

The Obama Presidency and the Question of Social Justice: A Critical Analysis of the Meaningful Milestone

Lawrence J. Hanks, Professor, Department of Political Science, Indiana University.

On January 20, 2009, essentially 200 years after the enactment of the embargo against the slave trade, 40 years after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Barack Hussein Obama became the 44th President of the United States of America. Using the one drop rule for racial designation which has prevailed in the USA for most of its history, America had elected its first black President. Using the new standard created by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, America now had its first commonly acknowledged bi-racial President. All can agree that Obama is not “wholly white,”—he is a “man of color” and therein lays the milestone; someone other than a white male was President of the United States of America. Analysts on the right were quick to declare that the US had overcome the challenge of race and the term “post-racial” abounded—from their perspective, race as a barrier to social justice had clearly been overcome. While acknowledging the achievement and progress of the major milestone, analyst on the left adamantly rejected the term “post racial” and argued that race still mattered with respect to one’s life chances of success.¹

The ultimate purpose of this paper is to analyze the validity of these competing claims. In order to contextualize this debate, a brief explication and analysis of the historical quest for African American equity will be provided. A crucial part of this analysis will include analysis of the internalist (conservative) and externalist (liberal) perspectives which became especially distinctive after the post WWII civil rights movement, i.e., the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 and the demise of segregation as mandated by *Alexander v Holmes County Board of Education* in 1969. Finally, before dealing with its ultimate purpose, this work will offer a brief analysis of the Obama campaign and his presidency as it relates to the goal of social justice.

¹ See the following for discussion on the legitimacy or delegitimacy of the term “post racial.” Ward Connerly, “Obama is No “Post-Racial” Candidate,” www.acri.org/ward_06_13_08/html; Ernest Harris, “We Are Not Post Racial Just Year, January 20, 2009,” www.huffingtonpost.com/earnest-harris/we-are-not-post-racial-ju_b_158978.html?vie...; Leonard Pitts, “Post Racial America isn’t here yet,” CNN.com. www.cnn.com/2009/politics/06/01/pittts.blackamerican/index.html; Christopher J. Metzler, *Diverse Education*, June 19, 2008, <http://diverseeducation.wordpress.com/2008/06/10/a-post-racial-america>

The Quest for African American Equity: The Pre-Slavery Era to the Age of Obama

According to Hegel, the dialectic is a clash of opposites in which every idea is opposed by a contrary idea. The dialectic is comprised of the first idea, the thesis, the opposing idea, and the antithesis. Out of the struggle between the two ideas comes a third idea, the synthesis. This process is a continuing one and is dynamic: as the synthesis becomes a thesis, which creates a new antithesis which results into a new synthesis and so forth. Since the civil rights movement, the competing thesis centered on the role of race and one's life chances. Internalists emphasize the progress while the externalists focus on the continuing challenges. Obama's election was indeed a prima facie boost for the internalists, thus, "The Age of Obama," yet a close analysis provides evidence for the externalists.

"The Age of Obama" is preceded by seven (7) distinctive era of American history. With respect to the quest for equity, each of these periods, may be characterized as either neutral, facilitative, or repressive. The periods are as follows: (1) The Pre-Slavery Era (1619-1641); (2) The Era of Slavery (1642-1865); (3) The Era of Reconstruction (1865-1877); (4) The Nadir (1877-1909); (5) The Era of the NAACP (1910 -1954); (6) The Post World War II Civil Rights Movement (1955-1969); and (7) The Post Civil Rights Movement Era (1970-2008.)² With respect to their state sanctioned designations, the Pre-Slavery Era had no specific designations but slowly deteriorated into slavery by colonial governments. Approximately 223 years of state sanctioned slavery was followed by over 100 years of state sanctioned discrimination. The Post Civil Rights Movement Era provided, for the first time in the history of the country, a state policy of being on the record for providing equal protection of the law for all, including African American citizens. Whether or not this policy was successfully implemented was debated vigorously between 1970 and Obama's election in 2008. While his election clearly made the case the progress was continuing, the extent of the progress remains a debatable question.

² See Lawrence J. Hanks. *The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment in Three Georgia Counties*. The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1987. Chapter One.

The Post WWII Civil Rights Movement and the Question of Social Justice for African Americans

After black indentured servanthship devolved into colonial slavery, it became clear that social justice would be a struggle for African Americans. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Law of 1968; state sanctioned discrimination in the US was virtually dead. The ruling in *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* (1969) ending the racially designated school systems in the South actualized the promise of the 1954 *Brown Decision*.

In order to fully appreciate the challenge of social justice for African Americans in the post civil rights movement era, it is important to understand the changes which manifested themselves during this era. First of all, physical, gross, and blatant discrimination (racism) was replaced with abstract, subtle, and nuanced discrimination (racism) according to those on the left. Thus, social justice, though closer to being actualized, was still denied. Secondly, while there were common components of treatment for black strata during the pre-civil rights movement era, class distinctions brought disparate treatment for blacks based on economic and social status even as the practice of racial profiling continues to create a common bond. Thirdly, African Americans separated into at least two nations with different challenges bonded by racial stereotyping and racial profiling.

The Post Civil Rights Movement Era: New Day, New Challenges, New Racism

The Post WWII Civil Rights Movement removed the physical, gross, and blatant forms of discrimination. African Americans now had access to places of public accommodations thanks to The Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed blatant barriers to voting. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 provided for legal access to housing. *Alexander v Holmes County Board of Education* (1969) ended the dual school systems of the South. While the physical, gross, and blatant discrimination became illegal, liberals maintain that these forms of discrimination were replaced with the abstract, subtle, and nuanced. While blatant racism became socially and legally unacceptable, the presence and impact of white privilege and institutional racism are fiercely debated.

White privilege may be defined as those unearned benefits which accrue to whites who are born into a culture that value “whiteness.”³ Institutional racism may be defined as those patterns and practices which are ostensibly neutral yet have a disparate negative impact on the opportunities for people of color.⁴ White privilege and institutional racism are not physical, gross, or blatant. They are abstract. Thus, their legitimacy face challenges. If a phenomena or entity is abstract, there is usually controversy regarding its very existence. If its existence can be established at some level of agreement, then there is usually some level of disagreement regarding the meaning of its existence. Thus, the concepts of institutional racism and white privilege face challenges.

The following are other challenges contributing to the controversy regarding the existence and legitimacy of institutional racism, white privilege, and other concepts raised by the critical race theorists:

- (1) Human beings are reluctant to accept any analysis of virtually anything that requires them to take ownership of anything which attributes to them a less than positive judgment. Thus, the average white person is not in a psychological state that would allow an awareness or acknowledgment of white privilege. The same hold true for unoptimized persons of color who are being told that a particular negative phenomena exist because they are part of the problem.
- (2) The more intellect required to understand a concept, the less likely it is that any particular individual will understand that concept.
- (3) The more individual responsibility that a particular perspective requires of an individual, the less likely it is that an individual will adopt the perspective.
- (4) If a phenomena or entity is physically observable, the more likely it is that the can be some common analysis of its meaning and existence. (Slavery, Jim Crow, and state sanction segregation are examples.)

³ Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege: Unpacking The Invisible Knapsack*” in Working Paper 189. *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence through Work in Women’s Studies*. Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA. 1988. (This essay is readily available by googling it on the net.); Tim Wise. **White Like Me: Reflections on Race From a Privileged Son**. Soft Skull Press. 2007

⁴ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. **Racism Without Racist: Color Blind Racism and The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States**. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York. 2006.

- (5) If a concept is abstract, requires intellect to understand, requires admission of a shortcoming, and if there is a sense that understanding and action on this concept results in a loss, the less likely it is that an individual will accept the existence of the concept.

Slavery contradicted the letter of the Constitution and the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. If one counts colonial slavery, slavery existed either in the colonies or the American nation for 223 years, 1642-1865. This period was followed by 105 years of unequal protection under the law, 1865-1970. Thus, one can understand the joy and exultation which came with finally achieving a real commitment to make philosophical principles and practices consistent. Majority of Americans are especially proud that legal state sanction discrimination has been overcome—there is usually great condemnation when gross discrimination is found in the post civil rights era. Thus, the reluctance to entertain the idea that perhaps the road to racial social justice is still not complete is understandable. Moreover, if it took 328 years to reach a consensus that physical, gross, and blatant discrimination, in the form of unequal treatment before the law, one is not optimistic when it comes to predicting when the nation will come to accept and appreciate institutional racism and white privilege.

The Emergence of Two Black Nations⁵: Optimizers and Sub-Optimizers

From the time of slavery up until the Post WWII Civil Rights Movement, there were social and class distinctions in the African American community. Nonetheless, these distinctions were trumped by the virtual universal treatment of all African American as pariah. Regardless of socio-economic status, virtually all African American were subject to a lack of equal protection of the law—African Americans could not vote in the South; they lacked access to places of public accommodation, and had little access to mainstream business and educational institutions. Thus, a sense of unity was created despite the various distinctions within the African American community. A crucial component of this unity was the sense of community created by all African American social classes segregated residentially. Regardless of socio-economic status, African Americans were forced to live in areas designated specifically for African Americans.

⁵ This term was coined by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. See “The Two Nations of Black America” in Christopher Foreman’s, **The Black Predicament**. The Brooking Institute. Washington, DC. 1999. pp. 10-16.

The success of the Post WWII civil rights movement would challenge this unity. In the post civil rights era, those with the skills to make it in mainstream America started to do so. Those who were not equipped could not. Moreover, as African Americans were allowed to leave the African American ghettos for the white suburbs, the black underclass was now segregated from the black optimizers. This separation is perhaps the etiology of the association of success with ‘acting white’ and “being white.” During the eras prior to the post civil rights era, being an intelligent, well spoken academic achiever was lauded as being the best antidote against racism. Excellence was the “blackest” thing that you could be and virtually all blacks agreed. It seems reasonable that if an intimate has now distinguished themselves from a group, one reaction is to demean the intimate who is now distinguished rather than to try to follow that person path. Thus, the possible origins of “acting and being white.”

The Challenges of the Post King Era: Then Internal, External, Individual, Collective, and Systemic

The post King Era found African Americans continuing to face challenges. The challenges may be characterized as the following: internal and external challenges; (2) individual and collective challenges; and (3) systemic challenges. The internal individual challenges include the following:

- (1) the victim mentality
- (2) separatism
- (3) anti-intellectualism
- (4) drug usage
- (5) gang and other criminal activity
- (6) low level of money management literacy
- (7) low self-esteem
- (8) low level of educational attainment
- (9) teenage pregnancy
- (10) divorce

The internal collective challenges include the following:

- (1) un-optimized use of economic power
- (2) un-optimized use of political power
- (3) un-optimized use of organizational power
- (4) class conflict
- (5) lack of group consciousness
- (6) lack of wealth

External systemic challenges include the following:

- (1) institutionalized racism
- (2) unequal protection of the laws
- (3) a conservative political system
- (4) features of capitalism
- (5) features of systemic “white privilege”

External individual challenges include the following:

- (1) individual/personal racism
- (2) white privilege manifested at the personal level

Through the aforementioned matrix of challenges, most African Americans have become successful (the black middle class and working class); others have failed miserably (the black underclass).

The Quest for Black Equity in the Post King Era: Optimizers, Sub-optimizers, Internalists, and Externalists

The Post WWII Civil Rights Movement help to separate African American into at least two groups: (1) optimizers, the group primed for success; and (2) the sub-optimizers, the group lacking the necessary skills for success. While these differences are indeed pronounced, African Americans are bound by the issue of racial profiling. Internalists, conservatives, focus on the success and make the case that social justice, defined as equal opportunity and equal protection of the law, has been achieved. Externalists, liberals, while acknowledging progress, focus on the continued challenges and argues that social justice, while it may be closer to achievement, is yet and elusive goal.

The following points make the essential internalist case for social justice:

1. *Dejure* and *defacto* discrimination are relics of the pre-civil rights era. When it raises its ugly head, it is repudiated by the culture and the courts.
2. Not only do African Americans have equal access and equal opportunities to all societies’ treasures, affirmative action programs actually give African Americans preference to many opportunities.
3. While outstanding African Americans achieved under the most oppressive conditions, i.e., state sanctioned discrimination, African American success is

common in the post civil rights era. African Americans who have skills, education, the proper attitudes, and proper behaviors have virtually no barriers to their success. Given the success of Barack Obama, everything is now possible.

4. The primary barriers which prevent African American equity and excellence are primarily personal attitudes and behaviors which are not conducive to success. African Americans are largely responsible for, and have the power to change these behaviors. With the proper attitudes and behaviors, there are no limits to African American excellence.
5. While raw blatant racism is rare though yet existent, and the notion of institutionalized racism may have marginal credence, neither of them are major barriers to the success of the African American collective. The path to African American equity lies on the road of African American self-determination. Blaming others for the self-inflicted wounds of the African American collective is disingenuous at best and pathetic at its worse.⁶

The following points make the essential externalist case for the absence of social justice

1. The reports of the death of blatant racism are greatly exaggerated. While blatant “racially designated signs or doors, public utterances of racial epithets, and a segregated public sphere are largely relics of the past. Evidence of blatant unadulterated racism continues to occur far too frequent to support the idea that we live a “post-racial” country. While legal redress is readily available and convictions are more likely than they were before the civil rights movement, convictions are not always certain. Unequal protection of the law is still an all too common problem.
2. White privilege and institutional racism continue to thwart the optimization of others groups in general and the African American collective in particular. So called “color blind” policies have a positive impact on the white collective. They allow white supremacy and white social capital networks to thrive unabated.

⁶ Gwen Ifill. **The Break Through: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama**. Doubleday. New York. 2009.

3. Despite the touting of color-blindness as a cherished core conservative value, color consciousness, as manifested in the practice of racial profiling, is a core tenet of the war on crime in general and the war of terror in particular. Color can be considered or is should not based on the desired ends of the conservatives.
4. The conservative American political system, though race neutral like the color blind legislation passed during the Nadir, thwarts efforts that would empower lower socio-economic people in general and African Americans in particular.
5. Capitalism is virtually the only economic system acknowledged as legitimate the worldwide marketplace of ideas. Yet, there are color blind features of capitalism which thwart the collective upward mobility of the African American collective.
6. Barack Obama ran virtually flawless campaign and clearly emerged as the best candidate in the minds of most objective people. And while one can understand how ideologically considerations would cause one to vote for John McCain, it is equally difficult to understand how, in the face of the virtual collapse of American capitalism and a candidate who states that he knows little about economics, 43% of white voters would still support John McCain. While it is indeed true that given the history of white voting in the USA, 43% is considerable progress, yet, it is also sobering to know that had it been left exclusively to whites, McCain would be President of the United States with Sara Palin as his Vice-President.⁷

The nature of argumentative political discourse, especially around the issue of race, precludes the giving of any ground to the opposition. An objective observer can acknowledge that both sides make valid points. The internalist analysts focus on the progress and success and virtually ignore the challenges faced by the optimizers. While much of their prescriptive advice would serve the

⁷ Prominent externalist writings include the following: the following works by Derrick Bell: **Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism**. Basic Books. New York. 1993; **Silent Covenants: Brown v Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes of Racial Reform**. Oxford University Press. New York. 2005; **Gospel Choirs: Psalms of Survival in an Alien Land**. Basic Books. New York. 1997; **Afrolantica Legacies**. Third World Press. 1997; And **We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice**. Basic Books. New York. 1989. The following titles by Michael Eric Dyson: **Is Cosby Right?: Or Has the Middle Class Lost Its Mind?** Basic Civitas Books. New York. 2006 and **Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster**. Basic Civitas Books. New York. 2007. Other writings include Cornell West. **Race Matters**. Beacon Press. 2001. Glen Loury. **The Anatomy of Racism**. Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 2003. and the following books on “critical race theory:” Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. **Critical Race Theory: An Introduction**. New York University Press. New York 2001 and Kimberle Crenshaw, et. Al. **The Key Writings That Formed the Movement**. The New Press. 2001.

sub-optimizers well, they offer little help for the optimizers; they are already following their advice, yet face a different set of challenges. The externalist focus on the challenges that primarily affect the optimizers while lessening their attention on the sub-optimizers.

The cultural, historical, and sometimes academic tendency to see African Americans as a monolith blurs this insight—there are at least two Black Americas with divisions within these camps. Optimizers are challenged primarily, though not exclusively by external issues at the professional and public level. Though successful, they are challenged with institutional biases and subtle and nuanced slights commonly called “micro-aggressions.” Sub-optimizers are challenged primarily, though not exclusively, by internal issues at the individual level. Personal behavior, perspectives, and attitudes impede them from competing successfully in the market place.

Clarence Thomas and the End of Non-Descriptive Blackness

The internal-external debate has raged since the end of the King era. While there have always been diverse ideologies and strategies regarding African American equity and social justice, the pervasive and oppressive nature of state sanctioned discrimination muted the distinctions. Being black was synonymous with being “progressive and liberal.” Thus, it was redundant to use the term “black liberal. Yet, this need manifested itself with the retirement of Thurgood Marshall, the first African American on the Supreme Court.

The NAACP insisted that George H.W. Bush replace Marshall with a “black.” When President Bush responded to the letter of their request rather than the spirit of their request, the ideological camps, which had always existed, became crystal clear. Bush nominated Clarence Thomas, a black but a conservative. It was now clear that African Americans come from diverse points on continuum of political ideology. Since that time, ideological labels, which coded or implicitly stated, are part of political discourse regarding African Americans. The next milestone in the public discourse regarding social justice and equity would be the ascendancy of Barack Obama.⁸

⁸ Steve A. Holmes, “NAACP Battle Over Thomas.” The New York Times. August 9, 1991. www.newyorktimes.com.

The Ascendancy of Barack Hussein Obama

Barack Obama became a household name when he was slated to give a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, July 27, 2004. At the time, Obama was merely a state Senator from Illinois. His speech immediately transformed him into a possible presidential candidate; his speech was that powerful. At the next convention, Obama would be the nominee of the Democratic Party. His rise to political feasibility was unprecedented in American history. The fact that he was an African American makes his rise even more remarkable.

The Obama campaign for the nomination was well funded and well executed. He took advantage of modern high-tech innovations in ways never dreamed by other campaigns. Overcoming the Clinton Machine, charges of “not being black enough,” charges of being “too black,” charges of being Muslim, and doubts regarding whether white Americans were ready for a black President, he emerged as the unlikely victor. While new challenges emerged in the presidential campaign, the Obama team would reap of historic victory. While the majority of white Americans were not ready for this well polished black candidate, 43% of the white majority laid the foundation for the 95% black support and majority support from other groups of color to provide the balance of power to take Obama to a 53% popular vote victory. Communications from around the world and across the political spectrum hailed a new day.⁹

The Obama victory was largely a result of the convergence of numerous factors which created a “perfect storm.” Many of the religious Christian persuasion are convinced that his campaign and presidency is “anointed,” chosen and protected by God to carry out a very specific mission. Obama, a youthful, healthy 47 year old, clearly executed all that was within his control: he ran a virtually flawless campaign, taking advantage of his organizational skills to mobilize his support and raised unprecedented amounts of money via the internet; he stuck with his message of “change: and artfully articulated this message; his anti-war stance served him well; he was articulate and intelligent as evidenced by his election to edit the Harvard Law Review; he was forthcoming regarding his youthful moral indiscretion and he was otherwise virtually morally flawless; his family exemplified ideal American values; he had the resource to outspend McCain by at least 4:1; and his choice of a running mate was prudent and pragmatic.

⁹ Gwen Ifill. **The Break Through: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama**. Doubleday, New York. 2009.

The Obama campaign benefitted appreciably from factors which were clearly beyond his control, many of them virtually laid as his feat by McCain. McCain, a 72 year old senior who had won two bouts with cancer, had a difficult time mobilizing his base and deciding on a campaign focus. While recognized as a military hero, his adamant support for the war in Iraq was not well received by the American public. By the end of the campaign, his stump speeches were riddled with misstatements and one could understand his graduating fifth from the bottom of his class at the U.S. Naval Academy.

His 90% support of George W. Bush's policies, his assertions that economics was not his strong suit, and that the fundamental of our economic system were sound provided potent fodder for the Obama arsenal. Moreover, his choice of Sara Palin brought his judgment into question with crucial independent voters. Yet, the polls showed McCain and Obama statistically tied in mid-October. While ideology and Republican loyalty explains some of the phenomena, the contrast between the two candidates was far too great to explain it all. It took the virtual collapse of American capitalism to give Obama the decisive thrust for the victory.¹⁰

The Obama Victory: The Meaning of the Historic Milestone

While it is inarguable that the election of Obama was indeed a historic milestone which speaks to racial healing in the American polity, it is also clear that race mattered in the election and continues to manifest itself in the Obama presidency. The following are clear examples of the role of race in the presidential campaign and the Obama presidency: (1) the continued competitiveness of John McCain even as his campaign devolved; and (2) the de-racialized *modus operandi* of the Obama campaign and his administration.

The strengths of Obama and the weaknesses of McCain had been explicated earlier. Imagine for a moment that the profiles were switched. Would Obama have been competitive? Few objective analysts would conclude "yes." Save for the sharp downturn in the economy, McCain may have pulled out a victory despite the foibles of his campaign. Perhaps a clearer lesson from the election is not the declining significance of race but the enduring a compelling significance of economic well being. In other words, economic well being trumped race. Race mattered but

¹⁰ For a clear straight forward analysis of the Obama campaign, see Chuck Todd's and Sheldon Gawiser's, **How Obama Won: A State-by-State Guide To the Historic 2008 Presidential Election**. Random House. New York. 2009.

economic well being mattered more. While Obama's election was the fulfillment of "a" dream, it was not the fulfillments to King's vision of social justice, the beloved community, where the content of character and excellence trumps socio-economic advantage and white privilege.

African Americans, who came of age before the civil rights movement, when the notion of a black president was comedic and lunacy, were often counseled that they would have to be twice as good as their white counterparts in order to be considered equal. The result of the 2008 election seems to suggest that the pre-civil rights advice is still valid even in the modern "Age of Obama." While Obama's election makes it clear that unprecedented opportunities are available to persons of color who are optimizers, being competent or equal is not enough. In order to prevail, candidates of color may need to be excellent while whites may be mediocre or simply qualified. While it is more often than not overcome, race, while it matters less, still matters.

While analysts want to usher in the term "post-racial," race and rumors of race permeated the nomination and the presidential campaigns. Sensing the discomfort with which a goodly number of whites approach discussions of race, the Obama campaign made a calculated decision to deracialize his campaign. While his Philadelphia speech on race, "Towards a More Perfect Union," was well received, it was done of out necessity; a mediocre performance would have ended his quest for the nomination. Moreover, as president, President Obama deals strategically with race—he has to affect a "down low" blackness as he seeks to help blacks in his generic quest to help everyone.¹¹

During the campaign, his Father's Day addresses castigating black men were criticized by many in the black community as "Sister Souljah" moments, ostentatious performances to show voters that you are not in the pocket of a particular group. In the case of not supporting a US delegation to the United Nations Conference on Racism in April 2009,¹² he took the conservative approach. In the case of honoring the Confederate Soldier on Memorial Day, he sought to diffuse controversy and appease all groups by honoring black soldiers also. Obama will have to continue to walk the racial tightrope—his feasibility is predicated on his ability to be the President for all,

¹¹ The term "down low" is a popular term used to describe men who have sex with other men yet deny being gay. They are gay yet choose not to acknowledge their "gayness" for fear of not be able to maintain the benefits of being in the sexual mainstream. "Down low blackness" is not acknowledging or emphasizing ones blackness in order to reap the support of mainstream white culture.

¹² "President Obama Bows Out of U.N. Racism Conference, Angers Blacks, April 18, 2009
www.nowpublic.com/world/president-bows-out-of-UN-Racism-Conference-Angers-Blacks

yet, if his black constituency starts to view him as largely symbolic, he is in political trouble. The black community understood the challenge facing Obama and gave him the benefit of any doubts. In point of fact, little critical analysis of the Obama campaign was tolerated. Sustaining this loyalty, by successful tight roping will be a challenge.

After the successful election of African Americans in predominantly white constituencies (Doug Wilder, Governor, VA, David Dinkins, mayor of New York City, and Norman Rice, John Daniels, and Michael White to the mayoralty of Seattle, New Haven CT, and Cleveland, OH respectively), Ron Walters argued there had emerged a new era for black politics, yet the payoffs were uncertain for black voters.¹³ Unlike the upfront and vocal commitment to black social justice expressed by black elected officials from the predominantly black districts, promises of black social justice by the deracialized black politicians were either deracialized (universalized) or deprioritized. Thus, Walters conclude that...black politicians could end up treating black voters the same way as white politicians do. In that sense, black would have gained a symbolic Pyrrhic victory. Rather than ushering in an era where race does not matter, is the Obama election a symbolic Pyrrhic victory?¹⁴

Given the role of race in the elections of 2008, it seems clear that the term “post-racial” is blatantly premature as a description for the state of race relations in the USA. Although President Obama refuses to deal with race frontally, given the fragility of his 43% white support, it is politically prudent that he maintains his strategy. Supporters of color are patient and understand that perhaps more can be done in the name of social justice and racial equity under the rubric of helping those who are challenged economically, regardless of race. Describing the Obama election as a “Pyrrhic Victory” and a “post-racial” accomplishment describe two extremes—race still matters and the Obama victory is than more symbolism. While the dialectic of social justice continues to yield greater margins of social justice on its continuum between slavery and defacto equal protection under the law, King’s beloved community has yet to be achieved.

¹³ Ron Walters, “A New Era for Black Politics, but Uncertain Payoffs for Black Voters.”The Atlanta Journal Constitution. Sunday, November 12, 1989, pages H-1 and H-2.

¹⁴ Mark Silk, “Debate on Electoral Strategy Has a Long History,” The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Sunday, November 19, 1989. Page C-1.

Reference List

See the following for discussion on the legitimacy or delegitimacy of the term “post racial.” Ward Connerly, “Obama is No “Post-Racial” Candidate,” www.acri.org/ward_06_13_08/html; Ernest Harris, “We Are Not Post Racial Just Year, January 20, 2009, www.huffingtonpost.com/ernest-harris/we-are-not-post-racial-ju_b_158978.html?vie...; Leonard Pitts, “Post Racial America isn’t here yet,” CNN.com. www.cnn.com/2009/politics/06/01/pitts.blackamerican/index.html; Christopher J. Metzler, Diverse Education, June 19, 2008, <http://diverseeducation.wordpress.com/2008/06/10/a-post-racial-america>

See Lawrence J. Hanks. *The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment in Three Georgia Counties*. The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1987. Chapter One.

Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege: Unpacking The Invisible Knapsack*” in Working Paper 189. *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence Through Work in Women’s Studies*. Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA. 1988. (This essay is readily available by googling it on the net.); Tim Wise. **White Like Me: Reflections on Race From a Privileged Son**. Soft Skull Press. 2007.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. **Racism Without Racist: Color Blind Racism and The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States**. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York. 2006.

This term was coined by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. See “The Two Nations of Black America” in Christopher Foreman’s, **The Black Predicament**. The Brooking Institute. Washington, DC. 1999. pp. 10-16.

Prominent internalist writings include the following: the following works by Shelby Steele. **The Content of Our Character: A Vision of Race in America**. Harper Perennial. New York. 1991; **A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America**. Harper Perennial. New York. 1999; **White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Movement**. Harper Perennial. New York. 2007; **A Bound Man: Why We Are Excited About Obama and Why He Can’t Win**. The Free Press. New York. 2007. The following works by John McWhorter: **Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America**. Harper Perennial. New York. 2001; **Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America**. Gotham Press. New York. 2005; and **Authentically Black**. Gotham. New York. 2004. Other popular internalist works include Jaun Williams. **Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and the Culture of Failure Undermining Black America—And What We Can Do About It**. Three Rivers Press. 2007 and Bill Cosby and Alvin Poussaint. **Come on People: On the Path from Victims to Victors**. Thomas Nelson. New York. 2007.

Prominent externalist writings include the following: the following works by Derrick Bell: **Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism**. Basic Books. New York. 1993; **Silent Covenants: Brown v Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes of Racial Reform**. Oxford University Press. New York. 2005; **Gospel Choirs: Psalms of Survival in an Alien Land**. Basic Books. New York. 1997; *Afrolantica Legacies*. Third World Press. 1997; **And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice**. Basic Books. New York. 1989. The following titles by Michael Eric Dyson: **Is Cosby Right?: Or Has the Middle Class Lost Its Mind?** Basic Civitas Books. New York. 2006 and **Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster**. Basic Civitas Books. New York. 2007. Other writings

include Cornell West. **Race Matters**. Beacon Press. 2001. Glen Loury. **The Anatomy of Racism**. Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 2003. and the following books on “critical race theory:” Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. **Critical Race Theory: An Introduction**. New York University Press. New York 2001 and Kimberle Crenshaw, et. Al. **The Key Writings That Formed the Movement**. The New Press. 2001.

Steve A. Holmes, “NAACP Battle Over Thomas.” *The New York Times*. August 9, 1991. www.newyorktimes.com.

Gwen Ifill. **The Break Through: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama**. Doubleday. New York. 2009.

For a clear straight forward analysis of the Obama campaign, see Chuck Todd’s and Sheldon Gawiser’s, **How Obama Won: A State –by-State Guide To the Historic 2008 Presidential Election**. Random House. New York. 2009.

The term “down low” is popular term used to describe men who have sex with other men yet deny being gay. They are gay yet choose not to acknowledge their “gayness” for fear of not be able to maintain the benefits of being in the sexual mainstream. “Down low blackness” is not acknowledging or emphasizing ones blackness in order to reap the support of mainstream white culture.

“President Obama Bows Out of U.N. Racism Conference, Angers Blacks, April 18, 2009@ www.nowpublic.com/world/president-bows-out-of-UN-Racism-Conference-Angers-Blacks

Ron Walters, “A New Era for Black Politics, but Uncertain Payoffs for Black Voters.” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Sunday, November 12, 1989, pages H-1 and H-2.

Mark Silk, “Debate on Electoral Strategy Has a Long History,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Sunday, November 19, 1989. Page C-1.