.[27] The disagreement between the two critics reflects the disciplinary anxiety caused by the democratic presuppositions of the field of rhetorical study.

Frank argues that Obama's 2004 DNC address employs a rhetoric of racial consilience that invites audiences to share in an act of "working through" the trauma of America's past.[28] This rhetoric provides Obama with the ability to establish common ground between moderate and progressive wings of the Democratic Party, a task Frank believes the American Left has failed to do since the end of the civil rights movement.[29] Frank's argument is important for my thesis because it positions the rhetoric of inclusion and consensus as a unique feature of Obama's interpretation of American democracy. The civil rights movement, Frank argues, appears in Obama's rhetoric as a symbol of the exceptional features of American democracy that are capable of overcoming the gap between America's democratic promise and the realities of racial violence in the United States. Frank also praises Obama's rhetoric for its capacity to change the democratic political conversation on race in America because it is rooted in the concept of equality, is inclusive of a diverse array of perspectives and values, and challenges binary us vs. them thinking.[30]

My thesis challenges Frank's interpretation on two levels. First, in chapter two, I critically scrutinize the historical claim that American democracy has provided a meaningful outlet for addressing racial inequality. Second, moving from a historical

claim to a theoretical claim, that chapter also challenges the idea that the inclusion of diverse viewpoints into democratic institutions constitutes a challenge to the political reality of racial oppression and inequality in the United States. My thesis investigates the possibility that democratic inclusivity is used to channel political antagonism into democratic institutions. Such institutions offer symbolic inclusion while reifying material conditions of racial inequality. If it is true that racial inequality in the United States is depoliticized through symbolic acts of inclusion into mainstream political institutions, Obama's status as the first black president of the United States constitutes a unique opportunity to study the relationship between inclusive politics and racial inequality in the United States. Interrogating how diversity is heralded in exceptionalist rhetorics as a democratic counter to racism may illustrate key structural linkages between democratic structures of political inclusion and the lasting racial inequalities that persist in the United States.

My argument builds upon the critique put forward by McPhail in his half of the collaboration. McPhail's account departs from Frank's on the issue of race and stands as one of the few critical exceptions to the emerging consensus in favor of Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism. I build upon McPhail's critique, while simultaneously attempting to challenge some of the democratic presuppositions of his critique. McPhail agrees with Frank that Obama's rhetoric works through consilience, but departs from Frank on the issue of coherence. McPhail argues that moving from mere consilience to actual coherence, "requires connections between principles and practices to create the social transformations it envisions."[31] McPhail's claim demonstrates the importance of discussing whether the values that Obama rhetorically articulates are meaningfully reflected in the policies he advocates.

For McPhail, Obama's speech serves to conceal rather than challenge the realities of racism in America because he "embraces a mythological American monologue, a narrative grounded in the ideals of the social contract and painfully ignorant of the realities of the racial contract."[32] McPhail argues that Obama's "politics of hope" is actually a "politics of disavowal," because the discursive articulation of hope allows Obama to glorify the accomplishments of the civil rights movement, while papering over the historical realities of segregation and discrimination in America.[33] McPhail contends that Obama's rhetorical resolution of binaries into the unity of the diverse American political scene, "draws heavily upon the resources of whiteness and its dominant rhetorical tropes: innocence, race neutrality, and positive self-presentation. It articulates well with white racial recovery narratives that silence serious discussions about race in this country."[34] This perspective is important for my thesis because it demonstrates the way that Obama's historical understanding of America as an exceptional, democratic nation reflects a political ideology that has long served to prop up and conceal the material and symbolic structures of white supremacy in the United States.

Although McPhail provides one of the sole acts of critical dissent against the largely favorable reception of President Obama in the field of rhetoric, I find his account lacking because his reliance on democratic ideology slips back into the discursive registers of white supremacy he attempts to escape. As an alternative to Obama's failed attempt at racial coherence, McPhail analyzes Al Sharpton's speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention in order to establish standards for adequate democratic discourse on race in America. What separates Obama's consilience from Sharpton's coherence is Sharpton's attention to the historical realities of racism in America.[35]

My analysis of Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech challenges the idea that the failure of Obama's racial discourse stems from his refusal to recognize the historical realities of race. In this light, McPhail's call for presidential rhetoric that more adequately recognizes the history of racial violence is potentially problematic because he describes the problem with Obama's speech as a question of historical accuracy rather than political ideology. If democracy operates through the establishment of consensus rather than antagonism, it is possible that the creation of more inclusive, historically accurate narratives actually stifles the revolutionary energy needed to challenge white supremacy in the United States. In chapter two, I discuss how the democratic rhetoric of racial inclusion and diversity functions to include minority subjects in official channels of democratic discourse while simultaneously disciplining these subjects into modes of speech that facilitate conciliation at the expense of addressing the real, material structures of racial inequality in the United States.

Another example of the overwhelmingly positive reception of Obama's rhetoric by rhetorical critics comes from Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones' analysis of Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention address, in which they declare that Obama, "explicitly embraced an exceptionalist vision of America."[36] Their work is useful for my thesis because it provides evidence for my claim that American exceptionalism is a central feature of Obama's rhetoric and establishes scholarly ground for a discussion of the ideological features of American exceptionalism. Contrasting Obama's communitarian vision of the American Dream with President Ronald Reagan's individualistic vision, they argue that Obama's rhetoric recasts the American Dream to include the perspectives of marginalized communities in "a narrative based in shared

identity as Americans."[37] Rowland and Jones account is exemplary of liberal democratic ideology, calling for a careful balance between individualism and communitarianism.[38]

In both chapter two and chapter four, I explore the precarious and problematic nature of the attempt to balance individualism with communitarianism. I suggest that instead of establishing a balance between communitarianism and individual liberty, the American Dream narrative comes to define community needs through an individualistic ideology. The myth of the American Dream contributes to the belief that a person's success in America is the result of their own individual accomplishment, their willingness to pursue the American Dream. I examine how this myth is articulated in Obama's rhetoric both in regards to race and the economy. In my chapter on the State of the Union, I describe how the democratic individualist ideology of neoliberalism allows Obama to praise individualistic, neoliberal economic political philosophy as the enactment of collective democratic progress.

In my chapter on "More Perfect Union," I note how the bootstraps myth is used to delimit appropriate black political discourse by excluding black anger. My analysis in this chapter considers the work inclusive rhetorical strategies perform. In the 2009 special issue of *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* on the rhetoric of the 2008 presidential election, Frank argues that Obama's "A More Perfect Union" employs an inclusive democratic discourse that encourages audiences in the United States to "work through" the historical trauma of racism in America. For Frank, the strength of this approach is that it blends the universal and the particular and opens up the scene of presidential discourse to diverse forms of democratically enacted agency. Obama claims the universal, ethical force of the struggle against racism while simultaneously investing his audiences with the particular, contingent agency of their ballot. For Frank, Obama's use

of universality to posit the audience's agency reaffirms the particular need for his executive leadership. "Obama casts coherence in universalist terms," Frank argues, "but it is a universalism that understands it is dependent on particular actions, laws, and policies."[39]

Frank's critical analysis of Obama's speech is integral for my treatment of American exceptionalism because it shows how rhetorical scholars and rhetoricians alike imbue individualism with universal democratic values. In her book *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, Dean persuasively argues that the ability to communicatively link the individual democratic subject to universal democratic values is an outgrowth of the capitalist ideology that now dominates liberal democratic discourse. Dean contends that the tendency to present democracy as "postideological" places the desires of the individual above collective struggles for social equality.[40]

Frank's analysis reflects the tendency to conflate the individual with the universal in his defense of Obama's rhetorical cloistering of Wright's critique of American imperialism to the apolitical and cathartic space of the black church. As individuals with the right to free speech and self-expression, blacks should be able to articulate their collective trauma in the closed spaces of the black church. However, as a collective, black Americans must not express their collective racial trauma as blacks, but rather as a democratic population, aligning their interests with the interests of the broader political spectrum of the United States, including upper and middle class white liberals. Speaking the true feelings of the black community risks angering white liberals, therefore disrupting the movement toward a mainstream liberal consensus in favor of democratic change.

Frank's critique rests on the notion that accepting the terms of liberal democracy is precisely the ground upon which Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism rests. Frank warns of the "very real political consequences" of engaging too radical a critique of democracy.[41] In other words, Obama's rhetoric went as far as it could without destabilizing the dominant liberal consensus that was necessary for the democratic party to achieve victory in the election. What remains to be seen is whether liberal consensus itself is desirable. Dean's argument suggests that democracies are only desirable for those whose power is reinforced in the apparatuses of constitutional democracy. According to Dean, "Real existing constitutional democracies privilege the wealthy. As they install, extend, and protect neoliberal capitalism, they exclude, exploit, and oppress the poor, all the while promising that everybody wins."[42] Given these perspectives, my thesis begins without the presumption that this promise is true, to engage a critique of the ideological apparatuses of democracy manifest in Obama's public address.

In a 2009 issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Robert E. Terrill also discusses Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech, arguing that it demonstrates a democratic form of rhetorical leadership because it introduces difference into the discursive registers of public deliberation.[43] Terrill's argument is exemplary of both the first and second trends I identify in the existing rhetorical scholarship on Obama. First, Terrill's analysis reflects the tendency for democracy to be perceived as ideologically inclusive while effacing the divergent interests of those who have been included. Terrill maintains that the speech articulates a political and ethical concern for difference by speaking to a unified yet diverse audience about a central conflict over values. Obama recognizes the conflicts that animate social division, and in turn invites audiences to identify with a unified national interest that incorporates these differential concerns into

the common good.[44] For Terrill, America's racial division is a byproduct of America's inability to meaningfully talk about racial difference, a "symptom" of a "public discourse" that has been "disciplined to imagine that our nation is, or should be, entirely homogenous."[45] The American public, in Terrill's account, suffers from racial aphasia, an inability to address race. By speaking in a "doubled mode," Terrill argues, "Obama provides some of the rhetorical resources" needed to address America's racial "aphasia." Terrill's critique demonstrates that rhetorical scholars view Obama's rhetoric as exemplary for its democratic rhetorical leadership because it allows for the introduction of heterogeneity and the inclusion of difference in democratic political culture. Judy L. Isaksen also holds a similar view of Obama's speech, writing that Obama's approach to race strikes a "balance quite skillfully in a rhetorical space between two extremes."[46] Isaksen argues that as rhetorical critics, "Like Obama, we too can dismantle the bipolarity of raceness and strive to negotiate a rhetorical balance."[47]

The second trend I identify in the extant rhetorical scholarship on Obama is the belief that Obama's discourse enables the audience's sense of agency. Obama's rhetoric promotes agency Terrill argues, because he, "shifts the burden of double consciousness from himself to his audience," and in so doing, "provides an especially powerful rhetorical resource that strains against the monoscopic and monovocal norms that currently cripple democratic life."[48] For Terrill, the inventional potential of Obama's discourse lies in the way that it allows difference to be incorporated as *a part of* public culture rather than *apart from* public culture. If Obama locates racial difference within public culture, the public, in turn, enacts their democratic agency by locating racial reconciliation within Obama himself, as his "biracial body" comes to symbolize "the material manifestation of racial reconciliation."[49] This argument is also reflected in John

M. Murphy's analysis of "A More Perfect Union" as an exercise in democratic pluralism. Murphy contends that Obama's rhetoric provided audiences with the necessary "discursive resources to invent social change."[50] In chapter two, I argue that arguments about Obama's rhetoric as a site of democratic agency fail to understand how the democratic nature of American exceptionalism works to stifle collective, revolutionary forms of political antagonism by selectively including token individuals into official channels of recognition. In both chapter three on Obama's "Our Security, Our Values" and chapter two on "A More Perfect Union" I shed some light on this strategy by analyzing the way Obama rhetorically packages his idealistic vision of American prosperity through specific individual narratives that come to symbolize universal democratic values.

John M. Murphy's analysis of the economic rhetoric of the 2008 election outlines the rhetorical strategies each candidate used to make the economy matter to voters, arguing that Obama's rhetoric resonates with voters because it describes the economy as something that can be influenced by the actions of citizens.[51] Murphy's account is relevant for me because it argues that Obama's economic rhetoric encourages audiences to find democratic agency in debates about the economy. For Murphy, Obama's rhetoric makes the economy matter to voters by framing it within a uniquely American narrative of national economic success while simultaneously encouraging his audiences to see themselves as agents of economic change rather than victims of economic circumstance. In chapter four on the 2011 State of the Union address, my thesis explores whether the economic principles Obama stands for are compatible with the democratic values in which they are coded. Participation in the economy is distinct from democratic governance of the economy. Badiou and Dean's arguments would suggest that the

economic and political philosophy of modern liberal democracy is problematic precisely because it makes the market, a system of exchanges ruled by individual desire rather than collective need, the rules of the game. I build on this critique by placing the arguments of these scholars in conversation with Murphy's argument. I do so through a close textual analysis of Obama's economic rhetoric.

Rowland and Jones' analysis of "A More Perfect Union" also demonstrates the tendency to view Obama's rhetoric as a source of democratic agency.[52] Here, Rowland and Jones extend their earlier analysis of the American Dream, arguing that the myth of the American Dream is distinct from other, more problematic political myths for two primary reasons. First, the American Dream is about common, ordinary people rather than heroic or extraordinary people. Second, Obama's articulation of the American Dream looks toward the future rather than attempting to return to the idealized origins of the nation's past.[53] Obama provides "a progressive myth in which the heroism of ordinary citizens working together produces a better society."[54]

Rowland and Jones' updated account of Obama's vision of the American Dream is useful for my thesis for two reasons. First, as outlined above, my thesis critiques the idea that the American Dream is accessible to "ordinary citizens." By blending particular political concerns with a universal model of "ordinary" citizenship, the rhetoric of the American Dream effaces the structural conditions of inequality that disproportionately affect minority communities. Second, Rowland and Jones provide an inroad into a discussion of how time and temporality operate in Obama's vision of American exceptionalism. They argue that Obama is able to transcend the past by calling on ordinary citizens to work toward a better future. David A. Frank's echoes this claim. He maintains that Obama's rhetorical signature bridges the gap between the "language of

becoming, of change" and "language of Being, of eternal principles."[55] Obama invites his audience to see themselves as participants in the active making of the future rather than viewers observing history unfold from the sidelines. However, in my chapter on Obama's "Win the Future" rhetoric, I subject this future orientation to critical scrutiny, calling into question the idea that Obama's forward looking American Dream is a progressive way of transcending the problematic myths of America's national origins.

The third scholarly trend I identify is the idea that Obama's's idealistic message of hope provides a peaceful alternative to the war-inducing discourse of fear that has come to dominate the American political scene. Robert C. Rowland argues that by refusing to "fear the future," Obama demonstrates a belief that "A revitalized sense of the power of public reason, of the possibility of 'civil conversation' in which facts and reason are valued, is also essential for achieving American Exceptionalism."[56] A similar claim appears in Denise M. Bostdorff's study of the arguments made by all of the 2008 presidential candidates on the issue of the Iraq War.[57] Bostdorff argues that Obama's foreign policy rhetoric provides a benevolent liberal alternative to the bellicose war-mongering fear appeals of the far right. Bostdorff locates Obama's foreign policy rhetoric on the far left of the US political spectrum. She suggests that Obama "was the only Democratic contender who continued to question dominant paradigms about the war."[58] Bostdorff's claim provides a useful starting point for my analysis of Obama's security rhetoric.

Chapter three examines the way Obama rhetorically constructs his administration's actions in the war on terror through a critique of fear and a return to the principles of democracy. Citing Obama's call to not only end the war, but also the "mindset that produced the war,"[59] I explore whether Obama actually establishes a paradigm shift away

from the mindset of war or simply enacts an exception to the broader rule of US war in order to demonstrate his executive prudence in deciding on the proper instances of warfare. By articulating the executive's sovereign ability to decide on proper and improper instances of warfare, Obama might actually contribute to the normalization of warfare as a necessary instrument of executive power.

The work of Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner reflects the tendency for rhetorical critics to describe Obama's vision of national security as a peaceful, democratic alternative to the warlike rhetoric of fear. Ivie and Giner highlight the democratic features of Obama's American exceptionalism, arguing that an "attitude of democratic exceptionalism pervaded Obama's discourse…throughout the general election."[60] Ivie and Giner trace the presence of what they call a "democratic exceptionalism" that provides an alternative to the combative, anti-democratic rhetoric offered by previous administrations. Obama's new vision of American exceptionalism constitutes "a significant but not yet realized rhetorical potential…for revamping exceptionalism into an engine of democracy."[61]

Ivie and Giner's work is of utmost importance to my thesis because it constitutes the most explicit example of rhetorical critics defending Obama's American exceptionalism as a commendable source of democratic discourse. Ivie and Giner write, "The mythic mandate for Obama's democratic vision was most conspicuously the enduring figure of an exceptional America that leads the troubled world toward a secure and just future."[62] Ivie and Giner contend that through the art of rhetoric, Obama was able to enfold an image of America's benevolent global leadership into the democratic *mythos* of America's founding.[63] In a later essay, Ivie argues that by "rhetorically segueing from an open-ended war on terrorism to… a 'struggle against extremism' in

which the United States would…conform again to the lasting values that gave America moral authority," Obama created a more tempered approach to security that, "invoked the traditional myth of American Exceptionalism… in a new democratic idiom… to promote peace and justice."[64] However, while these scholars view Obama's tempered exceptionalism as a move toward the possibility of peace, I seek to understand how the nexus of American power and democracy is rhetorically articulated as a means of expanding some of the less democratic features of American military and economic power under the guise of democracy itself. In chapter three, I examine how the rhetoric of the rule of law offers an alternative to the rhetoric of fear, providing Obama with a democratic rhetorical framework that articulates a vision of executive leadership in the war on terror grounded in the democratic principles of American exceptionalism.

James Darsey's work on Obama constitutes an important exception to the broader trends outlined above. Darsey traces the rhetorical potency of Obama's mantra of change to the archetypal metaphor of the journey.[65] For Darsey, Obama's journey represents "the confluence of trajectories of two metaphorical journeys: Barack Obama's personal journey and America's national journey."[66] What separates the concept of a journey from "mere movement," Darsey argues, "is purpose."[67] Darsey describes how Obama employs the archetypal metaphor of the journey to conflate the American journey, the African-American journey, his personal life journey, and ultimately, his own campaign for president. "What is distinctive about Obama's use of the metaphor," Darsey argues, "is the way in which it registers as a motif for the campaign."[68]

The journey metaphor thus demonstrates the rhetorical mechanism through which Obama identifies his own attempt to gain the power of the presidency as a uniquely important element of the exceptional American journey. Darsey's analysis of the journey

metaphor is also important for my thesis because it shows how Obama's individual narrative comes to stand in for the broader collective struggles that constitute the history of the American democratic experiment. At first glance, it appears that Darsey's evaluation of Obama's rhetoric is largely favorable, echoing some of the same critical trends outlined above. For example, Darsey presents Obama's journey metaphor as an alternative to the metaphor of the campaign as a war,[69] and as a site of democratic agency.[70]

However, Darsey introduces a fundamental ambiguity into his final judgment. Darsey contends that Obama calls on the archetypal narrative of the journey to define his political journey negatively against the distractions of partisan politics and bad judgment offered by the status quo political paradigm. In so doing, Darsey asserts that Obama plays on the same archetypes that are at the root of divisions such as light and dark, ascent and descent, or good and evil, "a family of metaphors" that is "utterly primordial."[71] The potency of Obama's leadership, for Darsey, lies in his ability to affirm his own charismatic exceptional political leadership while simultaneously displacing political conflict onto the historical contingencies of the scene of American democracy. Darsey thus begins the critical work of mapping the paradoxes of Obama's American exceptionalism, joining McPhail as one of the few voices of critical dissent against Obama's rhetoric. I believe my thesis can productively expound upon this critical impulse by attending to the exceptional basis of democratic presidential leadership in Obama's discourse.

By using the extant scholarly literature on Obama's rhetoric to guide my work and by de-centering the democratic presuppositions of rhetorical theory, I hope my thesis can help put Obama's discourse in a new light. Rather than viewing the inclusion of

alternative historical viewpoints as an exceptional feature of American democracy, my thesis examines whether Obama's discourse actually links this rhetorical inclusion to an ideology and a program of action that represents the interests of those who have been rhetorically included. Rather than viewing Obama's rhetoric as a renaissance of democratic agency, I will examine how the hegemonic ideology of liberal democracy facilitates a rhetorical strategy in which Obama expands the authority of the president by encouraging individuals to identify his administration as a part of what makes America exceptional. Rather than viewing the institutional power of the presidency and the rhetorical power of presidential public address as two distinct ways of understanding the roles and functions of the presidency, I view presidential rhetoric as a primary means of expanding the sovereign power of the president. The ways that this expansion of sovereign power can happen often go unnoticed because the values of democratic leadership tend to emphasize the democratic nature of the office rather than the president's sovereign position as a leader of government. By viewing these as inextricably articulated, I hope to track and analyze the specific discursive mechanisms through which sovereign leadership is rhetorically articulated.

Outline of Chapters

My thesis will continue with four additional chapters: three chapters of analysis and a conclusion.

Chapter two will consist of a close reading of Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech.[72] I analyze this speech for three main reasons. First, the speech is one of the most widely studied of Obama's speeches.[73] Second, many rhetorical critics consider the speech to be one of the most important speeches Obama delivered during his campaign

for presidency. Medhurst argues that in the campaign, "perhaps no single moment was more important."[74] Darsey writes that the speech was "one of the most important and most highly publicized speeches of the campaign."[75] That Obama was able to transform the intense controversy surrounding Reverend Wright into a political victory demonstrates that the speech is exemplary of Obama's rhetorical skill. This fact alone makes the speech a worthy object of study.

However, the primary reason I am analyzing this speech is because it facilitates a conceptual examination of the interaction between the dual meanings of American exceptionalism. On the one hand, the speech demonstrates the idea that America is a historically exceptional nation. In the speech, Obama defends himself against arguments that his association with Reverend Jeremiah Wright proved Obama did not believe that America was exceptional. On the other hand, the speech called on Obama to grapple with the subject of racial inequality, a topic that demonstrates the exceptional, racialized application of the norms of equality and freedom in American history. Obama's discourse in this speech provides a conduit through which to examine the rhetorical relationship between race, history, necessity, and the sovereign decision.

In chapter three, I engage in a close reading of Obama's speech "Our Security, Our Values," delivered on May 21, 2009 after the announcement that the detention camps at Guantanamo Bay would, despite campaign promises, remain open indefinitely.[76] The speech is useful for my thesis for three reasons. First, it is an attempt by Obama to rhetorically justify an exception to one of his administration's earlier rhetorical commitments to a security strategy based not on fear, but hope. Second, Obama rhetorically defends this exception by uniting discourse about America's security with discourse about American democratic values. Finally, it demonstrates the ongoing

importance of the role crisis rhetoric plays in the expansion of sovereign executive leadership.

In the final analysis chapter, chapter four, I outline the temporality of Obama's exceptionalism as it unfolds in Obama's 2011 State of the Union address.[77] Specifically, I focus on the Obama's "Win the Future" rhetoric as an articulation of American exceptionalism under the discursive rubric of economic competitiveness. I explore how Obama's rhetoric temporally situates his audience in a hegemonic neoliberal ideology of American exceptionalism. Understanding the temporal features of American exceptionalism elucidates how Obama uses the rhetorical deployment of history and temporality in service of his political aims.

In the conclusion, I summarize and survey the ground traversed by the analysis chapters. I again revisit the dual meanings of exceptionalism, attempting to explore the implications of these dual meanings. I discuss the different rhetorical strategies at play in Obama's particular use of American exceptionalism to discuss the unique issues of race, economy, and national security. However, in the conclusion, I outline the continuities in Obama's articulation of American exceptionalism that cohere throughout Obama's broader rhetorical strategy. As such, I attempt to understand the overall strategic function of American exceptionalism as it works in Obama's rhetoric to establish a lasting conduit for the maintenance and expansion of sovereign power. I end by discussing a few of the avenues of research opened up by this understanding of Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism.

Notes

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[3]Vanessa B. Beasley, "The Rhetoric of Ideological Consensus in the United States: American Principles and American Pose in Presidential Inaugurals," *Communication Monographs* 68.2 (2001): 169 –183.

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[9] Michael Leff, "Textual Criticism: The Legacy of GP Mohrmann," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72.4 (1986): 378.

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[12] Stephen E. Lucas, "Present at the Founding: the Rhetorical Presidency in Historical Perspective," in *Before the Rhetorical Presidency,* ed. Martin J. Medhurst (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2008), 35-41.

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[15] Badiou, *Democracy in What State?*, 8.

[16] Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," *Communication Monographs* 56.2 (1989): 91-111, 103.

[17] Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2009); Dana Cloud, "Hegemony or Concordance? The Rhetoric of Tokenism in `Oprah' Winfrey's Rags-to-Riches Biography." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13.2 (1996): 115-137.

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[21] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency,* 202.

[22] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 202.

[23] Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 181.

[24] Agamben, *The State of Exception,* 9.

[25] Martin J. Medhurst, *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M, 2004), xxi-xxii.

[26] Medhurst, *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency*, xiii.

[27] David A. Frank and Mark Lawrence McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience, and the (Im)possibility of Racial Reconciliation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8:4 (2005): 571-594.

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[29] Frank and McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address," 576.

[30] Frank and McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address," 577-579.

[31] Frank and McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address," 583.

[32] Frank and McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address," 583.

[33] Frank and McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address," 583.

[34] Frank and McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address," 583.

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[38] Rowland and Jones, "Recasting the American Dream," 444.

[39] David A. Frank, "The Prophetic Voice And The Face Of The Other in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 187.

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[42] Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies,* 76.

[43] Robert E. Terrill, "Unity and Duality in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95.4 (2009): 363- 386.

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[45] Terrill, "Unity and Duality," 363-386, 387.

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[50] John M. Murphy, "Barack Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 97.4 (2011): 387-410, 405.

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[52]Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "One Dream: Barack Obama, Race, and the American Dream," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14.1 (2011): 125-154.

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[54] Rowland and Jones, "One Dream," 135.

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[59] Bostdorff, "Judgment, Experience," 268.

[60] Ivie and Giner, "American Exceptionalism," 362.

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[62] Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner, "More Good, Less Evil: Contesting The Mythos Of National Insecurity In The 2008 Presidential Primaries," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 286.

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[69] Darsey, "Barack Obama and America's Journey," 95.

[70] Darsey, "Barack Obama and America's Journey," 97.

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CHAPTER TWO

American Exceptionalism and the Rhetoric of Racial Consensus in Obama's "A More Perfect Union"

Introduction

This chapter analyzes Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech in order to investigate how Obama deploys the rhetoric of American exceptionalism to discuss the issue of racism in the United States.[1] On May 18, 2008, Obama faced the challenge of having to maintain his hopeful yet pragmatic narrative of American exceptionalism in the face of the controversy posed by viral videos and 30 second news sound bites depicting his pastor of 20 years, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, shouting "God Damn America!" during a sermon on racial inequality in America.[2] Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner have argued that Obama's overarching rhetorical strategy in the election was to unify audiences behind a "pragmatic version" of the *mythos* of American exceptionalism grounded in a "rhetorical mantra of hope."[3] In order to maintain the narrative coherence of his campaign's hopeful vision of American exceptionalism, Obama had to address his very real relationship with a man who, according to PBS Journalist Bill Moyers came "to personify the black anger that so many whites fear."[4] In this light, Obama needed to honestly address the undeniable gap between America's professed egalitarian ideals and real legacy of racial inequity. Nevertheless he also called on a diverse, multiracial audience to retain hope in their belief that "America's improbable experiment in democracy" was capable of fulfilling the Constitution's democratic principles of "liberty and justice and a union that could be and should be perfected over time."[5]

For my purposes, Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech facilitates a critical examination of how Obama rhetorically navigates the conceptual anxiety at the heart of American exceptionalism: an anxiety over the tension between those supposedly universally held values that make the United States an exceptional nation and the notion that the United States has historically made exceptions to the universal application of those values. Russell Lowell Riley identifies the tension of exceptionalism as the "dissonance between [America's] creed of equality and customs of inequality."[6] Obama deploys this tension in the speech to describe America as like "no other country on Earth."[7] While he acknowledges that the "original sin" of slavery and racism are an exception to the foundational values of America's democratic institutions, he also insists that America's extraordinary democratic institutions are capable of providing Americans with a path of salvation by facilitating moments of mutual recognition, moments that while "not enough," are nevertheless "where…perfection begins."[8]

I argue that in "A More Perfect Union," Obama engages in a rhetorical act of inclusive exclusion that situates Wright in what Giorgio Agamben refers to as a "state of exception." This rhetorical enactment of the state of exception occurs as Obama includes Wright as an individual in Obama's narrative of America's exceptional democratic journey while simultaneously excluding Wright's racially motivated anger from the scene of proper American democratic discourse. Obama performs this act of inclusive exclusion by situating the United States as an exceptional nation whose revolutionary origins promise equality for all of its diverse peoples. America's promise functions inclusively in Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism by positing that racial discord can be overcome by uniting behind the inclusive democratic principles of mutual recognition and democratic participation. Obama's multiracial ethnic background encourages

audiences to identify their own participation in Obama's campaign with the diversity of the American democratic scene. Obama employs the rhetorical device of analogy to include the grievances of black audiences in his broader narrative about the decline of the middle class. However, it also allows him to exclude the grievances of black subjects by depicting white anger at black advancement as analogous to black anger at white supremacy, and calling on both white and blacks to avoid these analogous forms of anger. Obama uses this call to transcend racial anger to rhetorically cloister Wright's anger in the cathartic, apolitical space of the black church. Obama's discourse of diversity and inclusion mediates black anger through the liberal cultural registers of whiteness and white innocence. In so doing, Obama's hopeful vision of American exceptionalism pre-determines the political marginalization of black subjects by neutralizing the affective force of racial anger and delegitimizing racial antagonism as an inventional site of rhetorical democratic practice.

This speech demonstrates how American exceptionalism functions rhetorically to unify the nation while simultaneously accounting for the nation's diversity. Obama rhetorically guides his audience through a series of divisive racial dichotomies and then offers America's democratic promise as a means of overcoming these binaries. Robert E. Terrill describes this rhetorical gesture as an invitation to "experience double consciousness." Through this "doubled mode of speaking," Terrill argues, "Obama provides some of the rhetorical resources" needed to address America's racial "aphasia."[9] For Terrill, America's racial division is a byproduct of America's inability to meaningfully talk about racial difference, a "symptom" of a "public discourse," that has been "disciplined to imagine that our nation is, or should be, entirely homogenous."[10] This chapter offers a divergent account of Obama's speech.

While I share Terrill's view that Obama offers a doubled rhetorical style, I believe this doubled style functions simultaneously as a means of inclusion and exclusion. For Obama, this rhetorical inclusive exclusion enacted in the state of exception allows him to speak to a diverse American cultural and political landscape by including the identities of a diverse group of rhetors, such as Reverend Wright, while nevertheless maintaining the sovereign authority to exclude diverse forms of political speech, such as black anger, from the shared space of American public discourse. Obama's profound speech on race relations in America was remarkable for its expansion of the scope of presidential rhetoric on the issue of race. However, this expansion also constitutes a site through which sovereign power is capable of legitimizing its authority with a more diverse group of constituents while simultaneously limiting the modes of speech available to that diverse group of constituents. Presidential rhetoric is thus capable of expanding the scope of American civic discourse to include the perspectives of racial minorities, but in doing so, it also garners the consensus of marginalized people in favor of institutions of sovereign authority that are used to police and marginalize racial minorities, both domestically and abroad.

Thus, while I agree with Terrill that Obama employs a certain doubled style, I believe Terill's diagnosis of America's continued racial woes as stemming from a form of discursive aphasia needs to be slightly modified. Rather than suffering from a total aphasia, or an inability to discuss racial difference, perhaps American society suffers from an advanced form of aphasia, a sort of racial dyslexia. It is not that America lacks a language to discuss race, but rather that in the process of discussing racism in America, the discursive signals of inclusion and exclusion get crossed. Inclusion comes to operate

as a form of exclusion and the transcendence of racial division through democratic inclusion is mistakenly read as a means to overcome racial exclusion.

To construct my argument, I engage in a close reading of the speech, divided into four parts. These four parts follow four distinct rhetorical movements within the speech. In the first movement, Obama outlines the promise of America's revolutionary origins. Here, Obama positions his audience on the historical trajectory of the exceptional American nation. Obama describes America as a nation that is historically imperfect but nevertheless exceptional because its democratic structures move toward the *telos* of perfection. In the second movement, Obama condemns Wright's arguments as inappropriate distractions that prevent the nation from democratically unifying in the face of crisis. In the third movement, Obama recuperates Wright's perspective and explains his relationship to Wright by analogizing the grievances of the black community with the grievances of the middle class. In the final movement, Obama positions his audience in the forward-looking moment of the present, rhetorically returning them to the promise of perfection contained in America's origins. He establishes an optimistic *ethos* that forecloses the possibility of racial anger in order to maintain the mythological narrative of the exceptional American nation. In the conclusion of this chapter, I posit American exceptionalism as a rhetorical device that blunts the political force of racial antagonism while simultaneously offering racial balance and conciliation as a replacement for the affective force of black anger. I point to how this reading challenges the field of rhetoric to reconsider the idea that problems regarding race in America stem from an American identity that thrives on homogeneity and demands the repudiation of diversity. Instead, I describe diversity as a tool used to discipline racial minorities into modes of speech that are fundamentally compatible with the established institutions of American democracy,

but as a result, fail to challenge the economic, cultural, and political structures of white supremacy that continue to dominate American life.

The Promise of Origins

Obama's "A More Perfect Union" begins with a simultaneous declaration of America's origin and *telos*. Obama invokes the founding symbolic declaration of the American people, quoting James Madison's preamble to the US Constitution, "'We the people, in order to form a more perfect union…' 221 years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America's improbable experiment in democracy."[11] The sentence locates the promise of American democracy in its capacity to move toward the historical destiny of "a more perfect union." The temporal orientation of the audience begins by taking the contingent, "improbable" moment in which the American experiment in democracy was "launched" by the founders and then temporally and spatially returns the audience's attention to "a hall that still stands across the street."[12] The temporal juxtaposition of "221 years ago," and "still stands" highlights the profound and lasting historical legacy of American democracy while simultaneously reaffirming the immediacy of that legacy to the audience at hand.

Obama then rehashes the mythic narrative of America's revolutionary origins by identifying America's founders as "Farmers and scholars, statesmen and patriots who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution."[13] Obama thus opens the speech with a uniquely American affirmation of both the revolutionary *ethos* and civic duty of the founding fathers. Rhetorically, this identification provides Obama with a flexible, yet nevertheless potent imagery grounded in the originary *mythos* of American

identity. By beginning his exceptionalist narrative with the founding father's fight against tyranny, Obama sets up a move to claim both the revolutionary spirit of struggle and the resolution of that revolutionary spirit into paternal or sovereign figures of civic authority and constitutional legitimacy.[14] The narrative of America's exceptional origins allows audiences to identify both with the revolutionary spirit of antagonism and the mollification of that antagonistic affect through the institutions of American democracy. This sense of finality or destiny is reflected in the speech as Obama moves from origin back to *telos*. He references the Declaration of Independence to temporally mark the point at which the nation's revolutionary split from tyranny was "finally made."[15] The use of the word "finally" allows Obama to link the contingent revolutionary moment of America's origins to a *telos* of finality, a historically determined endpoint of equal representation under the law that is promised at the moment of the nation's founding.

However, Obama is forced to reconcile "America's improbable experiment in democracy" with the very real historical legacy of slavery in the United States. As he notes,

> The document they produced was eventually signed but ultimately unfinished. It was stained by this nation's original sin of slavery, a question that divided the colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate until the founders chose to allow the slave trade to continue for at least 20 more years, and to leave any final resolution to future generations.[16]

In this passage, the Constitution, and thus the political identity of the United States itself, is conceptually separated from slavery through the metaphor of the stain. The Constitution itself is not flawed, but is instead discolored by the external force of slavery. It would be up to "future generations" to actualize the potential contained within America's great democratic promise.

By rhetorically distancing America's founding from the blemish of slavery, Obama obscures the degree to which the establishment of the American experiment in democracy was articulated through a discursive and legal matrix of individual liberty that bolstered the political and rhetorical position that slave owners could not be denied their inalienable rights of property, including human chattel. This rhetorical distancing occurs through the democratic rhetoric of consensus building that surrounds the myth of slavery as a necessary compromise, the result of a "stalemate" that allowed the slave trade to continue.[17] Yet, while Obama positions the slave trade as politically expedient, significant historical scholarship demonstrates the myth of this claim. Historian David Lyons writes, "The Constitution that was agreed upon and ratified accommodated slavery. It did so excessively, beyond what was required for an agreement between those who represented slave owners' interests and those who were opposed to slavery."[18] The possibility that the Constitution's position on slavery was an excessive accommodation to the powers of slave owners is ruled out in Obama's mythical account of America's origins. Obama describes slavery as a historically necessary but nevertheless temporary stain on the fabric of American democracy. This stain, however, was necessary at the time, because without the compromise that allowed slavery to continue, the democratic institutions that will be put to work in the struggle against racism in the future would have never been "launched" in the first place.

The promised redemption provided by future generations is marked by Obama's description of slavery as "original sin." In this phrase, Obama mediates white guilt about slavery under the rubric of Christian universalist humanism. Original sin predetermines both the profane nature and sacred *telos* of human existence. It maintains that human nature is inherently imperfect, a status imposed by the mere fact of being a human born

of Adam and Eve. James Arnt Aune describes how original sin played a similar role in Reinhold Niebuhr's pragmatic "Cold War liberalism" by depicting the inevitable reality of human sin as a reason to take the necessary steps to secure one's position in an international arena dominated by fallible human actors.[19] However, by determining that there is a transcendent or sacred state that humanity has fallen from, original sin also bestows on these naturally imperfect humans the promise of salvation.[20] When used as a metaphor for slavery, "original sin" thus treats slavery as a predetermined imposition placed on America's founders by the mere fact of their being human. The metaphor of original sin effaces the intricate historical relationship between slavery and the political and economic institutions of the United States by treating slavery as an inevitable fact of humanity's fallen, profane existence, rather than a series of mutually reinforcing political and economic structures of white supremacy.[21] It also treats slavery as a historical phenomenon that can be transcended by the promise of salvation embedded in American democratic institutions and the work of future citizens.

Obama takes up the salvation offered by America's democratic institutions in his subsequent point. The Constitution, Obama argues, "promised its people liberty and justice and a union that could be and should be perfected over time."[22] In this phrase, Obama plays on the rhetorical ambiguity of the word "promise." Promise can mean both a pledge and an opportunity. In the former sense, "promise" points toward a sacred obligation contained in the origins of American democracy, a promise that the founders passed onto the citizens and to the world, that America would uphold the great ideals of freedom and equality embedded in its founding documents. In the latter sense, "promise" represents the fact that the nation's reality did not yet match up to its ideals, providing

America with an opportunity to improve. "Promise" in this sense signifies that America is imperfect, but this imperfection inherently contains the potential for perfection.

As Obama heralds the promise of democracy, the two uses of exceptionalism begin to merge. One understanding holds that exceptionalism means that a nation is historically unique because it expresses exceptional values. The other defines exceptionalism as the recognition that the unique responsibilities faced by a given nation require that nation's leaders to make exceptions to previously established laws or values. In Obama's historical account of American democracy, these concepts of exceptionalism fold into one another. For Obama, the United States is exceptional because of the values of equal recognition, civic participation, and democratic leadership that are embedded in the Constitution. The times when America has failed to live up to these values are historically accounted for through the rhetorical framework of American democratic values. The founders had to allow slavery to continue or else risk upending the democratic consensus around the Constitution. America's imperfections become the reason why Americans must continue to trust in the possibility of democratic change embedded in the Constitution.

Obama describes how the promise of the Constitution might come to fruition. For him, the Constitution alone is mere "words on a parchment," signifying that America's promise is imperfect, partial, and contingent. In order "to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time," Obama declares, "what would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part — through protests and struggles, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience, and always at great risk."[23] In Obama's narrative history of the

United States, America's founding fathers bequeathed to American citizens a promise of exceptional perfection, yet it was up to American citizens to make that promise a reality.

After locating this promise of racial harmony in the institutions of American democracy, Obama can then begin depicting his own presidential campaign as a continuation of America's journey toward perfection: "This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this presidential campaign — to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America."[24] In this passage, Obama joins his own struggle to the list of those struggling for a more perfect union. Obama's own journey situates him as a living manifestation of the American struggle to overcome racism, carrying on the fight of those fighting in the "civil war," those who used "civil disobedience" and those who fought "in the courts."[25] Here, Obama continues the move to identify his American journey both with the spirit of revolutionary struggle and the resolution of that struggle into the institutional mechanisms of democracy.

Obama's vision of American exceptionalism articulated thus far in the speech attempts to bridge the gap between instances of revolutionary struggle and the institutional order that was built out of that struggle. In so doing, Obama demonstrates a paradigm of democratic governance rooted in what Giorgio Agamben calls the state of exception.[26] The narrative of the American experiment in democracy demonstrates how the sovereignty of democratic governments evolves out of revolutionary insurrection. As Agamben argues, "the state of exception" maintains a "close relationship to civil war, insurrection, and resistance."[27] The legitimacy of the democratic legal order is founded in an expression of popular sovereignty that was first articulated through the violence of the nation's revolutionary origins. The sovereign must claim to represent the popular

force of this violence in order to garner authority for implementing the law. The sovereign's position on the precipice of legality and revolution is a hallmark foundation of American exceptionalism. Yale law professor Paul W. Kahn argues that the belief that the sovereign's authority emerges neither from the word of God nor from the word of the law itself but rather from the popular sovereignty of the people is "the absolute bedrock of the American political myth."[28] By situating his sovereign authority at American exceptionalism's foundational nexus of revolution and democracy, Obama aligns his mainstream liberal democratic coalition politics with the revolutionary *ethos* that "launched" America's drive toward perfection.[29] Obama directs the affective force of racial antagonism away from the legacy of racial violence in the United States by situating it within a uniquely American journey that rhetorically accounts for both racial antagonism and the resolution of that antagonism into consensus.

Obama describes the move from racial antagonism into democratic consensus as "the long march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America."[30] Here, the principles of justice, equality, and prosperity merge in a flattening rhetorical unification of America's march toward perfection in the future. The contingent prosperity of those struggling for racial equality is rhetorically analogized with the overall historical *telos* of American prosperity. American Studies scholar Nikhil Pal Singh argues that the rhetoric of American exceptionalism offers "a clear hierarchy of value and teleology of progress" capable of perpetually mediating the tension between the universality of American values and the political reality of American white supremacy.[31] American exceptionalism perpetuates the cultural articulation of white supremacy under the rubric of democratic universalism, Singh argues, because it is "governed by an intellectual procedure separating a 'good, enduring, civic nationalism'

from a 'bad, departing, racial nationalism.'"[32] Obama rhetorically enacts this intellectual procedure in two ways. First, he conceptually separates America's history of racism from its core democratic principles and institutions, for example, in the metaphor of slavery as a stain on the Constitution. Second, Obama calls on his audience to recognize their racial differences as part of what defines their own civic journey, but to not let that source of civic nationalism bubble over into racial animosity.

In Obama's rhetoric, racial animosity poses a threat to the possibility of democratic unity. Obama's vision of America's journey is coded through the democratic rhetoric of coalitional unity:

> I chose to run for president at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together, unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction — toward a better future for our children and our grandchildren.[33]

Obama's campaign thus represents the unified movement of the people coming together to strive toward a more perfect future. Democratic citizenship becomes coded with a particular orientation towards the future. Democratic citizens are those who are willing to put aside racial animosity to work toward a better future for "our children and our grandchildren."[34]

Obama's rhetoric of unity stems from both his "unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people," and from his own identity as a multi-racial American citizen.[35] Obama frames his biography in this speech by presenting his story as a paradigmatic example of the diversity that constitutes the scene of American political identity:

> I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners — an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.[36]

Obama describes himself as a symbol of the complex diversity that constitutes the tapestry of American national identity. The union of these diverse identities in Obama's singular personhood represents the unification of all Americans, regardless of their multiplicity of differences, under the singular banner of American nationhood. What makes America exceptional and unique is that it provides opportunities for people regardless of their identity. Obama constructs a paradoxical vision of exceptionalism by praising America for being like "no other country on Earth," precisely because of the opportunities it affords for descendents from every country on Earth. In this paradox, particularity blends into universality, as the biological concept of race disappears into the unifying diversity of the American nation. However, while the diversity of America's exceptional journey appears at first to offer a transcendence of racial division, it nevertheless draws on a deeper rhetorical structure of American nationalism that is supplemented by a foundational belief in American racial superiority.[37]

Obama argues that his story "has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts — that out of many, we are truly one."[38] Here, Obama slips between poles of identification—from the scene of his personal, differentiated individuality to the representative of the unity of these individual

differences in American civil society. Obama's rhetorical authority emanates from the interplay between the individual corporeality embodied in the materiality of Obama's personhood ("seared into my genetic makeup") and the universal, immaterial, or transcendent authority of the unified community. Agamben argues that the authority, or *auctoritas,* of sovereignty "inheres immediately in the living person" of the sovereign.[39] Obama's authority "springs from his person," as his own genetic makeup offers a source of rhetorical authority for "law's claim that it coincides at an eminent point with life."[40] In other words, by positioning his own racially diverse identity as a manifestation of America's exceptional journey toward perfection, Obama garners rhetorical authority to speak for the multiplicity of racialized subjects that are contained within the narrative scene of American democracy.

The diversity contained in the American democratic experiment functions rhetorically to offer the possibility of transcending racial animosity through the unified scene of American democracy. However, because diversity supplies a means for transcending or overcoming the traumas of racial violence, the liberal articulation of the rhetoric of multiculturalism can also play into the rhetorical foundations of white supremacy by delimiting the potential of black anger as an inventional site of rhetorical praxis. As Frank B. Wilderson III argues, the "multicultural paradigm" offers "an insufficiently critical…pursuit of a coalition politics," that ultimately requires a pacification of racial antagonism.[41] The pursuit of coalitional unity blunts the force of racial antagonism because it requires a unifying discursive scene that "crowds out and forecloses" the "grammar of suffering" experienced by black populations who have been subjected to gratuitous violence in the form of slavery and mass incarceration.[42] Racial difference is accounted for through Obama's own individual diversity, and as such

Obama invites audiences to imagine their own individual identity as a part of the unified struggle of democratic politics. As Singh argues, "American exceptionalism's expansive universalism is rooted in avowedly white supremacist conceptions of the human individual."[43] Or, as Wilderson declares, "the White is the personification of diversity, of life itself."[44] Thus, while American exceptionalism provides a rhetorical means for including a more diverse group of citizens in democratic politics, it also works to delimit the acceptable scope of democratic action by channeling the affective force of racial antagonism into the institutional apparatuses of the liberal state.

Obama praises coalitional democratic politics as a form of redress that will perfect the union. Such a move occurs as Obama moves immediately from his own personalized, biological metaphor of American diversity into a political discussion of his campaign. His campaign represents the overcoming of racial animosity and the triumph of democratic consensus:

> Throughout the first year of this campaign, against all predictions to the contrary, we saw how hungry the American people were for this message of unity. Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African-Americans and white Americans.[45]

Obama argues that this victory was an example of Americans willing to put aside racial animosities to achieve political consensus. The American people have a hunger for unity that transcends the "purely racial" divisions in American society. The fact that Obama can succeed politically in a state "where the Confederate flag still flies," demonstrates one of the great complexities of the American system of democracy. The rhetoric of consensus is politically enabling because it invites Obama's constituents to put aside racial animosity, but in doing so, it also accedes to the discursive limitations of a political

scene born out of white supremacy. Obama's rhetorical articulation of American exceptionalism is effective because it offers "invocations of a demonstrated racial transcendence" that work to draw racial minorities into the cultural mythology of a political system founded on and maintained through violence against racialized others.[46] In order for Obama to achieve this racial transcendence, he must first deal with the controversy of his association with Reverend Wright, a figure whose anger about the real legacy of violence against racialized others threatens to disrupt the promise of coalitional unity offered by the Obama campaign. In the next section I describe how Obama deals with that controversy by condemning Wright's racial anger.

The Condemnation of Wright

After establishing the steps his candidacy has taken to fulfill America's promise of egalitarian democratic progress out of the history of racial division in America, Obama then begins his discussion of Jeremiah Wright. Although racial tensions flared throughout the campaign, at the time of this speech, the flames of racial controversy threatened to envelop the Obama campaign. Obama describes the Wright controversy as a form of racial divisiveness that has interrupted the campaign's movement toward unity: "[I]t has only been in the last couple of weeks that the discussion of race in this campaign has taken a particularly divisive turn."[47] Obama frames this divisiveness according to two contrasting perspectives on race. "On one end of the spectrum," Obama argues, "we've heard the implication that my candidacy is somehow an exercise in affirmative action…to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap."[48] The controversial statements of Jeremiah Wright embody the other half of the racial divide Obama wants Americans to transcend: "On the other end, we've heard my former pastor, Jeremiah Wright, use

incendiary language to express views that have the potential not only to widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation, and that rightly offend white and black alike."[49] Obama offers the conservative idea that liberals are nothing but race-baiters and Wright's condemnation of America as two flawed but nevertheless real American viewpoints that have to be negotiated rhetorically through his speech.

The image of racial transcendence supplied by the Obama campaign requires him to describe his candidacy as a balanced compromise that inclusively recognizes but exclusively opposes two radically opposed racial perspectives. Obama's particular discursive treatment of the two viewpoints reflects the way that the subtle exclusion of race happens alongside an explicit rhetoric of multiracial inclusivity. Obama articulates the first perspective as those conservatives who see his campaign as an exercise in racial difference where it should be multiracial union. The problem Obama has with this viewpoint is not that it reflects a racialized viewpoint, that of white Americans who fear the advancement of black individuals, but that it refuses to see Obama's campaign as an exercise in something besides race, and in this regard, chooses political divisiveness at a time when the country needs unity. Conservatives are mistaken because they assume that liberals have bad intentions, or because they choose to see race where they should instead see coalitional unity.

When dealing with Wright, Obama's language becomes explicitly coded in the discursive registers of white civil society. The "firestorm" that resulted from Wright's "incendiary language" did not simply create a divisive electoral atmosphere, but rather threatened to "widen the racial divide."[50] Such a "racial divide" is understood as a discursive breach between whites and blacks caused by uncivil discourse for which both

whites and blacks are responsible. Wright violates this code of civil discourse in the way he "denigrate[s] both the greatness and the goodness" of the American nation. Obama's choice to use the word "denigrate" demonstrates the faint echoes of the cultural registers of whiteness. The Online Etymology Dictionary holds the etymology of the word "denigrate" to be: ""to blacken, defame," from the root word of …"nigr-, stem of niger "black" (see Negro)."[51] Jane Lazarre describes how the word "*denigrate* means to blacken and defame" and functions as one of the subtle "cultural connotations" of whiteness and white supremacy that emerges in "seemingly neutral language."[52] That which Wright's black anger makes dark and therefore defames is the sacred goodness of America's experiment in democracy.

The phrase "the greatness and the goodness" picks up on the language used to describe God in a series of prayers based on Psalm 150.[53] In this regard, Obama performs something of a sanctification of America. This represents how Obama, through the promise of America's origins, predetermines the *telos* of America's movement toward a society of racial egalitarianism. Obama uses a discourse of universal citizenship that places Wright's speech on the outside of the American democratic community. Obama depicts Wright as sullying "our nation" and demonizes Wright's statements that "rightly offend white and black alike."[54] Here, Obama constructs a barrier of political speech that bars Wright's discourse from accessing the shared space of American democracy.

However, Obama must also incorporate Wright back into the discursive scene of American democracy to explain Obama's own relationship with his pastor. Obama uses a series of rhetorical questions to establish Wright's broader discourse and Obama's own attendance at Wright's church as part of the unique American democratic experience of free speech and civic debate:

> Did I know him to be an occasionally fierce critic of American domestic and foreign policy? Of course. Did I ever hear him make remarks that could be considered controversial while I sat in the church? Yes. Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely — just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests, or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed.[55]

Obama first articulates the importance of open debate and vocal critiques of institutionalized truths. The first understanding of American exceptionalism comes to the fore, as Wright is described as part of the civic experience that makes American democracy historically exceptional. Nevertheless, Obama distinguishes between this generic and proper experience of deliberative democracy and the exceptional and improper remarks made by Wright, remarks that "weren't simply controversial. They weren't simply a religious leader's efforts to speak out against perceived injustice."[56] For Obama, what is exceptional about American democracy is its ability to represent and accommodate a broad spectrum of divergent viewpoints. Wright's identity rhetorically situates him as one of the good, democratically interested citizens included in this political spectrum. However, the particular remarks that have "caused a firestorm in recent weeks," have crossed a line of acceptable democratic speech.[57] As Obama explains, "they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country — a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam."[58]

The distinction Obama articulates is that Wright's comments presented a "distorted view" of the United States. The second understanding of American exceptionalism, the idea that exceptions to American democratic ideals must be

occasionally made to preserve the very existence of the American democracy, emerges as Obama establishes an exception to the value of free speech by calling Wright's arguments inappropriate distortions of the truth. The two distinct conceptual understandings of American exceptionalism fold into one another in Obama's discursive state of exception on the issue of race relations in American society. Obama argues that Wright's arguments constitute an exception to the legitimacy of civic discourse precisely because these comments refuse to accept that America is an exceptional nation.

Obama affirms the possibility of Wright's contribution to democratic discourse by defending Wright's potential identity as a "religious leader" making "efforts to speak out against perceived injustice," yet simultaneously dismisses Wright's real "efforts to speak out against *perceived* injustice" (italics mine) by portraying them as divisive and contrary to "all that we know is right with America."[59] Obama adopts a politically and morally charged belief system grounded in the *mythos* of American exceptionalism and stylizes it as objective truth, something that "we know is right."[60] The problem with Wright's discourse is not that it articulates difference, but that it refuses to respect the democratic value of mutual understanding that is shared by all Americans. By rejecting the foundation of American civil discourse, in which a multiplicity of viewpoints come together to share their knowledge and debate about ideas, Wright is seen as posing a threat to the very diversity of the American political scene by making arguments that are contrary to the scope of what everyone knows. Obama treats the political objections raised by Reverend Wright as outside of the scope of differing truth claims that constitute the America's diverse but unified political landscape.

He is able to accomplish such an outcome by setting forth the terms of what kinds of public discourse counts as unifying or divisive. For Obama, Wright's specific

"distortions" of truth are divisive for the "we" he identifies in the speech. Indeed, Wright's claims are positioned as wrong given "all that *we* know is right with America." Obama thus delimits Wright's brand of discourse from the scene of permissible democratic debate by rhetorically segregating Wright's claims in a realm that exists beyond the space of shared American civic knowledge. Giorgio Agamben argues that the sovereign "ban" or exclusion operates by way of an inclusion, by "maintaining itself in relation to something presupposed as nonrelational."[61] It is possible to see this operation at work in Obama's rhetorical treatment of Wright, as Obama maintains a relationship to Wright by explaining and describing his place in the great American experiment in democracy, but ultimately holds his arguments to be nonrelational to all that the democratically constituted "we" know to be true.

What ultimately divides Wright's earlier "controversial" but politically acceptable comments from the politically improper statements Obama had to condemn is that the latter were "not only wrong but divisive at a time when we need unity…to come together to solve a set of monumental problems."[62] The problems Obama speaks of are framed as a series of crises that demand unity:

> Reverend Wright's comments were….racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems — two wars, a terrorist threat, a falling economy, a chronic health care crisis and potentially devastating climate change — problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all."[63]

Here, Obama's liberal democratic *ethos* merges with the rhetorical matrix of security discourse. The discursive limitation of Wright is deemed necessary by Obama so that his campaign may establish democratic unity in the face of a broad continuum of military, economic, and environmental crises. These crises constitute an overlapping field of

emergencies that demand the response of a sovereign executive chosen by a unified citizenry. Agamben argues that the capacity for executive state violence against punishable populations has been dramatically expanded in the name of securing otherwise liberal and inclusive democratic governments during times of crisis.[64] As such, Obama's use of security discourse further places Wright's comments as dangerous and undemocratic.

Obama condenses the warrants for the necessity of his election into a single sentence about the various crises that face the American people. The rhetorical force of this sentence occurs as Obama quickly unpacks a list of extreme dangers, "two wars, a terrorist threat, a falling economy, a chronic health care crisis and potentially devastating climate change," posed by irresponsible and distracting political arguments like Wright's.[65] Obama's sudden emphasis on these crises establishes the immediacy of the present moment as that which requires unity. It likewise delegitimizes Wright's critique of the United States. Obama separates Wright's expression of black anger from the universal scene of political discourse. These universal concerns are "problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all."[66] Here, the universal nature of the challenges facing America codes the exclusion of Wright's black anger as vehicle of inclusion. By asking voters to identify with Obama as a candidate who rejects racial anger while nevertheless recognizing its existence, Obama couches his candidacy as a politics capable of both transcending the divisions of race yet simultaneously speaking to the interests of all races.

Obama's rhetoric calls on the individual citizen to recognize the universal necessity of addressing a matrix of crisis politics, placing Obama's particular claim of political necessity beyond the realm of legitimate political contestation. While the

alternative perspectives embodied by Wright's comments partially represent the norms of diversity and free speech that constitute Obama's exceptional American narrative, the presence of these overarching crises requires that exceptions be made to these norms. Not all perspectives can be included. Decisions must be made about which perspectives should be heard and which perspectives should be ignored. By condemning Wright, Obama is rhetorically rehearsing for the public the sovereign act of decision on the boundaries of the political. Obama must establish his credibility as a representative of the diverse scene of voices that constitute the American narrative. Yet, running for president also means demonstrating his ability to put the rabble of dissenting voices aside when tough decisions have to be made.

At this point in the speech, the rhetorical condemnation of Wright is complete. Obama has publicly announced the necessary sovereign exclusion of Wright's anti-American comments from the scene of proper democratic discourse. Obama successfully separates himself from Wright's racial divisiveness by establishing the need for racial unity and democratic coalition-building in the face of crisis. For the speech to be truly successful, however, Obama has to not only separate himself from Wright, he also had to explain his initial connection to Wright. Merely dismissing Wright would have risked alienating a number of black voters who possibly identified with Wright's views on race in America. Obama must exclude Wright's arguments from the sphere of acceptable political discourse while simultaneously including Wright's identity in Obama's vision of the diverse American democratic scene. The next section focuses on the inclusive features of Obama's rhetorical exclusion of Wright.

The Recuperation of Wright

Once Obama completes the rhetorical work of excluding Wright's statements from his own understanding of America's exceptionalism, he engages the rhetorical work of explaining his initial relationship with Wright. In so doing, he maps the affective landscape of the multiracial coalition that he is attempting to unite within his campaign's vision of American exceptionalism. Obama cannot entirely denounce Wright, as Wright plays a significant role in Obama's self narrative. As is chronicled in *The Audacity of Hope*, Wright is part of Obama's uniquely American journey and his rhetorical construction of a renewed compact with the American Dream. Indeed, the titular phrase of the volume was borrowed from one of Wright's sermons.[67] Delivering a speech that explains Obama's longstanding relationship to this controversial figure of black anger without abandoning the black voters who Obama will rely upon for support in the election requires making a series of inclusive rhetorical moves that explains the affect of black anger while nevertheless distancing himself from it. In this speech, Obama accomplishes such an end by analogizing the struggle of black Americans with middle class Americans.

Obama answers the "nagging questions" about his relationship with Wright by rhetorically subsuming Wright's identity into Obama's broader narrative about his own exceptional American journey.[68] Obama's description of Wright corresponds to the civic virtues contained in the promise of American greatness:

> The man I met more than 20 years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith, a man who spoke to me about our obligations to love one another, to care for the sick and lift up the poor. He is a man who served his country as a United States Marine; who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and who for over 30 years has led a church that serves the community by doing God's work here on Earth — by

> housing the homeless, ministering to the needy, providing day care services and scholarships and prison ministries, and reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS.[69]

Here, Wright embodies patriotism, civic duty, Christian leadership, and a commitment to political equality and community leadership. Wright represents values that are coded in liberal, Christian universalism, in a manner that allows Obama to define him as an important part of his own exceptional American journey. John M. Murphy notes that what makes Obama's vision of America's sacred covenant unique from more conservative variants of the American myth is that Obama affirms the diverse identities of America's outsiders, visionaries, rebels, and dreamers as equal participants in America's exceptional narrative, for it is "the troublemakers, provocateurs, soft hearts, and eggheads [that] made this nation great."[70]

Obama continues with his own story, quoting his biography, *Dreams From My Father*. As he returns to his own story about his time at the Trinity church, he highlights lessons grounded in the universalism of Christian suffering:

> I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones. Those stories — of survival and freedom and hope — became our stories, my story. The blood that spilled was our blood, the tears our tears, until this black church, on this bright day, seemed once more a vessel carrying the story of a people into future generations and into a larger world. Our trials and triumphs became at once unique and universal, black and more than black.[71]

Obama's description of the Trinity church functions as a symbol for the black community at large. His experience at Trinity becomes the rhetorical vehicle through which Obama begins negotiating the tension between the anger of black community and the narrative *telos* of American promise. Much like Wright the individual and America the nation, Obama describes the Trinity church as a complex, contradictory, and diverse scene of

cultural uncertainty that nevertheless is unified by a common struggle toward a common end. Obama declares, "Like other predominantly black churches across the country, Trinity embodies the black community in its entirety — the doctor and the welfare mom, the model student and the former gang-banger."[72]

Yet, his description of the diversity of the black community is coded in the cultural discourse of stereotypes. The black community is symbolically bifurcated into two contrasting pairs of archetypes: the model minority and the abject other. One represents the great *mythos* of the successful individual, the archetypal container of the American Dream. The other represents those who are on the margins of this American society, the ones who have yet to be developed or brought along into America's great project of perfection. They represent the imperfections of America that Obama nevertheless claims are part of the American Dream. These drastic binaries of success and abjection provide a diverse audience with a comfortable fantasy of liberal black social mobility in which certain self-empowered individuals transcend the normative status of blacks as welfare queens and "gang-bangers."[73] Yet by positing both the successful and marginalized black subjects along a differential axis of liberal hope in the American experiment in democracy, Obama can claim to represent both perspectives in the unity of his campaign. He does not abandon his blackness through his rejection of black anger because he recognizes the very real figures of black abjection are part of who he is. Obama thus mediates his recognition of America's ills with his belief in the greatness of America, combining them both in an affective map of the diversity of the black experience in America through the rhetorical construction of the Trinity church.

The Trinity church thus functions as a rhetorical vehicle for the unification of the black community's own diversity. As Terrill rightly notes, this reflects the broader

"doubled" rhetorical style Obama uses throughout the address in describing the diversity of the American democracy.[74] Obama's rhetorical style posits a dualism between two oppositional binaries and affirms the unity of the two positions as an embodiment of democracy in action. Obama continues in this style, saying, "The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and, yes, the bitterness and biases that make up the black experience in America."[75] Obama subtlety refers to Wright's anti-American positions as an expression of the "bitterness and the biases" of black Americans. The terms "bitterness" and "bias" function euphemistically to moderate and mediate supposedly divisive black anger. This language of "bias" corresponds to Obama's earlier description of Wright's "distortion" of the truth. The black church is delegitimized from denouncing the historical and ongoing legacy of slavery, segregation, economic inequality, and mass-incarceration with justified anger.[76] Instead, Wright's statements display the black community's "bias," a "bias" produced by the "bitterness" they feel for their mistreatment in the past. The idea that "Racism is endemic to America" is the manifestation of an otherwise "fierce[ly] intelligent" black community's "shocking ignorance."[77]

Yet, Obama cannot entirely disown Reverend Wright, for he has already acknowledged Wright's good character. For Obama, Wright's political viewpoints may be wrong, but, as a person, his identity is a valid part of the American experience. Obama declares, "he has been like family to me."[78] Notice a return to the genetic, familial metaphors Obama used earlier in the speech when describing how the unity of American diversity is "seared into [his] genetic makeup."[79] Obama's own corporeal individuality becomes one of the means through which he rhetorically establishes his

sovereign authority. Obama cannot condemn the man who baptized his children any more than he can "disown my white grandmother," who loved and sacrificed for him but repeatedly "uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes."

Here, Obama's rhetoric poses two divisive racial binaries in order to mediate them through the unified but diverse cultural scene of Obama's exceptional American journey. On one hand, Obama poses Wright and the members of the Trinity United Church of Christ, with their "bitterness" and "bias," on the other, his racially insensitive but loving grandmother. Obama cannot disown either of these groups because, he says, "These people are a part of me. And they are part of America, this country that I love."[80] Obama portrays himself as a representative of the diversity and complexity that makes America an exceptional nation. Obama normalizes racism and diffuses black anger by coding it in the liberal democratic terms of diversity. The guise of diversity allows Obama to pay some semblance of recognition to Wright's views, so as to not anger black voters who may sympathize with Wright, while nonetheless doing very little to shift the dominant conversation on race away from affirmative action and race-baiting.

Obama then warns against the desire to "dismiss Reverend Wright as a crank or a demagogue," arguing that Wright's comments reflect a deeper current of racial resentment that must be publicly resolved. Wright represents "the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked though—a part of our union that we have not yet made perfect."[81] He calls on all citizens to "come together and solve challenges" including not simply racism but also health care and education. Obama returns to the rhetoric of coalitional democratic unity in the face of universal challenges and crises that effect all people, regardless of their identity. For Obama, when Wright forwards a divisive argument about race, he is "retreat[ing]" into the "respective corner" of black

anger.[82] Here, coalitional unity is seen as the most desirable political option for black people. Joining this diverse union, however, requires accepting dominant norms of discursive permissibility.

These discursive norms reflect the mores of a society in which inequality has been grounded into the public consciousness. For black citizens who are angry at the very real and persistent legacy of American inequality, this takes the form of biting one's tongue in conversations about how America is an exceptional nation because of its egalitarian values. Thus, the inventional space of black or other marginalized racial subjects is expanded in Obama's discourse, but it is tempered by the rhetorical mechanism of American exceptionalism. The mantra of hope that constituted the affective force of the Obama campaign also constituted a discursive barrier against critiques of American exceptionalism.

After setting up the binary between anger and hope, he begins by historicizing the black perspective, but does so in a curious manner, arguing, "We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country."[83] Obama implies that the history of racial injustice is already a well known fact in America, akin to the Pledge of Allegiance or the alphabet, something that all children are expected to know. Although public recognition of the history of slavery is ostensibly not necessary, as it is common knowledge that anyone can recite, the rhetorical situation demands that Obama must still remind his audience of the grievances that cause black frustration. He does so by highlighting the inequalities and "brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow."[84] He continues by discussing "segregated and inferior schools," "legalized discrimination" and economic inequality, the services denied urban black neighborhoods, and the "cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continues to haunt us."[85]

Given the rhetorical constraints faced by a candidate attempting to be the first black president, this retelling of the history of racial injustice in the United States must be acknowledged as an extraordinarily frank and remarkably honest account. David A. Frank writes that in this section of the speech, Obama was able to "rehearse, in some detail, the sins committed by America against African Americans," by "[e]xplicitly recognizing the historical trauma suffered by American blacks."[86] While it is true that Obama's narrative recognizes the suffering of blacks, it neutralizes the affective force of black anger and blunts the rhetorical inventional potential of black political antagonism by discounting in advance black anger at present day racial inequalities as a source of political discourse. By treating racial violence as historical and contingent, Obama forecloses the possibility of recognizing racism as an ongoing or structural feature of American society.[87] Obama treats ongoing American racism as simply a holdover from the past legacy of slavery. Racism itself is placed in the past, even though "disparities" remain. The cause of these "disparities" is located in the past, rather than the present, as they "can be traced directly to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation."[88]

Second, Obama discusses black grievances through the register of economic social mobility. He suggests "legalized discrimination" prevented black home ownership, employment opportunities, and ultimately limited "any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations."[89] This allows him to analogize black grievances with the diverse grievances of other social actors embodied by Obama's neoliberal democratic platform, while simultaneously effacing the racial dimensions of inequality facing black populations in the United States. Obama outlines three unique forms of discrimination: school segregation, legal discrimination, and income inequality. In each of these paragraphs, Obama accurately describes a form of discrimination and then situates its

lasting, present day impact in terms of unequal access to liberal upward economic status and social mobility. Segregated schools were inferior, resulting in a lasting "achievement gap."[90] The impact of economic discrimination in terms of the inner guilt and shame black men feel from not being able to live up to the model of self-reliant citizenship is "a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened."[91] For Rowland and Jones, this tactic is precisely the rhetorical genius of Obama's speech as "issues of race are contextualized as part of a larger story in which millions of Americans of many races and ethnicities are denied access to the American Dream."[92]

Yet, while Rowland and Jones see this framing as a virtue, Obama's account sets up the generic black subject position to be an analogous but deficient image of the norm of civil life, obscuring the degree to which the security and prosperity of the American Dream has evolved out of the active creation of the systemic deficiencies that plague black communities. For example, Obama describes black communities as void of the "basic services" of the prototypical American neighborhood, "parks for kids to play in, police walking the beat, regular garbage pickup, building code enforcement."[93] Obama codes black neighborhoods as a deficit of the economic and social benefits of middle class American civil society.

The description of urban black communities as violent, blighted, and neglected positions them as the antithesis of civility, as hindrances to the promise of America. Yet, it also evokes the bootstrap myth and allows Obama to posit these concerns as surmountable through America's exceptional national virtues. Obama argues that, "What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but how many men and women overcame the odds."[94] These exceptional black individuals "were able to make a way out of no way, for those like me who would come after them."[95] Thus,

these successful black individuals represent the exceptional possibility and promise of the American Dream. Their accomplishments signify the possibility that, despite systemic inequalities, hard working blacks can also be a part of American Dream. Dana Cloud argues that the rhetorical figure of the successful black individual enacting the American Dream operates to obscure the systemic conditions of black inequality in the United States by treating the individual model of success as universally available.[96]

Obama accounts for these systemic inequalities, yet then immediately directs his audience to focus on the "remarkable" individuals who have overcome this systemic inequality. Indeed, Obama's own personal biography embodies an optimistic story of black upward social mobility and accomplishment. Obama's articulation of these figures of successful black individuality demonstrates how executive agents of sovereign power rhetorically deploy figures of black upward social mobility as examples of the exceptional American Dream.

However, Obama reminds his audience that not all are as lucky as him:

> For all those who scratched and clawed their way to get a piece of the American Dream, there were many who didn't make it — those who were ultimately defeated, in one way or another, by discrimination. That legacy of defeat was passed on to future generations — those young men and, increasingly, young women who we see standing on street corners or languishing in our prisons, without hope or prospects for the future. Even for those blacks who did make it, questions of race and racism continue to define their worldview in fundamental ways.[97]

Here, Obama continues his earlier balancing act between the rhetorical poles of black success and black failure. Again, Obama provides a generic contrast between "all those" who made it and the "many" who did not, making the poles of black success and failure seem equally balanced while obscuring the structural inequalities that ensure that while some exceptional blacks catch the public eye, most blacks will not be able to "make it" in

America. In this description, certain blacks are deemed to be entirely outside of the future-oriented vision of communal citizenship. If the American Dream represents victory and accomplishment as the great *telos* of American exceptionalism, black dereliction represents "defeat" as an exception to the norm of American accomplishment. Here, those figures of black dereliction that exist outside the norms of middle-class economic citizenship are depicted as having no "hope" or "future." Obama's speech thus, to borrow a phrase from Wilderson, "marks the difference between those who are alive, the subjects of civil society, and those who are fatally alive, or 'socially dead,' the 'species' of 'absolute dereliction.'"[98] The tense and tenor of Obama's speech relegates black, derelict bodies, as outside the narrative of American exceptionalism that would otherwise offer them a bright future.

Obama must ultimately leave those without future behind, moving immediately back to a discussion of "those blacks who did make it," for whom "questions of race and racism continue to define their worldview in fundamental ways."[99] In the next two paragraphs, Obama attempts to mediate black "anger." Obama argues, "For the men and women of Reverend Wright's generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away; nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years."[100] This is the first time in the speech Obama describes the attitude presented by Wright as "anger," transitioning away from his earlier description of black frustration as "bitterness and bias." Within the framework of this speech, it is appropriate for the black community to have bitterness and bias, as that represents part of what is diverse and unique about the black community. However, black "anger" must be carefully negotiated. Notice that this anger is not felt by the blacks "languishing in our prisons," but by "the men and women of Reverend Wright's generation."[101] Their anger is not directed toward present day

political realities, for example, the prison-industrial complex or the war on drugs, but rather at the past, at "*memories* of humiliation," and "the bitterness of *those* years." (emphasis mine) This anger is not an appropriate source of present-day political mobilization, but rather an affective force that is "exploited by politicians, to gin up votes along racial lines, or to make up for a politician's own failing."[102] Obama plays into a general fear of race-baiting politicians securing black votes through the inappropriate use of racial resentment. By condemning these race-baiting politicians, Obama separates his multi-racial democratic coalition from the purely political mobilization of black anger feared by some audiences.

Obama argues that black anger also "finds voice in the church on Sunday morning, in the pulpit and in the pews."[103] This private, cathartic anger, while understandable, is ultimately detrimental to the black community if treated as a means for publicly engaging the question of race. Obama declares, "That anger is not always productive; indeed, all too often it distracts attention from solving real problems; it keeps us from squarely facing our own complicity within the African-American community in our condition, and prevents the African-American community from forging the alliances it needs to bring about real change."[104] Obama problematizes the anger of the black community by appealing to both a conservative and liberal explanation of the dilemma posed by black anger. In the conservative account, black anger prevents blacks from being personally responsible individuals capable of overcoming their "condition." In this account, blacks are not seen as objects of white supremacist regimes of governance such as slavery, segregation, and mass-incarceration, but rather as analogously responsible agents of their own historical destiny whose anger prevents them from transcending their abject social status. In the more liberal account, Obama mediates black anger through the

rhetoric of coalitional unity by asking blacks to put that anger aside to form the "alliances" needed "to bring about real change."[105] This appeal to coalitional unity, necessary to exclude the political manifestation of black anger, also sets up Obama's move to then include black racial anger as an analog to class-based anger.

Although black anger may not be productive, Obama argues, "the anger is real; it is powerful. And to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races."[106] Obama proclaims black anger's analogous relationship to white anger, declaring, "In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience — as far as they're concerned, no one handed them anything. They built it from scratch."[107] Here, Obama plays into the *mythos* of American self-reliant ingenuity. Obama crafts a multi-racial image of American accomplishment in which together, a diverse scene of Americans have helped craft America into the great country that it is today. It is for this reason that the loss of American jobs and the tight economic conditions produce economic tensions that must be understood as such. Just as whites must understand black's anger at economic inequality, blacks must understand white's loss of their ability to achieve the American Dream. Obama assumes that black subjects already exist on the terrain of an achieved position of American accomplishment.

Obama uses the rhetorical device of analogy to compare "white resentments" with black anger.[108] Analogy, when deployed as a rhetorical device in Obama's discourse, allows two binaries to be engaged dialectically. Here, analogy is used to unite racial and economic resentment under the exceptional banner of American democratic civil

discourse and liberal coalitional unity.[109] Later, Obama suggests that both white resentment and black anger should not be opposed but united in their struggle against "the middle class squeeze" propagated by "corporate culture" and lobbyists.[110] All black grievances are included with the middle class as they are rendered in exclusively economic terms. The American Dream is thus coded as a universally accessible phenomenon, and American exceptionalism comes to take on a form of universalism that speaks across the diverse scene of American identity.

In order for Obama's multiracial coalition to be successful, Obama argues, blacks must at least accept the foundations of white racial resentment: "And yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist, without recognizing they are grounded in legitimate concerns — this too widens the racial divide and blocks the path to understanding."[111] The shared concerns Obama identifies are "the middle class squeeze," and a "Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests."[112] Obama asks blacks to recognize that white anger at economic woes and government bureaucracy as akin to racial inequality. Here, the racial dyslexia of Obama's inclusive exclusion becomes apparent. In the name of speaking across racial divisions, Obama analogizes white insecurities about the middle class with black anger at categorical exclusion. Obama then asks blacks to analogize their experience to the white loss of representation by a Washington culture of special interests that is only now perverted by greed.

While analogies can be made between the desires and fantasies of white civil society and black civil society, their ontological positionality, or, as Wilderson writes, their "grammar of suffering" is without analogue. Yet by positioning the desires of the black community to be analogous with the white community, their demands can be

equivocated and subsumed into the broader rhetorical matrix of America's exceptional experiment in democracy.[113] Black subjects are thus disciplined into putting aside a discussion of the unique suffering faced by African Americans by linking their concerns to the broader concerns of the American middle class.

In Obama's rhetoric, the ruse of analogy emerges in a form adapted to Obama's narrative about restoring American exceptionalism through a return to America's core egalitarian values. In this story, all people are analogously subject to competition in the global market place, so blacks must understand why whites disdain unfair advantages doled out to blacks (the welfare state), just as whites must understand why blacks disdain white privilege (the historical impact of slavery, segregation, unequal schools, and unfair economic opportunities). In order for Americans to rise together to reclaim America's exceptional state in history, people of all races must learn to see their grievances as analogous. They must learn the lessons of Obama's analogized, doubled style in order to allow America to prosper.

In this way, the ruse of analogy effaces the differential violence conducted by economic interests and civil society toward black Americans. Even insofar as Obama is correct to identify economic inequality as a shared concern amongst black and white audiences, by treating racial tension as an outgrowth of economic frustration, Obama sidesteps the speech's central question of race entirely, reducing race to economic disparity. As cultural historian Maurice Berger notes, "whiteness continues to afford white Americans (the rich, the middle class, and even, to an extent, the poor) an almost constant dividend – the ability to live their lives without having to think about the color of their skin."[114] By analogizing black grievances and white grievances, Obama allows middle class whites to maintain this dividend by perpetuating the illusion that the white

middle class subject of democratic civil society is a universally applicable model for understanding other subjects. The grievances of whites who only now know what it is like to lose their secure status as middle-class Americans are analogized with the grievances of many black Americans that have, from the beginning of the American pursuit of perfection, been structurally barred from the security of middle-class white civil society.

The Promise of the Present

Now that he has described the conflict that troubles his campaign's narrative of the exceptional American journey, Obama returns his audiences to the moment of the present, as an embodiment of the promise of America's origins. After describing the historical grievances of both black and white audiences, Obama declares, "This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years."[115] While recognizing the naïveté of believing "that we can get beyond our racial divisions…. with a single candidacy," Obama asserts his "firm conviction….that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union."[116] Obama calls on his audience to move beyond racial trauma, to locate racism in the past, and to transcend racial resentment in order to achieve the great *telos* of American exceptionalism, the "path of a more perfect union."[117]

Obama then calls on black audiences to embrace, "the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past."[118] He contends that the racial resentment felt by blacks must be bound up with the concerns of all struggling Americans in order to be politically useful, by "binding our particular grievances" with "the larger aspirations of all

Americans."[119] In short, blacks must join with other Americans struggling to reassert democratic hegemony over the present political scene. Black political "grievances" are subsumed into the *telos* of American exceptionalism, as Obama calls on blacks to join a democratic movement aimed at making the share of American accomplishment more fairly distributed. While this was doubtlessly an effective strategy for placing racial perspectives in dialogue, the containment of black anger in the rhetorical matrix of liberal democratic politics comes at the cost of effacing the justifications for and antagonistic political potential of black anger.

In the next few lines of "A More Perfect Union," black citizens are told to repress their anger and aspire to singularly positive democratic participation:

> And it means taking full responsibility for our own lives — by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny.[120]

Here, the obligation Obama places on the black community is the conservative, bootstraps logic of the self-empowered individual. By calling on blacks to live up to their obligations as fathers, Obama returns to a paternal image of sovereign authority grounded in the responsibility of the father as a model of democratic citizenship.[121] By inscribing the figure of the paternal sovereign onto black male subjectivity through the rhetoric of individual responsibility, Obama presents a naïvely optimistic view of the situation faced by black men in American society. The idea that any individual "can write their own destiny," is a fundamentally utopic trope of individualism. Rather than inviting listeners to historicize racial violence, Obama's discourse de-emphasizes the audience's task of historical analysis by emphasizing the audience's responsibility to control their own

future regardless of their past. He delimits black anger as a source of both rhetorical invention and as a legitimate way for subjects to conceive of their own identity, by calling anger and resentment a distraction from the individual's task to seize responsibility for their own future.

For Obama, the purpose of analogizing the black perspective and the white perspective is to position blacks within the optimistic narrative of American progress that founds American exceptionalism. Americans have reason to hope in the very fact of their American identity, regardless of their race or social position. This narrative positions a diverse group of individuals along a uniquely American journey toward the future. They are oriented toward a universalized *telos* of democratic accomplishment.

To enact this journey, Obama presents his audience with two options. In the first, Obama argues, "We can tackle race only as spectacle…or in the wake of tragedy…or as fodder for the nightly news."[122] This option is bankrupt, Obama argues, because it treats race as a distraction from the tasks facing the country. It prevents the future-oriented model of citizenship that ignores the spectacles of the present and the tragedy of the past to focus on the future. "We can do that," Obama declares, "But if we do, I can tell you that in the next election, we'll be talking about some other distraction. And then another one. And then another one. And nothing will change."[123]

The other option Obama presents is for racial unity in the face of the challenges of the present and the trauma of the past in order to transcend racial animosity by progressing toward the *telos* of the American promise. Again, this plea is coded explicitly in the liberal economic and social issues promised by the Obama campaign, referring to schools, health care, and economic competitiveness, as the problems that plague all Americans equally. He calls on Americans to address that which is shared, not

that which divides. He proclaims, "This time, we want to talk about the men and women of every color and creed who serve together and fight together and bleed together under the same proud flag."[124]

Such a universalizing tactic posits all differences and critiques as the same and places hope for unity in a future of economic prosperity. As Obama says, the "real problem" is not that "someone who doesn't look like you might take your job; it's that the corporation you work for will ship it overseas."[125] Obama asks listeners to shift their orientation, to have a different conversation "this time" and believe that the union "can always be perfected."[126] By articulating difference in this manner, American exceptionalism itself becomes a site for various subjects to invest their optimism. Because the future, unlike the past, has not foreclosed the possibility that these subjects will no longer be made the exception to the narrative of American progress, the future-oriented moment of the present is the site Obama uses to mediate the past grievances of racialized subjects. He repeats the phrase "this time" to orient these different subject positions in the totalizing moment of the present while directing their energies toward a universalized future, calling them to put the tragedies of the past behind them.

Obama then moves into an anecdote that demonstrates the powerful role analogy plays in uniting diverse audiences around the *mythos* of American exceptionalism. Obama tells the story of Ashley, a white Obama supporter who struggled to overcome poverty as a young woman. As an organizer for the campaign in South Carolina, Ashley told her story to a room full of people and praised the Obama campaign as fighting for children and parents facing similar constraints as her. In the story Obama recounts, an elderly black man listening to Ashley comes to support the Obama campaign "because of Ashley."[127] Obama heralds the identification between Ashley and the elderly black man

as what is needed to mediate the relationship between the grievances of the past and the promise of the future. As a rhetorical archetype, the elderly black man embodies the trauma of the past, representing the generation of black Americans who remember the time of Jim Crow because they lived through it. Ashley, the young white woman, represents the analogized trauma of lower-class white Americans. Together, Obama declares, the "moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man" is "where our union grows stronger."[128] Through their moment of mutual recognition in analogous struggle, they represent the movement out of past traumas and into the future.

Obama ends the speech by connecting the "moment of recognition" of the present to the promise of America's origins: "And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the 221 years since a band of patriots signed that document right here in Philadelphia, that is where the perfection begins."[129] The document that was "stained by this nation's original sin of slavery" has now come full circle to embody the promise of a unified democratic nation moving forward together toward a better future for all individuals. Obama positions the legacy of slavery and racial trauma firmly in the past so that his audience may locate their agency in a moment of hope about the future. For Frank, Obama's historical discussion of black oppression locates racial trauma in the past and is central to the rhetorical action of the speech. Frank argues that Obama appropriately historicizes racial animosity in America by "placing Wright in his context and establishing chronological limits to the episode of segregation."[130] Obama calls on blacks to put aside the memory of racial violence so that they may join, to borrow a phrase from Melanie Loehwing, the "coordinated, future-oriented communal life" of the exceptional American citizenry.[131]

Conclusion

Terrill argues that Obama's doubled rhetorical style introduced a rhetorical challenge to America's racial aphasia. Aphasia refers to an almost complete loss of speech that can potentially occur after a stroke or other brain injury, implying that the US public is so traumatized by America's history of racial division that American citizens do not even possess the ability to talk about racial difference.[132] America simply "lack[s] a language" capable of "moving ourselves across the racial folds" that have developed in the "fabric" of American identity over "centuries of distrust and oppression."[133] While Terrill offers an astute account of the rhetorical medicine provided by Obama, Terrill's diagnosis requires a slight retooling. American political discourse has never labored entirely under an illusion of cultural homogeneity, nor are "monoscopic and monovocal norms" entirely responsible for "crippl[ing] democratic life."[134] Constructing a narrative of a unified, exceptional American nation has always required grappling with the tremendous diversity of the American nation. As Vanessa B. Beasley argues, "Because the American people have never been characterized by the level of ethnic or religious homogeneity…of most other nations, Americans have always had to imagine their national political community" by constructing an American 'We' that is rhetorically "salient in a democracy whose diversity is unmatched throughout the world."[135] It is in this regard, Beasley argues, that "the rhetorical presidency" can be interpreted "as an institutional response to the United States' diversity."[136] I argue that when Obama was called to respond to the Wright controversy against a diverse American political scene, he replied with a discursive articulation of American exceptionalism that relied on the rhetorical act of inclusive exclusion to mollify the antagonistic rhetorical force of racial anger.

Terrill's account of America's aphasia is insufficient because it holds that the solution to America's racial problem lies in the inclusion of discussions of racism in presidential rhetoric. Terrill contrasts "A More Perfect Union" with Obama's 2004 Keystone address at the Democratic National Convention, noting that the former speech marks Obama's rhetorical transition from a "refusal to recognize" the realities of racism to a speech focused entirely on racial division, a topic that was "studiously avoided" throughout the rest of the campaign.[137] Mark Lawrence McPhail similarly critiques Obama's 2004 address for "silenc[ing] serious discussions about race in this country."[138] However, in this analysis, I have attempted to demonstrate how "A More Perfect Union" disrupts the racial silence of presidential rhetoric while simultaneously marginalizing the inventional potential of black anger by delimiting the history of racial violence from public discussion. The rhetorical act of inclusive exclusion in "A More Perfect Union" demonstrates that challenging racist discourse in America it is not simply a matter of introducing speech about racism where there once was silence. While Obama recognizes racial antagonism, he insists his audience put aside that antagonism so that they may analogize their differences and build a "more perfect union" for the future. It is in this regard that Obama's style does not cure racial aphasia but rather codes the exclusion of racial difference through the inclusive discourse of American exceptionalism. Although Obama's discourse does provide a language for Americans to use to discuss racism, the doubled style allows for the democratic continuation of racial division within the institutions of democracy, rather than the transcending of racial division through democratic dialogue. In this way, Obama's doubled rhetorical style entrenches the problems of racial antagonism without offering the possibility of redress. As the signals

between inclusion and exclusion become crossed, Obama's rhetoric perpetuates America's ongoing racial dyslexia.

Throughout this essay, I have attempted to show how Obama simultaneously includes and excludes the perspective of his pastor, Jeremiah Wright. In so doing, Obama attempts to balance the concerns of black voters and the concerns of white voters. Frank argues that in "A More Perfect Union," Obama creates balance between "black and white hush harbor talk," by placing it, "in dialogue, seeking to promote mutual understanding and to chart a path beyond the racial stalemate."[139] Judy L. Isaksen writes that Obama's approach to race strikes a "balance quite skillfully in a rhetorical space between two extremes."[140] Isaksen argues that as rhetorical critics, "[l]ike Obama, we too can dismantle the bipolarity of raceness and strive to negotiate a rhetorical balance."[141] Terrill describes the speech as "an invitation both to recognize the racial divide and to engage it productively through an ethic of reciprocity represented by the most common of maxims, the Golden Rule."[142] This chapter challenges the initial premise of these accounts by arguing that the inclusion of alternative viewpoints can both be a way to make discourse more balanced and be a way to further delegitimize certain types of political speech.

It is true that this speech contains one of the most frank discussions of race by an American presidential candidate in the history of presidential public address. However, to call the speech an act of rhetorical racial balancing misses the structural imbalances out of which black political subjectivity in America emanates in the first place. In "A More Perfect Union," the real, historical legacy of slavery and the ongoing racial discrimination of black populations is accounted for, but the inventional rhetorical potential that emanates out of this legacy of slavery and discrimination is tempered, grafting the

optimistic *ethos* of American exceptionalism onto the positionality of radical black subjectivity. In other words, black anger is located outside of the acceptable boundaries of public discourse capable of perfecting the union. Those who share Wright's view are called on to analogize their resentment with the acceptable grievances of class.

Yet, for Obama's speech to be successful, he had to not only exclude Wright, he had to do so in such a way that those who identified with Wright's anger and pessimism could still be rhetorically included in Obama's narrative of coalitional democratic unity. The anger and pessimism of the black community provided a certain revolutionary energy that the Obama campaign hoped to tap into in order to mobilize previously alienated progressive voters. Obama was able to capture this revolutionary energy while simultaneously directing it toward the ends of mainstream politics because he situates his audience temporally and spatially within the narrative arc of America's great experiment in constitutional democracy. The universal values of American democracy thus provide the solution to the historical problem of American racism, effacing the degree to which the values of American democracy are themselves underpinned by exclusions to the promise of democratic participation.

To be clear, I am not arguing that democratic coalitional politics is bankrupt or calling for a retreat from institutional politics. Instead, the goal of my critique is pay close attention to the limitations that democratic coalitional politics place on black discourse in the United States. In order to be politically tenable, too often the grievances of the black community must be made rhetorically analogous to the grievances of the white community. Mainstream democratic liberal coalition politics begins with a profoundly limited rhetorical grammar of action, one that posits black rage as a divisive retreat from the political, rather than an expression of a radical black political subject position.

Rhetorical scholars should recognize the radical positionality of black anger as an inherent challenge to the rhetorical scene of racial discourse in America, rather than an apolitical expression of historical trauma that must be dismissed as politically divisive. The positionality of black rage should be understood as both a political and rhetorical challenge to the cultural politics of white civil society and the rhetorical boundaries of democratic discourse. Obama's optimistic, future-oriented American exceptionalist rhetoric delimits the political force of racial anger and silences the historical and current exclusions of black subjects from the promise of equality and freedom. As such, Obama's exceptionalist discourse delegitimizes the inventional potential of black anger and racial antagonism capable of calling into question the idea that America's exceptional principles will necessarily deliver Americans into salvation from the sin of racial inequality.

Notes

[1]Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union," Speech in Philadelphia, PA (March 18, 2008), *Barack Obama: 'A More Perfect Union' (Full Speech),* YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrp-v2tHaDo&feature=youtube_gdata_player (Accessed February 10, 2012). For a Transcript of the speech, see: "Obama Race Speech: Read The Full Text," *Huffington Post*: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/18/obama-race-speech-read-th_n_92077.html (Accessed February 20, 2012).

[2] For example, an 18 second version of the clip was posted to YouTube on March 14, 2008, four days before Obama's speech, with a caption reading: "Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Barack Obama's Pastor And Spiritual advisor professing his hate for America." Mattcantor65, "Reverend Jeremiah Wright "God Damn America," (YouTube: March 14, 2008): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnlRrxXv-v8&feature=youtube_gdata_player, (Accessed February 19, 2012).

[3] Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner, "American Exceptionalism in a Democratic Idiom: Transacting the Mythos of Change in the 2008 Presidential Campaign," *Communication Studies* 60.4 (2009).

[4] Bill Moyers, Interview with Jeremiah Wright, "Transcript", *Bill Moyers Journal* (April 25, 2008): http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/04252008/transcript1.html (Accessed February 10, 2012).

[5] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[6] Russell Lowell Riley, *The Presidency and the Politics of Racial Inequality: Nation-keeping from 1831 to 1965* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), x.

[7] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[8] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[9] Robert E. Terrill, "Unity and Duality in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95.4 (2009): 363-386, 364

[10] Terrill, "Unity and Duality," 387.

[11] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[12] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[13] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[14] Joshua Gunn argues that both Lacan's figure of the father and Agamben's figure of the sovereign straddle a certain zone of indistinction between authority and anomie, which is to say between authority and the crisis experienced in the emergency that demands the

authority's decision on the state of exception: "The fundamental character of sovereignty is only discernable when events suggest a regression to the state of nature, when a polis is unquestionably in some kind of emergency, because its power is fundamentally and decisively transgressive… Sovereignty is defined in such a moment. Such a view is comparable to Freud's primal father and Lacan's characterization of the symbolic father: the sovereign* be it a group or an individual* has the legal power to determine when there is an exception to the Law." Joshua Gunn, "Father Trouble: Staging Sovereignty in Spielberg's War of the Worlds," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25.1 (2008): 1–27, 16.

[15] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[16] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[17] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[18] David Lyons, "Unfinished Business: Racial Junctures in US History and their Legacy," Boston University School Of Law, Working Paper Series, Public Law & Legal Theory, Working Paper No. 02-06 (2002): http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=316627.

[19] James Arnt Aune, "The Argument from Evil in the Rhetoric of Reaction," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6.3 (2003): 518-522, 519.

[20] John B. Hatch argues that the concept of original sin is used in Christian attempts to account for historical instances of racism, because it evolves from the "Christian narrative of divine grace entering into broken humanity through Christ's healing power and loving sacrifice, providing redemption, initiating reconciliation, and inviting humans of all races and cultures to enter into this transforming narrative through repentance and faith." John B. Hatch, "Dialogic Rhetoric in Letters Across the Divide: A Dance of (Good) Faith toward Racial Reconciliation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.4 (2009): 485–532.

[21] Frank B. Wilderson III bluntly describes the structural inseparability between American economic institutions and slavery: "Capital was kick-started by the rape of the African continent… by approaching a particular body (a black body) with direct relations of force." Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," *Social Justice* 30.2 (2003): 18-27, 22. A more detailed account of the economic and political structures of white supremacy in American society is provided by Lacy K. Ford, Jr. who argues that slavery and white supremacy are intricately tied to both the economic and political foundations of American democracy in the Jacksonian south. On the economic foundations of white supremacy, Ford writes: "Whites in the Lower South generally accepted slavery as an institution essential to the region's continued prosperity and agreed that the thorough subordination of blacks best served their society's interests." On the political foundations of white supremacy, Ford writes: "Common whites found in the privileges of whiteness a social entitlement and a source of leverage they could employ with great effect in political debate. Lacking wealth but boasting numbers, white egalitarians used the ideological imperative of whiteness to wrest

meaningful political concessions, if not outright control, from wealthy elites at key moments." Taken together, the political and economic institutions of white supremacy formed an interlocking relationship of white privilege that defined civil society in the American south: "In turn, by accepting, even tacitly, the legitimacy of slavery and the material inequalities it sustained, white egalitarians left the wealth and economic power of the planter elite secure. Thus the triumph of whiteness allocated valuable privileges, including voting and legal equality, solely on the basis of skin color." Lacy K. Ford, Jr. "Making the 'White Man's Country' White: Race, Slavery, and State-Building in the Jacksonian South," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19.4 (1999): 713-737. The structural linkages between the economic prosperity of the United States and the institution of slavery are not limited to the American south, however. Contrary to the popular cultural mythology of northern reticence to slavery, the northern United States both profited from and was complicit in the slave trade, as Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank argue, "The history of the United States is typically told backwards, as a means of explaining to members of the current generation how their country grew to be the way it is. In such an account, slavery is a single chapter, a background event limited to one region of the country… A history told frontwards, however, pushes slavery into the foreground, inserting it into nearly every chapter. The truth is that slavery was a national phenomenon. The North shared in the wealth it created, and in the oppression it required… By the American Revolution, slavery was already a vital part of the national economy…. Well before that point, however, slavery had become the foundation of a network of independent economic systems throughout the country that rested on the premise that it was acceptable to view black human beings as property." See: Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, Jenifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), xxv-xxvi.

[22] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[23] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[24] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[25] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[26] Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[27] Agamben, *The State of Exception*, 2.

[28] Paul W. Kahn, "American Exceptionalism, Popular Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law," *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*, Michael Ignatieff, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 198-222, 198.

[29] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[30] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[31] Nikhil Pal Singh, "Beyond the 'Empire of Jim Crow': Race and War in Contemporary U.S. Globalism," *The Japanese Journal of American Studies* 20 (2009): 89-111, 92.

[32] Singh, "Beyond the 'Empire of Jim Crow'," 92-93.

[33] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[34] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[35] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[36] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[37] As Singh argues, "Racial ideologies and distinctions are lodged at the center of this paradox—they both define national particularity and constantly threaten to undo and overspill its boundaries." Singh, "Beyond the 'Empire of Jim Crow'": 92.

[38] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[39] Agamben, *State of Exception*, 84.

[40] Agamben, *State of Exception*, 84-85.

[41] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 23-24.

[42] Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black,* 23-25.

[43] Singh, "Beyond the 'Empire of Jim Crow'": 92.

[44] Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black,* 9.

[45] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[46] Singh argues that this invocation of transcendence has historically worked to help make racial minorities acquiesce to the political structures of racial domination: "[R]acial division at home was repeatedly described as the nation's "Achilles heel" in the struggle against Soviet Communism and in defense of the "free world." Indeed, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon actually heightened tendencies to promote the transcendence of racial division, as African Americans and Latinos were seemingly incorporated into the cultural citizenship of nationalist sentiment (even as Arabs, Muslims and South Asians were being subjected to new forms of racial profiling). A spate of newspaper articles prominently testified to a new, unprecedented comity between black, brown, and white—including most improbably, new levels of trust between black communities and the New York City Police Department (NYPD), despite raw memories of the police killing and torture of unarmed black criminal suspects such as Amadou Diallo and Abner Louima in 1999." See Singh, "Beyond the 'Empire of Jim Crow'." 94

[47] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[48] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[49] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[50] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[51] "Denigrate," *Online Etymology Dictionary* (Douglas Harper, 2001-2012): http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=denigrate&allowed_in_frame=0 (Accessed February 19, 2012)

[52] Jane Lazarre, *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness: Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 74.

[53] "PSALM 145: The Greatness and Goodness of God," *The Sacred Heart*: http://www.thesacredheart.com/psalm/psalm145.htm (Accessed February 1, 2012); For prayers involving the phrase "The greatness and the goodness of God", see: "Afternoon Prayer," Robert Freeman Ministries (2012): http://www.robertfreemanministries.com/prayer/ (Accessed February 1, 2012); Rev. Pierre-Henry Buisson, "Easter Vigil," St Martin's In-the-Field (April 23, 2011): http://www.stmartinsinthefield.org/sites/default/files/Sermon%20Easter%20Vigil%20042311%20-%20PH.pdf (Accessed February 1, 2012).

[54] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[55] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[56] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[57] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[58] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[59] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[60] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[61] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 65.

[62] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[63] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[64] Agamben, *The State of Exception*.

[65] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[66] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[67] Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2006), 356.

[68] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[69] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[70] John M. Murphy, "Barack Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 97.4 (2011): 387-410, 404.

[71] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[72] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[73] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[74] Terrill, "Unity and Duality."

[75] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[76] Dylan Rodriguez describes this very real legacy of white supremacy: "Variable, overlapping, and mutually constituting white supremacist regimes have in fact been fundamental to the formation and movements of the United States, from racial chattel slavery and frontier genocide to recent and current modes of neoliberal land displacement and (domestic-to-global) warfare." See Dylan Rodriguez, "American Globality and the US Prison Regime: State Violence And White Supremacy from Abu Ghraib to Stockton to Bagong Diwa," *Kritika Kultura* 9 (2007): 29-30.

[77] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[78] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[79] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[80] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[81] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[82] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[83] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[84] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[85] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[86] David A. Frank, "The Prophetic Voice And The Face Of The Other in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009).

[87] Wilderson writes, "[V]iolence against black people is ontological and gratuitous as opposed to merely ideological and contingent. Furthermore, no magical moment (i.e., 1865) transformed paradigmatically the black body's relation to this entity. In this regard, the hegemonic advances within civil society by the Left hold out no more possibility for black life than the coercive backlash of political society. What many political theorists have either missed or ignored is that a crisis of authority that might take place by way of a Left expansion of civil society, further instantiates, rather than dismantles, the authority of whiteness. Black death is the modern bourgeois-state's recreational pastime, but the hunting season is not confined to the time (and place) of political society; blacks are fair

game as a result of a progressively expanding civil society as well." Frank Wilderson III, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?" *Social Identities* 9.2 (2003): 226-240.

[88] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[89] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[90] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[91] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[92] Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "One Dream: Barack Obama, Race, and the American Dream," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14.1 (2011): 127.

[93] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[94] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[95] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[96] Dana Cloud, "Hegemony or Concordance? The Rhetoric of Tokenism in `Oprah' Winfrey's Rags-to-Riches Biography." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13.2 (1996): 115-137.

[97] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[98] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 48-49.

[99] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[100] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[101] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[102] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[103] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[104] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[105] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[106] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[107] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[108] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[109] Wilderson argues against the ruse of analogy, arguing that the ontological subject of blackness is, for white civil society, without analogue, because white civil society's grammar of ethics and civility has been constructed as an active negation of the black

subject: The ruse of analogy erroneously locates blacks in the world – a place where they have not been since the dawning of blackness. This attempt to position the black in the world by way of analogy is…a mystification and an erasure because, whereas masters may share the same fantasies as slaves, and slaves can speak as though they have the same interests as masters, their grammars of suffering are irreconcilable. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 3-4.

[110] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[111] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[112] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[113] Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 3-4.

[114] Maurice Berger, *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness* (New York, NY, Macmillan: 1999), 168.

[115] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[116] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[117] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[118] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[119] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[120] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[121] Gunn, "Father Trouble."

[122] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[123] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[124] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[125] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[126] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[127] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[128] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[129] Obama, "A More Perfect Union."

[130] Frank, "The Prophetic Voice," 183.

[131] Melanie Loehwing, "Homelessness as the Unforgiving Minute of the Present: The Rhetorical Tenses of Democratic Citizenship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96.4 (2010): 380-403.

[132] According to the Mayo clinic, aphasia refers to a neurological condition suffered by stroke and head injury victims that "robs [them] of the ability to communicate." Mayo Clinic Staff, "Aphasia: Definition," (March 6, 2010), http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/aphasia/DS00685 (Accessed February 10, 2012).

[133] Terrill, "Unity and Duality," 364.

[134] Terrill, "Unity and Duality," 381.

[135] Vanessa B. Beasley, *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 5-7.

[136] Beasley, *You, the People,* 7.

[137] Terrill, "Unity and Duality," 367.

[138] David A. Frank and Mark Lawrence McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience, and the (Im)possibility of Racial Reconciliation," Rhetoric and Public Affairs 8.4 (2005): 571-594, 583.

[139] David A. Frank, "The Prophetic Voice And The Face Of The Other in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 380-403, 385.

[140] Judy L. Isaksen, "Obama's Rhetorical Shift: Insights for Communication Studies," *Communication Studies* 62.4 (2011): 456-471, 468.

[141] Isaksen, "Obama's Rhetorical Shift," 469

[142] Terrill, "Unity and Duality'," 365.

CHAPTER THREE

American Exceptionalism, The Rule of Law, and the Rhetoric of the Sovereign Decision in President Barack Obama's "Our Security, Our Values"

Introduction

On May 21, 2009, President Barack Obama delivered a speech at the National Archives in Washington D.C. entitled, "Our Security, Our Values."[1] In the speech, Obama explains his administration's policies regarding the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. In this chapter, I look at how Obama rhetorically packages his administration's actions toward detainees at Guantanamo Bay through the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. "Our Security, Our Values" is an important speech for understanding Obama's rhetorical vision of American exceptionalism because in the speech Obama offers a defense of an exception his administration made to the values that he claims makes America exceptional. In the speech, Obama praises the values that make America "a light that shines for all who seek freedom, fairness, equality, and dignity around the world."[2] However, in order to explain why the administration is holding detainees without trial despite campaign promises to close down Guantanamo Bay, Obama justifies his declaration of exceptions to democratic values in the name of national security.

I argue that "Our Security, Our Values" instantiates what Giorgio Agamben calls the "state of exception" by situating the administration's actions and decisions in the war on terror at the rhetorical nexus of the rule of law and national security. Through this rhetorical nexus, Obama enacts what Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner call "American exceptionalism with a democratic inflection," offering the rule of law and national security as a balanced democratic foundation for the administration's actions in the war

on terror.[3] Obama situates the rule of law as an alternative to the Bush administration's politics of fear, and in so doing, distances himself from the previous administration's approach to the war on terror. In an era of increased public scrutiny of the executive's actions in the war on terror, Obama must find a new rhetorical packaging for his administration's ongoing effort to "take the fight to the extremists who attacked us on 9/11 in Afghanistan and Pakistan."[4] Obama deploys the rhetoric of the rule of law to provide his sovereign power over detainees with the rhetorical mantle of legality. Obama thus normalizes the executive's power to detain suspected terrorists by describing the new "durable" legal framework his administration created to justify "prolonged" detention and other executive actions in the war on terror.[5] American exceptionalism, articulated at the dual nexus of national security and the rule of law, allows Obama to rhetorically package his administration's extra-juridical police and military policies as legal and legitimate.

The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections, followed by a conclusion. In the first section, I outline Agamben's theory of the state of exception as it relates to executive power in the war on terror. In the second section, I situate Obama's return to the rule of law in "Our Security, Our Values" as a challenge to Agamben's theory of the state of exception. In the third section, I return to Agamben's theory of the state of exception to help explain how Obama's rhetorical balancing of the rule of law and security normalizes sovereign power over life. In the conclusion, I propose that this speech calls for a re-evaluation of fear as the primary rhetorical engine of warfare, suggesting instead that American exceptionalism functions as the primary rhetorical engine of perpetual American state violence.

The State of Exception

The state of exception refers to the emergency powers claimed by executives in times of crisis that justify their ability to suspend or make exceptions to the laws and norms of the constitutional order while nevertheless claiming to uphold the rule of law.[6] Sovereign executives are imbued with the power to suspend the law because legislators cannot adequately predict the real situations and crises executives will face when deciding on how to apply the law. In other words, there exists a fundamental gap between the anomic or unnamable reality of life and the language of the law. The goal of the law is to bring unwanted forms of lived life into line with the ideal life of the community, an ideal form of life that transcends the immanent nature of real, lived existence. The task of the sovereign is to suture the gap between the law and life with apparatuses of power. The state of exception, therefore, produces an "articulation between life and law" that is "effective though fictional."[7]

The state of exception points toward the fundamental aporia at the heart of all theories of sovereignty in which the sovereign, the person who decides on the law, must necessarily be both inside and outside of the law. A very basic example of this is when a police officer drives over the speed limit to catch and punish a driver who is speeding. The state of exception ensures the sovereign's monopoly on illegal behavior so that the sovereign may prevent others from engaging in illegal behavior. This concept was central to the paradigm of sovereign governance articulated by Nazi Jurist Carl Schmitt. Schmitt, as quoted in Agamben's *State of Exception*, holds that "the sovereign stands outside of the normally valid juridical order, and yet belongs to it."[8]

Agamben radicalizes Schmitt's interpretation of the state of exception, describing the prevalence of the paradigm of the state of exception in both totalitarian regimes like

Schmitt's Nazi Germany and in constitutional democracies like the United States. By pointing to the paradigmatic similarities between the emergency powers guaranteed to executives in both democracies and totalitarian states, Agamben accounts for the vast expansion of emergency powers in modern constitutional democracies. Such expansions grant executives the right to temporarily suspend certain laws in order to protect the nation those laws purport to represent.[9] While in principle, the emergency powers of democratic states are supposed to be limited to exceptional circumstances, Agamben argues that the "unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government" has moved the state of exception from the margins of political life to its center, dramatically increasing the sovereign power of democratic executives.[10] By inscribing the executive's ability to make exceptions to laws that constrain executive power within the rule of law itself, the state of exception functions "as a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism."[11]

For Agamben, the state of exception has become the overarching paradigm of governance for an increasing number of constitutional democracies. These regimes deal with political, economic, and national security crises by granting executives the legal and political capacity to declare exceptions to the norms and laws of the constitutional order.[12] Because they are required to speak both to and for the whole nation, national executives describe these various crises as a series of existential threats that place in jeopardy either the lives of all citizens or the constitutional order that protects those lives.

A central component to the state of exception is the notion of bare life. For Agamben, bare life signifies the political reduction of life to mere biological existence. This reduction of life to mere biology occurs both conceptually and physically. The conceptual reduction of life to bare life occurs as the idea of life comes to mean only

life's biological essence and as such becomes the central object of the government's concern. As Agamben writes, "the species and the individual as a simple living body become what is at stake in a society's political strategies."[13] The physical reduction of bare life occurs when the sovereign takes absolute measures in order to protect the biological life of the population. This act tends to occur in one of two primary ways. In the first, sovereign power captures certain people in order to keep them alive while denying them political rights. Agamben describes this as the situation of prisoners in concentration camps who were, Agamben writes, "lacking almost all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence, and yet were still biologically alive."[14] In the second, the sovereign kills certain people without claiming to have violated either their political rights or the laws that protect those political rights. Here, Agamben provides the example of the ancient category of Roman law known as *homo sacer* or "sacred life."[15] When a person was legally deemed to be *homo sacer*, that person could be killed by any of the emperor's subjects without violating the laws barring the emperor's subjects from committing homicide.[16] As such, *homo sacer* is included in Roman law through its exclusion as an "originary exception in which human life is included in the political order in being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed."[17] The state of exception signifies the point when a threat to the bare, biological life of the population allows the sovereign to justify taking away a person's political rights, or outright killing them.

Bare life is thus the foundation of the modern democratic state's relationship with its citizens. The sovereign is assigned with protecting the political existence of the individual as citizen subject. Yet, for Agamben, the political existence of the citizen is predicated on the subject's bare biological life. In other words, the sovereign is charged

to protect both the nation's security and the rule of law that makes security meaningful by guaranteeing the individual's right to life and liberty. Individuals who are deemed to be a threat to either the bare life of the community or the constitutional order that protects that bare life can be denied the legal protections of the constitutional order without violating the rule of law. These individuals are, Agamben argues, "stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life."[18] They can be held captive and denied the protections of the rule of law without threatening the rule of law itself. Bare life, like the sovereign, is both simultaneously interior and exterior to the law.

Agamben identifies the "indefinite detention" of suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay as an extreme, yet paradigmatic example of the production of bare life in the state of exception.[19] The executive order issued by President Bush authorizing these detentions exposes "the state of exception as the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension."[20] Agamben argues that by denying detainees the protections of both of the Geneva Conventions and the American Constitution, "Bush's order…radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being."[21] The detainees represent a severe manifestation of the reduction of life to "bare life," a life subjected to state power while nevertheless being denied the rights guaranteed to subjects of the state, constituting an "extratemporal and extraterritorial threshold in which the human body is separated from its normal political status and abandoned, in a state of exception, to the most extreme misfortunes."[22] The war on terror, Agamben argues, creates an absolute state of exception that removes detainees from both time and law, abandoning them indefinitely from the human community:

> Neither prisoners nor persons accused, but simply "detainees," they are the object of a pure de facto rule, of a detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight.[23]

Agamben depicts the war on terror as the logical outgrowth of the paradigm of security that now constitutes the central concern of democratic government. Because the government's first and foremost task is protecting the bare biological life of the population, the government must maintain the capacity to render the population bare, depoliticized life. For Agamben, striking a balance between security and democracy is impossible, for democracy and security have entered into a mutually destructive zone of indistinction. "Because they require constant reference to a state of exception," Agamben explains, "measures of security work towards a growing depoliticization of society. In the long run, they are irreconcilable with democracy."[24] In this way, attempting to constrain the sovereign through the law is an exercise in futility because the sovereign is ultimately the one who decides on the law. Agamben forcefully declares, "From the real state of exception in which we live, it is not possible to return to the state of law…for at issue now are the very concepts of "state" and "law."[25]

Agamben's theory of the state of exception warrants closer attention by rhetorical scholars because it provides new explanations for how representatives of sovereign power go about justifying actions of sovereign violence. In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama calls for a continuation of the war on terror with "an abiding confidence in the rule of law."[26] Agamben argues that the emergency powers of constitutional democracies have become normalized, creating a situation where "the normative aspect of law can thus be obliterated and contradicted with impunity by a governmental violence that…nevertheless still claims to be applying the law."[27] It is therefore important for

scholars of presidential address to examine instances where the president seeks to expand the executive's legal powers while simultaneously making claims of "applying the law."

Because rhetorical scholars study real sovereign actors, such as presidents, engaged in the act of rhetorically justifying their actions, the field of rhetoric is uniquely poised to test the validity of Agamben's argument that "the state of exception has today reached its maximum worldwide deployment."[28] If it is true that the state of exception is now not simply a temporary state, like the state of war, but an overarching paradigm of governance, rhetorical scholars must be aware of how this paradigm affects the rhetorical machinations of presidents. Presidents must now seek authority for ongoing, durational forms of conflict rather than temporary states of war. Agamben specifically names the actions of President Bush in Guantanamo Bay as an extreme example of the state of exception. However, in "Our Security, Our Values," Obama attempts to distinguish his administration's Guantanamo policy from the "hasty decisions…based on fear rather than foresight" that characterized Bush's approach to Guantanamo.[29] Obama's Guantanamo Bay rhetoric thus constitutes a crucial litmus test for Agamben's argument that "The state of exception has by now become the rule."[30]

Returning to the Rule of Law

In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama couches his Guantanamo policy through the rhetoric of American exceptionalism by articulating his administration's attempts to return to the rule of law. This happens in four distinct ways. First, Obama describes the rule of law as part of what makes America exceptional. Second, Obama relates the rule of law to his own exceptional American journey. Third, Obama contrasts the rule of law

to the politics of fear. Finally, he rejects "indefinite" detention by describing his administration's new review process for handling Guantanamo detainees.

The first way Obama enacts a rhetorical return to the rule of law is by describing the rule of law as an intrinsic feature of America's exceptional experiment in democracy. In the lexicon of American liberalism, the rule of law promises "predictability in social life by placing constitutional limits on the type of powers that governments may legitimately exercise, as well as on the extent of those governmental powers."[31] The rule of law is one of the founding principles of American democracy. As legal scholar Daniel L. Dreisbach notes, "voluntary submission of the citizen's self-interests to the public good and rule of law was the measure of civic virtue in the founding era."[32] The term also enjoys a particularly strong rhetorical salience in American political culture, as Anne Demo argues, describing the rule of law as a cultural "god-term."[33]

The rule of law is a key foundation of American exceptionalism because it founds the basis of popular, rather than divine sovereignty. In liberal thought, one key feature that separates constitutional democracies from monarchies and totalitarian states is the fact that executives, unlike kings or dictators, are bound and constrained, by the rule of law.[34] The idea that the rule of the people, or popular sovereignty, is expressed through the rule of the law is what Yale law professor Paul W. Kahn calls "the absolute bedrock of the American political myth."[35] Kahn argues that one cannot "understand the power and character of American exceptionalism" without understanding "the intimate relationship among American political identity, the rule of law, and popular sovereignty.[36] Although the formal cause of the state's claim to the rule of law is the American Constitution, Kahn argues, the material cause of the state's claim to the rule of law is the individual, represented as a body connected at birth to the nation through

citizenship. America's democratic heritage is exceptional from the point of liberal thought because it distinguishes the sovereign who claims authority through the bare life of the citizenry from the sovereign who claims authority through divine right. As Kahn argues, "the popular sovereign has a material existence only in the bodies of the citizen."[37] However the bare life of the citizenry also constitutes the limits of personhood, as Kahn maintains, "The stateless person lacks something essential to his or her very identity: a political life."[38] Kahn contends that the "nation exists only as a meaning borne by citizens willing to invest their bodies in its continued existence as an order of law."[39] American exceptionalism as articulated through the rule of law thus connotes an implicitly biopolitical vocation of sovereign power, as the sovereign represents and is charged with the protection of all citizens based on the mere fact of their biological existence.

In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama describes the rule of law as a central feature of his vision of American exceptionalism. Speaking at the National Archives in front of the founding documents of the American legal order, Obama pays homage to America's exceptional experiment in democracy, an experiment founded on a belief in the rule of law. *The Washington Post*'s Dan Froomkin comments on the connection between Obama's physical presence at the Archives and his symbolic affirmation of the rule of law, writing, "His voice echoing in the rotunda of the National Archives, the U.S. Constitution behind him, the Declaration of Independence to his right and the Bill of Rights to his left, Obama made the case that…the war on terror must be…brought under the rule of law."[40] Obama's physical presence in front of these founding legal documents highlights the symbolic connection between the body of the citizen-sovereign and the order of the rule of law that founds America's exceptional democratic project.

Obama begins by reviewing the steps his administration has already taken to help make the nation secure, but then declares that those actions alone will not keep America safe. Obama argues that America's security will not be assured unless the nation holds true to the values laid out in the founding documents that mark America's exceptional experiment in democracy:

> I believe with every fiber of my being that in the long run we also cannot keep this country safe unless we enlist the power of our most fundamental values. The documents that we hold in this very hall -- the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights -- these are not simply words written into aging parchment. They are the foundation of liberty and justice in this country, and a light that shines for all who seek freedom, fairness, equality, and dignity around the world.[41]

Here, Obama presents a vision of American exceptionalism in which America leads the world by example. The American value of the rule of law, established in America's founding documents, serves an example for other democratic peoples to emulate as they seek their own freedom. America's capacity to be a global leader capable of leading the world to the promised land of democracy relies on maintaining a firm commitment to the value of the rule of law.

Faith in America's values works in this speech to articulate a rhetorical vision of American exceptionalism that constructs a moral hierarchy of allies and enemies, from the historical enemy figures of communists and fascists up to present day terrorists. For Obama, "[f]idelity to our values" allowed the United States to become "the strongest nation in the world," by creating "strong alliances that amplified our power," while drawing "a sharp, moral contrast with our adversaries."[42] This moral hierarchy of international relations is built upon the discursive separation of liberal and illiberal regimes through the rhetorical articulation of the rule of law. Obama suggests that

American values are what allowed the United States to "overpower the iron fist of fascism and outlast the iron curtain of communism."[43] The belief in the rule of law has not only historically separated America from its enemies, Obama argues, it will continue to provide a moral high ground for America's present day struggle against terrorist enemies who refuse to submit to an international order founded on America's universal political values. The rule of law separates America from the terrorists that Americans will continue to fight and defeat:

> From Europe to the Pacific, we've been the nation that has shut down torture chambers and replaced tyranny with the rule of law. That is who we are. And where terrorists offer only the injustice of disorder and destruction, America must demonstrate that our values and our institutions are more resilient than a hateful ideology.[44]

The struggle to replace both tyranny and terrorism with the rule of law is, for Obama, an intrinsic part of the American journey. It is what guides the American nation in their lasting conflict against enemies who oppose the American way of life.

The second way Obama aligns his vision of American exceptionalism with the rule of law is by describing his own personal journey as an experience heralding the values of the American legal system. The rule of law defines not only "who we are," but also who Obama is. Obama portrays the rule of law as inextricably caught up with his personal American journey:

> I stand here today as someone whose own life was made possible by these documents. My father came to these shores in search of the promise that they offered. My mother made me rise before dawn to learn their truths when I lived as a child in a foreign land. My own American journey was paved by generations of citizens who gave meaning to those simple words -- "to form a more perfect union." I've studied the Constitution as a student, I've taught it as a teacher, I've been bound by it as a lawyer and a legislator. I took an oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution as Commander-in-Chief, and as a citizen, I know that

> we must never, ever, turn our back on its enduring principles for expedience sake.[45]

Here, Obama's uniquely American journey is characterized by his own expertise as a student, teacher, practitioner, maker, and enforcer of the law. James Darsey notes that in Obama's rhetoric the metaphor of the journey functions as a "vehicle inviting the American people to join together to follow Obama along the path out of our present circumstances and toward a new day."[46] By describing his own uniquely American journey through the rhetoric of the rule of law, Obama implies that what makes America exceptional is that the journey of each individual citizen makes up the fabric of popular sovereignty out of which the democratic tapestry of American government emerges. However, this tapestry also requires traditionally American archetypes of light and dark, ascent and descent, or good and evil, "a family of metaphors" that is "utterly primordial."[47] In this story, Obama taps into that family of metaphors by inviting his audience to follow him on his journey out of the lawlessness of the last administration's approach to the war on terror, as the rule of law comes to rhetorically separate the bright future promised by the light of American democracy from the dark future promised by the lawlessness of America's enemies. Through this moral hierarchy, Obama creates a new vision for America that rhetorically packages the administration's approach to fighting terrorism through the symbolic foundation of American exceptionalism.

The third rhetorical feature of Obama's return to the rule of law is a move away from the politics of fear. Obama posits the rule of law as more objective and apolitical than previous approaches to the war on terror. According to Obama, after September 11th, the Bush administration made a series of "hasty decisions" that were "based on fear rather than foresight."[48] In making these decisions, the government "trimmed facts and

evidence to fit ideological predispositions."[49] By appealing to the law as a means of conducting the war on terror based on evidentiary facts rather the political distortion offered by fear, Obama rhetorically codes his administration's actions in the war on terror as apolitical and non-ideological. Separating the improper use of military power based on fear from the proper use of military power based on evidence allows Obama to delineate a mode of executive power that appears to be grounded in the objectivity of the law.

Obama ensures his audience that he is not abandoning the war on terrorism, but rather subjecting executive actions in the war on terror to the checks and balances required by America's commitment to the rule of law:

> Now let me be clear: We are indeed at war with al Qaeda and its affiliates. We do need to update our institutions to deal with this threat. But we must do so with an abiding confidence in the rule of law and due process; in checks and balances and accountability.[50]

Obama calls for a sustainable legal foundation for the war on terror, one that avoids the problems of the Bush administration's "ad hoc legal approach for fighting terrorism that was neither effective nor sustainable."[51] For Obama, Bush's lawless approach to the war on terror "failed to rely on our legal traditions and time-tested institutions, and…failed to use our values as a compass."[52] Obama calls on the nation to abandon the politics of fear so that they may bring the nation's institutions up to date, allowing his administration to continue "investing in the 21st century military and intelligence capabilities that will allow us to stay one step ahead of a nimble enemy."[53]

After describing the lawlessness of the last administration's fearful approach to detainee policy, Obama then turns to a description of his administration's efforts to return to the rule of law. First, Obama explains his decision to ban "the use of so-called

enhanced interrogation techniques by the United States of America."[54] For Obama, these "brutal methods" are not simply ineffective at combating terrorism, they also "undermine the rule of law."[55] In a subtle reference to the international legal norms regarding the treatment of prisoners of war, Obama argues that the practice of torture can "risk the lives of our troops by making it less likely that others will surrender to them in battle, and more likely that Americans will be mistreated if they are captured."[56] Torture threatens America's exceptional status as a leader of the civilized world toward the *telos* of global enlightenment by placing America on "the wrong side of history."[57]

Obama then reminds the audience of his administration's campaign promise and executive order to close Guantanamo Bay. Guantanamo Bay undermined the rule of law, Obama argues, because the military commissions set up to deal with Guantanamo detainees made it extremely difficult to prosecute suspected terrorists, resulting in the prosecution of "a grand total of three suspected terrorists."[58] Obama affirms the Supreme Court's decision in *Boumediene v. Bush*, rejecting the idea that Guantanamo Bay should be a legal black hole operating entirely outside of the law:

> Instead of building a durable framework for the struggle against al Qaeda that drew upon our deeply held values and traditions, our government was defending positions that undermined the rule of law. In fact, part of the rationale for establishing Guantanamo in the first place was the misplaced notion that a prison there would be beyond the law -- a proposition that the Supreme Court soundly rejected.[59]

Here, there is a temporal dimension of Obama's account of the return to the law. The administration's approach to fighting al Qaeda must be "durable" and must draw on the "deeply held" values that have endured throughout America's lasting historical experiment in democracy. The durability of the documents Obama stands in front of is evidence of the durability of the legal framework that will allow the administration to

fight a prolonged war against an enemy that refuses to respect the civic virtues that make America an exceptional nation.

Obama continues by recounting the review process his administration established for disposing of the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. According to Obama, this review process corrects the Bush administration's haphazard approach to Guantanamo. Obama argues that Guantanamo Bay is "a mess -- a misguided experiment that has left in its wake a flood of legal challenges that my administration is forced to deal with on a constant, almost daily basis."[60] The review process allows Obama to again contrast his rational and educational legalist approach to the situation from the politics of fear typified by the Bush administration. Dealing with these challenges requires a review process free from "the politicization of these issues that have characterized the last several years" and the "fear-mongering" rhetoric used to "scare people rather than educate them."[61]

Obama's use of the rule of law to "educate" his audience rather than "scare" them demonstrates how American exceptionalism emerges in Obama's professorial rhetorical style. Drawing on his rhetorical experience as a professor of law, Obama outlines for his audience the five-fold legal review process provided by his administration's new executive legal framework, providing rhetorical continuity with the formal standards of legal justice through his detailed, academic rhetorical form. He carefully describes five categories into which detainees shall be separated. The rhetorical elaboration of the details of these newly established detainee categories allows Obama to describe for his audience how his administration has helped construct a new framework of legal guidelines surrounding detention policies, continuing his administration's journey back to the rule of law.

The first category consists of those detainees that can be tried in American federal courts. Trying these prisoners in American "courts provided for by the United States Constitution" demonstrates, for Obama, the legitimacy of the American legal system and the values of the rule of law.[62] Obama cites the convictions of Ramzi Yousef and Zacarias Moussaoui as evidence that "Our courts and our juries, our citizens, are tough enough to convict terrorists."[63] "If we can try those terrorists in our courts and hold them in our prisons," Obama reasons, "then we can do the same with detainees from Guantanamo."[64] While Obama recognizes that terrorists will indefinitely pose a threat to American national security, providing audiences with a reason to fear terrorists, Obama mediates the affective force of this fear through the audience's investment in the safety provided by the military and legal apparatuses of the American security complex, apparatuses that are fully capable of capturing and prosecuting terrorists who seek to do us harm.

The second category of detainees consists of those who can be tried for war crimes by military commissions. While military commissions are not discussed in the Constitution, Obama situates these commissions as in line with the American spirit of the rule of law as it has been applied historically. Here, as it is performed rhetorically in Obama's speech, the rule of the law exceeds its strict legal context. As Obama argues, "Military commissions have a history in the United States dating back to George Washington and the Revolutionary War. They are an appropriate venue for trying detainees for violations of the laws of war."[65] Obama situates his executive authority as both inside and outside of the law by appealing to the founding narrative of the American Revolution. While military commissions are technically not a part of the Constitution, Obama argues that these extra-legal measures are acceptable because they have always

existed alongside America's legal order, even when that legal order was still a nascent idea being sought through revolutionary violence. As Agamben argues, "the state of exception" maintains a "close relationship to civil war, insurrection, and resistance."[66] The democratic legal order of the rule of law is founded in an expression of popular sovereignty that was first articulated through the violence of the nation's revolutionary origins.

Obama recognizes that although he has previously been on record opposing military commissions as a violation of the rule of law, his administration is working to bring these commissions back in line with the rule of law. "Instead of using the flawed commissions of the last seven years," Obama contends, "my administration is bringing our commissions in line with the rule of law."[67] The reforms Obama lists include refusing evidence obtained by "cruel, inhuman, or degrading interrogation methods," and providing detainees with "greater latitude in selecting their own counsel, and more protections if they refuse to testify."[68] Obama then promises to work with Congress and "legal authorities across the political spectrum…on legislation to ensure that these commissions are fair, legitimate, and effective."[69]

The third category of detainees consists of those who have been released by the courts. Here, Obama is referring to the 2008 Supreme Court decision in *Boumediene vs. Bush*. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision that the Military Commissions Act, which eliminated *habeas corpus* jurisdiction for "enemy combatants" at Guantanamo Bay, was unconstitutional. In so doing, the court effectively granted detainees the right to petition the court for a review of their case on the grounds of *habeas corpus*.[70] Legal scholars have argued that *Boumediene* challenged the indefinite nature of detentions at Guantanamo.[71] The decision introduced the idea that the time of

detention was a legitimate legal justification for limiting the executive's power to suspend *habeas corpus*.

The return to both time and law exists both in the legal ruling provided by the court and in Obama's speech. Benjamin J. Lozano argues that if the Bush policies subjected detainees to a lawless and atemporal detention, *Boumediene* returned detainees to the law and to temporality. Lozanao argues that although "time has first and foremost always been a concept endemic to the declaration of a national emergency," and therefore a means of expanding executive authority, in *Boumediene* the courts used the length of the detention to conclude "a state of emergency now exists for the vindication of petitioners' rights."[72] *Boumediene* thus demonstrates the juridical apparatus of the law using the durational nature of the war on terror to establish a claim for the rights of suspected terrorists. The return to time and to the law also happens in Obama's speech, as Obama attempts to create a durable framework for the executive's lasting actions in the struggle against extremists. While it is true that in the juridical apparatuses of the courts, the state of emergency allows the duration of the war on terror to serve as a justification for *habeas corpus* petitions, in doing so the law also accedes to a durational framework for executive action in the war on terror. The executive establishes lasting, "durable" power in the future for capturing and detaining suspected terrorists on America's new battlegrounds in the war on terror because the ongoing nature of the conflict allows those captured to eventually appeal their status. Thus, in the give and pull of the American system of checks and balances, both the Supreme Court and the Chief Executive deploy the law as a means of establishing a sense of stability and normality to the government's actions in the war on terror.

Because the court handed down this decision, Obama is also capable of separating his executive policy on Guantanamo Bay from the sphere of politics by locating it in the sphere of law. Obama argues that the release of prisoners "has nothing to do with my decision to close Guantanamo. It has to do with the rule of law. The courts have spoken."[73] Obama affirms the limitations on presidential power as a hallmark of the rule of law: "I cannot ignore these rulings because as President, I too am bound by the law. The United States is a nation of laws and so we must abide by these rulings."[74] After *Boumediene*, detainees are no longer objects of an entirely *de facto* rule, but rather subjects of a legal system in which they are capable of challenging their status as detainees.[75] Six hundred such detainees have successfully appealed their status and have been released from Guantanamo Bay.[76]

In describing the release of terrorist suspects, Obama separates himself from the politics of fear, but not entirely. The fear of extremist recidivism still exists, but is primarily located in the past administration's *ad hoc* legal approach to the war on terror. Obama ensures the nation that his administration is committed to preventing extremist recidivism, as he argues, "We are currently in the process of reviewing each of the detainee cases…. And as we do so, we are acutely aware that under the last administration, detainees were released and, in some cases, returned to the battlefield."[77] Unlike detainees released under the Bush administration, Obama argues that his administration is only going to release detainees who have been proven through the objective legal standards of the law to pose no threat to the United States. The rule of law provides a rhetorical device for Obama to simultaneously participate in and distance himself from the politics of fear. Obama can therefore remain committed to an

exceptionalist vision of American leadership in the struggle against extremism, while simultaneously affirming the legally ordered release of detainees.

The fourth category "involves detainees who we have determined can be transferred safely to another country."[78] Transferring detainees to another country allows the Obama administration to hand off legal authority to other actors, offering a return to the rule of law by removing detainees who pose a challenge to the application of American laws from the legal system itself. The transfer of detainees is described as a way of relieving the American legal system of the problems posed by the detainees, and thus offers Obama another means to claim that his administration is doing everything it can to close the legal black hole of Guantanamo Bay.

The fifth category consists of those "detainees at Guantanamo who cannot be prosecuted yet who pose a clear danger to the American people."[79] The final category of detainee poses a unique challenge to Obama's attempt to adhere to rule of law, as Obama admits, "this is the toughest single issue that we will face."[80] While Obama promises that his administration will "exhaust every avenue that we have to prosecute those at Guantanamo who pose a danger to our country," the administration cannot be expected to place absolute temporal limits on their right to detention, as "even when this process is complete, there may be a number of people who cannot be prosecuted for past crimes, in some cases because evidence may be tainted, but who nonetheless pose a threat to the security of the United States."[81] The enduring temporal nature of the war on terror is used to justify the creation of this new category of detainee in the law: "Even when" the review process is complete, the conditional possibility of the existence of terrorists who "may be" unable to be prosecuted yet "nonetheless pose a threat" requires a category of "prolonged detention."[82] Obama reaffirms his legal right as Commander-in-Chief to

decide which detainees "remain at war with the United States," and thus cannot be released.[83] However, Obama argues, these preventative detentions must also be subject to the rule of law:

> I am not going to release individuals who endanger the American people…. Having said that, we must recognize that these detention policies cannot be unbounded. They can't be based simply on what I or the executive branch decide alone. That's why my administration has begun to reshape the standards that apply to ensure that they are in line with the rule of law. We must have clear, defensible, and lawful standards for those who fall into this category. We must have fair procedures so that we don't make mistakes. We must have a thorough process of periodic review, so that any prolonged detention is carefully evaluated and justified.[84]

While recognizing the legitimacy of the executive's power to detain suspected terrorists without trial, Obama also calls for this power to be brought into line with legal standards, standards that his administration is in the process of creating. As such, Obama contrasts his administration from the lawless, fear-based approach of President Bush. Obama attempts to return American actions in the military struggle against extremists to the moral high ground of American exceptionalism through an image of the rule of law that is balanced with realistic, pragmatic concerns about the nation's security.

The last two detainee categories, transferrable detainees and detainees who cannot be prosecuted but who still pose a threat, differ from the first three detainee categories because they call on the administration to develop new legal mechanisms for dealing with detainees rather than simply applying or reforming old legal mechanisms. Because these detainees can't be prosecuted in US courts, military tribunals, or settle their *habeas corpus* claims in front of the court, the Obama administration must make administrative decisions about how to handle their status. Obama portrays his administration's actions as part of the construction of a new rule of law surrounding detention policies.

Obama's rhetorical and political work thus changes the temporal and juridical way in which the war on terror proceeds. Lorenzo's analysis suggests that post-*Boumediene* detainees are no longer subject to what Agamben would call the "extratemporal and extraterritorial threshold" of abandonment of the law, but have rather been returned to the world of time by the law itself.[85] Obama's broader rhetorical signature corresponds with this return to time and the contingency of the present. David A. Frank, quoting John Murphy, locates Obama's rhetoric in the "language of becoming, of change" rather than the "language of Being, of eternal principles."[86] Obama does not position himself as "outside of the normally valid juridical order."[87] For, as Obama declares, "As President, [he] too [is] bound by the law. The United States is a nation of laws and so we must abide by these rulings."[88] Obama's rhetorical appeal to "foresight" instead of "fear" and "facts and evidence" over "ideological predispositions" represents Obama's efforts, in the words of Robert Rowland, to "revitalize the idea of public reason at the heart of Madisonian democracy."[89] Through the rhetorical nexus of the rule of law and national security, Obama promises to bring the lasting fight against extremists back to the domain of public reason. Ivie suggests that by "rhetorically segueing from an open-ended war on terrorism to…a 'struggle against extremism' in which the United States would…conform again to the lasting values that gave America moral authority," Obama created a more tempered approach to security that "invoked the traditional myth of American Exceptionalism…in a new democratic idiom…to promote peace and justice."[90] By setting America's journey back on the path toward the values that make America exceptional, Obama sets up a "durable" political and rhetorical framework of executive leadership for detaining suspected terrorists captured in America's struggle against extremists.

Rule of Law as a Normalization of Executive Power

In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama describes his administration's Guantanamo policy as a return to the rule of law. However, in this section I illustrate how Obama's return to law constitutes an expansion of sovereign power for extra-juridical violence rather than a limitation on sovereign power. By situating executive action in the war on terror at the rhetorical nexus of the rule of law and security, Obama normalizes and legitimizes the state of exception, creating a durable and flexible legal and bureaucratic framework for the capture of bare life in present and future US military and police operations against extremists. In order to combat a "nimble" enemy that poses an indefinite threat to the United States, the President must have a flexible set of powers durable enough to withstand both the test of time and the scrutiny of the public.

Obama's rhetorical articulation of the exception occurs through three primary rhetorical moves. First, Obama establishes his dual obligation under the law to both protect the people and the Constitution. Second, Obama points to the durational nature of the war on terror as a justification for establishing a stable yet flexible legal framework for executive action in the war on terror. Third, Obama rhetorically articulates his decision on a series of necessary exceptions to legal principles otherwise upheld in the rule of law. These exceptions include the "preventative" or "prolonged" detention category, trial by military commissions, and national security restrictions on detainee transfer.

Throughout "Our Security, Our Values," Obama depicts his role as president to be both the protector of the people and the defender of the Constitution. As such, Obama is bound by the rule of law through his inaugural oath, declaring, "I took an oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution as Commander-in-Chief."[91] Obama

extends this obligation to "each and every member of Congress" when he states, "I am not the only person in this city who swore an oath to uphold the Constitution."[92] This shared obligation under the rule of law, Obama argues, means "together we have a responsibility to enlist our values in the effort to secure our people."[93]

While his interpretation of the rule of law compels Obama to defend legal restrictions on the president's power to detain suspected terrorists, it also situates Obama as the legal guardian of the nation's security, requiring him to make exceptions to the liberal values he claims to represent. Obama balances his duty to protect the values of the constitutional order and secure the people of the nation. Although Obama attempts to strike a "delicate balance" between the rule of law and national security, Obama recognizes that "[his] single most important responsibility as President is to keep the American people safe."[94]

Obama works carefully throughout the speech to establish a rhetorical balance between his obligation to secure the nation and his obligation to the rule of law. This carefully constructed rhetorical balance allows Obama to argue that the nation is not forced to choose between having security and having the rule of law, because America's exceptional experiment in democracy offers both. However, when the value of the rule of law conflicts with national security, Obama describes how his role as Commander-in-Chief and protector of the public requires him to privilege national security interests over all other values. By explaining to his audience why certain exceptions may be made to the broader legal standards his administration affirms, Obama rhetorically performs for his audience the sovereign decision on the state of exception. However, by rhetorically establishing the primacy of his constitutionally mandated obligation to protect the people,

Obama's decisions to make exceptions to the rule of law also function as rhetorical affirmations of his legal duties as president.

Obama argues that the durational nature of the war on terror requires a stable yet flexible legal framework capable of legitimizing broad executive action in the war on terror. Obama describes Al Qaeda as a lasting, imminent threat that requires exceptional powers to defeat, declaring, "We are less than eight years removed from the deadliest attack on American soil in our history. We know that al Qaeda is actively planning to attack us again. We know that this threat will be with us for a long time, and that we must use all elements of our power to defeat it."[95] Whereas the totalizing immediacy of the crisis following September 11th resulted in an *ad hoc* "indefinite" detention policy, now that the war on terror has endured for over eight years and shows no sign of stopping, Obama calls on his audience to support the use of "all elements of our power to defeat" the terrorists that will continue to pose a threat "for a long time." For Obama, fighting this permanent war requires a sustainable legal framework for extra-legal detention policies:

> After 9/11, we knew that we had entered a new era -- that enemies who did not abide by any law of war would present new challenges to our application of the law; that our government would need new tools to protect the American people, and that these tools would have to allow us to prevent attacks instead of simply prosecuting those who try to carry them out.[96]

While celebrating the values of the rule of law, Obama recognizes the need for "tools" that go beyond "simply prosecuting" terrorists to "prevent[ing] attacks."[97] To engage in a "prolonged" struggle against extremists that do not respect the rule of law, the United States must move away from lawless "indefinite" detention standards toward sustainable standards of executive action codified in the law.[98]

A "prolonged" struggle against extremism rooted in American exceptionalism cannot be sustained on rhetorical rations of fear alone. Long after the trauma of terrorist violence has passed, fear by itself constitutes a meager discursive diet. Certainly, the fear of the terrorist other will persist for years to come as a rhetorical reality in both presidential public address and in the affective background of American political and cultural discourse at large. However, in an era of national anxiety about the nation's continued exceptional status, the rhetoric of fear can be supplanted by additional rhetorical appeals that tap into the affective wellspring of American political mythology. The rule of law, in which all individuals are upon birth included as citizens in the political community, is invoked in order to remind Americans that they too are on the progressive journey forward in history. Of course, this journey forward in history involves the sacrifice of perpetual military involvement around the world in order to sustain the moral hierarchy of American exceptionalism. The legal foundation that protects the citizen's biological life as a political entity is thus capable of providing the rhetorical foundation for the executive's power to render non-citizens bare life for "prolonged" periods of time.

In this speech, Obama rhetorically channels the inevitable dissent to the war on terror that arises over time through the sovereign rhetorical apparatuses of law and security. To posit his policies as durable, these extra-judicial measures are rhetorically brought in line with the rule of law. Obama argues, "We are indeed at war with al Qaeda…. We do need to update our institutions….with an abiding confidence in the rule of law and due process; in checks and balances and accountability."[99] Obama offers the balance of rule of law and national security as a strategy for creating a lasting framework for executive action in the war on terror. For Obama, this strategy is superior to the Bush

administration's, "ad hoc legal approach for fighting terrorism that was neither effective nor sustainable" because it "failed to rely on our legal traditions."[100]

Finally, Obama ultimately normalizes the state of exception by articulating those exceptions to the rule of law within his administration's newly created process of executive review for detainee cases. In the previous section, I described the five detainee categories the Obama administration established to help bring Guantanamo Bay back within the rule of law. While these categories seem, on face, to constrain executive power by bringing it in line with the rule of law, a careful examination of each category demonstrates how the rule of law functions to legitimate sovereign power over bare life.

In his discussion of the first category for detainees—those who can be tried in US federal courts and held in US prisons—Obama defends the US justice and penitence system as a supreme arbiter of the rule of law. After pointing to the successful trial and incarceration of convicted terrorists Ramzi Yousef and Zacarias Moussaoui, Obama argues, "If we can try those terrorists in our courts and hold them in our prisons, then we can do the same with detainees from Guantanamo."[101] Obama portrays the American prison system as a foundation of the American rule of law. These "highly secure prisons that ensure the public safety" are the "same type of facilities in which we hold all manner of dangerous and violent criminals within our borders."[102] Obama reminds his audience of the airtight protection provided by American prisons, declaring, "Nobody has ever escaped from one of our federal, supermax prisons, which hold hundreds of convicted terrorists."[103] He also defends the strength of the legal system that would prosecute these criminals, arguing, "Our courts and our juries, our citizens, are tough enough to convict terrorists."[104] Trying and convicting suspected terrorists involved in September 11th is a

victory for the rule of law, Obama argues, because "after over a decade, it is time to finally see that justice is served."[105]

In this discussion, the American prison system enters into a zone of indistinction from military action. The prison is naturalized both as a source of immanent justice under the rule of law and as the system that ensures public safety by incarcerating "dangerous and violent criminals" in the United States.[106] The American legal system appears in Obama's exceptionalist rhetoric as a natural solution to the problem of criminality itself. Terrorists are posited as foreign variants of the domestic category of the outlaw, unwilling to submit to the natural order of society and therefore subject to the violence of the law.[107] Military and police power blend into a co-productive model of legitimized executive violence in which wars are carried out in the name of the rule of law and police action becomes increasingly militarized.[108]

Obama describes the juridical system in such a fashion to create a zone of indistinction between the task of police in enforcing the laws and the task of the military in protecting the nation against nation. These distinctions become blurred as his executive power is constituted through a mutually reinforcing model of police and military power. In this line of thinking, terrorists who are not bound to the laws of the United States are treated as criminals who have violated the rule of law and must be detained, despite being denied the same legal protections otherwise afforded to citizens. Hayley Duchinski, a Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Ohio University argues, "Militarization and penalization work hand in hand to produce patterns of captivity" based on "the liberal discourse of 'the right to life' that constitutes the foundation of the rule of law," creating a foundation for state violence in which "empires, through the

militarization of all domains of social life, imprison, not only the bludgeoned and brutalized peoples occupying the margins of state life, but all state subjects."[109]

By treating the unregulated detention of suspected terrorists as a violation of American values and the prison system as an embodiment of these values, Obama normalizes violence against those bodies that are not afforded the protections of the Constitution given that they are not citizens. However, in doing so, Obama also normalizes the violence against those bodies that, while still remaining citizens, have lost the full rights of citizens by engaging in actions that have been deemed to be criminal. Dylan Rodriguez warns that as resistance to military prisons such as Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib becomes more widespread, "the intimate and proximate bodies of those locally and intimately imprisoned within the localities of the United States constantly threaten to disappear from the political and moral registers of US civil society."[110] Obama thus justifies in this speech the "the visceral and institutionally abstracted logic of bodily domination" through which the bodies of marginalized and criminalized persons are captured in "the regime of the American prison," a regime that, Rodriguez argues, "is fundamental, not ancillary, to US state-mediated, state-influenced, and state-sanctioned methods of legitimated 'local' state violence across the global horizon."[111]

With the second category of detainees—those who can be tried for war crimes by military commissions—Obama's defense of reformed military commissions constitutes an articulation of the executive exception on multiple levels. First, Obama is making an exception to his own declaration as a candidate and as President that military commissions violate the rule of law.[112] However, I have already described how Obama attempts to account for this exception by contrasting the "flawed commissions of the last seven years" with his attempts to bring military commissions into the rule of law.[113] Yet,

these reforms also constitute an articulation of the executive exception by attempting to bring extra-legal measures into the rule of law. By inscribing an exception to the law into the law itself, Obama demonstrates that, as Agamben argues, in the state of exception, "The norm can be applied to the normal situation and can be suspended without totally annulling the juridical order."[114] Ultimately, Obama's proposed reforms in no way affect the extra-legal nature of military commissions.

Obama is paradoxically attempting to bring extra-legal military commissions that are founded on an attempt to bypass criminal due process restrictions, a hallmark of the rule of law, into the rule of law itself. As Vincent Warren, executive director of the Center for Constitutional Rights argues, "putting a few due process protections on an old George Bush policy is like rehabbing a house on a toxic waste site…. [Y]ou can't make the military commissions better."[115] Laura Pitter, a counterterrorism advisor for *Human Rights Watch*, argues that even after the reforms made by the Obama administration, the latest round of military commissions for suspected terrorists demonstrate that "fundamental procedural protections afforded defendants in federal courts simply do not exist in military commissions."[116] While providing the rhetorical appearance of the rule of law, Obama's newly created legal category of prolonged detention only further entrenches the legal zone of indistinction faced by Guantanamo detainees.

As Obama references those detainees who were released by the courts (the third category in the review schema), he reveals his own exceptional position as both inside and outside the law. While it is true that the *Boumediene* decision did create a system of legal appeal that allowed some detainees to gain their freedom, this system is ultimately limited by the exceptional power of Obama as the sovereign. For example, although Fiona de Londras defends *Boumediene* as an "important reassertion of fundamental

values; of the principle that government action is subject to meaningful limits," she nevertheless recognizes that "it does little or nothing to relieve the deprivations of rights and liberty experienced by detainees."[117] This is because ultimately, the decision on who can be subject to indefinite detention lies with the sovereign, a right that Obama makes clear when he declares, "Let me repeat: I am not going to release individuals who endanger the American people."[118] The Obama administration has repeatedly subverted the *Boumediene* ruling by declaring that the ruling did not extend to detainees housed in the new detention center at the US Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. [119] This action has been supported by the federal courts, in a decision Charlie Savage of the New York Times calls, "a broad victory for the Obama administration in its efforts to hold terrorism suspects overseas for indefinite periods without judicial oversight."[120] Thus, although he defends the rule of law, Obama simultaneously defends his capacity as Commander-in-Chief and guardian of the nation's security to make exceptions to the rule of law.

In his discussion of those detainees who can be transferred to other countries (the fourth category), Obama presents the decision to transfer detainees as part of the institutional bureaucracy of his new legal framework. He cites the successes of the "review team" in transferring detainees to other countries whose governments will then be responsible for "detention and rehabilitation."[121] Here, the rhetoric of "transfer" functions euphemistically to obscure the fact that the detainees are being subjected to forced relocation at the hands of the executive bureaucracy. In the review process, a team of "60 career professionals, drawn from the Department of Justice, Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, and National Counterterrorism Center" are granted the authority to transfer a detainee to a new country.[122] Once there, the

detainee's fate is then taken out of the hands of the executive bureaucracy that put them there.[123] In Obama's account of sovereign action constrained by the rule of law, the only question that can be asked of the sovereign is whether the detainee's status was eventually reviewed and successfully transferred, not whether the treatment of a given detainee at the time of capture was fair. As Erik Doxtader writes, "the performative and oppositional space of invention is disciplined by…the idea that recognition's struggle begins and ends with the law's stamp of good identitarian housekeeping."[124] The detainee transfer process amounts to an executive and bureaucratic shuffling of the life of each prisoner that is caught up both physically and legally in the grasp of sovereign power.

By depicting the extra-legal status of detainees as the problem with the former administration's detainee policy, Obama normalizes the inventional space of dissent against executive detention policy by constraining it to the terrain of legal struggle. This normalization functions to expand the authority of sovereign power by situating dissent on a terrain upon which the sovereign executive apparatus is well equipped to engage in a lasting, durational struggle: the terrain of the law. Although the transfer process grants the appearance of legal restriction, the executive ultimately reserves the right to suspend or delay the transfer on the basis the executive's perception of a national security crisis. For example, the *Final Report* of the Obama administration's Guantanamo Review Task Force, released January 22, 2010, reports that, "There are 29 Yemenis approved for transfer who remain at Guantanamo." However, after the Obama administration stopped a terrorist attack potentially organized by Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen, "the President publicly announced a moratorium on the transfer of detainees to Yemen. Accordingly, none of the 29 Yemeni detainees remaining at Guantanamo who are approved for transfer

will be repatriated to Yemen until the moratorium is lifted."[125] These detainees remain in a state of legal limbo; they are both included in the legal review process and yet simultaneously treated as an exception to the administration's rhetorically and legally established norm against indefinite detention.

Although Obama promises that these detainees will be "transferred safely," the recent transfer of Farhi Saeed bin Mohammed to Algeria suggests otherwise.[126] Bin Mohammed was an Algerian who feared being tortured if returned to his home state. He appealed his transfer on the grounds of *habeas corpus*, but the court denied to hear his appeal. He was then transferred without his lawyers being notified after a secret deal was struck between the United States and Algeria.[127] Bin Mohammed's transfer provides evidence for the fear articulated by Daphne Eviatar, Senior Associate for the group Human Rights First, who wonders whether "the 'extraordinary rendition' program conducted by the Bush administration has now been transformed into an equally abusive proxy detention program run by its successor."[128] While Obama uses the transfer of detainees to represent progress in his goal of closing down the legal black hole of Guantanamo Bay, the already well established exceptions to the norms of detainee transfer signals that detainees placed in the transfer category are by no means protected from the power of the sovereign decision.

As Obama details the fifth category, those detainees who "cannot be prosecuted yet who pose a clear danger to the American people," he codifies the state of exception as central to his administration's actions in the ongoing war on terror. The move from total lawlessness to legalized extra-legality is exemplified in Obama's explanation of the "prolonged" detention category of Guantanamo detainees. Obama describes the new

legal category as an attempt to resolve the "indefinite" nature of detention, but ultimately leaves the power to decide on the length of this detention up to the executive:

> Now, finally, there remains the question of detainees at Guantanamo who cannot be prosecuted yet who pose a clear danger to the American people. And I have to be honest here -- this is the toughest single issue that we will face. We're going to exhaust every avenue that we have to prosecute those at Guantanamo who pose a danger to our country. But even when this process is complete, there may be a number of people who cannot be prosecuted for past crimes, in some cases because evidence may be tainted, but who nonetheless pose a threat to the security of the United States…. These are people who, in effect, remain at war with the United States.[129]

Here, Obama declares the sovereign's right to decide who constitutes a threat to the American public and therefore can be excluded from America's norms of democratic representation under the rule of law. The sovereign decision on prolonged decision is thus presented as a last resort, only applicable after the administration "exhaust[s] every avenue that [they] have" to first bring the detainee back within the formal constraints of law.[130] Yet, despite being unable to satisfy either the formal legal standard of prosecution or the informal standard of trial by military commission, Obama's status as Commander-in-Chief grants him the authority to take extra-judicial actions without disrupting the normal operation of the legal order he helped construct.

Here, Obama's description of the sovereign decision is rational and tempered rather than irrational and politically motivated. The phrase "I have to be honest here..." expresses a certain level of humility and thoughtfulness about the administration's approach to making difficult decisions. This is an example of what Ivie and Giner call the "calm demeanor and unhurried, thoughtful manner of speaking" that exemplify Obama's balanced approach to foreign policy.[131] By presenting his actions as carefully thought out exercises of executive expertise, Obama contrasts his reasoned approach to

irrational politics of fear. Although Obama maintains that he will attempt in every instance to prosecute these individuals, the rule of law itself may still prove insufficient. Despite being unable to prosecute the past crimes of these suspected terrorists, Obama claims with the certainty of evidentiary fact that these detainees "pose a clear danger to the American people."[132] The calm, rational, and judicious approach the administration will use in making this decision allows the mere accusation of terrorism to become indistinguishable from a statement of fact. Suspected terrorists become "people who, in effect, remain at war with the United States."[133]

Vincent Warren argues that Obama's new legal category of "prolonged" detention actually legitimizes "preventative detention," in which people are no longer arrested on the basis of crimes they have actually committed but rather "because of their general dangerousness or that they may commit a crime in the future."[134] Obama's preventative detention exemplifies the kind of pre-emptive executive power outlined by Jean Baudrillard in which authority figures are able to identify criminals even before a crime has been committed.[135] Obama and the agents of the executive branch fighting the war on terror function as preternatural authorities with the capacity to distinguish criminals without a trial to substantiate the crime. Their conclusions about the possibility of terrorist precrimes, based as they are on "facts and evidence" rather than "ideological predispositions," must be accepted regardless of whether they can be proven in a trial.[136] Mark Neocleous, Professor of the Critique of Political Economy at Brunel University, argues, "emergency measures are part of the everyday exercise of powers, working alongside rather than against the rule of law as part of a unified political strategy in the fabrication of social order."[137] By rhetorically depicting his actions as operating in tandem with rather than against the rule of law," Obama subverts the basic legal maxim

that the accused remain innocent until proven guilty while simultaneously donning the rhetorical mantle of the rule of law.

For Obama, the suspension of the norms of the law occurs because of the overwhelming threat these terrorists pose to the United States. Their desire to harm the population becomes a source of extra-legal executive power, as the executive must go beyond the law to protect the population from terrorists who do not abide by the rule of law. Obama's "single most important responsibility as President is to keep the American people safe."[138] The primary source of political legitimacy upon which Obama, as chief executive of the law, grounds his authority is the bare, biological life of the population. Agamben declares, "Placing biological life at the center of its calculations, the modern State therefore does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life."[139] While the president is also responsible for protecting rights, his primary responsibility is to the mere life upon which those rights are founded. The "inalienable" rights that define the human citizen as a political or social animal emanate from the inalienable fact of their humanity, from their mere biological existence as humans. Because "the fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as originary political element," Agamben argues, "Western politics is a bio-politics from the very beginning, and…every attempt to found political liberties in the rights of the citizen is, therefore, in vain."[140] The sovereign, the guarantor of the life of the population, is thus endowed with the capacity to take away one's rights in the name of preserving the social order that guarantees those rights.

However, the sovereign must declare in every instance that the act of selectively removing rights is actually an enactment of the legal order that protects those rights. This is reflected as Obama, in an attempt to distinguish his "prolonged" detention policy from

the policy of "indefinite" detention, argues, "In our constitutional system, prolonged detention should not be the decision of any one man."[141] It is for that reason, Obama declares, "my administration will work with Congress to develop an appropriate legal regime so that our efforts are consistent with our values and our Constitution."[142] Obama calls for congressional oversight, inviting the political system he had previously distanced himself from to add another layer of legal oversight to the process of detention. This reflects the fundamental ambiguity of the law's relationship with politics. Obama must both appeal to Congress to sustain his claim to legal authority, yet must manage the political forces unleashed by Congress through the creation of new laws. Obama's rhetoric thus places on display the fundamental zone of indistinction between constitutive and constituent power that Agamben argues is at the heart of democracy, as "democracy designates both the form through which power is legitimated and the manner in which it is exercised."[143] Obama calls on Congress to provide oversight to the process of executive detention, but in establishing this rhetorical demand for congressional action, Obama also creates a rhetorical constraint that his own presidency will have to live up to when an inevitably politically minded Congress responds with new anti-terror measures.

Thus, despite initial reservations, on December 31, 2011 Barack Obama signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).[144] Far from restricting the executive's power of executive detention, the NDAA provided a legal foundation for the practice of indefinite detention in the struggle against terrorism. Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, declared, "By signing this defense spending bill, President Obama will go down in history as the president who enshrined indefinite detention without trial in US law." For Roth, Obama's action comes as something of a surprise: "In the past, Obama has lauded the importance of being on the right side of

history, but today he is definitely on the wrong side."[145] While this may have been a surprise to Roth, for those paying close attention to Obama's rhetorical machinations in "Our Security, Our Values," there should be nothing surprising in this move, for in signing this bill, Obama was merely following through on his administration's rhetorical commitment to an extended war on terror fought in line with the values of American exceptionalism.

A close analysis of the "Our Security, Our Values" speech indicates that the sweeping power granted to Obama in the NDAA is not an aberration from Obama's position on the rule of law, but rather an exemplary manifestation of the balance between the rule of law and national security that has always defined Obama's approach to Guantanamo Bay. In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama describes his policy on prolonged detention as an effort to "clean up the mess at Guantanamo."[146] However, as my analysis demonstrates, Obama was not simply fixing the problems caused by the transgressive actions of the past administration, but actively ensuring his administration and future administrations could engage in similar actions without being perceived as subverting the rule of law. As Journalist Tom Engelhardt argues, "Obama didn't just inherit the presidency. He went for it. And he isn't just sitting atop it. He's actively using it. He's wielding power…. [I]n his war policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, his imperial avatar is already plunging deep into the dark, distinctly opaque valley of death."[147] By situating his presidency at the rhetorical nexus of national security and the rule of law, Obama sought out a new rhetorical ground for continuing the American government's historical involvement in perpetual military and police violence across the globe.[148]

In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama offers his own individual capacity as a sovereign actor, as a living embodiment of the law. In front of the founding documents

of the American legal order, Obama highlights his own journey as a student, professor, litigator, legislator, and enforcer of law, calling on American citizens to join him in this journey back to the founding values of the American experiment in democracy. Obama's use of the rule of law provides an interesting supplement to Agamben's theory of exceptionalism. Legal critics of Agamben argue that Agamben fails to understand how the law functions as practice. For example, Leila Brännström contends that Agamben's critique of the law fails to understand how "law is a living practice whose performance involves engagement in political and ethical struggles about its formulation, interpretation and application."[149] Bas Schotel criticizes Agamben for ignoring the legal practice of judicial review, arguing that legal "practice does not matter to Agamben."[150] What an analysis of Obama's rhetorical approach to the legal situation of Guantanamo detainees reveals, however, is that even when the law is suspended or applied exceptionally, the law nevertheless continues to function rhetorically and politically through the apparatuses of sovereign power. In this regard, Agamben's account of the law as a "fictional" but "effective" apparatus of sovereign power provides a better explanation of how the law functions rhetorically in the public address of presidents seeking to use the law to expand their sovereign power.[151] Obama's rhetorical articulation of the rule of law demonstrates that law as a living practice exceeds its strictly juridical contexts when the rule of law is deployed rhetorically as a means of suturing the gap between life and the apparatuses of power that attempt to control it.

By declaring the necessity of conducting a prolonged struggle against extremists who refuse to respect the rule of law, Obama rhetorically establishes an executive mandate to engage in extra-judicial measures to ensure the safety of the citizens he is charged to protect. Obama's agency as sovereign executive is situated at the rhetorical

nexus of the rule of law and national security, offering an appearance of balance between these two poles, while nevertheless creating a clear hierarchy that ensures the rule of law always operates first and foremost in service of the nation's security. Schotel argues that Agamben's pessimistic account of the law refuses to recognize that "our current legal practices can actually hold the individual officials accountable."[152] However, a rhetorical analysis of "Our Security, Our Values" demonstrates that legal accountability can also provide a source of rhetorical authority for the expansion of executive power beyond the formal constraints of the law.[153] Obama justified ongoing executive action in the war on terror despite the fact that "Americans had become increasingly skeptical of an open-ended war on terrorism."[154] Obama both depicted his leadership as constrained by the rule of law while simultaneously working to construct a lasting legal framework for prolonged detention. Joshua Gunn argues that the figure of the sovereign is simultaneously protective and legislative, as the sovereign is both enforcer and maker of the law.[155] In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama enacts this model of sovereign power rhetorically by depicting himself as both the enforcer of the law and an active participant in the creation of the nascent legal framework regarding executive detention.

The rhetorical effect of this depiction was to filter dissent into the rhetorical confines of the legal system, blunting the inventional power of discursive resistance to the executive's extra-judicial actions in the war on terror. By locating American exceptionalism at the rhetorical nexus of the rule of law and national security, Obama provides a rhetorical context for the lasting efforts of the United States in the struggle against extremism. It is not America's fear of the terrorist other, but America's desire to prove the universal desirability of the American way of life that perpetuates America's commitment to the ongoing struggle against terrorists and extremists. As the war on

terror continues to expand to new fronts and new battlefields, Obama draws on American exceptionalism's time-tested reservoir of rhetorical resources to garner the authority needed to perpetuate the sovereign power over the bare lives of those captured in a seemingly endless conflict between the rule of law and the specter of terrorism.

Conclusion

For scholars of rhetoric, this speech poses an important question about the relationship between the rhetoric of fear and the politics of war. Ivie and Giner argue that "Obama's rhetorical achievement was to articulate a plausible vision of positive change within the constraints of a political culture that ordinarily feeds on fear of demonized enemies."[156] For them, by shifting away from a rhetoric of fear, Obama provides a "restorative vision" of "American exceptionalism with a democratic inflection" that could potentially "facilitate a salutary retrieval of alienating and deadly projections."[157] In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama articulates a critique of the politics of fear and an affirmation of the values of American exceptionalism in an attempt to create a durable framework for military and police power in the war on terror. Much less than facilitating a retrieval of America's deadly projections, Obama established an exceptionalist rhetorical packaging to bring the practice of "prolonged detention" in line with a "durable framework" capable of fighting an indefinite war against those terrorists who are "actively planning to attack us again" and who "will be with us for a long time."[158] Fear plays a role in Obama's war rhetoric, but it is a subtle, balanced, and restrained role. The implicit fear and demonization of the lawless terrorist other is supplanted by a positive discourse of American exceptionalism, played out as an image of America fighting for the exceptional way of life promised by the democratic value of the rule of law.

Obama's shift away from the rhetoric of fear and toward the rhetoric of democratic exceptionalism may suggest that the politics of permanent or "prolonged" American warfare are not primarily indebted to the rhetoric of fear but rather to the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Obama's democratic vision of exceptionalism is better suited to carry out acts of executive violence in an era of increased public scrutiny of the executive's actions in the war on terror. By channeling and managing dissent through the dual rhetorical apparatuses of law and security, Obama narrows the discursive space available to audiences who seek to challenge executive authority in the war on terror. Because conceptually all people are subject to the law and all people are affected by security, the rhetorical balance of the rule of law and national security allows for a maintenance of sovereign authority when the political climate is distanced from the memory of collective trauma, and thus, not well attuned to a rhetorical climate of fear. Perhaps, then, the ultimate impetus for state violence is perhaps not the rhetorical construction of the demonized enemy, but rather the rhetorical construction of the greatness of the people that the enemy threatens. As Agamben argues, "the people always contains a division more originary than that of friend-enemy."[159] The "people" that is democratically articulated in Obama's vision of American exceptionalism is constituted rhetorically as bare life. When the biological remainder of the political community that is established in law through the declaration, "We the people…" is threatened, the executive, in order to secure America's journey toward a "more perfect union," may take actions that fall outside of the rule of law without suspending the legal order itself. Obama thus confirms his status as the decider of the moment of exception, a position that must necessarily be both inside and outside of the law.

The rhetoric of the rule of law itself functions as a site of rhetorical violence. As International Studies scholar Tugba Basaran argues, "Liberal discourses seek to conceal law's own violence by representing law as an autonomous field of reason and rational rules, based upon formal justice and fair procedures, a technical field of expertise of legal professionals."[160] A similar concealment is evident in the way Obama's calm, rational approach to executive detention allows him to depict the detention of terrorists without trial as a return to the rule of law. By portraying himself as a lifelong practitioner of the law, concerned with "facts and evidence" rather than "ideological predispositions," Obama distances himself from the politics of fear while nevertheless articulating the permanent nature of the terrorist threat, tapping into what Gunn calls "the affective economy set into motion by the war on terror."[161]

While it is true that the rhetoric of the rule of law functions, in Obama's discourse, to call for a more restrained approach to the war on terror, it also allows Obama to reaffirm the dichotomy between the civilized West and the savage terrorist that forms the mythological foundation of the war on terror. Obama argues that we are engaged in an indefinite war against "enemies who did not abide by any law of war." Thus, the terrorist represents a threat to the universal standards of the rule of law that define the boundaries of civilized existence in the international arena. The rhetoric of the lawful self and the lawless other has a long history in presidential war rhetoric. Ivie argues that the depiction of the enemy as lawless was a key rhetorical feature of the *topoi* of savagery used to justify US military actions in Vietnam.[162] Timothy Cole suggests that President George H.W. Bush used the rhetoric of the rule of law at the end of the cold war to help explain the "civilizing" direction of the Russian state. As Cole argues, the rule of law functioned as a sort of ontological barrier between the communist other

and the democratic self.[163] Carol Winkler, studying the pre-emptive military actions taken by both President George W. Bush and President Ronald Reagan contends that even presidents taking pre-emptive military action must "depict themselves as rational actors in abeyance with the rule of law," so that they may "avoid even the appearance that their actions provoke war."[164] The rule of law functions historically as a means for presidents to engage in ongoing military involvement while nonetheless conforming to the democratic norm of limited warfare. By appealing to the rule of law, Obama taps into a rhetorical resource that has long been used by presidents to justify both legal declarations of war and extra-legal forms of military and police violence. American exceptionalism allows these apparatuses of sovereign power to be depicted as both an integral and ongoing, yet limited and restrained, feature of American foreign policy.

Obama's promise of a return to America's exceptional *telos* in the rule of law obscures the zone of indistinction in which the sovereign's lawful right to engage in actions outside of the legal order becomes normalized. Here, the exception moves from the periphery of law to its center. As Doxtader notes, "the promise of a return to progress has done well to obscure the ''grey zone'' that forms when a sovereign('s) rule of law strives to sanctify and negate the normative power of its own precedent."[165] By both submitting to the new legal framework of the war on terror and aiding in the creation of new legal framework for detainees, Obama demonstrated a substantial commitment to the rule of law. However, this new legal framework normalized and bureaucratized an expansive model of executive power in the war on terror.

While it is true that the actions of the President in the war on terror are now subject to more stringent checks and balances, the president's rhetorical appeals to the ongoing nature of the terrorist threat continue to perpetuate a political and rhetorical

norm in which the president's abilities to capture and detain non-citizens without charge for "prolonged" periods of time are deemed to be a lawful manifestation of the people's sovereign will to seize bare life. The rhetorical articulation of executive authority in the war on terror through the ideology of the rule of law calls on the public to, in Agamben's words, "accept as the humane and normal dimensions of our existence, practices of control that had always been properly considered inhumane and exceptional."[166] Whereas the state of war once referred to a temporally bound state with a definitive beginning and end, war now blurs with the perpetual operation of the executive's security apparatuses, as "prolonged" measures must be taken to ensure America's perpetual safety in the face of terrorists who are supposedly plotting to strike America yet again.

What remains to be seen is how presidential rhetoric can legitimately begin a lasting move away from war. The peaceful norm at the heart of the promise of sovereignty increasingly appears as an empty fiction used to link life with the law through the apparatuses of sovereign power. The capacity for presidents to provide a meaningful rhetorical vision capable of instantiating a prolonged shift away from the political realities of American militarism is rendered asunder in the discursive matrix of an exceptional American identity committed to a universal vision of popular sovereignty under the rule of law. When the demonized and uncivilized enemies of the popular sovereign move to the background of the cultural imaginary, the rhetorical apparatuses of American exceptionalism work to re-secure the citizenry's belief in their own civility. If signs of resistance do creep back to the center of the American political landscape, the constitutive power of fear is at the disposal of the executive to elicit the constituent power of the law. Rhetorical scholars must be aware of the durational nature of executive violence. Agamben's account calls on rhetorical scholars to pay attention to the

paradigmatic features of sovereign power. Focusing on the paradigm of exceptionalism allows rhetorical scholars to maintain the necessary vigilance required to properly examine the rhetorical justification for expanding and normalizing executive authority over time.

Notes

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[106] Obama, "Our Security, Our Values."

[107] Agamben argues that in German antiquity, the figure of "the bandit and the outlaw" provided the foundation for myths about werewolves who, being both human and inhuman, were simultaneously included and excluded within the law. The legally established right to locate citizens as outside of the law through the legal act of the ban thus constitutes a threshold that defines inclusion in the law through the exclusion of the inhuman that exists exterior to the law: "What had to remain in the collective unconscious as a monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city – the werewolf – is, therefore, in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city. That such a man is defined as a wolf-man and not simply as a wolf... is decisive here. The life of the bandit, like that of the sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law and the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit is the life of the *loup garou*, the werewolf, who is

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[153] De Londras, "Guantánamo Bay."

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[159] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 178.

[160] Tugba Basaran, *Security, Law and Borders: At the Limits of Liberties* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 26-29.

[161] Gunn, "Father Trouble," 23.

[162] Robert L. Ivie, "Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War," *Communication Monographs* 47 (1980): 288.

[163] Timothy M. Cole, "When Intentions Go Awry: The Bush Administration's Foreign Policy Rhetoric," *Political Communication* 13 (1996): 96, 99.

[164] Carol Winkler, "Parallels in Preemptive War Rhetoric: Reagan on Libya; Bush 43 On Iraq," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10.2 (2007): 321.

[165] Doxtader, "The [Rhetorical] Question of Exception," 214.

[166] Giorgio Agamben, "No to Bio-Political Tattooing," *Le Monde* (January 10, 2004), http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/totalControl.html (Accessed February 12, 2012).

CHAPTER FOUR

Winning the Neoliberal Future: The Use of Time as a Rhetorical Strategy in President Barack Obama's 2011 State of the Union Address

Introduction: Time and American Exceptionalism

> In charging presidents with reporting on the state of the Union, the Constitution offers them the role of national historian, giving them the opportunity to reconstruct the past in order to forge the future. By using history skillfully, they can involve Congress and the people in an affirmation that this is not only the way it was, but also the way it will be.
>
> - Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson[1]

> We do big things. The idea of America endures. Our destiny remains our choice. And tonight, more than two centuries later, it's because of our people that our future is hopeful, our journey goes forward, and the state of our union is strong.
>
> - President Barack Obama[2]

> Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to 'change the world', but also --- and above all --- to 'change time'.
>
> - Giorgio Agamben[3]

American exceptionalism functions ideographically, cutting across the political spectrum of the United States to provide presidents with a diverse reservoir of rhetorical resources from the legacy of American civil religion.[4] While both the left and the right of mainstream American politics are united in their affirmation of American exceptionalism, there are nevertheless fault lines of American political culture that divide American exceptionalism into conservative and liberal variants. One particularly important division

separating the liberal and conservative visions of American exceptionalism in American political culture is the relationship of Americans to time. As John M. Murphy notes, American civil religion usually takes one of two distinct temporal forms: one conservative and one liberal. The conservative variant relies on the "language of Being, of eternal principles, of religion, tradition, and authority." The liberal variant relies on the "language of Becoming, of change."[5] Competing visions of American exceptionalism are therefore intimately related to competing visions of temporality.

For Murphy, the distinction between these temporalities was also at work in the 2008 presidential campaign. Such distinctions marked the more technical liberal rhetoric of Hillary Clinton, who "accepts as given the rules of the game," and the conservative rhetoric of John McCain for whom "The market exists outside of our control; we can but obey its dictates," from the progressive economic rhetoric of Barack Obama, for whom the market is not *the* rules of the road, but rather simply "not given."[6] Obama's rhetoric was different, in other words, because the destiny of the economy was not pre-determined, but rather subject to democratic intervention in the present. The economy was couched in the language of becoming rather than the language of being. David A. Frank argues, however, that Obama's rhetorical signature attempts to span the gap between these two traditions, "challenging and embracing" both of these manifestations of American political culture.[7] While more conservative notions of American exceptionalism rely on the greatness of America's past and more liberal notions of American exceptionalism rely on the promise of America's future, Barack Obama's exceptionalist rhetoric spans this divide by articulating a vision of American exceptionalism in which past, present, and future are united.

In the 2011 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama announced his plans to revitalize the stalling US economy by inviting Congress and the American public to take action to ensure that America would "Win the Future."[8] The focal point of the address was the administration's plan to rejuvenate American economic competitiveness.[9] Although the economic crises of the past few years proved onerous for Americans, Obama rearticulated these crises as an opportunity for Americans to demonstrate the uniquely American values of hard work, entrepreneurial know-how, and individual self-governance. By describing the global economic competition Americans face in the present as a necessary manifestation of the rules of the road established by the historical model of American free market economics, Obama called on Americans to see the present as an opportunity to live up to the exceptional democratic values enshrined in the history of America's founding. American exceptionalism thus functions as the rhetorical means through which Obama calls on his audience to live up to the promise of America's past by investing their agency in the present so that the United States may win the future.

This chapter will engage in a close reading of Obama's 2011 State of the Union address in order to analyze the ideological implications of Obama's use of time as a vehicle for articulating his unique vision of American exceptionalism. Obama uses a unified three part temporal structure to construct a narrative of American exceptionalism that situates audiences in the present as democratic agents capable of deliberating on and participating in America's path to future victory, therefore assuring Americans of the originary promise contained in America's past. This unified three part temporal structure unfolds in the argumentative and symbolic content of the speech, the syntax/pacing, the oscillation of tense, and the repetition of three part lists. Although this structure requires

Obama to move between past, present, and future tense, the three tenses are mediated and thus unified in this speech by a special use of the present progressive tense called the transcendent tense. I argue that in the rhetoric of neoliberal economics, the transcendent tense mediates the past, present, and future by inviting audiences to locate their agency in the present while simultaneously transcending the economic problems of the present. Obama's temporal articulation of American exceptionalism relies on a neoliberal economic ideology that perpetuates the belief that neoliberalism's unification of capitalism and liberal democracy will "eras[e] social barriers" by creating a "'market democracy' of small entrepreneurs and innovators in perfect competition with each other."[10] Obama invites his audience to invest their agency in the competition of neoliberal economics through a tripartite rhetorical structure that unites past, present, and future. While this tripartite structure situates audiences in the democratic moment of the present, it simultaneously transcends the crises produced by the free market system by glorifying the economic prosperity contained in American exceptionalism's promised future *telos* of universal historical accomplishment.

Obama's rhetorical deployment of temporality in this speech draws on a secularized version of the sacred nature of the trinity. In the Trinitarian doctrine of Christianity, humanity's profane existence on earth is united with the eternal Kingdom of God through the glory of the consubstantiality of God's tripartite being. Giorgio Agamben describes how this Trinitarian doctrine has been secularized in modern democracies by glorifying the profane or earthly economy as a means of accessing the eternal promise of life's sacredness.[11] This is reflected in the tripartite yet unified rhetorical structure of past, present, and future in Obama's rhetoric. By situating his audiences as participants in the present rather than spectators on the sidelines of history,

Obama offers a vision of American exceptionalism that is intimately connected to the liberal democratic values of participation and agency, yet nevertheless remains rhetorically committed to an economic ideology that directs participation and agency into the pre-determined end of economic competition. Thus, economic competition becomes the means through which Americans invest their contingent agency in the present to the eternal, glorious promise of American exceptionalism.

The argument will proceed in three subsequent sections. In the first section, I will demonstrate how much of the existing scholarly analysis of neoliberal economics too often relies on spatial modes of analysis that fail to account for how time operates as a rhetorical vehicle for discussing economic competitiveness. Second, I move to a close reading of Obama's 2011 State of the Union address. This close reading will reveal the three-part temporal structure that situates audiences in a unified vision of past, present, and future. Finally, in the concluding section, I bring the conversation back to the relationship between presidential rhetoric, American exceptionalism, and neoliberal ideology, discussing the implications of Obama's temporal rhetoric on the rhetorical study of American exceptionalism in presidential public address.

Space, Time and the Neoliberal Rhetoric of Economic Competition

A growing body of scholarship from the diverse fields of critical geography, urban studies, international studies, and globalization studies has substantially contributed to an understanding of economic competitiveness as a form of neoliberal ideology.[12] These scholars analyze the ways in which economic competitiveness is pressed into the service of compelling self-governance. These scholars astutely analyze how neoliberal economic discourses work to manage space—states, bodies, and the

global market itself. Such scholarship will inform my interrogation of Obama's State of the Union address. Yet, as I will contend later in this section, too often, scholarly analyses of neoliberal economics rely on spatial models of critique that overlook the temporal force of rhetoric.

Gillian Bristow traces the conceptual history of economic competitiveness to the rhetorical registers of economics and business management.[13] Bristow argues that the neoliberal rhetoric of economic competitiveness arranges spatially bound entities such as states, regions, and cities in a hierarchy of economic value according to a discourse of responsibility and efficiency that calls upon individuals within these areas to be held accountable for their own economic success and failure. By treating these actors as players on a pre-determined field of economic competition, neoliberal ideology places all responsibility on individuals, deflecting focus away from political and economic causes of inequality.[14] Profit and growth rather than sustainability and equality become the rhetorical benchmarks for success.[15]

Alongside other scholars, Bristow argues that "competitiveness has become a strategic, rhetorical device" used by policymakers, economists, and business leaders to support neoliberal economic policies that de-politicize fundamental questions about the relationship between the economy and the government.[16] The rhetorical device of economic competitiveness functions, according to Tore Fougner, through a three part constitutive model of political action as sovereign, disciplinary, and competitive.[17] In this model, the free market is naturalized as an exterior and inevitable feature of existence in an increasingly globalized world of sovereign states who will inevitably seek to compete against each other. However, this logic of competition does not merely change the actions of sovereign states, as competition is instead individuated onto all citizens

through a disciplinary model of economic self-reliance and individual responsibility. The logic of neoliberalism is thus internalized into both policymakers' and citizens' understanding of their role as political actors. As economics becomes individuated, the entirety of an individual's existence comes to be defined through the logic of neoliberal economics. This allows economic progress to trump all other values, demonstrating the extreme degree to which "economic logic has…successfully colonised human thought."[18]

Bristow and Fougner's analysis is immensely valuable for understanding the conceptual and ideological features of economic competitiveness rhetoric. They illustrate the ways in which discourses about the market are used to elicit change in individuals. Moreover, these accounts describe what the discourse of economic competitiveness refers to, where it comes from, why rhetors have adopted it, and the distinct features it takes when used to discuss various sites.

What is lacking from these accounts, however, is an understanding of how the discourse of economic competitiveness emerges in rhetorical action that takes place in both space and time. Robert Hassan argues that "the study of time in the social sciences and social theory has suffered a more generalized neglect," occupying "a peripheral role as a method through which modernity was understood."[19] By exclusively focusing on the way economic competitiveness discourse is grafted onto various spaces, scholars studying the geography of economic competitiveness risk perpetuating the naturalized mythology of neoliberal economics by evacuating space itself as a site of temporally experienced human existence.

The field of rhetoric might be uniquely poised to address this critical oversight. Michael Leff argues that "temporal movement" is an "essential" feature of "rhetorical economy" because the experience of time in a text "frames the action of the various

argumentative and stylistic elements, blends them into a unified field of textual action, and projects this field onto…public events."[20] The spatial discourse of economic competitiveness refers to a particular mode of knowledge that describes how cities, regions, and states vie for superiority in the global economy. The temporal rhetoric of economic competitiveness refers to the attempt by rhetors to invite audiences to locate their agency in the global competition for economic superiority through particular forms of symbolic action at a given moment in time. While the field of rhetoric is distinctively able to critically engage the temporality of economic competitiveness rhetoric, the current scholarship on the rhetoric of time does not sufficiently account for the ideology of neoliberalism. Thus, placing the rhetorical scholarship on time in conversation with the spatial scholarship on the neoliberal ideology of economic competitiveness could provide a more thorough account of how the rhetoric of economic competitiveness works in both space and time.

Two recent articles in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, one by Roger Stahl, the other by Leslie A. Hahner, highlight the centrality of time and temporality to the study of rhetoric.[21] Stahl, writing in 2008, attempts to trace how the war on terror constitutes a form of conservative "authoritarian politics" that employs time through a series of discursive apparatuses that function as "rhetorical strategies for disciplining dissent."[22] Hahner's 2009 contribution builds on Stahl's discussion of time as a mechanism of control, analyzing how time functions as a form of disciplinary power. However, Hahner warns that Stahl's analysis of public time as a mechanism of authoritarian control risks missing how the rhetorical experience of time circulates differentially and productively amongst various subjects. As a corrective, Hahner analyzes "the means through which subjects are disciplined into the enactment of particular temporal modes, and the potential

for subjects to resist or subvert the order of time."[23] Hahner is correct to suggest that the rhetoric of time is not simply a function of external, authoritarian control, but also works, as Fougner's tripartite model of economic competitiveness suggests, through internalized conduits of disciplinary power.

However, my analysis departs from Hahner's in two crucial ways. First, by focusing on the rhetoric of time as a feature of disciplinary power that circulates amongst publics rather than a feature of sovereign power that is employed by executives in the service of state power, Hahner's account overemphasizes the degree to which disciplinary power has replaced sovereign power. As Fougner's analysis makes clear, as it relates to economic competitiveness, sovereign power and disciplinary power function in tandem.[24] This demonstrates the need to analyze not only how individual subjects experience power but also how agents of sovereign control, like the president, exercise power. Second, although Hahner is correct to assert that subjects can "resist or subvert the order of time," her depiction of resistance is overly reliant on notions of freedom and agency that ultimately fail to provide an adequate ground for resisting the modern manifestation of capitalist temporality.[25] While it is possible that the re-deployment of efficiency for the sake of personal freedom and the rejection of "efficiency as a means to industrial output" constituted a challenge to the management of time in the workplace at the turn of the twentieth century, conceiving of resistance as a matter of individual freedom becomes much more problematic in light of the modern manifestation of neoliberal capitalism.[26]

Jodi Dean argues that "the political, economic, and social changes associated with the…defeat of the…welfare state have been accompanied by increased emphases on the singular, individual, and personal."[27] The modern manifestation of capitalism is less about disciplining workers in order to maximize their output and more about disciplining

political subjects into accepting neoliberal individualism as the ideological terrain of subjective identification. Defending an individual's subjective freedom to use and manipulate time thus unwittingly plays into the ideological terrain of neoliberalism. Any critique of time that seeks to address contemporary conditions of neoliberal economics must therefore address the way that audiences are situated both as participants in the transcendent universality of the free market and as individuals with free agency to act in contingent moment of the present.

Celeste Michelle Condit's analysis of the use of time as an ideological rhetorical resource in President Nixon's "Checkers" speech provides an important inroad into understanding the ideological implications of time in American presidential discourse. Condit argues that the temporal resources at work in Nixon's speech constitute particular temporal "*dispositions*" that arise out of a dominant "ideological constellation"[28] of capitalism and conservatism.[29] Condit's analysis is useful in my critique of Obama's economic rhetoric because it demonstrates how presidents use the rhetoric of time to articulate capitalist modes of economic governance. However, while Condit is concerned with the conservative disposition that arises out of Nixon's ideological contestation, I am concerned with how Obama's neoliberal ideology frustrates attempts to describe Obama's temporal disposition as either conservative or liberal.

Condit's analysis of the "transcendent" tense demonstrates the fundamentally ideological nature of the rhetoric of time in presidential discourse. The transcendent tense describes the use of a present verb that takes on the connotation of permanence. The ability to slip back and forth between the contingency of his individuality in the present and the universality of capitalist ideology allowed Nixon to use the media spectacle of the Checkers event to don the rhetorical garb of post-ideological

transcendence, asserting "universal validity for a particular ideology and a clearly partisan position."[30] According to Condit, Nixon used the transcendent tense to judge his actions in the present according to a universal or eternal standard of political judgment in order to avoid deliberation about the future. As she writes, "This transcendent, permanent standard replaced a deliberative orientation, that is, an orientation toward the future, while still providing some kind of generalized measure for judgment."[31] Although I agree that the transcendent tense establishes an ideological relationship that helps naturalize capitalist economics, the neoliberal ideology that underpins Obama's progressive vision of American exceptionalism demonstrates a temporal rhetoric that, while still transcendent, need not necessarily efface or replace the process of deliberation about the future.

In her recent *Quarterly Journal of Speech* essay, Melanie Loehwing argues that the sharp distinction between the present-centered model of subjectivity offered by early modern reason-of-state philosophies and the future-oriented model of subjectivity posited by civic humanists has blurred in modern democratic societies. The democratic citizen-subject is now constituted through discourses that seek to ensure the security of subjects in the present so that they may join in the future-oriented life of communal citizenship. Studying the rhetoric of homelessness, Loehwing argues that the norms of democratic citizenship work to construct the economically self-reliant and future-oriented neoliberal citizen as the norm against which present-oriented subjects like homeless individuals are deemed to abnormal.[32] Because they are incapable of transcending the crises of the present to enter into normal economic competition with other self-reliant individuals, homeless subjects are "unable to occupy the future-oriented perspective that transforms isolated individuals into communally minded democratic citizens."[33]

Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism does not transcend conversations about the future, but still functions to narrow discussions about the economy through a future oriented model of citizenship. Loehwing's description of time in neoliberalism points toward such a future oriented model of democratic subjectivity. Whereas Condit and Stahl describe how time functions as an ideological resource in conservative and neo-conservative rhetoric by transcending deliberation about the future, Loehwing describes how time functions as an ideological resource in neoliberal discourse by constituting a model of future-oriented democratic subjectivity based in the subject's ability to transcend the crises of the present. Power under neoliberalism does not operate simply by replacing or transcending democratic deliberation about the future with mindless spectacle. Neoliberalism blends conservative ideas about the inevitability of market economies and the ethical value of individual self-reliance with liberal ideas about the importance of democratic participation in a state capable of protecting the rights of those democratically constituted, future-oriented citizen subjects.[34] Because, as Vanessa Beasley suggests, American exceptionalism functions in presidential discourse ideographically to draw upon and rearticulate the rhetorical values of "liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire," American exceptionalism seems perfectly poised to provide a rhetorical vehicle for neoliberal rhetoric that aims to span the discursive and cultural gap between the language of being and becoming.[35]

While Loehwing's analysis attends to neoliberalism to demonstrate how the future-oriented model of democratic citizenship is articulated negatively against present-oriented subjects, it is also important to understand how the future-oriented tense of rhetoric is articulated positively through the rhetorical apparatuses of sovereign power. Obama's rhetoric in the State of the Union represents the articulation of a neoliberal

model of subjectivity that naturalizes the economy by calling on audiences to transcend the crises of the present by investing their agency in the future to secure the promise of America's exceptional experiment in democracy. It is with that understanding that I now turn to a close reading of the 2011 State of the Union.

The Tripartite Temporality of Obama's American Exceptionalism

The rhetorical action of the 2011 State of the Union Address occurs through a tripartite structure that situates Obama's audience in a unified temporal field of past, present, and future. The textual evidence of the tripartite temporal structure includes the speech's argumentative and symbolic content, syntax/pacing, tense, and the use of three part lists. The tripartite temporal structure allows Obama to symbolically oscillate between the past, present, and future as he connects the narrative of American accomplishment with arguments about how America should approach the crises of the present.

The first feature of the tripartite rhetorical structure involves the recollection and remembrance of the originary greatness of the promise of America's founding in order to establish a historical *telos* that says the future is America's to win. Second, this originary greatness is periodically interrupted by moments of crisis. These crises constitute a challenge to the historical promise of the future victory embedded in the promise of America's founding. However, each of these moments of crisis also manufactures an opportunity to prove America's originary greatness, which occurs as Obama invites his audience to invest their democratic agency in America's attempt to win the future. Finally, Obama connects the agency of the American people in the present to the *telos* of the future contained in the promise of America's founding. This temporal structure

situates audiences as participants in the present, encouraging them to view the present state of the nation as a contingent moment of crisis that nevertheless embodies the eternal promise of future victory. Obama argues that America's path out of economic crisis requires remaining committed to a democratic vision of a global world order structured according to the fundamentally American values of neoliberal economic competitiveness.

While Obama does offer a rhetorical transcendence of the present, the present nevertheless has a role to play in his rhetoric. The transcendence that is offered here is not a complete transcendence of the present, but rather a partial transcendence of the crises of the present through a rhetorical linkage of the present with the future. This partial transcendence simultaneously works to naturalize the crises of the global economy by rhetorically situating them in the past. This structure is rhetorically powerful because it utilizes the three temporal modes (past, present, and future) to both reassure Americans of their promised future as history's victors while simultaneously referencing the crises of the global economy as a reminder of why Americans need to invest themselves in the present struggle to win the future.

The tripartite temporal structure allows Obama to connect the narrative arc of American exceptionalism with a series of proposals aimed at revitalizing American competitiveness. By recalling America's originary greatness, Obama calls on Americans to remember that the economy has historically worked in their favor, positing the economy as a historical source of American accomplishment, regardless of current economic woes. Ideologically, the totalizing temporal move to unify past and future subtly works to depoliticize economic issues by treating the current state of global finance as the preordained rules of the road. The problems of the American economy are not symptoms of a diseased system of neoliberal free market economics, but rather a sign

that Americans have temporarily stumbled along a path that otherwise would have lead to certain victory. As Obama articulates it, while the United States still enjoys its position of military and economic hegemony, it is allowing others to catch up in the race to win the future. This crisis is not a cause for fear, and does not constitute a challenge to the core values of the nation. Rather, the crisis constitutes an opportunity for Americans to prove the exceptional nature of the American experiment in democracy to the entire world by leading the globe toward economic prosperity, winning the future.

Obama begins the speech by recognizing the empty chair of US Representative Gabby Giffords. Her absence provides Obama with a symbol of the dangers of political partisanship gone wrong, establishing the current crisis as a need for unity in the present. This present moment of crisis is assuaged through a rhetorical articulation of the originary values of American democratic deliberation. Gifford's absence allows Obama to couch partisanship as a barrier to unifying behind the universal values that constitute the promise of the American Dream:

> Now, it's no secret that those of us here tonight have had our differences over the last two years. The debates have been contentious; we have fought fiercely for our beliefs. And that's a good thing. That's what a robust democracy demands. That's what helps set us apart as a nation.
>
> But there's a reason the tragedy in Tucson gave us pause. Amid all the noise and passion and rancor of our public debate, Tucson reminded us that no matter who we are or where we come from, each of us is a part of something greater, something more consequential than party or political preference.
>
> We are part of the American family. We believe that in a country where every race and faith and point of view can be found, we are still bound together as one people; that we share common hopes and a common creed; that the dreams of a little girl in Tucson are not so different than those of our own children, and that they all deserve the chance to be fulfilled.
>
> That too is what sets us apart as a nation.[36]

Obama thus begins his speech on economic competitiveness with a call to put partisan bickering in the past. His rhetorical move reflects a common presentation of neoliberal ideology that obscures the politics of neoliberal economics by portraying supposedly rational forms of economic managerialism as apolitical.[37] Obama presents the crisis of partisanship as an example of the great values of America's experiment in democracy, and then calls on Americans to transcend that partisanship in the name of American exceptionalism, declaring that it is the "common hopes and a common creed" that "sets us apart as a nation."[38] Here, American exceptionalism is symbolically coded in the rhetoric of democratic idealism.

The syntax and shifting of tense employed in these paragraphs works within Obama's three-part temporal structure. The first paragraph begins with two longer and more complex sentences. The tense begins in the present with "Now, it's no secret," but moves to the past progressive, with "tonight have had." The second sentence continues with phrases in the past progressive linked together by a semicolon: "have been contentious…have fought fiercely." These longer, more complex sentences move from the future to the past progressive in order to link the crises of the past to the present, and then resolve with three short, simple sentences in the present tense: "And that's a good thing. That's what a robust democracy demands. That's what helps set us apart as a nation."[39]

Additionally, the transitions between the second to third paragraphs and the third to fourth paragraphs are marked by long, complex sentences that resolve into short, purposeful sentences. "Amid all the noise…party or political preference" transitions into "We are part of the American family." "We believe that in a country… chance to be

fulfilled" transitions into a short and purposeful statement in the present tense, "That too is what sets us apart as a nation."[40] This rhetorical structure moves from the crises of the immediate past into the resolution of the present as a conduit to the assurance of future victory. Complex, protracted sentences shift the temporal movement of the past into the present moment of crisis, with all its complexities and contingencies. But the move back into the present helps create the sense of certainty reflected in the short, direct sentences at the beginning of each new paragraph.

Obama uses the rhetorical devices of parallel structure and three part lists in a series of rhetorical moves that invite the audience into a tripartite temporal structure of the past moving into present and united with future: "[1] And that's a good thing. [2] That's what a robust democracy demands. [3] That's what helps set us apart as a nation."[41] This occurs again as Obama employs polysyndetic coordination to mediate the differences of "[1] every race [2] and faith [3] and point of view," with the promise that "we are still bound together as one people."[42] The use of three part lists is a common rhetorical device employed to create a sense of rhetorical unity. "[T]he three-part list," Adrian Beard writes, "is embedded in certain cultures as giving a sense of unity and completeness."[43] Perhaps the rhetorical display of unity provided by these three-part lists is not mere happenstance, but is instead central to understanding how power is articulated in Obama's rhetoric. Obama deploys these devices in order to unify the audience as a people saved by their common orientation to economic crises.

The three-part list plays a recurring role as a unifying device in the Judeo-Christian rhetorical tradition.[44] The Judeo-Christian rhetorical tradition is a foundational source of inventional inspiration in Obama's rhetoric.[45] Giorgio Agamben, describing the "theological genealogy of the economy," argues that the modern concept of

"economy" evolves out of the Greek word *oikonomia*. The term was adopted by the church as a means of articulating the Trinitarian theology, providing the mediation between the eternal substance of God and the material body of Christ on earth. According to Agamben, to justify the immanent power of the Christ's kingdom on earth while simultaneously banishing polytheism and paganism from the unified model of Christian monotheism, the church fathers articulated the fundamental Trinitarian philosophy of government and economy:

> God, insofar as his being and substance is concerned, is certainly one; but as to his *oikonomia* – that is to say the way in which he administers his home, his life, and the world that he created – he is, rather, triple. Just as a good father can entrust to his son the execution of certain functions and duties without in doing losing his power and his unity, so god entrusts to Christ the 'economy,' the administration and government of human history.[46]

Thus, the trinity becomes the theological site upon which the fragile link between God's eternal transcendent Glory and God's earthly historical Kingdom is perpetually articulated.[47] Doxology refers to the process in which the church's management of the daily life, the *oikonomia* or economy of the people, was endowed with glory.

As the trajectory of Western political philosophy came to replace divine government with earthly government, it appears as though the doxological features of government which once established a link between the earthly Kingdom and the eternal substance of God's glory now takes center stage in the communicative practices of modern democracy. As Agamben argues, "If the media are so important in modern democracies, this is the case not only because they enable the control and government of public opinion, but also and above all because they manage and dispense Glory, the acclamative and doxological aspect of power."[48] In Christianity, the *telos* of human salvation is heaven. In the secularized *telos* offered by Obama's doxological Trinitarian

temporality, America is saved from the crises of the present by the glory of the American free market, individualist system of economics, the *oikonomia* of American neoliberalism. Agamben argues, "The modern concept of time is a secularization of rectilinear irreversible Christian time," which maintains Christianity's concept of salvation but grafts it onto an empty concept of chronological progress.[49] The idea of winning the future thus offers a secularized, economic vision of the salvation promised by the Christian experience of time.

As such, the profane realities of the economy are glorified and made sacred through the consensual relationship established between individual subjects and the apparatuses of democratic governance.[50] The tripartite temporal structure of Obama's economic rhetoric mirrors the unifying force of Trinitarian theology by uniting the contingent moment of the present with the sacred promise of future victory inscribed in the originary glory of the American nation. The tripartite temporal structure of Obama's rhetoric connects the agency of audiences in the contingent moment of the present to the transcendent values of American democracy. Agamben argues, "To have completely integrated Glory with *oikonomia* in the acclamative form of consensus is…the specific task carried out by contemporary democracies and their *government by consent.*"[51] The intimate link between Obama's tripartite rhetorical structure and the articulation of government power over the economy may reflect the subtle way this Trinitarian theology of worldly government has been secularized to become a central feature of neoliberal democratic ideology.

Obama then moves from the originary promise that "sets [America] apart as a nation" to a recognition of the challenges that Americans are presented with in the present.[52] "Now, by itself," Obama warns, "this simple recognition won't usher in a new

era of cooperation. What comes of this moment is up to us." The crisis of the present marked by the utterance "Now…," then extends into the immediate future: "What comes of this moment will be determined not by whether we can sit together tonight, but whether we can work together tomorrow."[53] Obama continues by proclaiming his faith in the fact that America will come together to meet the challenges it faces, declaring, "I believe we can, and I believe we must."[54]

The future then merges with an imperative demand issued to all Americans in the present. This demand requires Americans to put aside ideological and partisan politics in order to establish a firm foundation for American leadership:

> At stake right now is not who wins the next election. After all, we just had an election. At stake is whether new jobs and industries take root in this country, or somewhere else. It's whether the hard work and industry of our people is rewarded. It's whether we sustain the leadership that has made America not just a place on a map, but the light to the world.[55]

The tense of the address returns to a present moment of crisis and the conditional possibility that Americans might be allowing themselves to slip from the current position of global leadership. Obama uses the conditional present, for example, "At stake is whether new jobs…take root," to pose the possibility that America risks losing its status as an exceptional nation, becoming just another "place on a map."[56]

In a loose allusion to the exceptionalist "City on a Hill" metaphor, Obama invokes the historical self-understanding of America as a shining moral example for the rest of the world to follow. By calling America the "light to the world," American hegemony is coded in the universal values of American exceptionalism. By saying that America is "not just a place on a map," Obama demonstrates the way spatial rhetoric is supplemented by temporal rhetoric. The light metaphor signifies that America provides

light in the darkness, lighting the path of the world as it moves forward in history. It is not simply that America lights the world, but rather that America lights the world in its progress forward in time. The spatial merges with the temporal in this articulation of an exceptionalist America guiding the world toward its proper destiny.

"Now, we are poised for progress," Obama declares in the present tense, using this alliterative phrase to bring his audience back into the moment of the present.[57] Obama briefly reviews the economic crisis of the immediate past in order to reassure Americans of the resurgence of the American economy in the present. "Two years after the worst recession most of us have ever known," Obama argues, "the stock market has come roaring back. Corporate profits are up. The economy is growing again."[58] Notice that Obama's evidence for the link between the present and the future involves a three-part list, describing the present in terms of "the stock market," "corporate profits," and "the economy." Couched in a rhetorically unifying list, the stock market, corporate profits, and the economy at large are provided as evidence that once again, the victory of the future is within America's grasp.

While economic victory is offered by Obama as a site for audiences to invest their agency in American exceptionalism, Obama's description of the economy is simultaneously naturalized and depoliticized. In the phrase, "[t]he economy is growing," the economy itself is made the agent of economic recovery. The stock market appears as a sort of wild animal, "roaring" back on its own accord, further evidence of the rhetorical naturalization of the economy. In this depiction of economic growth, the economy is seen as the natural road to progress, despite occasional hiccups. Corporate profits unproblematically symbolize economic recovery rather than a source of economic inequality and crisis. Obama is subtly making a political argument, grounded in

neoliberal market ideology, about the intrinsic link between corporate profits and American prosperity. However, this argument appears as an apolitical statement about the pre-existing nature of the economy. The naturalization of the economy in Obama's speech demonstrates how American exceptionalism functions to simultaneously politicize the economy as a site of democratic agency while delegitimizing arguments made about the nature of the economy. In short, this mode of address ultimately depoliticizes the economy itself by removing it from the scope of meaningful democratic deliberation.

This is not to say, however, that Obama is completely silent on the issue of economic inequality. The next paragraph returns to the originary values of the past to demonstrate the nature of the present as a conditional crisis of America's promise:

> But we have never measured progress by these yardsticks alone. We measure progress by the success of our people, by the jobs they can find and the quality of life those jobs offer; by the prospects of the small-business owner who dreams of turning a good idea into a thriving enterprise; by the opportunities for a better life that we pass on to our children. That's the project the American people want us to work on. Together.[59]

Obama describes progress as the success of the future-oriented individual and the enduring entrepreneurial spirit that embodies the American Dream. The danger lies in the ease with which Obama temporally oscillates from glorifying the greatness of America's economic success to the simultaneous recognition that America's success is not producing equal results for all Americans. The material kingdom of America's economy, threatened by American's failure to take the steps to win the future, is united with the glory of the eternal promise of the American Dream. A short sentence in the past progressive, "But we have never measured progress by these yardsticks alone," transitions into a long, complex sentence divided into three present tense phrases separated by semicolons: "We measure…to our children." The paragraph then ends with

two short sentences that blend the present tense with the conditional future: "That's the project the American people want us to work on. Together."[60] These lists unify the people in the promise of economic equality ensured by the mythological values of America.

Obama calls on his audiences to invest their political agency in a universalizing moment of the present. In so doing, he obscures the particular political content of neoliberal economic ideology, namely, that an adherence to the economic principle that holds that expansion of corporate profits constitutes a sign of American economic progress at large. Obama treats unemployment and corporate profits as equivalent influencing factors determining the ability of the United States to win the future. What is lost in this account is the fact that only a select few are actually doing the winning in a world where corporate profits and employment are treated as equal political goals, unified together in the moment of the present. On one level, this claim is problematic because it obscures the fact that despite the growth of corporate profits in the United States, income inequality in the United States has steadily worsened.[61]

On another level, this rhetorical move is problematic because it functions ideologically to provide a neoliberal spin to the rather conservative concept that the rising tide can, in fact, raise all boats. The neoliberal turn is evident in the invitation to Americans to locate their democratic agency behind both their own entrepreneurial spirit and the bipartisan agenda put forward by the President. The belief that a person's success is the result of his or her own individual accomplishment, their willingness to enact the American Dream is part of the fantasy of American exceptionalism that effaces the structural conditions of political and economic inequality that disproportionately impact minority communities.[62] The assumption is that when hard working Americans invest in

themselves, and when government officials take the correct steps to rationally manage the economy, the free market can lead Americans on the path toward victory.

Immediately after declaring that the American people want the government to focus on jobs, Obama uses the past tense to declare that that goal has already been partially accomplished, passing into a present in which the future is secured through the economic management of his administration:

> Now, we did that in December. Thanks to the tax cuts we passed, Americans' paychecks are a little bigger today. Every business can write off the full cost of new investments that they make this year. And these steps, taken by Democrats and Republicans, will grow the economy and add to the more than 1 million private sector jobs created last year.[63]

Obama moves immediately from a recognition that the economy is not working for a number of Americans without jobs to a discussion of the steps taken the past year that are now resulting in economic benefits in the present and in the future. These lengthier sentences about the steps taken in the contingent moment of crisis define the immediate past then resolve into a short declaration of the future imperative faced by Americans: "But we have to do more."[64] Obama states, "These steps we've taken over the last two years may have broken the back of this recession," then announces the address's titular temporal phrase, "but to win the future, we'll need to take on challenges that have been decades in the making."[65]

Obama provides continuity between the present imperative for action and the steps already taken by his administration to overcome the crises of the immediate past, calling on America to "win the future" by "addressing challenges that have been decades in the making."[66] In order to discuss these challenges, Obama must address the problems of the past while simultaneously reassuring Americans of their promised place in history.

Here, Obama invokes the cultural *mythos* of American prosperity to argue that the promise of upward mobility and economic security that was once central to the ongoing fabric of the American Dream is currently at risk of becoming a distant memory:

> Many people watching tonight can probably remember a time when finding a good job meant showing up at a nearby factory or a business downtown. You didn't always need a degree, and your competition was pretty much limited to your neighbors.
>
> If you worked hard, chances are you'd have a job for life, with a decent paycheck and good benefits and the occasional promotion. Maybe you'd even have the pride of seeing your kids work at the same company.
>
> That world has changed.[67]

Obama references the mythological cultural memory of upward mobility and economic stability. While this reference most strongly represents the laboring middle class, his example comes to symbolize the broader experience of the American Dream. Rowland and Jones argue that Obama's rhetoric recasts the American Dream to include the perspectives of marginalized communities in "a narrative based in shared identity as Americans."[68] However, this narrative is not truly based in a shared identity because not all Americans share the cultural memory of an American Dream that was once alive but has since been taken away. Wayne Parent argues that liberalism's "common belief in the propriety of individual labors producing individual rewards" obscures the racial and class based exceptions to this exceptional dream of upward mobility.[69]

Obama then argues that nations such as India and China are beginning to surpass America in the race to win the future: "They started educating their children earlier and longer, with greater emphasis on math and science. They're investing in research and new technologies."[70] The danger posed to America by the loss of its status as a world

economic leader is that other nations will achieve the same accomplishments as the United States. Framed in the strategic rhetoric of neoliberalism, the rise of successful educational and scientific institutions in so-called 'developing' nations like China and India are depicted as a strategic threat to American economic competitiveness. China and India are increasingly engaging in scientific and economic fields that were once the proud domain of American economic hegemony. Americans must reinvest their energies in the great American experiment in free market economics and democratic government in order to ensure that they remain on the winner's side of history. Here, the material realities of global economic inequality are framed in terms of a game that has winners and losers. Glyn Daly, paraphrasing Slavoj Žižek, describes neoliberal ideology as a form of universalism that "attempts to naturalize capitalism by presenting its outcomes of winning and losing as if they were simply a matter of chance and sound judgment in a neutral market place."[71] The universalism of neoliberal ideology, Daly argues, "reproduces and depends upon a disavowed violence that excludes vast sectors of the world's populations."[72] The rhetoric of winning the competition for the future masks these realities of economic inequality by portraying those at the bottom of the global economic hierarchy as poor competitors in the global competition for economic leadership.

Obama then connects the originary values of America's rise from an exceptional experiment in democracy to the present tense promise embodied in the nation's youth:

> We are the first nation to be founded for the sake of an idea, the idea that each of us deserves the chance to shape our own destiny. That's why centuries of pioneers and immigrants have risked everything to come here. That's why our students don't just memorize equations but answer questions like "What do you think of that idea? What would you change about the world? What do you want to be when you grow up?[73]

The originary and exceptional greatness of the American nation is connected to a legacy of historical accomplishment. However, this accomplishment is not without perils, as people have "risked everything to come here." The risk faced by America's settlers is simultaneously presented as an opportunity for greatness that is then resolved in a discussion of the promise of America's youth. Obama blends economic arguments about the strengths of America's education system and the entrepreneurial spirit of American businesses.

Obama's economic rhetoric operates under a discursive banner of democratic idealism that links the present with the glory of the past in an attempt to win the future, declaring, "And now it's our turn. We know what it takes to compete for the jobs and industries of our time. We need to outinnovate, outeducate and outbuild the rest of the world."[74] Notice again the use of three part lists, "[1]What do you think of that idea? [2]What would you change about the world? [3]What do you want to be when you grow up?," and "[1]outinnovate, [1]outeducate and [1]outbuild." Here, the application of the unifying rhetorical device of three part lists is used to invest the audience's energies into the democratic potential for deliberating about how to best shape the world for the better. The child who is concerned about her future occupation represents the ideal future-oriented democratic citizen subject. Her concerns are universal concerns of how to make the world better. Yet, this universal concern is filtered through the particularity of American leadership, as Americans are called on to outperform the rest of the world in the task of making the world a better place to live.

Obama continues with a discussion of his first step for winning the future:

> The first step in winning the future is encouraging American innovation. None of us can predict with certainty what the next big industry will be or where the new

> jobs will come from. Thirty years ago, we couldn't know that something called the Internet would lead to an economic revolution.
>
> What we can do, what America does better than anyone else, is spark the creativity and imagination of our people. We're the nation that put cars in driveways and computers in offices; the nation of Edison and the Wright brothers, of Google and Facebook. In America, innovation doesn't just change our lives. It is how we make our living.
>
> Our free enterprise system is what drives innovation. But because it's not always profitable for companies to invest in basic research, throughout history our government has provided cutting-edge scientists and inventors with the support that they need. That's what planted the seeds for the Internet. That's what helped make possible things like computer chips and GPS. Just think of all the good jobs, from manufacturing to retail, that have come from these breakthroughs.
>
> Now, half a century ago when the Soviets beat us into space with the launch of a satellite called Sputnik, we had no idea how we would beat them to the moon.
>
> The science wasn't even there yet. NASA didn't exist. But after investing in better research and education, we didn't just surpass the Soviets; we unleashed a wave of innovation that created new industries and millions of new jobs.
>
> This is our generation's Sputnik moment.[75]

These paragraphs continue the complex pacing and syntax of the speech. The first lines after the topic sentences are long complex sentences used to discuss the crises and opportunities or the uncertainties and contingencies of America's historical experiment in greatness. One of these sentences is an intricate three part rhetorical list of pairs ("We're the nation…Facebook.") used to list America's legacy of historical accomplishments. These sentences then resolve into two short sentences about America's eternal promise of greatness: "In America, innovation doesn't just change our lives. It is how we make our living." A similar syntax is used when discussing the Sputnik event, with the uncertainty of the Sputnik moment being described in longer, more complex sentences that resolve

into the present's connection with America's eternal greatness: "This is our generation's Sputnik moment."

The contingent crises of the present are transcended by the arrival of "our generation's Sputnik moment." However, the transcendence occurs in such a way that it appears at first that there is no transcendence at all, as Obama employs the language of becoming rather than the language of Being. We cannot simply transcend the crises of the present because we do not know how, just as the country did not know how it would defeat the Soviet Union in the race to space. Winning the future will require the audience to invest their agency in the contingent moment of the present rather than transcending deliberation about the future. However, notice that in the middle of the sentence situating American people as the cause of the creativity and imagination that will drive America to win the future, Obama switches from the modal auxiliary verb phrase "What we can do" to the auxiliary verb phrase "What America does." Auxiliary verbs are a special type of verb that reveal distinctions in tense, and modal auxiliary verbs are a subsection of auxiliary verbs that refer to the tense of possibility. The modal auxiliary verb "can" grammatically indicates possibility or contingency, whereas the auxiliary verb "does" refers to actions that are certain.[76] The shift in tense that occurs mid sentence is a shift from the conditional present to the modal state of certainty. The audience is invited to recognize their contingent agency in the moment of the present but the contingency of that agency is immediately turned into the certainty of American identity. Ultimately, Obama argues, "Our free enterprise system is what drives innovation."[77] American's capacity to expand and innovate, to win the future, is a promise guaranteed by the American system of free market economics. Their job is to simply manifest the destiny

of historical accomplishment promised by the exceptional American experiment in democracy.

Obama's homage to the Sputnik Moment is an example of Americans transcending a crisis of identity by "winning" the race to the future. It demonstrates a rhetorical indebtedness to the transcendent temporal rhetoric used by President John F. Kennedy in his rhetorical appeals to the American public about the necessity of engaging in the space race. John W. Jordan argues that Kennedy engaged in "the rhetorical appropriation and manipulation of time to generate a sense of both urgency and perseverance."[78] Kennedy described the "present moment as the precipice before the next stage of human enterprise," and in doing so, "compelled his audience to realize and make good on their ancestral heritage."[79] Whereas space offered Kennedy a new frontier for the American people to demonstrate their exceptional abilities, Obama calls on Americans to see the increasingly globalized economy as a new frontier upon which they may reaffirm the promise of America's origins. Kennedy moved space from the technical to the public sphere by "enabling everyday people to feel a part of the project," enacting a transcendent rhetorical strategy that "worked because it allowed the people to be romanced by it."[80] In a similar manner, Obama invites a reinvigoration of the public's connection with the technical spheres of science and economics, but in doing so also connects the public with the eternal promise of America's experiment in popular sovereignty.

While recognizing the need for public incentives to make private research profitable, Obama describes his application of this public funding in the rhetoric of neoliberal efficiency. He posits his administration's financial support for clean energy as an entrepreneurial challenge to the fields of science and technology. "We're not just

handing out money," Obama declares, "We're issuing a challenge. We're telling America's scientists and engineers that if they assemble teams of the best minds in their fields, and focus on the hardest problems in clean energy, we'll fund the Apollo Projects of our time."[81] Obama stresses the need to handle government like a business, to not give handouts but rather to fund the most efficient and successful projects. The rhetoric of liberal transcendence underpins both Obama and JFK's rhetorical manipulation of time and works to reinvigorate public support for the technical spheres of knowledge. Yet, both rhetorics also attempt to mobilize the cultural registers of manifest destiny and American empire at work behind the massive expansion of the American military industrial complex into every avenue of American society after World War II.[82]

One way the integration of the public into the culture of American militarism occurs is by subsuming public education into the competitive framework of neoliberal economics. Obama declares, "Maintaining our leadership in research and technology is crucial to America's success. But if we want to win the future, if we want innovation to produce jobs in America and not overseas, then we also have to win the race to educate our kids."[83] This call for education is couched within neoliberal understandings of economic success. Emery J. Hyslop-Margison and John Dale argue that the shift in public education following the Sputnik moment "to technical-rational models…guided by the political and corporate view that schooling should focus on the sciences and functional literacy to be competitive in the world marketplace" situated American education at the nexus of "US military jingoism" and "emerging neoliberalism."[84] In much the same way, Obama articulates education as the foundation of America's technological and economic prowess. By inviting the American public to reinvest in the fields of science and technology, Obama is also calling for a renewed commitment to the

neoliberal education complex. Under neoliberalism, public education increasingly becomes oriented toward the functionalist ends of the economic and military institutions that constitute the network of imperial power relations behind America's quest for global leadership and total security. This merging of the institutions of education, the economy, and the military result in what Henry A. Giroux has described as a "biopolitics of academic militarization"[85]

Obama begins his neoliberal articulation of education policy by placing responsibility for education on individuals as parents. He declares, "So the question is whether all of us, as citizens and as parents, are willing to do what's necessary to give every child a chance to succeed. That responsibility begins not in our classrooms, but in our homes and communities….We need to teach them that success is not a function of fame or PR, but of hard work and discipline."[86] Through hard work, Obama argues, children can be placed on an equal footing with those whose success comes from "fame or PR." This reaffirms the individualistic, bootstraps logic of neoliberal ideology by writing off structural inequalities. Obama situates the illusion of wealth and power as the mere trappings of fame or empty public relations campaigns. These illusions are no match for the empowered neoliberal democratic citizen.

However Obama's account does not distribute responsibility solely to individuals, as, Obama declares, "Our schools share this responsibility." Rowland and Jones claim that Obama's rhetoric offers a progressive balance between individualism and communitarianism.[87] Their thesis is clearly visible in Obama's balance of social responsibility regarding America's schools. Yet, while Obama does recognize that both individuals and the community have a responsibility to fix American schools, the language he uses to describe his administration's approach to education demonstrates a

firm commitment to the individualistic neoliberal logic of economic efficiency. Fixing the American education system requires treating it like a business:

> When a child walks into a classroom, it should be a place of high expectations and high performance. But too many schools don't meet this test. That's why, instead of just pouring money into a system that's not working, we launched a competition called Race to the Top. To all 50 states, we said, "If you show us the most innovative plans to improve teacher quality and student achievement, we'll show you the money."[88]

Once schools are run like a business in the marketplace of competition, they will excel.

Ultimately, success in the public education system is less about the government's commitment to public education and more about the individual educators who overcome the odds to find ways to do more with less:

> You see, we know what's possible from our children when reform isn't just a top-down mandate but the work of local teachers and principals, school boards and communities. Take a school like Bruce Randolph in Denver. Three years ago, it was rated one of the worst schools in Colorado, located on turf between two rival gangs. But last May, 97 percent of the seniors received their diploma. Most will be the first in their families to go to college. And after the first year of the school's transformation, the principal who made it possible wiped away tears when a student said: Thank you, Ms. Waters, for showing...that we are smart and we can make it.[89]

The scene Obama describes is reminiscent of films like *Stand and Deliver* and *Lean on Me* in which rogue educators apply innovative teaching practices and demonstrate an exceptional commitment to the students of their failing inner-city schools, giving the students the opportunity to defy all odds and join the future-oriented community of successful democratic citizens.[90] The dramatization of the teacher wiping tears away from her eyes rhetorically constructs a cinematic moment of individual triumph over all odds, reaffirming the *mythos* of the American Dream's accessibility to anyone willing to work hard enough to achieve it. This cinematic moment of transcendence works,

therefore, to obscure the real structural inequalities that stack the odds against poor and minority students in the first place.

Obama's discussion of infrastructure is also coded in the rhetoric of neoliberal temporality. America's infrastructure is part of what allowed America to become the global leader that it is today, and thus a source of inspiration as Americans continue on their exceptional journey toward winning the future, as Obama argues, using the rhetorical device of the three part list: "America is the nation that built the Transcontinental Railroad, brought electricity to rural communities, constructed the Interstate Highway System."[91] However, despite this promise of American greatness, the present constitutes a moment of crisis in which this greatness is challenged, as Obama states, "Our infrastructure used to be the best, but our lead has slipped."[92] For Obama, by maintaining the free-market principles of efficiency and self-reliance that made America great in the first place, America can transcend this crisis of leadership and once again put the United States back in a position to win the future. Obama declares, "We'll put more Americans to work repairing crumbling roads and bridges. We'll make sure this is fully paid for, attract private investment and pick projects based on what's best for the economy, not politicians."[93] Here, the management of the economy is described as an apolitical expression of technical economic rationality, obscuring the intricate relationship between state and corporation under global neoliberalism.

The end of the speech situates the audience firmly in the transcendent tense, as Americans who have overcome the crises of the present by uniting in their commitment to secure the promised glory of American exceptionalism:

> We do big things. From the earliest days of our founding, America has been the story of ordinary people who dare to dream.

> That's how we win the future.
>
> We're a nation that says: I might not have a lot of money, but I have this great idea for a new company. I might not come from a family of college graduates, but I will be the first to get my degree. I might not know those people in trouble, but I think I can help them, and I need to try. I'm not sure how we'll reach that better place beyond the horizon, but I know we'll get there. I know we will.
>
> We do big things. The idea of America endures. Our destiny remains our choice. And tonight, more than two centuries later, it's because of our people that our future is hopeful, our journey goes forward, and the state of our union is strong.
>
> Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America. [94]

Here, the originary promise of American greatness does not need to be articulated in the past tense. "The idea of America endures" in the present, as an eternal source of agency for audiences seeking to tap into the *mythos* of American exceptionalism. Although the path toward the future is uncertain, victory is guaranteed so long as Americans continue to have faith that the great American experiment in democracy will help them "reach that better place beyond the horizon."[95]

Conclusion: Obama's Exceptionalism and the Temporality of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism constitutes a challenge for rhetorical scholars attempting to grapple with how the "politically potent" ideograph of American exceptionalism "can change in meaning across time, circumstance, or audiences."[96] This is because in neoliberalism, the traditional political divisions of left and right begin to blur. For example, Murphy argues that the conservative rejection of democratic intervention into the free market has eroded the liberal foundation for government regulation of the economy.[97] For Murphy, Obama's economic rhetoric offers a return to the *ethos* of liberalism that "crafts an

American story replete with agency" by refusing to "turn over our economic fates to an impersonal market or to a technical expert."[98]

This chapter, however, suggests that Murphy's account of Obama's rhetoric relies on a false distinction between the ideology of free markets and the ideology of liberal government regulation. Bernard E. Harcourt argues that such a false distinction is not simply a misleading classificatory scheme, but rather a creation of hegemonic neoliberal ideology. Treating liberal economic management as an alternative to free-market capitalism ignores the ways democracies have historically made rules and regulations that benefit the wealthy and created laws and punishments that harm the poor.[99] In other words, the rules of the game are not equal, but stacked against those without access to opportunity.

While it is true that Obama's vision of American exceptionalism encourages audiences to invest their agency in the economy, the terms of this investment are ultimately out of their control. By inviting audiences to invest their agency in the economic competition of the present while simultaneously treating victory in economic competition as the pre-determined *telos* of human progress, Obama's rhetorical deployment of time depoliticizes considerations of economic inequality and naturalizes the violence of neoliberalism. The market is not impersonal because it is defined by the individual agency of each person who participates in it. Although the market is not impersonal, it is nevertheless naturalized in Obama's vision of American exceptionalism through the use of the transcendent rhetorical tense. The tripartite rhetorical structure of Obama's rhetoric situates audiences in a forward-looking discourse of competition that transcends the crises of the present, but in doing so, also transcends any possibility of holding a political conversation about the desirability of neoliberal economics. No longer

forced to choose between the language of contingency and becoming and the language of tradition and being, Obama's neoliberal vision of American exceptionalism is capable of articulating both simultaneously.

In order to speak across the temporal divide separating America's belief in the eternal values of American democracy and America's hope in the moment of the present, Obama deployed a temporal structure that united the language of becoming and the language of being. American exceptionalism provided Obama with this temporal structure by both allowing him to invite his audiences to invest their agency in the economy while simultaneously narrowing the scope of democratic debate about the nature of the economy and America's role in it. The idea that America could abandon its destined trajectory of greatness and accept a more modest role in the world is ultimately lost in the quest to be the best. While Americans are committed to the idea that they can indeed shape the future, they must also be reassured that the mere fact of their identity as Americans ensures them of their capacity to win that future. Obama's unification of the past, present, and future in the rhetoric of American exceptionalism allows him to glorify the neoliberal consensus behind the market economy as offering Americans an eternal promise of glorious victory. The promise of economic victory in the future allows Obama to situate his audience in a transcendent relationship to the economic crisis of the present, so long as they remain faithful to the sacred values of the American experiment in democratic government and market economics.

Notes

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[2] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in State of Union Address," (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary: January 25, 2011), http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/remarks-president-state-union-address (Accessed February 10, 2012).

[3] Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: the Destruction of Experience* (London and New York, NY Verso: 2007), 99.

[4]Vanessa B. Beasley, "The Rhetoric of Ideological Consensus in the United States: American Principles and American Pose in Presidential Inaugurals," *Communication Monographs* 68.2 (2001): 169 –183.

[5] John M. Murphy, "Power and Authority in a Postmodern Presidency," in *The Prospect of Presidential Rhetoric*, eds. James Arnt Aune and Martin J. Medhurst (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 28-45, 43.

[6] John M. Murphy, "Political Economy and Rhetorical Matter," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 303-316, 316.

[7] David A. Frank, "Obama's Rhetorical Signature: Cosmopolitan Civil Religion in the Presidential Inaugural Address, January 20, 2009," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14.4 (2011): 605-630, 623.

[8] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[9] See, Erica Werner, "State Of The Union Speech: Obama Only Latest President To Push Competitiveness," *The Huffington Post,* (January 25, 2011), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/25/obama-state-of-the-union-_2_n_813526.html; (December 1, 2011)

[10] Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Andrew Herod, and Susan M. Roberts, "Negotiating Unruly Problematics," in *An Unruly World: Globalization, Governance, and Geography*, eds. Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Andrew Herod, and Susan M. Roberts (London: Routledge, 2003), 6.

[11] Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[12] See: Stuart Tannock, "Knowledge for What? Wales, Militarisation and the Endless Promotion of the Knowledge Economy," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 7.3 (2009): 257–274; Gillian Bristow, "Everyone's a 'Winner': Problematising the Discourse of Regional Competitiveness," *Journal of Economic Geography* 5 (2005): 285-304; Ole B. Jensen and Tim Richardson, "Framing Mobility and Identity: Constructing Transnational Spatial Policy Discourses," in *Space Odysseys: Spatiality and Social*

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[13] Bristow, "Everyone's a 'Winner'."

[14] Bristow, "Everyone's a 'Winner'," 299.

[15] Bristow, "Everyone's a 'Winner'," 300.

[16] Bristow, "Everyone's a 'Winner'," 301.

[17] Fougner, "The state, International competitiveness."

[18] Fougner, "The State, International Competitiveness," 184.

[19] Robert Hassan, "Timescapes of the Network Society," *Fast Capitalism* 1.1 (2005): http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/1_1/hassan.html (Accessed December 12, 2011).

[20] Michael Leff, ''Dimensions of Temporality in Lincoln's Second Inaugural,'' *Communication Reports* 1 (1988): 26-31, 26.

[21] Roger Stahl, "A Clockwork War: Rhetorics of Time in a Time of Terror," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94.1 (2008): 73-99. Leslie A. Hahner, "Working Girls and the Temporality of Efficiency," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95.3 (2009): 289-310.

[22] Stahl, "A Clockwork War," 75.

[23] Hahner, "Working Girls," 290.

[24] Fougner, "The state, International competitiveness."

[25] Hahner describes how the narrator of *The Long Day* rhetorically subverts the capitalist order of time by "submitting" time to her own "agenda," and re-evaluating "time as something other than service toward industrial profit." See Hahner, "Working Girls," 209-301.

[26] Hahner, "Working Girls," 293.

[27] Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 4.

[28] Celeste Michelle Condit, "Nixon's 'Fund': Time as Ideological Resource in the 'Checkers' Speech," in *Texts in Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes in American Political Rhetoric*, eds. Michael C. Leff and Fred J. Kauffeld (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1989), 219-242.

[29] Condit, "Nixon's 'Fund'," 225.

[30] Condit, "Nixon's Fund'," 231.

[31] Condit, "Nixon's Fund."

[32] Melanie Loehwing, "Homelessness as the Unforgiving Minute of the Present: The Rhetorical Tenses of Democratic Citizenship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96.4 (2010): 380-403.

[33] Loehwing, "Homelessness," 397.

[34] Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 1-18, 51-55.

[35] Beasley, "The Rhetoric of Ideological Consensus," 173.

[36] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[37] Dean argues, "The present value of democracy relies on positing crucial determinants of our lives and conditions outside the frame of contestation in a kind of 'no-go zone.' These suppositions regarding growth, investment, and profit are politically-off limits, so it's no wonder that the wealthy and privileged evoke democracy as a political ideal. It can't hurt them." Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 76.

[38] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[39] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[40] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[41] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[42] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[43] Adrian Beard, *The Language of Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 38.

[44] Gerhard Delling, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), 216-226.

[45] Frank writes, "Obama sounds the prophetic voice of Afrocentric theology that merges the Jewish and Christian faith traditions with African American experience," David A. Frank, "The Prophetic Voice And The Face Of The Other in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 167-194, 167; John M. Murphy:

Barack Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97.4 (2011): 387-410; Frank, "Obama's Rhetorical Signature."

[46] Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 9-10.

[47] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*

[48] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xii.

[49] Agamben writes, "Only the process as a whole has meaning, never the precise fleeting *now*; but since this process is really no more than a simple succession of *now* in terms of before and after, and the history of salvation has meanwhile become pure chronology, a semblance of meaning can be saved only by introducing the idea – albeit one lacking any rational foundation – of a continuous, infinite progress." Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 96-97.

[50] Agamben writes, "The society of the spectacle – if we can call contemporary democracies by this name – is, from this point of view, a society in which power in its 'glorious' aspect becomes indiscernible from *oikonomia* and government." Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xii.

[51] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, xii.

[52] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[53] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[54] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[55] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[56] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[57] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[58] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[59] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[60] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[61] Zachary A. Goldfarb, "Wall Street's Resurgent Prosperity Frustrates its Claims and Obama's," *The Washington Post* (November 6, 2011), http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/wall-streets-resurgent-prosperity-frustrates-its-claims-and-obamas/2011/10/25/gIQAKPIosM_story.html?fb_ref=NetworkNews&socialreader_check=0&denied=1 (Accessed December 12, 2011); Henry Blodget, "CHARTS: Here's What the Wall Street Protesters Are So Angry About...," *Business Insider* (October 11, 2011):

http://www.businessinsider.com/what-wall-street-protesters-are-so-angry-about-2011-10?op=1#ixzz1eK32jEBG (Accessed December 12, 2011).

[62] Dana Cloud, "Hegemony or Concordance? The Rhetoric of Tokenism in Oprah' Winfrey's Rags-to-Riches Biography." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13.2 (1996): 115-137.

[63] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[64] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[65] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[66] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[67] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[68] Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones "Recasting the American Dream and American Politics: Barack Obama's Keynote Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93.4 (2007): 425-448, 442.

[69] Wayne Parent, "A Liberal Legacy: Blacks Blaming Themselves for Economic Failures," *Journal of Black Studies* 16 (1985): 3-20, 4-6.

[70] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[71] Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004), 15-16.

[72] Žižek and Daly, *Conversations with Žižek,* 15-16.

[73] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[74] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[75] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[76]Ron Cowan, "Auxiliary Verbs," *The Teacher's Grammar of English: A Course Book and Reference Guide* (New York, London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 21-22.

[77] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[78] John W. Jordan, "Kennedy's Romantic Moon and its Rhetorical Legacy for Space Exploration," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6.2 (2003): 209-231, 218-219.

[79] Jordan, "Kennedy's Romantic Moon," 209-231, 218-219.

[80] Jordan, "Kennedy's Romantic Moon," 226.

[81] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[82] For a description of the intimate relationship between the development of the U.S. space program and the development of the American military industrial complex, see: Fraser MacDonald, "Anti-Astropolitik – Outer Space and the Orbit of Geography," in *Progress in Human Geography* 31.5 (2007): 592-615.

[83] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[84] Emery J. Hyslop-Margison and John Dale, *Teaching for Freedom and Transformation: The Philosophical Influences on the Work of Paulo Freire* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 13.

[85] Henry A. Giroux, *The University In Chains: Confronting The Military-Industrial-Academic Complex* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 69

[86] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[87] Rowland and Jones, "Recasting the American Dream," 444.

[88] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[89] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[90] John G. Avildsen, *Lean on* Me (1989), Internet Movie Database: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097722/ (Accessed February 12, 2012); Ramón Menéndez, *Stand and Deliver* (1988), Internet Movie Database, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094027/ (Accessed February 12, 2012).

[91] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[92] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[93] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[94] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[95] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[96] Beasley, "The Rhetoric of Ideological Consensus," 173.

[97] For more on Murphy's liberalism, see: John M. Murphy, "The Language of the Liberal Consensus: John F. Kennedy, Technical Reason, and the "New Economics" at Yale University," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90.2 (2004): 133-162.

[98] Murphy, "Political Economy…": 313.

[99] Bernard E. Harcourt, *Punishment and the Myth of the Natural Order* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis, I have attempted to track the rhetorical functions of American exceptionalism in Barack Obama's public address. I initially identified American exceptionalism as the dual tension between the idea that America is an exceptional nation and the idea that America makes exceptions to the values that make it a great nation. The tension between America's ideals and America's application of those ideals comes to play in each of the speeches I analyzed. In chapter one, I asked about the particular rhetorical situations that give rise to Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism. In the subsequent three chapters, I examined how Obama deployed the discourse of American exceptionalism to respond to rhetorical situations regarding three issues: race, the economy, and national security.

In chapter two, I performed a close reading of Obama's "A More Perfect Union" address to examine how Obama uses American exceptionalism to discuss the issue of race. I argued that American exceptionalism provided Obama with the tools necessary to engage in an inclusive exclusion of Reverend Jeremiah Wright. By identifying his campaign with the revolutionary promise of equality contained in America's democratic origins, Obama called on citizens of all races to put aside their racial differences and come together in a democratic coalition to help revitalize the American Dream. While this inclusive picture of a diverse, multiracial democracy allowed Obama to deliver a frank speech on the history of racial division in American society, it also required him to code this speech in the cultural registers of the middle class American Dream by

analogizing the racial grievances of black audiences with the economic grievances of the white community. Obama called on audiences to transcend racial division and join together in the struggle toward a more perfect union. Because racial anger focuses on the grievances of the past and distracts from the crises of the present, Obama delegitimized black anger as a site of possible democratic discourse about the future. In this sense, Obama's hopeful vision of American exceptionalism delimits the scope of political discourse in American democracy by denying the inventional potential of racial anger as a source of political antagonism.

The analysis in this chapter disputes the notion that inclusivity is always a positive rhetorical feat for diverse audiences. In the introduction of this thesis, I identified a trend within the extant rhetorical scholarship on Obama. Namely, most scholars describe Obama's vision of American exceptionalism as an inclusive rhetoric that is conducive to public participation in deliberative democracy.[1] In particular, a number of rhetorical scholars praise "A More Perfect Union" for providing a balanced account of race relations in America that productively engages the topic of racial division by encouraging audiences to put aside racial differences and unite behind Obama's vision of a multiracial democratic society.[2] My reading of "A More Perfect Union" differs from these accounts by challenging the idea that the inclusion of the perspectives of minorities in presidential rhetoric itself constitutes a challenge to the realities of American racism. In response to Robert E. Terrill's claim that American society suffers a form of racial aphasia, or lack of speech, I claim that Obama's speech enacts a doubled-style in which inclusion and exclusion become crossed—what I briefly name a form of racial dyslexia.[3] This tactic works by crossing rhetorical signals so that exclusion comes to stand for inclusion. My reading of "A More Perfect Union" calls on scholars to see how the

rhetoric of diversity is deployed strategically in ways that legitimately increase the representation of minorities, but does so in such a way that it limits the discursive options open to minorities. By allowing for the inclusion of Wright's identity but demanding the exclusion of Wright's statements of anger, Obama enacts an inclusive exclusion that mediates black anger by analogizing it with white, economic frustration. The ruse of analogy blunts the affective force of black anger by making the suffering of slavery and structural inequality seem analogous with the erosion of the middle class, delimiting racial antagonism as a site of democratic discourse.

In chapter three, I turn to Obama's "Our Security, Our Values" speech to engage how Obama deployed American exceptionalism when dealing with the issue of national security, particularly as it pertained to his administration's policies on the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. Obama situated his vision of American exceptionalism at the rhetorical nexus of the rule of law and national security. The rule of law, understood as an expression of the will of the people, is a hallmark of American exceptionalism because it defines the American experiment in democracy as distinct from other forms of sovereign government in which sovereignty is generated from a source that is not the will of the people. However, because the rule of law is supposed to represent the will of the people, the executive charged with protecting the law can make exceptions to the law when extra-legal actions are deemed necessary to protect the people the law is supposed to represent. Obama positions his administration's Guantanamo policy as a transcendence of the politics of fear through a return to the rule of law. Obama argues that in order to fight a prolonged war against an enemy that does not respect the rule of law, America must bring its own tactics in the war on terror back in line with the rule of law. American exceptionalism, which draws on the rule of law as a trope of American

democracy, offers Obama a durable rhetorical packaging for extra-legal executive action in the war on terror. Obama lays forth the rhetorical groundwork for his administration's legal framework for the "prolonged" detention of detainees captured in the war on terror. While it could be argued that this represents an attempt by Obama to moderate America's impulse to war by subjecting the executive's actions in the war on terror to the rule of law, I argue that both Obama's rhetoric and his actions demonstrate a firm commitment to the expansion of sovereign power. The rule of law itself functions as a means through which American identity is constructed as more civilized than the uncivilized terrorist other, providing an impulse to military action rooted in American exceptionalism itself.

Thus, while appealing to fear may be one possible rhetorical tool presidents use to generate sovereign authority for military action, "Our Security, Our Values" demonstrates that fear is not the only tool in the president's rhetorical toolbox. Rhetorical scholars have argued that Obama's refusal of the politics of fear deploys a restorative vision of American exceptionalism capable of remaking a warlike American culture that feeds on the fear of enemy others into a culture that once again respects democratic values such as the rule of law and public reason.[4] While Obama's shift to a less explicitly war-like discourse is certainly admirable, it is also increasingly important for rhetorical scholars to notice how the discourse of peace and due process is used to promote the war on terror. As the explicit temporal boundaries of war begin to blur with the everyday tasks of government in the generalized paradigm of the war on terror, the use of violence—extraordinary rendition, infinite detention, etc.—is increasingly justified not simply under the banner of war and fear but also under the banner of peace. In this light, police and military action become a logical outgrowth of the rule of law and public reason.[5]

Using the work of Giorgio Agamben, I argue in this chapter that the dual executive functions of Commander-in-Chief and chief executive of the law begin to merge, and the military and the police enter into a zone of indistinction. The position of the sovereign as simultaneously inside and outside of the law is affirmed. In this light, Obama provides a rhetorical foundation for executive authority in this legal gray zone by deploying the rhetoric of the rule of law and national security simultaneously to position his administration's actions in the war on terror as in line with the exceptional values of American democracy.

In chapter four, I analyze the temporal dimensions of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. I attend to how Obama applies American exceptionalism to the issue of economic competitiveness in the 2011 State of the Union address, "Win the Future." In this chapter, I describe how Obama's rhetorical articulation of American exceptionalism relies on the integration of past, present, and future in a unified three part temporal structure. Using this structure, Obama constructs a narrative of American exceptionalism that situates audiences in the present as democratic agents capable of deliberating on and participating in America's path to future victory, therefore assuring Americans of the originary promise contained in America's past. Obama's inclusive democratic vision of American exceptionalism invites audiences to view themselves as active participants in the present struggle to win the future while simultaneously limiting the agency of citizens by situating them in an economic competition that is defined in advance through the economic logic of neoliberal ideology. Obama's temporal rhetoric of American exceptionalism demonstrates an ideological commitment to neoliberalism through the normalization of a self-reliant, future oriented model of individual citizenship and the

naturalization of economic competition as the pre-determined goal of government economic policy.

I argue that one trend within the early body of scholarship on Obama's rhetoric is the celebration of Obama's rhetoric as a triumph of democratic agency in an increasingly depoliticized society. In particular, John M. Murphy contends that Obama's progressive approach to the economy in the 2008 presidential campaign was successful because Obama invited audiences to view themselves as active participants in the economy, unlike his opponents who treated the economy as an inert object whose rules were determined in advance.[6] For Murphy, Obama's brand of American exceptionalism is unique from more conservative styles of American exceptionalism because of its temporal orientation in the contingent moment of the present. This description corresponds with Murphy's account of the division in American political culture between the conservative "language of Being, of eternal principles" and the liberal "language of Becoming, of change."[7] However, as David A. Frank notes, Obama's rhetorical signature is marked by an attempt to span the gap between these two traditions, "challenging and embracing" the temporal divide separating conservatives and liberals in American political culture.[8] Rather than entirely supplanting the temporality of conservatism, Obama supplements this temporality with the rhetoric of democratic agency.

I suggest that while neoliberal economic ideology predetermines the Being or essence of economic relations as competitive, neoliberalism's ideological adherence to individual liberty calls on citizens to internalize the logic of the market so that they may see their own participation in the economy as an expression of their agency.[9] Neoliberalism provides the ideological foundation of Obama's rhetoric of American

exceptionalism, as is evident in Obama's call for Americans to see the moment of the present as an opportunity to join in America's struggle to fulfill its eternal promise by winning the future.

In order to elaborate how Obama deploys neoliberalism in the service of exceptionalism, I turn to the temporal dimensions of this speech. Rhetorical scholars Celeste M. Condit and Roger Stahl persuasively describe how time operates as a rhetorical resource in conservative ideology by transcending democratic deliberation about the future.[10] However, because they identify conservative ideology as the primary rhetorical means through which capitalist ideology comes to supplant democratic deliberation, Condit and Stahl miss the ways in which capitalism under neoliberalism works not by replacing democratic deliberation, but rather by situating democratic deliberation within a predetermined field of capitalist economics. Melanie Loehwing describes how neoliberal rhetorical models of citizenship identify an orientation to the future as a crucial boundary dividing concerned democratic citizens from non-citizens.[11] My reading of the 2011 State of the Union address indicates that the economic logic of the market is naturalized not through a transcendence of deliberation about the future, but a transcendence of deliberation about the past that occurs by situating democratic subjects in a totalizing moment of the present. This temporal structure works to circumvent the goal of economic competition. In short, Obama's notion of exceptionalism as it relates to economics works by crafting a temporal structure that continually goads audiences toward a bright future, promised by the past, and enacted in the present.

American exceptionalism provides a flexible rhetorical foundation for presidents to deploy in a wide variety of circumstances. As I noted in the introduction, Vanessa B. Beasley describes exceptionalism as an ideograph in American political discourse that

functions in different ways, for various purposes at particular times. With this in mind, I set out to investigate the particular rhetorical trajectory of American exceptionalism in Obama's rhetoric. While I demonstrate in the thesis how Obama's vision of American exceptionalism unfolds in response to three different rhetorical situations, I will now attempt to outline three features about Obama's particular articulation of American exceptionalism that cohere across each speech. First, in each of the speeches, Obama enunciates a crisis or state of exception that threatens America's exceptional experiment in democracy. Second, Obama resolves the respective crisis in each speech through a sovereign act of inclusive exclusion. Finally, although chapter four focuses specifically on Obama's use of time as a rhetorical resource, temporality is an important rhetorical function for deployment of American exceptionalism in all three speeches.

In each speech, Obama describes a crisis that threatens America's exceptional experiment in democracy, constituting a state of exception that demands exceptional acts of executive leadership. In "A More Perfect Union," the Wright controversy functions as a political crisis that threatens to unhinge Obama's campaign goals and hope for multiracial solidarity. In order to resolve the immediate political crisis of the Wright affair, Obama calls on the American public to put aside racial differences to address larger crises of terrorism, war, environmental destruction, and economic downturn. In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama deals with the crisis posed by the administrative "mess" of Guantanamo Bay, a mess that was left to his administration by the last administration and threatens to become a full blown legal nightmare if executive authority in Guantanamo Bay is not returned to the rule of the law. To rhetorically address this crisis, Obama appeals to the emergency posed by the threat of terrorism in order to justify 1) the need for executive actions in line with the rule of law; and 2) the

need for executive actions that exceed the strict boundaries of this legal framework when the application of the rule of law would release a terrorist who would pose a threat to the safety of American citizens. In Obama's "Win the Future" speech, Obama describes the crises facing the American economy in a world of global economic competition. These crises demand a renewed commitment to the American economy by both citizens and the government. Obama argues that in the face of economic crisis, policymakers have an exceptional role to play in providing the necessary investments in American infrastructure and education capable of securing America's place at the top of the global economic hierarchy. While the particular rhetorical situation that motivates each speech is different, each rhetorical situation constitutes a crisis that threatens America's exceptional experiment in democracy, and therefore demands exceptional action to address this crisis.

Second, Obama resolves the crisis established in each speech through a rhetorical act of inclusive exclusion. In "A More Perfect Union," Obama performs the rhetorical exclusion of Wright through an inclusive discourse of democratic diversity. Black anger is inclusively accounted for by explaining that Wright represents the diversity of the American tapestry, but is excluded from the scene of proper democratic discourse because his anger (and other's anger) poses a threat to Obama's democratic coalition. In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama includes the detainees at Guantanamo Bay under the rubric of the rule of law, claiming that even the president cannot transcend the law. However, those detainees that would pose a threat if released cannot be included in the rule of law. Through prosecution or military trial, they are excluded from legal protections by their inclusion in the legal category of detainees who qualify for "prolonged" detention. In the 2011 State of the Union, Obama rhetorically includes the

agency of citizens in democratic debates about the economy but excludes from these debates any political consideration over the purpose of government economic policy. Obama both praises the democratic institutions of the United States for providing citizens with a means for investing their political agency in their own economic future yet simultaneously attempts to transcend the failures of America's democratic institutions by locating his administration's economic policy in a sphere of public reason and economic rationality that transcends political squabbles. Obama situates the public as both inside and outside the economy. The public is inside the economy insofar as the public's democratic participation is required to fix and revitalize American economic competitiveness. The public is outside the economy insofar as the decision to strive for economic competitiveness is determined in advance by the neoliberal economic consensus of American democracy. Thus, the public is called upon to fix America's economic system, but doing so requires beginning with the premise that the neoliberal economic foundation of America's economic system is not fundamentally broken.

Third, each speech involves a rhetorical articulation of temporality that orients audiences in the present to the future *telos* of America's exceptional experiment in democracy in order to reconnect to the values of America's past. In "A More Perfect Union," Obama calls on his audience to reconnect with America's democratic values by putting aside the racial divisions of the past so that they can join together in the present to continue America' struggle for a more perfect union in the future. In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama describes the need to continue America's fight against terrorism into the future. He asks audiences to transcend the political divisions of the immediate past and use the moment of the present to reconnect with the originary values of American democracy by creating a durable framework for future actions in the war on terror. In his

speech on the economy, Obama asks Americans to reconnect with the promise of America's origins by investing their agency in the administration's plan to help the nation win the future. In each speech, Obama offers a vision of American exceptionalism that is both accessible to audiences in the contingent moment of the present while simultaneously supplying audiences the chance to transcend the contingency of the present by reconnecting with the eternal, originary values of the American nation.

These three continuities in Obama's rhetoric are not separate and distinct rhetorical features, but are rather constitutive of an interlocking rhetorical structure of sovereign power. As such, Obama's rhetorical deployment of American exceptionalism points toward an understanding of the rhetorical presidency as a conduit for the expansion and maintenance of sovereign power over bare life. That is, Obama justifies American exceptionalism by proclaiming that he is protecting the life of the people or the principles of democracy. The deployment of crisis in each speech calls for exceptional actions capable of protecting either the bare life of the population or the institutions of democracy that provide that bare life with political meaning. When moments of crisis threaten America's exceptional democratic experiment, sovereign actions that exclude certain political subjects or certain styles of political discourse don the rhetorical mantle of inclusion. They deem these actions to be necessary to protect the democratic foundation of popular sovereignty that includes all political subjects in the law through the mere act of their birth. Sovereign power thus captures bare life in an inclusive exclusion in which subjects can be denied the protections of citizenship in the name of protecting the citizenry itself.

In order to maintain the credibility of the inclusive rhetorical features of the inclusive exclusion, Obama's rhetorical articulation of American exceptionalism situates

audiences in an optimistic narrative of American progress that transcends the crises of the present by reconnecting Americans with the eternal values of American democracy. Maintaining public faith in the idea that America is an exceptional democratic nation progressing toward a more fair, just, and equal future requires disciplining and delegitimizing of political subjects who call into question the exceptional values of American democracy. Because subjects who challenge the promise of a more democratic future are excluded in advance by the rhetorical boundary of American exceptionalism, the institutions of American democracy are shielded from criticism through a form of rhetorical autoimmunity. Such exclusions create a perpetual blind spot in democratic discourse that renders American democracy incapable of facing its own imperfections.

The overlapping rhetorical apparatuses of sovereign power at work in Obama's unique articulation of American exceptionalism demonstrate the immense challenges faced by rhetorical scholars as they attempt to grapple with the paradoxical relationship between American exceptionalism and the modern rhetorical presidency. By and large, the field of rhetoric welcomed Barack Obama with open arms. Frank argues that by "establish[ing] higher standards of eloquence" that "seemed to stand in stark contrast with the norms established by George W. Bush," Obama generated a "general euphoria" in the field of rhetoric, "affecting many rhetorical critics' positive assessment of the Obama candidacy and presidency."[12] Obama's hopeful, inclusive, and revitalized rhetorical vision of American exceptionalism supplied something of a disciplinary breath of fresh air to rhetoricians who had grown weary under the suffocating rhetorical atmosphere of fear and otherization characteristic of Bush's Manichean brand of exceptionalism.[13] Obama's overwhelmingly positive reception in the field of rhetoric emerged out of the field's innate hope that Obama's rhetoric marked something of a

rhetorical renaissance following what Ivie calls the "dark age of anti-democratic imperial ambition" characterized by the "manipulative spectacle" of the Bush administration's war on terror.[14]

However, the interlocking apparatuses of sovereign power at work in Obama's unique vision of American exceptionalism require a closer examination of the democratic assumptions undergirding Obama's overwhelmingly positive reception in the field of rhetoric. Understanding the rhetorical presidency as a conduit for sovereign power encourages rhetorical critics to not only look at divergences in the way particular ideographs are deployed over time, but also how sovereign power coheres over time throughout the differential deployment of particular ideographs. Thus, the role of rhetorical criticism should not be to simply determine which particular articulations of presidential rhetoric are more or less democratic than other forms, but rather to track and analyze how the rhetorical matrix of democracy functions across the divides of political culture to constitute lasting mechanisms for the articulation of sovereign authority that can manifest in both democratic and non-democratic ways.

As is clear in my analysis, Obama deploys exceptionalism to shore up sovereign power, while justifying his actions as democratic. While Obama's rhetoric does avoid the rhetorical quagmire of fear and demonization that characterized the rhetoric of the Bush administration, Obama maintains a rhetorical commitment to a more generalized paradigm of security. As I suggest in my analysis of "Our Security, Our Values," Obama regularly articulates his leadership through a discursive matrix of perpetual crisis management, Obama rhetorically maintains a backdrop of fear (even when that backdrop is coded through peace) while simultaneously mediating that fear through the promise of security offered by the sovereign. In this sense, Obama retools the fear of the terrorist

other by appealing to the need to resolve crises. More generally, the idea that the fear of an enemy other is the primary factor driving military violence offers an outdated account of warfare. Such an account ignores the degree to which the modern concept of war has lost its original temporally bound beginnings and endings. Today, war is increasingly enacted through the day-to-day activities of global policing. The idea that America's exceptional democratic values are universal and inclusive of all peoples around the globe provides Obama with an egalitarian backdrop to promote an exceptional vision of American interests while simultaneously effacing the institutions of power that work to police and exclude those who are criminalized or otherwise marginalized by the expansive system of global American power. Rather than understanding fear as the source of executive violence, this thesis posits American exceptionalism as the primary rhetorical vehicle of sovereign violence.

While Obama's unique vision of American exceptionalism does expand the scope of presidential rhetoric to explicitly address the concerns of marginalized populations, this expansion also works to discipline the rhetoric of previously alienated subjects in order to make their inclusion into mainstream politics politically tenable. As is clear on my analysis of "A More Perfect Union," to become politically acceptable in the eyes of democratic institutions that have historically marginalized minority views, marginalized groups must frame their interests in the terms of the society that has dominated them. Therefore, although the rhetorical act of inclusion offers a significant increase in the formal public representation of marginalized groups in presidential rhetoric, the inclusion of a these groups in presidential rhetoric at the level of identity constitutes an exclusion of the marginalized group's rhetoric at the level of form. Marginalized groups are drawn into democratic institutions based on the promise that these institutions will redress the

inequities of democratic society. However, as they are drawn into mainstream democratic discourse, marginalized groups are also forced to abandon the affective force of anger that drives their attempts to challenge the inequities of democratic society. Minorities are taught to put their racial anger behind lest they risk disrupting the majoritarian power structure they will depend on for increasing their representation. The more these minorities become entrenched in the discourse of democracy, the more they abandon the rhetorical ground necessary to truly change the inequities of democratic society.

The same effect occurs in Obama's other acts of inclusive exclusion. In the "Win the Future" speech, Obama's rhetorical vision of American exceptionalism offers audiences a greater sense of agency in shaping their own future. Yet, the trajectory of this future is determined for the audience in advance by the economic ideology of neoliberalism. Obama calls on his audience to invest their political agency in his plan to win the future, allowing Obama to portray his economic policy as return to public reason and rational economic management by the government. However, Obama also calls on these debates to be free from the politicization that puts fear in front of rationality. Obama's neoliberal vision of American exceptionalism emphasizes the public's role in debates about how to win the future, a move that narrows public debate about the economy both by limiting the scope of argument and by limiting who constitutes a viable member of the public. By defining individual citizenship according to the individual's capacity to master the future, Obama delegitimizes those subjects who are systematically denied from the future oriented norms of neoliberal economic citizenship.

The challenge posed by Obama's paradoxical articulation of American exceptionalism calls on rhetorical scholars to rethink the relationship between rhetoric

and democracy. Obama's inclusive rhetoric reveals how American exceptionalism is able to incorporate a variety of diverse political subjects into the institutions of American democracy while simultaneously disciplining these subjects in ways that prevent them from openly criticizing the flaws of American democracy. Obama's use of the democratic rhetoric of the rule of law to articulate his actions in the war on terror demonstrates how the capture of bare life in the apparatuses of sovereign power is not merely a function of the rhetoric of fear. Instead, the rule of law can also justify the *mythos* of popular sovereignty. Obama's temporal unification of past, present, and future reveals how American exceptionalism relies on appeals both to eternal, transcendent American values and to the contingency of democratic agency in the present.

This thesis sought to understand how American exceptionalism relies on explicitly democratic rhetorical appeals of hope, inclusion, and the rule of law that implicitly marginalize the inventional rhetorical critiques of American exceptionalism. America's exceptional experiment in democracy constitutes a rhetorical barrier that is perpetually articulated through the sovereign act of deciding what counts as an appropriate political speech and who counts as an appropriate political subject. Exceptionalism thus comes to define the limits of what we consider to be democratically possible. Imagining new democratic subjects and new democratic styles of speaking may require greater critical attention to the figures of rhetorical invention that are excluded from the scene of American democratic discourse because of the rhetorical threat they pose to the symbolic construction of American exceptionalism.

While I have attempted to examine how Obama's unique rhetorical articulation of American exceptionalism unfolds over these three speeches, the limited scope of my thesis leaves much ground to still be investigated. First, there remains much to be said

about Obama's particular articulation of American exceptionalism. American exceptionalism has been a central feature of Obama's discourse across a diverse set of rhetorical situations including the economy, race, and national security. His ability to apply this rhetorical framework to the range of issues discussed in this thesis indicates that critics are likely to find exceptionalism at play throughout Obama's rhetoric regarding a broad array of topics. Future research in this area should attempt to discover how Obama's vision of American exceptionalism is applied throughout his rhetoric.

While I believe future research should study how Obama applies exceptionalism in other situations, I also believe that this study has not exhausted the research that can be done on these particular texts. One particularly pressing area of investigation that I plan on pursuing in future study is Obama's use of visual rhetoric. The Obama administration released an enhanced version of the 2011 State of the Union address that viewers could choose to watch on the internet.[15] The enhanced version of the speech provides viewers with an accompanying slideshow of images, graphs, charts, and text to help explain the president's plan to win the future. I believe studying how this rhetoric calls on audiences to interact with the president's message could bolster the arguments made in this thesis about how the rhetoric of democratic inclusion is used to garner authority for sovereign power.

"Our Security, Our Values" also involves an element of visual rhetoric that I have not been able to address in this thesis. In "Our Security, Our Values," Obama discusses both his administration's policies on Guantanamo Bay and his decision to block the court-ordered release of photographs depicting American soldiers involved in acts of torture. While this thesis focused only on the former, future research into this speech should involve a discussion of how Obama applies American exceptionalism in making

the sovereign decision to block the release of American torture photos. In the speech, Obama both praises the democratic norm of government transparency and simultaneously calls for an exception to be made to that norm in regards to the new round of pictures. How Obama discusses these images, or rather the absence of these images, could offer an interesting examination of how presidents handle the conflict between the values of the nation and images that depict the nation in a less than favorable light.

I also believe this thesis establishes grounds for future investigations of how Obama's vision of American exceptionalism is different from the vision of American exceptionalism offered by other presidents. While I have attempted to track Obama's particular articulation of American exceptionalism, it will be important for rhetorical scholars in the future to compare and contrast this particular vision of exceptionalism with the image of American exceptionalism articulated by other presidents. However, in my understanding, the reason why it is important to understand other different models of American exceptionalism has less to do with finding out which model is better or worse, but rather has to do with understanding how American exceptionalism is deployed across political culture as a conduit of sovereign power. While the work of scholars such as Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner has already contrasted Obama's vision of American exceptionalism with that of George W. Bush, it would also be useful for scholars to help track how Obama's vision of American exceptionalism emerges from the vast legacy of presidential rhetoric on America's exceptional experiment in democracy. While, as the introductory chapter notes, Obama is the first president to explicitly use the phrase American exceptionalism, he is not the first president to discuss the idea that America is an exceptional nation. In tracking the particular forms of exceptionalism at work in Obama's rhetorical exceptionalism, I hope my thesis helps lay the groundwork for

rhetorical scholars in the future to map Obama's exceptionalism against other presidents by analyzing where and how exceptionalism manifests in the tradition of American political discourse.

I also believe my project opens up new avenues for the exploration of how future presidents deploy American exceptionalism. If exceptionalism proves to be a flexible and reliant strategy for articulating presidential leadership, it is likely that other presidents in the future will take note of Obama's rhetorical articulation of American exceptionalism and deploy exceptionalism for their own purposes. In laying out how Obama's vision of exceptionalism works to establish executive authority across a broad array of issues, this thesis provides an initial exploration into how Obama creates a lasting rhetorical framework for the expansion of executive power under the rhetorical guise of American exceptionalism. I hope that future research in this area can build upon my critique of sovereign power in the American presidency by looking at how exceptionalism is deployed as a strategic mechanism for garnering power by future presidents.

Notes

[1] David A. Frank's contribution to the joint article by Frank and Mark Lawrence McPhail, David A. Frank and Mark Lawrence McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience, and the (Im)possibility of Racial Reconciliation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8.4 (2005): 571-594; Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "One Dream: Barack Obama, Race, and the American Dream," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14.1 (2011): 125-154;
[2] David A. Frank, "The Prophetic Voice And The Face Of The Other in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 380-403; Judy L. Isaksen, "Obama's Rhetorical Shift: Insights for Communication Studies," *Communication Studies* 62.4 (2011): 468-469; Robert E. Terrill, "Unity and Duality in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95.4 (2009): 363-386.

[3] Terrill, "Unity and Duality," 364

[4] Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner commend Obama's "less fearful…attitude of democratic exceptionalism" for offering the potential to "facilitate a salutary retrieval of alienating and deadly projections." Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner, "American Exceptionalism in a Democratic Idiom: Transacting the Mythos of Change in the 2008 Presidential Campaign," *Communication Studies* 60.4 (2009): 359–375, 373; Robert C. Rowland argues that by refusing to "fear the future," Obama demonstrates a belief that "A revitalized sense of the power of public reason, of the possibility of "civil conversation" in which facts and reason are valued, is also essential for achieving American Exceptionalism. Robert C. Rowland, "Barack Obama and the Revitalization of Public Reason," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14.4 (2008): 693–726, 716.

[5] Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 14.

[6] John M. Murphy, "Political Economy and Rhetorical Matter," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12.2 (2009): 303-316.

[7] John M. Murphy, "Power and Authority in a Postmodern Presidency," in *The Prospect of Presidential Rhetoric*, eds. James Arnt Aune and Martin J. Medhurst (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 28-45, 43; David A. Frank, "Obama's Rhetorical Signature: Cosmopolitan Civil Religion in the Presidential Inaugural Address, January 20, 2009'," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14.4 (2011): 605-630, 623.

[8] David A. Frank, "Obama's Rhetorical Signature: Cosmopolitan Civil Religion in the Presidential Inaugural Address, January 20, 2009," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14.4 (2011): 605-630, 623.

[9] Tore Fougner, "The State, International Competitiveness and Neoliberal Globalisation: Is There a Future Beyond ' The Competition State'?," *Review of International Studies* 32 (2006): 165–185.

[10] Celeste Michelle Condit, "Nixon's 'Fund': Time as Ideological Resource in the 'Checkers' Speech," in *Texts and Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes in American Political Rhetoric*, eds. Michael C. Leff and Fred J. Kauffeld (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1989), 219-242; Roger Stahl, "A Clockwork War: Rhetorics of Time in a Time of Terror," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94.1 (2008): 73-99.

[11] Melanie Loehwing, "Homelessness as the Unforgiving Minute of the Present: The Rhetorical Tenses of Democratic Citizenship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96.4 (2010): 380-403.

[12] David A. Frank, "Introduction," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14.4 (2011): 601-604, 601.

[13] See: Robert L. Ivie, "Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10.2 (2007): 221-248; Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner, "Hunting the Devil: Democracy's Rhetorical Impulse to War," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37.4 (2007): 580-598; Douglas Kellner, "Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the 'War on Terror,'" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37.4 (2007): 622-645; John M. Murphy "'Our mission and our moment': George W. Bush and September 11th," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 607-632.

[14] Robert L. Ivie, "Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37.4 (2007): 577-579, 578.

[15] The enhanced version of the speech is available online at the White House Website: Barack Obama, "The State of the Union: Winning the Future: Watch and Engage," (January 25, 2011): http://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union-2011 (Accessed February 27, 2012).

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